

Writing: ***Leading part-time: Do we have to work 50 hours per week to lead effectively? Or is it another glass ceiling?***

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Earlier this year I turned forty-one. I started my first real job, as a trainee chartered accountant, at the age of eighteen whilst awaiting my A level results. For a year I worked five days a week, 8.45am to 5.15pm, with an hour for lunch and fifteen days holiday a year. This is the only year out of the last twenty-three that I have worked full-time in one role.

I left the accountancy firm in the summer of 1989 to pursue my interest in art, ultimately graduating with a degree in Fine Art from Northumbria University in 1993. In my twenties I became self-employed working on commissions and community projects, I founded an artist-led collective, and I worked part-time for social services in a day centre for adults with learning disabilities.

In 1999 I joined Helix Arts¹ as Development Director, working three days a week. And in 2000 I became a father with the arrival of the first of our two sons Harvey.

For the past eleven years I have combined part-time work at Helix Arts with my arts practice and fatherhood.

At Helix Arts I worked three days a week becoming Director in 2006 and Chief Executive in 2010. During this time I was instrumental in growing the charity, in scale and reputation, into a national leader in its field, providing a platform for the company to reach more people, drive up quality standards, build new partnerships, sustain growth and improve efficiency. Between 2001/02 & 2009/10 Helix Arts achieved growth in turnover of 272%, total value of projects 1225%, earned income 562%, whilst increasing core costs by only 103%. 2009/10 was Helix Arts fifth consecutive record year enabling the charity to grow from six to nine permanent staff. Today the charity has a turnover of around £500k and currently employs nine part-time staff working between 22.5 and 30 hours per week.

My arts practice has continued to develop, with over fifteen performances, screenings and events over the last decade, increasingly outside of the UK.

And at home I have enjoyed being with my sons and enabling my wife to also work part-time as a midwife.

In 2007 I also joined the board of directors of North Tyneside Art Studio², becoming chair in 2009, and this year I have joined the governing body at Harvey's new high school.

However, I am now forty-one, I am more passionate than ever about art and culture and the role of the third sector in society, I believe I have a lot to offer, and I am looking for a new challenge; but if I fancied a leadership role in a larger charitable institution, working part-time, could I secure one?

Unfortunately I don't think so, and I think that's a missed opportunity, not just for me and the organisation I might work for, but for anyone who chooses to lead part-time, for whatever reasons, and for all the organisations that could benefit.

So, in order to encourage organisations, large and small, to consider applications from part-time workers for key leadership positions, I will briefly outline **how we made part-time working a key strength at Helix Arts**, I'll cite **some current research and thinking on this topic** and finally I'll suggest **some ways in which organisations might better capitalise on part-time leaders**.

Work-life balance as core strength

The key to leading effectively part-time is fully understanding the role, and prioritising time and resources effectively to deliver the role. It's a combination of flexibility and discipline.

Since 2007 all staff at Helix Arts have recorded their time to 15 minutes in order to achieve a Full Cost Recovery costing profile for the work of the charity. In 2009/10 I worked 1002 hours and 15 minutes at Helix Arts (134 days). The breakdown of my time during the year was as follows: 28% internal relations – managing the performance of the team; 26% external relations – developing relationships with partners, funders, collaborators and advocates; 29% organisation development – developing the organisation to meet current and future needs; 6% governance – working in partnership with the Board to lead the organisation effectively; and 11% personal administration.

This personal time recording discipline (which I started in 2002 whilst doing management training), coupled with a clear understanding of my leadership role, enabled me to both lead effectively without unnecessary overworking, and to develop and refine the future role of the new Chief Executive, also a part-time position, in line with the business plan. Helix Arts successfully transitioned to its new Chief Executive earlier this year.

The following is extracted from an external evaluation of Helix Arts organisational development programme, 2007/08 to 2010/11:

Work in balance – all of the staff at Helix Arts work part-time “at least 75% wouldn't be here if that wasn't the case” says Toby Lowe (then Head of Programme) “that is what attracted me to coming here.” It is really unusual for a whole company to work in this way, and particularly to offer senior management positions on such a basis. When Andrew McIntyre (Fundraising & Business Support Manager) joined the organisation the whole work culture surprised him “It is just so healthy, people come in on time and leave on time, they never seemed really stressed – that isn't typical of an arts organisation!”

A Story of Change: Helix Arts' implementation of Arts Council of England Thrive! Funding - An Organisation Development Programme, 2007 – 2010, Gayle Sutherland

As a result of this embedded culture of placing work-life balance at the heart of the organisation - and valuing diversity, in the broadest sense - Helix Arts continues to attract exceptional candidates for positions at all levels in the organisation, and benefits from extremely low levels of sickness and high levels of employee retention.

