How can we create efficiencies and be more responsive to economic change?

Come to this discussion for a conversation about new ideas and innovative practice to ensure economic resilience.

'We need to find models of business development from outside our industry – what can we learn that will help us be more effective organisations?'

'The effect of Brexit is uncertain. However the restricted freedom of movement, overall economic effect and potential impacts on grants and VAT may be damaging. Are we contingency planning?'

'Would alternative income sources and working with corporate sector allow people in the arts more financial stability in London and regionally?'

'When investors contribute to commercial capitalisation it's a form of private giving. Is this a new way to become a patron of the arts?'

'Is there a rise in UK theatre exports to global, non-EU markets?'

'What can we do as Local government cuts get tighter?'

'We still practice capitalistic budgeting where we strive for the best price, not the fairest.'

Venues and producers: new ways of working?

The relationship and working practice between theatre producers and venues is critical. Has the new economic landscape brought new ways of working for us all to understand?

'Theatre Tax Relief has been an enormous benefit – but it's having an effect? Do subsidised producing companies have the legal and accounting skills for complex co-productions? Is touring now so complex that it's not a place for beginners? New producers find it easier to start off west-end, touring nationally is now only killed art form'.

'Venues are increasingly risk averse in their programme choices and rely on one-nighters and streamed performances – as a replacement to mid-scale touring theatre'

'Whose Audience is it Anyway? Bringing venues and touring companies together to share their joint investment in audience development are fraught with issues of differing priorities, poor communication and overstretched resources.'

How can mid-scale touring survive and flourish? Is it now only a marketplace for venues to tour to peer venues? Who is independently making innovative and challenging work for midscale venues? And do the venues want it/can they bring audiences to it?

'Venues are passing risk on to presenting companies and producers. How can venues collaborate more effectively to resolve long-standing issues?'

'Deals are becoming more complex – each one includes its own traps and ticket levies that aren't clear at the outset'

'The crossover between commercial and subsidised sector – is opening a large scale touring musical in a subsidised venue giving some producers a competitive advantage?'

'Producer insistence on using 3rd party ticket agents to sell popular shows – is this another way to reduce the venues income and increase the producer's income?'

How do we get ahead of societal and technological change to stay relevant to audiences?

This discussion will look ahead at digital trends and societal shifts and consider how our practice and understanding should change to stay relevant to audiences of the future.

'Our population is changing radically with very different consumer needs from the baby boomers to millennials. What will the future look like and what does this mean for our businesses?'

'We need to think of a different model, and prepare for the fact that we're going to need to engage with audience in less traditional ways, if we want audiences to engage during times of financial uncertainty'

'I know that loads of young people love shows like Into the Heights, Hamilton & Lion King etc but would never be able to afford to see them live, maybe this is the way that they can be engaging with theatre?'

'How can we speak for a country that voted for Brexit when, mostly, we did not see this coming. We have to question our relevance, are we so removed that we could not perceive that seismic shift?'

'Ticket prices are a massive thing … my mum always used to try and take me to the theatre when I was younger at least once a year even during financial struggle, but there is no way she could afford to buy a ticket now for my younger sister with rising ticket prices.'

'How to and why we can embed representation of diversity (race, disability, class, age, gender) in the programme and to reach audiences. Do we address this as development, or is it a box office aim?'

'Audience behaviour: Some are loud and talking (or drunk), traditional audiences complain but they are dying out. How do we keep both happy?'

'Digital marketing – do we do this well enough?'

'Phones should be accommodated for, in this new age of technology and social media. We need to stop fighting against this - it makes the industry look dated and unwelcoming, which will stop people engaging with it.'

'Could commercial producers work with small scale companies that are telling great stories but do not have the financial resources to take their stories to the forefront of the west end?

What do we need to do to develop a workforce for the future?

In this session we will share what works in arts and education programmes, entry routes, skills development and broadening the diversity of our workforce.

'The culture of low pay for workers in the arts is reaching a breaking point for many people I have spoken to. People are considering leaving the arts because they cannot afford to have a comfortable living wage/work-life balance.'

'Leadership and governance - what styles, models and skills do we need for an increasingly complex business environment? What's our succession plan for future leaders?'

'We need more ingenuity, resource, ability and attention to toured in work in regional marketing'

'We need to do more to diversify our workforce and creatives – the next generation should look different'

'Above all, we need tackle to class diversity'.

Improving theatre's working culture

Come to this discussion for a conversation about how we can make theatre a more supportive environment for everyone.

'Because we work in an industry that we want to work in there seems to be an assumption that we must work absurdly hard and have a miserable time at work - just because we are lucky does not mean that we have to suffer for it'

'The industry is hierarchical - directors lead, the lead shows they lead companies - is that really the best way to make theatre and to manage staff?'

'We need a better work life balance and more flexible working practices. Stop ridiculous 70 hour tech weeks'

'There's a passive culture of endorsing bullying as a part of the culture of working in theatre. Leaders perpetuate it with statements such as 'that's just how they are' or we have 'extreme characters in our industry' or 'it's the price you pay for the talent'.'

'There's a major issue with self-employed workers. You are employed project by project and networking is vital. The risks of challenging (and of having a reputation for being outspoken) are high.'

'There's a culture of over work and long hours in the theatre. This can result in work and social lines becoming blurred, and a 24/7 culture where employees are expected to be available via email or phone day and night'.

'The artistic temperament is a myth. The value placed on some individuals, and their artistic output and process, places them beyond criticism and perpetuates the culture'
'We have to consider the difficulties faced by all departments. There is harassment and bullying in all areas; off stage, front of house and administrative roles'

Open Space: ideas

'Environmental sustainability. The Government will at some not too distant point start paying attention to this and we really do not need them legislating on this'

'What is the impact on individual freelance production staff, and on the industry as a whole, when touring shows fail? What protection/understanding of the issue can be achieved?

'Attacks on Freedom of speech. Increasingly the government on the back of terrorist actions are creating laws curtailing what they decide are extreme communications. Both government & media (including theatre) are cracking down on sexploitation and harassment. Whilst these are both understandable and well-meaning they do potentially impact theatres ability to challenge difficult / controversial subjects'

'The decline in paid arts criticism roles is resulting in PR fluff over genuine critical discourse. What alternative models can drive this vital component of a healthy sector?'

'As theatre makers we know programmers don't always have time to attend rehearsed readings and pitch events and showcases are based on a particular vision and curation. How do theatres want work to be pitched to them? Would they prefer digital extracts of the work?'