



Creative Matters podcast

The Art of Leadership

Episode 2: Conflict and Crisis

Transcript

Presenter:

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Discussion panel:

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Donna Munday - Freelance Executive Producer and Chair, National Student Drama Festival

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[INTRO MUSIC] Creative Matters – conversations on all things culture and creativity from Arts Council England **[END]**

Kirsty Lang: Hello, I'm Kirsty Lang and welcome back to *Creative Matters*, Arts Council England's brand-new podcast. We're kicking off with a three-part series on the Art of Leadership in which we're discussing how arts and cultural organisations can demonstrate good leadership in governance. The first episode was all about boards. Who should be on them, how should they function? How do you get that critical relationship right between the CEO and the Chair? That is now available on the Arts Council website, so be sure to give it a listen if you haven't already.

But now on to episode two. This one's called conflict and crisis. We're going to be discussing how boards and executives can best work together to manage challenges. How do you keep an organization unified during a crisis? At what point do you bring in external expertise? How do you communicate to stakeholders and the public?

Let me introduce our panel. We have Tim Crarer, who is chair of Wiltshire Creative. This is a new pan-arts organisation based in Salisbury, which came out of a merger between the Salisbury Playhouse, which Tim was formerly chair of, the Salisbury Arts Centre, and the Salisbury International Arts Festival. Donna Munday, who is a freelance executive producer currently working on *Death of a Salesman* in the West End. She's also chair of the National Student Drama Festival and a board member of Headlong Theatre Company. And Tony Butler, who is the executive director of Derby Museums a founder of the Happy Museum Project and a trustee of The Mighty Creatives.

Let me dive straight in the deep end. In your experiences - I'm going to ask this to all three of you. When things do go wrong, who should take charge? Tim, you first.

Tim Crarer: It's interesting in the context of our merger because it wasn't as though there was an immediate crisis. I can talk later about the Novichok crisis, which happened later. In fact, what happened with the merger was that funding was getting tighter. It was becoming increasingly clear that three national portfolio organisations in one city was not going to be a sustainable option.

Certainly, at Salisbury Playhouse before the merger, we had ourselves gone through a restructure having identified that the cliff-edge was if not looming, it was certainly not far away. We underwent a major restructure ourselves. Then, having done that and put ourselves in a stronger position, we then looked at the idea of merging the three organisations together. Hardly a crisis, but it did require quite careful management throughout the process.



Kirsty: Very specifically, who took charge? This was the executive or the board or working together?

Tim: In terms of the merger, it started with informal approaches by me to my fellow chairs. It was an informal process, to begin with. Once it started going, we were quick to appoint a group quality advisor who'd actually been through our own restructure and also, at a fairly early stage, appointing the correct professional advisors because it was very important to get its structure right, right at the beginning.

Kirsty: I'm going to come back to the Novichok crisis later but let me move on to Donna. Donna, when things do go wrong, who should take charge?

Donna Munday: I think it tends to vary on the exact circumstances. I've been involved either as a Chief Executive or as a trustee with a number of different types of crisis and conflict. Things like unexpected redundancies. Things like the very sad death of a cast member, financial issues coming to light which weren't known about. I think the answer in terms of who takes charge is somebody. Somebody has to take charge.

I think it's quite easy for organisations to go into paralysis when you're faced with something unexpected and dramatic happening. It can vary depending on the circumstances who the right person to take charge is. The main answer has to be somebody has to take the lead because what an organisation needs, and indeed what a board needs, in times of crisis and conflict is leadership.

I think the communication with the board as chief executive is really essential in keeping them up to speed and informed as you go along and being very clear about where the board responsibility starts and stops and where the executive responsibility starts and stops. My mantra in this and in fact, in all cases dealing with boards is it is the responsibility of the board to make sure that it is done, it is the responsibility of the chief executive to do.

Kirsty: How important is it for the Chief Executive to be transparent with the board at all times, you say keep them informed?

