

# Using mentoring to embed organisational change

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## Summary

This paper looks at how mentoring affected organisational change and renewal in a number of large museums in the UK. The research found that mentors frequently supported their protégés in their agendas for change, even though mentoring typically fossilises existing mindsets and behaviours. The research also identified mentoring as a crucial method for establishing organisational change.

## The research is based on 16 interviews with a new generation of directors at National Museums in the UK

The 16 directors were all identified as being agents of change in their organisation, had acknowledged a process of mentoring in their career trajectories, were comprised of nine men and seven women, and held senior administrative positions such as Director of Research, Education, or Curatorial Activities.

## Mentoring in a state of conflict

The researchers found that many of the interviewees had found themselves in a mentoring relationship as a result of some particular conflict, not alignment, with their mentor's vision for the organisation in which they both worked. After an initial collision, the mentors then gave support, protection (and space) to their protégés in such a fashion that allowed the organisation to confront

conflict and disagreement without putting the career of the protégé at any risk. The mentors tended to be strictly professional, rather than friendly, in their dealings with their protégés. They supported someone with a different vision than their own for the organisation, and kept that conflict and contradiction subsumed.

## Embedding change

By protecting and promoting the work of new and emerging professionals, the mentors enabled the innovative ideas of their protégés to become embedded and institutionalised within their museums. Their mandate for change was strengthened through the mentoring and the organisations benefited in the long term as a result.

### Keywords

**organisational change** **UK** **museum** **conflict** **mentoring** **interview**  
**directors**

Title	Mentoring and change in cultural organizations: the experience of directors in British national museums
Author(s)	Paquette, J.
Publication date	2012
Source	The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society, Vol 42, Iss 4, pp 205-216
Link	<a href="http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10632921.2012.749817#.Uzcdf17R3dE">http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10632921.2012.749817#.Uzcdf17R3dE</a>
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By **Culture.Case** | 16 April 2014 | **Insights into arts and culture** ,  
**Organisational change in arts and culture** |



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