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The Mad, Mad Chase for Innovation in the Arts

Diane Ragsdale · Wednesday, June 15th, 2011



A few weeks back, I wrote in a post that I'm beginning to wonder whether the process of adapting to a changing environment has become harder for arts organizations than it needs to be because many arts funders seem to be fixated on the idea that future success will come only through 'radical innovation'. I suggested that perhaps we could see some pretty great results through good-old-fashioned, common-sense, it's-about-time, just-do-the-right-thing, 'improvements'. I'm not suggesting that 'innovation' in the arts and culture sector should not be enabled or supported (it should). But I am skeptical of the funder-driven 'innovation in the arts' bandwagon. Here's why:

First, once new ideas are funded within funder-led 'innovation' initiatives, they tend to get heralded (by the press, funders, and field experts) as 'innovative' before they have demonstrated that they are. As an example, the Dance Theater Workshop and Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company merger has been called 'innovative'; but the idea to merge a dance company and a presenting organization is not, in and of itself, an 'innovation'.

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