Donna: I think it's pretty crucial, these are the people who ultimately have legal responsibility for the well being of the organization. If it's a charity, as many of my companies have been, then you've got very, very clear legal responsibilities as the trustee of a charity and your obligation of a trustee for the wellbeing of that charity overrides pretty much everything else, so you do have to keep your trustees very well informed and engaged in the process.

Kirsty: Tony, when do you think the board should step in and how can trustees work most effectively with exec teams?



Tony: Well, I think it depends on how you define crisis, whether a crisis is a process or an event. Sometimes it's a process and extends over a long period. It can be months, even years. If it's an event and there's decisive action required, then it's really important that there's a real closeness between the Chief Executive and the Chair. That relationship is absolutely key in any aspect of the charity or the organisation's life but in times of crisis, it's especially important.

Boards step in if the Chief Executive fails almost, if the Chief Executive isn't decisive enough, or is compromised by a crisis, then, absolutely, the board steps in as Donna's just described. Ultimately, it's going to be a real judgment for the chair. The chair's roles is quite unforgiving, almost because they have to make a decision as a non-exec of when to step in.

Kirsty: In my experience, also when there is a crisis or conflict, it can be quite difficult to keep a board unified. I mean, the nature of human beings, especially if you're a large board is that they can divide, take sides, which is quite dangerous, isn't it?

Tony: It is, and it's especially complicated if your board includes politicians. In my current board there's 16, that's quite a big board, three of them are politicians from three of the main parties within the city. They're on the board because the city council still own the assets in our collections and our buildings and are important stakeholders.

In the five years I've been there it's been all sweetness and light and we've all got on and we've approached difficult events, say crises, difficult events collectively with solidarity. That especially complicates matters when politicians are involved who may have very different views and when they get –

Kirsty: Different constituents and loyalties and –

Tony: Absolutely.

Kirsty: – all of those things pulling at it. Okay, let's drill down to some of the sorts of challenges that arts organisations often face, a very common one is money, dealing with a financial crisis. Donna, talk us through that, dealing with a financial crisis, how does one manage?

Donna: I think the first stage tends to be discovery when the first realisation when you may be in an organisation or leading an organisation that has financial issues that have come to light. You have to get over the shock of discovering that something you thought was okay actually is not and then act quickly. I can think of one organisation where the first thing I did was to bring in a financial expert, like a consultant to do an investigation for me because I didn't have the capacity to do it



and I felt although my own financial skills are pretty advanced, I felt I would actually be better served by somebody independent.

I brought somebody in to do a forensic investigation of what had occurred, and from then on, we took preventative action, mitigating action, worked out whether the organisation can continue and deliver what it should be delivering. I think what we really did was, I suppose, quarantine the problem having ascertained what it was. Make sure the organisation was stable and could continue to deliver on its core objectives. Kept our stakeholders, in this case, it was an Arts Council organisation really closely informed from the very, very first moment. Keep people informed as much as possible and carry on making sure that you're delivering your objectives and against your core values as well.

8:30

Kirsty: Would you at that point, bring in perhaps members of the board who have financial expertise?

Donna: Yes. If I was running an organisation and not on the board myself, probably the first port of call would be the chair and the second person I would call would be the person or people on the board for if you had financial designated responsibility. Trustees have shared financial responsibility. One individual can't hold that responsibility as an individual but there always tends to be on a board someone who has more expertise than the others who tends to be the first port of call with that issue to be discussed.

Kirsty: Tim?

Tim: Yes, I agree with all of that. I think the key thing is to have the right people on the board to begin with so that you've got a decent cross-section of people with the relevant skills that you can turn to in a crisis and hopefully, don't end up in the crisis to begin with because you're scrutinizing properly the accounts, you know you're doing proper cash flows, you're doing proper annual plans, five-year plans. You shouldn't really get blindsided. There are things that are beyond your control but there's a lot that is within your control and I completely echo the point you made about governance and management, that you should be able to leave the day to day running to the executives. One of my trustees has a wonderful expression about the board's attitude should be 'noses in, fingers out' for board members.

