WHAT ARE BARRIERS, AND WHERE DO THEY COME FROM?
Stephen Cashman

Stephen Cashman looked at a wide range of barriers to arts involvement, and concluded that both organisational and social change is needed to break them down.

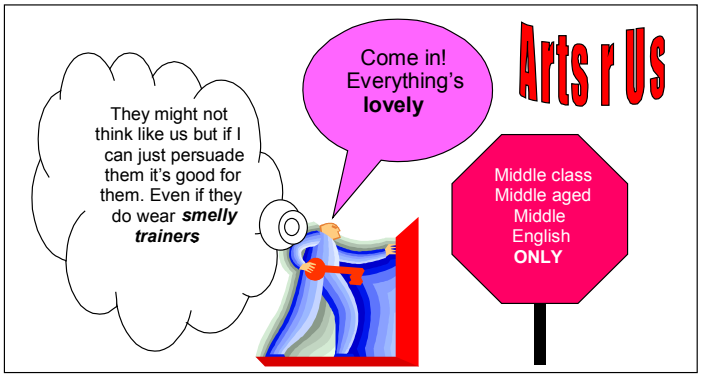
There are six propositions upon which the following observations about barriers to involvement in the arts rest:

- Barriers that have real consequences can be identified.
- Some barriers come from inside our organisations and a prevailing culture of (inadvertent) 'institutional elitism'.
- Some approaches to marketing the arts risk compounding the problem.
- Social inclusion activity is not the same as social exclusion work – the nature of a barrier depends upon how and where we look from.
- Organisations must start changing by changing their mind(set)s.
- A lot of audience development may prove futile unless we work to change society itself.

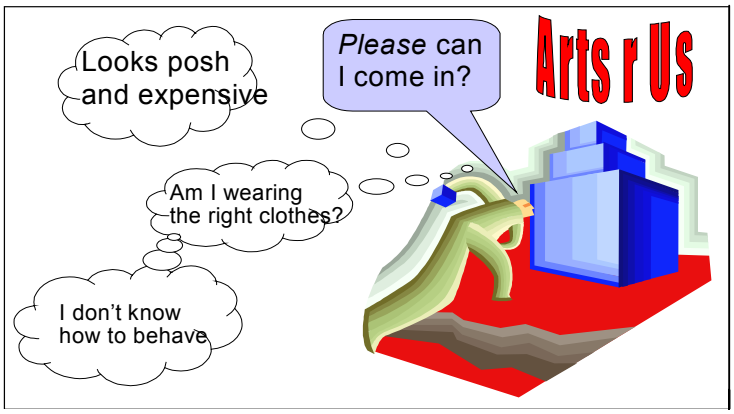
With all of that in mind, we should start by investigating and categorising the nature of generic barriers. They may be physical, social or linguistic. They may be created through organisational processes, attitudes and behaviours, or stem from customer attitudes. They can be psychological, informational, economic or temporal. Certain barriers – physical, social, psychological, economic and attitudinal – are exogenous, external to the arts organisation; but most of the others are endogenous – having an internal cause or origin.

This leads to an important question. Is marketing part of the problem (as well as part of the solution)? Does it create barriers? Systematic, scientific, targeted marketing seems to allow an approach to attracting users that is analytical, rational and effective. But it also risks losing sight of our multiple objectives. Effectiveness implies a process of reductionism, so more precise targeting implies greater potential exclusion, unless similar processes are used to seek out, reach and persuade the non-usual suspects. Furthermore, when we start to talk about social inclusion and exclusion, are we guilty of blurred terminology? Social inclusion activity is about working to pull people to what we already do – and is within our capability; but social exclusion activity is about changing and using our work to address the causes and consequences of social exclusion.

Social inclusion?



Social exclusion?



