Reflections on #BeyondMeasure Twitter chat I chaired on 23 July 2020. Thanks to all those who joined in and to the invited contributors: Chris Fremantle Daniel Regan Chris Rolls Thanh Sinden and Kirsty Stansfield

Adapting / translating / re-inventing

As part of Beyond Measure?, an online programme exploring research and evidence in culture and health, in July 2020 I was invited to curate a Twitter chat on the 'Artist as Researcher: Impact on the Practitioner'. I wanted to explore how artists are adapting, translating and re-inventing practice as we navigate our way through the significant changes brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic.

As an artist researcher, my primary focus is to explore how reflective practice activities can be employed to offer support to practitioners, and to understand how the topic is being researched elsewhere. This year, supported by AHRC and Clore Leadership, I will be developing my Artists Practising Well research further, and the contributions shared in the Twitter chat have already expanded my thinking, which in turn will inform my approach. The chat brought together perspectives from practitioners, academics and those facilitating support structures, and the following is a short commentary on some of the points raised.

Dynamics of altered spaces

For some practitioners, the transition from face to face working to online delivery has been rapid: from having responsibility for artistic content, process and interpersonal

dynamics held within physical spaces (workshop room, hospital ward, community setting) to managing online spaces (for which they may have received little or no training). Alongside this, their own creative practice may have needed to be significantly re-considered and re-invented.

Creative practitioners who work with people will be used to reading the room, interpreting interactions and body language: noticing the space a participant chooses to use, engaging in incidental conversation during a tea break and being available at the end of a session when a participant waits to ask a question privately. These are all important sources of information, so how can the practitioner's skills in reading the physical room be translated to the digital space? How are other practitioners managing this change of context? Resources are needed to expand the existing good practice of peer to peer discussion group provision to ensure common challenges and changes like these can be shared, and collective solutions proposed and tested.

The pandemic is something we have experienced collectively and individually — we each hold our own personal experience alongside our role as professionals. Affective support spaces and practices can be used to acknowledge the seismic changes that have happened within our own lives, our individual creative practice and our approaches to working with people. It can be important to name what has been lost or altered — albeit on what we hope will be a temporary basis — in terms of changes in approach, translating ways of working which may have been developed over many years and adapting relational dynamics. Being conscious of the reality of a situation can help with moving through and beyond it. Locating what is at the core of creative practice, and exploring how that can operate within the current framework of screen based working and social distancing, has the potential to strengthen practice and expand it in new directions.
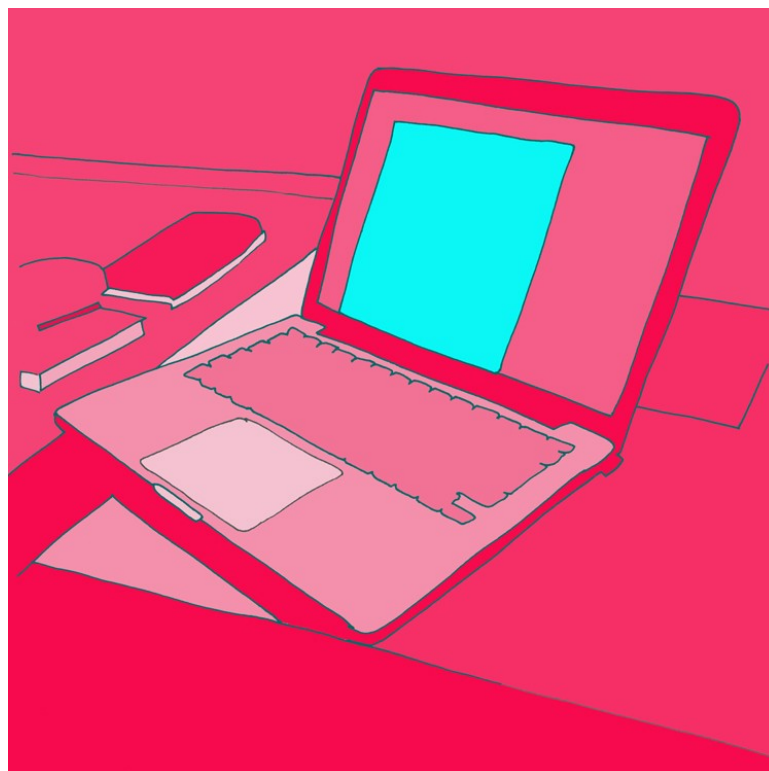
A blended approach in the future

The Covid-19 pandemic brings to the fore the interdependence of instrumental and affective support. Instrumental support covers the need for clearer and more reliable pay structures and contracting, which have long been inconsistent and precarious. It considers appropriate training in the use of digital platforms and technical support during sessions, and provides participants with the necessary resources so they can be in the digital room. Affective support — which may take the form of reflective writing, a mentoring conversation, a coaching session or peer to peer group discussion — can help the practitioner to process an abrupt ending of work in mid-process, the swift adaptations to practice needed to move into an online space and the attention needed to identify the heart of the work, keeping it central to new ways of working.
As the conditions of the pandemic evolve what is likely to emerge is a blended approach to arts for health and wellbeing: retaining what has been learnt and is beneficial about online working, complementing it with the re-introduction of face to face working. Affective and instrumental support for practitioners must be discussed, planned, resourced and implemented if we are to protect the wellbeing of practitioners who in turn facilitate creative spaces for others, offering opportunities for connection and reflection.