Kirsty: Now you had to manage this huge merger between three separate organisations in Salisbury, the theatre, the festival, the Arts Centre, and you got some stick in the local media for it who saw it because of your close association with the playhouses, a bit of a takeover, the whale swallowing the smaller fish. How did you deal with that?



Tim: We were very respectful of the legacy organisations, by which I mean all three of them, because in a town like Salisbury people are very passionate about the organisations that they've supported financially and emotionally for years and years. You have to be receptive to that and understand that you tread carefully. But it was a situation where the merger really had to happen because the three organisations were not viable independently and the distinct possibility that all or some of them of them would simply not have survived had we not done the merger.

You had to keep gently moving people along that path to understand that there really wasn't an alternative. But by the same token, reassuring them that once the merger did take place, we would continue to deliver a festival. We would continue to operate the arts centre and that the economies of scale that were generated would actually help in running those organisations better, and so it has proved in terms of cross-fertilisation of audiences and so on. We're getting people booking through one outlet as it were to go to the other shows and so on.

Kirsty: How long did it take for people to come around to the idea?

Tim: We merged 18 months ago so it's a work in progress, I'd say but we are seeing the signs of it now.

Kirsty: So was this all in process when you get blindsided by Salisbury, actually becoming the set of a Le Carre novel when two Russian spies attempt to murder another spy with Novichok in the town? Nobody can possibly predict something like that.

Tim: We should have had it on the main stage, actually, instead of out in the streets but it happened I think, three months after the actual merger. The hard administrative work of simply bringing the three organisations together, all the contractual work and all the legal input was done. And then we thought we could take a deep breath and then have a year or so of consolidation while we decided how best to shape the organisation. And it was yes, three months in that the Novichok crisis hit us. Mercifully, we had already taken a decision to have a rest from the festival for the year in question, which as it turned out was very lucky. Otherwise, we might have been trying to put a festival on with no audience. That actually worked out reasonably well but yes, it was a major blow.

Again, coming back to the point Donna made earlier about notifying your stakeholders and those whom you need to communicate with, it's important not to hide them, hide from these things.

Kirsty: Be transparent, keep everyone closely informed because people just get suspicious, don't they, when they don't know what's going on? Tony, how do you go



about explaining big changes to the public? At what point does one bring in the local media and so on.

Tony: That's often a very difficult judgment but I'd operate on the basis of keep it simple and always tell the truth. Never try to soft-soap any stakeholder. A fairly recent example was back in 2015, the Derby Museum Trust had only been going for a couple of years. It was the run-up to the General Election and local council elections. The local authority decided to chop off £350,000 from our budget without much warning, which would have led to the closure of museums. We'd always argued because they were a principal funder that we accept the need for cuts but let's do them over a longer period and give us a chance to bring in external income to soften that.

We were very clear with the public about what the implications would be and then we took the quite difficult decision. Some even say it's a slight foolhardy decision to raise petition in our buildings with the public. My chair was fully behind this. We put petitions in each of the museum's buildings, and each of these buildings are owned by the Council, so they were a bit cross, and we got 10,000, 11,000 signatures just over the Christmas period.

In the end, I was sort of dragged up into the Council meeting and given two minutes to talk to the Council and the public about what the implications of these cuts would be. In the end, the Council did relent and we still got the cut but over a three-year period instead of one. I think we, as a Board and as the Executive, showed good judgment there but we probably lost that bit of capital now. We kind of pressed the nuclear button.

Kirsty: That's very good. It's a risky strategy.

Tony: We won't get away with doing that again,

Kirsty: So you and the chair kept close during all of this?

Tony: Absolutely. The chair and I were really as one and so were the Board. What was interesting was that the politicians on the Board took a step back. Within local government, obviously, the most important things are keeping young people safe and looking after older people. But closing museums, shutting theatres, doing bad things to the arts, are vote losers and sometimes that's really powerful as well. That's where the need for clear and sometimes brave judgments are required. The other implication from that was that we ended up then getting monthly meetings with the Deputy Chief Executive that we've never had before. Since then, we have a brilliant relationship.