More broadly, the evidence base for the benefits of working part-time is extensive. Perhaps most radically, the new economics foundation (nef) makes a compelling case for a new standard 21 hour working week in their publication *21 hours – Why a shorter working week can help us all flourish in the 21st century*³ (2010).

Whilst I want to focus specifically on the dynamics of *leading* part-time, I think it is worth pausing to consider some of nef's broader thinking in this area.

Generally: *'By sharing working hours and tasks more equally, everyone would be able to undertake more meaningful work and, by shortening the working week to four days we could create a better balance between paid work and the vital “core economy” of family, friends and community life.'* Page 16, *21 hours*

On citizenship: (a much shorter working week would free up time to...) *'...participate, enriching civil society, strengthening democratic processes and making it easier for voters to hold politicians to account.'* Page 22, *21 hours*

On benefits for business: *'Women's talents can be more fully realised if they find it easier to combine paid work with other responsibilities. Men will have the chance to become more rounded*

and emotionally intelligent individuals as their daily routines, identities, and values are more closely connected with home and family. Integrating paid employment with the rhythms and interests of domestic life will make managing or ‘juggling’ the two spheres less stressful and divisive. Emotional intelligence and better balanced lives are both known to produce better outcomes in the workplace. There is evidence, too, that people who work shorter hours are more productive, hour for hour.’ Page 24, 21 hours

nef go on to provide detailed arguments building a powerful case for a much shorter working week focusing on three key drivers: ‘Safeguarding the natural resources of the planet’, ‘Social justice and well-being for all’, and ‘A robust and prosperous economy’.

‘A much shorter working week would change the tempo of our lives; it would re-shape habits and conventions and profoundly alter the dominant cultures of western society. It would help to promote sustainable social justice, well-being, and the good life, to safeguard the natural resources of the planet, and to build a robust and prosperous economy.’ Page 25, 21 hours

The Work Foundation is a little blunter in their key messages for employers summarised in *About time for change* (The Work Foundation, in association with Employers for Work-life Balance, 2003), stating ‘*The smartest and most forward-looking organisations will see that by putting work-life balance at the heart of their cultures and their strategic plans they will not only be satisfying employees and creating more equitable workplaces, but increasing their productivity and responding competitively to significant changes...*’ Page 3

About time for change presents a number of case studies of organisations reaping the considerable benefits of placing work-life balance at the centre of their organisational culture: ‘*At PricewaterhouseCoopers we firmly believe that promoting work-life balance is a “business critical” issue and not simply the “right thing to do”.*’ Page 14

In terms of making my argument, perhaps the most useful quote is from Lloyds TSB who state that they view ‘...*their worklife balance policies as not just being about ‘helping the bank to meet its core strategic aims’ but also: ‘about moving from a “long hours culture”, where attendance matters more than achievement, to an environment where people are valued for the results they deliver and the competencies they demonstrate...*’ Page 15

So what might be the critical success factors to leading effectively part-time? I can think of six:

1. Having a clear (shared, agreed and understood) **strategic direction** – knowing the priorities, understanding the key drivers, having a strategy in place with clear performance indicators and robust reporting mechanisms. Here, the relationship with the board is key.
2. Having a strong and empowered **senior management team** in place – *having the right people around you*. This creates great opportunities to develop the performance of other team members by sharing responsibility through effective delegation.
3. Having a **clear focus on the strategic** rather than the operational/programme role/function – always ask, *is this a truly strategic task?*
4. Highly structured and **effective team working and communication** – through good annual appraisal processes, one-to-one supervision, team meetings, away days and internal communications systems.
5. **Rigorous time management** - planning forward (best time estimating), capturing (recording), reflecting and adapting (analysis) - and **ruthless prioritisation** - knowing what’s important, and what can wait or be delegated.
6. **The willingness of non-executive boards to think differently**. Perhaps this is one of the main barriers to leading part-time. So there is a job to do here too - to make the case by evidencing, to board members in particular, that leading part-time can be effective and value adding.

And what might the rewards be?

- A wealth of **new perspectives and approaches** from individuals who not only see the bigger picture, but are part of it.
- The opportunity to attract and develop **talented individuals** through offering flexible working patterns to increasing numbers of potential employees who demand them.
- A happy, motivated, hard-working, fulfilled leader!
- And don't forget, a part-time leader takes a **part-time wage** – do you really need, and can you really afford a full time leader?

¹ Helix Arts <http://www.helixarts.com/>

² North Tyneside Art Studio <http://ntartstudio.wix.com/4>

³ <http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/entry/21-hours>