Organisational culture is an important factor in determining whether an organisation is socially inclusive. Culture is about the organisation's shared values – the things people believe and assume, and the mental models they use to make sense of the world. In short, 'the way we do things around here'. Culture is learned. It's determined by the organisation's history; it's partly subconscious; and it's heterogeneous. It is also evident through the symbols we use, and the group behaviours that take place. These are the overt, outward signs of organisational culture. But hidden beneath them are underlying beliefs and assumptions, and 'the way we see things is determined by what we know or what we believe' (John Berger, 1984). The mental models we create of people are active – they shape how we act because they affect what we see. These mental models can be simple generalisations such as 'people are untrustworthy', or they can be complex theories. But they tend to be internally consistent, and stable – resistant to change. They are simplifications of the real world, and stories that run through our minds that determine how we act.

So perhaps it's time for change. In fact, to retain relevance to the communities we serve, arts organisations need to change – or they will die. We need to change the way we behave and what we assume – in other words, our culture and mental models.

There are different levels of organisational change that can be implemented:

- Developmental change – improving current activities.
- Transitional change – replacing old activity with new.
- Transformational change – changing beliefs and making a leap of faith.

Engendering culture change requires an awareness of a vision for the organisation. Know what you want, know where you are, and then align everything with the vision: change behaviours, systems and attitudes, track progress, work with what works and learn from and discard what doesn't. To set about changing culture and mental models, you must first expose and challenge the paradigm – the way things are done. Powerful advocacy is required to activate and legitimise dissent.

Even when we've changed our organisations' cultures, some exogenous barriers will remain. Removing the barriers these lead to can't just be done through audience development or marketing. It needs social change. And this is where social exclusion activity kicks in . . .

Further reading

Michael Ballé (1994) *Managing with Systems Thinking*, Maidenhead: McGraw Hill
John Berger (1984) *Ways of Seeing*, London: BBC/Pelican
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DEVELOPING A CULTURALLY DIVERSE AUDIENCE

Philly Desai, George Matheson and Ron McAllister

Philly Desai reported the findings of a qualitative research project funded by the Arts Council of England which examined ethnic minority attitudes to the arts.

Background

The objective of the research was to understand more about the attitudes to and arts experiences of ethnic minority audiences. The triggers and barriers to attendance were investigated, with a view to identifying audience development strategies. The methodology used was qualitative, involving focus groups.

Definitions of arts

Asked to define the arts, the mainstream art forms were found to be top of mind for these audiences. Various Black, Asian and Chinese arts were also mentioned, although these were not always seen as 'arts' – more as 'cultural and social' activity. Occasionally activities like night-clubbing, deejaying and dancing to music were also defined as 'arts'.

Attitudes to mainstream arts

Participants in the research could be classified in three groups in terms of their attitudes to the arts: enthusiasts, experimenters and avoiders. The predominant image held of arts attenders was of white middle/upper-class people aged over 35, intellectual and 'arty', speaking in 'posh accents' and dressed in dinner jackets, ball gowns or suits. There were reports of negative experiences and expectations – parallels drawn with 'a Dalmatian with five black spots', and recollections of feeling 'why am I seeing this?' and 'sitting there miserably' thinking 'it's just a load of noise, innit?' One person said, 'I tried to like it, but it is boring'. Factors found to influence attendance included personal recommendation, special occasions and local publicity; and most favoured were events that are relevant, familiar and participatory.

Attitudes to Black, Asian and Chinese Arts

Attitudes to mainstream arts and to Black, Asian and Chinese Arts do not correlate, suggesting that ethnic minority audiences are not alienated from arts *per se*, rather from a particular version of 'the arts'. There is clear demand for a range of arts activities and a creative energy exists.

Black, Asian and Chinese Arts are seen as providing cultural continuity, and create pride and ownership in the communities. They are felt to relate to 'our experience', and provide deeper satisfactions and a safe space for self-criticism.

Community-based events are favoured, including religious and cultural festivals which engender feelings of participation and belonging. Social events, at which the arts are part of a wider social experience and enable active participation, are seen as blurring the line