Kirsty: Actually, in the end, local authority also took away a lesson from that, that they should keep in better contact with you.



Tony: That's absolutely the case. It hasn't necessarily led to oodles of cash coming our way. We still had to experience reductions in funding, but it's given us the chance to make the case to say, "slow them down, give us the ability to raise our own income." Our financial risk has been spread much more now because of the time they gave us.

Kirsty: I'm interested in this issue about how you actually directly communicate with your public in a crisis. I remember reading that in Hamburg when they built their amazing new concert hall which went massively over budget, there was huge amounts of negative press in the local media around it. What the board and the directors of the concert hall decided to do was literally invite in the public before it opened - not going through the media, but directly appealing to people, bringing them in saying, "This is your concert hall. This will make you proud of your city. It's for everybody." Because often, we go through the mediator of the local media, or social media, or whatever. I'm struck, Tony, that you used a petition. Can we think of other examples?

Tim: Yes. One of the sensitive issues was the fact that we, as I said, didn't have a festival last year. We did this year but not last year because we needed just to take a break. There wasn't time to get it set up, there wasn't the money to do it. But in order to reassure people, what we did was to do what was called a lift-off weekend over the August Bank Holiday. We put on a series of events in the centre of Salisbury. We attracted 13,000 people over the weekend to these various events. It was hugely well-received, and it was a statement of intent to say "we are here still."

Kirsty: You used that as a way of communicating with the public that the festival wasn't disappearing.

Tim: Absolutely.

Kirsty: It was just taking a break, and this was a sort of taster.

Tim: Absolutely right, yes.

Kirsty: Now, we're going to take a pause now to hear some insights on crisis communications from a former journalist and media consultant, Tine Van Houts, who trains organisations on effective communication strategies in times of crisis and how to prepare Chief Execs and Chairs for tough media interviews.

[Cut away]

Tine: It's very difficult to prepare for a crisis, I always think, because if you know that it's going to happen beforehand, of course, you make sure that it will never happen at all. You prevent it, but real life, of course, is not like that. The best way I think to



prepare is to look around you, look at similar organisations, art organisations, and look at what horrible disasters have befallen them.

Imagine, for example, that you have some organized gala opening a new museum of a new exhibition by a prize-winning artist. On the day, unfortunately, it becomes known that the painter is paedophile. He won the prize because he's a close friend of the CEO. Your sponsor happens to be an oil company and the ceiling has just fallen in on all the VIP guests.

Now, you might say, "Well, Tine, hello, get a life. Real life is not like that." But I'm afraid that all these examples are a little bit of things that happened to arts organisations not so many months, or years, or even days ago. The best way to prepare for any crisis situation is to imagine the absolute worst that could happen to your arts organisation. Never, ever think it won't happen to me.

Meet with your team and say, "Okay, what is the worst you can expect?" They all have their own personal fears and prepare for all of them. You also really should decide then and then who will be your spokesperson and what you will say. A great thing to start is to say, "Sorry." It doesn't mean that you, as an organisation, take responsibility for the falling in of the ceiling or whatever has happened, but you can say sorry as an ordinary human being, that you are sorry for this horrible thing that happened.

Then, you should tell the truth because if you don't, it will always come back to haunt you in the digital world. In the past, with the crisis training, we always said, "Oh, there is a golden hour." You will have an hour just after the crisis the event happened in which you can prepare and then make a statement.

But nowadays, a tweet is around the world in eight seconds, you haven't got that time. If you join the debate about your crisis after the social media who often make a lot of errors, then you're already starting from really a losing position. When you're preparing for what you are going to say, think about the values of your organisation and keep to those values. In all the situations you imagine that might happen, and you hope that they won't, of course, you will have to think about the basic values your organisation has and then you will automatically find the right answers in which be true, of course.

I think the role of the leaders, of the CEOs, is fantastically important and they should be seen or heard straightaway. Don't hide. Don't say, "Oh," to journalists, "you'll get a statement via the email in three hours' time." We don't like that. I think that the best way to avoid making journalists your enemy is to really be, from the very first moment, a trustworthy, reliable source. I think for spokespeople of an organisation in crisis, cooperation with the journalists is very, very, very important because it takes



years to build up your good reputation and it only takes a few minutes to ruin it maybe forever. The easiest way to do that is to tell the truth.

Of course, when you're in the middle of a crisis you don't know everything. You can say that. You say, "Okay, this is what we know at this very moment. When we know more, we will be in touch with you straight away." Then, please be in touch, ring back, be polite, we'll be eternally grateful. Because remember that in a time of social media, the social media will be first always and the only way in which you can really bolster your reputation is to be really, really fair and close to the real official journalist because that way you can keep a grip on your version of what has happened. Make sure it's the true version because otherwise, you will just be sunk by social media.

[Cut away]

Kirsty: Well that was the media consultant, Tine Van Houts. Just out of interest, do any of you have people on your teams who are specifically trained to deal with media comms in crisis management and so on?

Tony: Ironically, the day that I was invited to come and speak here, we had just had a crisis communications session. We're currently redeveloping a museum, the UNESCO world heritage site Derby Silk Mill, it's the site of the world's first factory. It's a £17 million project. We got all the team together for the museum side, but also the contractors, exhibition designers, builders for a couple of sessions around crisis communications so that everyone is prepped for any eventuality.

Kirsty: Did you have to bring in somebody externally to do that?

Tony: Yes, we worked with an external company giving us advice on what to do and a lot depends on the nature of the crisis...

Kirsty: You were anticipating brainstorming the potentially bad headlines that you might get?

Tony: Absolutely, obvious ones from a construction site is a serious injury or an accident. Working with a major contractor that's going through their minds any way and they'll obviously be prepped for that too. There's also the more benign, less serious stuff around the public being disappointed with the outcome and how one manages that, so they range from –

Kirsty: Cost overrunning.

Tony: – the cost overrunning, disappointment, to serious injury.

Kirsty: Well, how about you, Donna? How do you feel about bringing in external consultants if you had to do that?



Donna: Absolutely and that could be legal advice. It could be specific human resources and personnel type advice, financial expertise as I referred to earlier and indeed communications advice as well. If it was something really horrendous that had happened and you needed proper PR, high-level senior knowledge, then I would bring someone like that in, but I myself have had comms training. I actually did that when I got my first chief executive job and since then I've always made sure that if I was running an organisation that the person who's in charge of press has comms training so they know the basic fundamentals of how to respond in moments of difficulty.

Tim: Our comms team is well set up and our joint executive is very experienced as well. We didn't feel the need to bring in external help, but we were careful to war game the whole situation in terms of getting the merger message out in terms of what we were trying to achieve.

Donna: I do brainstorming if it's something difficult and you know you're going to be asked questions either internally or externally, I'll get a small group of people around and we'll brainstorm the most horrendous questions we might possibly be asked. My one rule of going into any really difficult meeting is that you absolutely know something's going to be asked of you that you have not prepped for and that it's absolutely fine to say, "I'm not in a position to answer that at the moment and I will come back to you." Anyone who's going into any difficult meeting in any organisation I work for, I say that's your cardinal rule. You don't always have to answer on the spot.

Kirsty: One issue that's been attracting huge amounts of media attention recently is the business of sponsorship of the arts and culture and in recent months we've seen the Royal Shakespeare Company put an end to BP sponsorship and the British Museum defend it. Tony, you're running a museum, you first.

Tony: Thank you very much. From a regional museum's perspective, chance will be a fine thing to have millions of pounds of sponsorship from the corporate sector and the relationships that we build with the corporate sector, they're long in the building and they're deep.

In our case, Rolls Royce is a big employer in our city. We've built a partnership with them over five or six, seven years since the Trust came into existence. In our city, they employ 13,000 people or so. They're an incredibly important part of the firmament of life in the city.

If you dig deep enough, you could make the case that a Rolls Royce making jet engines and that's a massive contribution to the climate crisis. Again, dig even further deeper, they're making components for nuclear submarines, so links to the weapons industry. You're never going to be far away from bad money - all sorts of



corporations do not good things. Each of those judgments have to be weighed up. This specific issue around working with fossil fuel companies. I heard Mark Rylance on the radio at the weekend and he's talking about the active obfuscation of the fossil fuel companies 20, 30 years ago. To stymie research into alternative fuels and to campaign out to vote against people that were advocating combating climate change. There's a particular issue with those oil companies but you don't have to look that far for difficult decisions with other corporations.

Kirsty: Exactly, I read quite a good column by Matthew Paris in the *Times* recently saying, come on, this is all very hypocritical arguing against Mark Rylance. We all drive cars, we all get our petrol from BP petrol stations and so on. Why the arts getting all the stick? It's a really tricky one. Let's face it. If you're faced with it, who takes the call? Is it the exec or is it the board? I'm throwing this open to everyone.

Tim: I think it needs to be the board without a doubt because I suppose the point is it's reputational damage. If you start losing your audiences, then they start boycotting you then that's extremely bad news. I happened to think in this particular debate that it is too narrowly construed. And actually, if it was the case that the fossil fuel company in question was applying some editorial control over what's through the stages, for example, that would be a disaster. If they were brave enough to sponsor it, notwithstanding, we are putting up climate change plays and literature and art, I can't really see a problem with it. I think the harm done to, for example, the cheap ticket scheme-

Kirsty: This is the five-pound tickets for the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Tim: -I think that's a sad loss. I think you need to be encouraging young people into the theatres and to encourage them to experience all manner of art. If you take away an important means of doing it, the young people are still able to express their opinions. Hopefully, they do it within the organisations as well. Even if they are sponsored by the oil companies.

Donna: I think it can be a case of 'how bad is the bad money' and what is the benefit of turning the bad money into good? There've been a couple of times where I've been involved with organisations where we've had to raise a very significant sum of money, like between £10 and £20 million. You're talking to organisations that tend at somewhere in their being to have bad decision making or a bad product or something that would not go down well with the general public. The challenge for a board and having a policy about what you do and what you don't accept in terms of money from organisations is that it changes so quickly.

What the public taste is for what is acceptable or not changes on a regular basis. I also do think that there is a way of taking what's deemed to be bad money and turning it into good, the point that you were making, in terms of the benefits that are



delivered by that money and can it be justified, and how public are you able to be about your views of what that company does are all quite crucial. Having an overarching policy as a board is tricky when things change so rapidly as to what is and is not acceptable. Because two years ago, we wouldn't have been talking about climate change like we are today. We wouldn't have been talking about #MeToo related things like we are today.

Kirsty: It's quite tricky, and often, the room can divide over it. Reaching a consensus can be a challenge on something like this can't it?

Tim: You should have the forum in which to try and reach that consensus, whether that's at board level or whether that's within the organisation with its customers and its audiences. We're at a point where it's so easy for everyone to withdraw into the echo chambers. By taking funding from perhaps controversial funders, you are enabling people to come and have that debate and actually listen to the other side of the argument, that's got to be a good thing.

Kirsty: Open your spaces, use your theatres, your museums, or to have that debate it'll allow people to come in and argue it out.

Tim: Yes. Have the speakers at the festivals. Have the controversial speakers at the festivals, because if they got bad arguments, then they should be challenged. I'm probably going to get hate mail through Twitter now, so I'll stop talking.

Kirsty: Well, you raised an interesting point about social media. Should arts organisations be using social media to get their point across or actually are you then getting yourself into a more difficult area?

Tony: Again, that's an area where it's really important to exercise good judgment. I'm an avid user of Twitter. The opinions and things that I would talk about on social media aren't always the same as the things that we would tweet, as Derby Museums. There has to be a distinction between the person and the organisation and obviously, that area is sort of blurred at Chief Executive level but the judgments I would make about the use of social media [is that] our corporate feed is less controversial but as leaders, we have to take a stand if there's things that are damaging to society, and if we see injustice, or if we see bad things happening, they cannot be ignored. We are part of this world, our contribution to the climate, and actually a number of our team went off on strike for the day, so we accommodated that. One of our pictures went on strike. It was a large portrait by Joseph Wright of Derby of Sir Richard Arkwright, the founder of the factory system, which one might suggest is, well, why we're in this mess with it, the full-on industrialisation, so there are –

Kirsty: Do you mean it went on strike, you mean –



Tony: We put a big cover over it, and then artwork on strike. There are a number of things that happened--

Kirsty: Then tweeted it, that's brilliant.

Tony: Yes, exactly. It's symbolic.

Kirsty: This is a good point isn't it? Since what you're saying is, look, we're creative organisations, let's find creative ways of managing the debate.

Donna: I think, though, that if you're talking about conflict and crisis management on social media, I think that the most important thing that you can remember is that the speed at which social media operates is not the same as the speed at which your response to crisis and conflict should take place. It's so tempting when you're being attacked by whoever, on whatever subject to respond fast. I think it's so important that you don't, and that you be calm and take stock. If necessary, take advice, take legal advice, take professional comms advice.

Do not feel that just because you've got an onslaught of social media, negative comments coming at you feel that you have to respond to it straight away, because I have seen that backfire really, really badly.

Tony: Going back to the social media issue, absolutely pause and also remember that the traditional channels of criticism in times of crisis operate much more slowly than social media does, but they're much less important that they used to be. A local newspaper circulation today in hard print is probably five, six times lower than it was 10 years ago. 10 years ago, you'd react immediately if you have bad things in the press. These days, it's coming at you from all sorts of different directions and you have to be really careful about which media you choose –

Kirsty: Don't panic if you had a few nasty tweets.

Tony: The local BBC radio station is often the best place to put through a coherent and clear and simple argument.

Kirsty: Would you get in touch in that case with the local radio station?

Tony: It's two minutes down the road from where we are, and often we are very helpful to them for more benign stories. We've built very good relationships with BBC Derby. Obviously, they're journalists, they're going to challenge you, especially if something controversial is happening. Good relationship at a local radio level is probably the best one to build.

Donna: I think that one thing to bear in mind is that's absolutely right but the other thing to bear in mind is that however you are responding to these things that you need to respond to, you also need to think how you're keeping your internal



organisation on side and informed. One rule I've always tried to implement whenever I'm handling anything like this, is that I don't say anything in the public domain unless I have somehow or the other communicated that to the staff team, and certainly the rest of the board and stakeholders first.

Sometimes, depending on the size of your organisation, it can mean calling a full staff meeting. I can think of WhatsApp trails that have gone on for board members to keep them involved at literally hour-by-hour, notifications of something that's gone on. It's quite easy to forget when you're prepping for an interview somewhere like the BBC studio or wherever it is. Your staff must never be surprised, your board must never be surprised, your closest stakeholders must never be surprised about what you happen to say.

Kirsty: I think there is often a danger, isn't it, that people think about comms being external facing and they forget often the very critical thing that you're communicating externally, but also internally as well, at the same time in a crisis.

Tim: And that's a really good point, because actually, we had obviously a very good example of that with our merger because it wasn't just about the external comms about how the organisation was going to look. You were bringing into the organisation a lot of people who'd worked for the other organisations and who were there for culturally, they were under the legacy cultures and it was a matter of melding that into a new organisation, so a lot of internal communication required to bring them on the journey really.

Kirsty: Well, look, I think we've come to the end of our time for today. That was an excellent, very stimulating conversation. I'd like to thank Donna, Tim and Tony for taking part, bringing their experiences and insights to the table. Thanks also to Tine Van Houts for her insight. Join us in this conversation on Twitter, letting us know what you think of the episode. You can do that by using #AceLeadership. Do make sure you visit the Arts Council's website for more resources and guidance around the topics of leadership and good governance, and you can find that at artscouncil.org.uk/leadership. From me, Kirsty Lang, it's goodbye.

[OUTRO MUSIC]

V/O: Thanks for listening to creative matters. For more from Arts Council England, visit artscouncil.org.uk/creativematters.

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