

Report from the tenth Culture24 Action Research Project

# LET'S GET REAL



## **Building a thriving hybrid working environment**

By Alec Ward, Anra Kennedy and Jane Finnis - May 2023

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# Foreword

Over the eleven years Culture24 has been running our Let's Get Real programme the cultural sector has not kept up with the rapid pace of technological change. As a sector, only a small percentage of us have fully embraced digital transformation (both creatively and operationally) and our digital activities often remain siloed and under-resourced.

The sector is caught in an unhelpful Catch 22 situation. Without strong digital literacy, especially of our senior staff, the depth and reach of the problem is not fully understood and can therefore be overlooked or dismissed. Without digital literacy, our sector won't be able to shake off the unhelpful paradigms of the past and become more inclusive and equitable. Digital literacy is now more important than ever. Without it we don't know what we don't know and maintaining the status quo can seem like a strategy. The truth is that for any business hoping to build a successful operational and engagement model in the 21st century, digital transformation is fundamental and digital literacy is the key to make that possible.

One positive outcome from the Covid-19 pandemic was that it forced organisations and their leadership to pay close attention to their own digital activities. Digital tools and channels became the only way to do their work, to connect as a team and to connect to their audiences. Those organisations lucky enough to have a digitally mature team in place were able to make this jump reasonably smoothly. Others were left playing catch-up. For a moment, digital was in the spotlight and the speed of digital change accelerated for some, but not for everyone.

Let's Get Real Hybrid began in 2022 as the world opened up again. We wanted to take this moment to stop and reflect, to make sure that we didn't lose the momentum towards real digital transformation that the pandemic had kick-started. We wanted to make sure we didn't just slip back to our old rhythms and ways of doing things. We asked ourselves 'what might a thriving hybrid working environment look like?'

The methodology within Let's Get Real provided each participant with a supported space to do the work needed to begin to answer that question. This report shares what happened, what we have learned along the way and the bigger story it tells for our sector. It is a story about the value of experimentation in our search for positive change; a story about the importance of digital literacy and the confidence it gives people to lead those changes.

This story and the role that Let's Get Real takes in championing this change is needed now more than ever.



**Jane Finnis, CEO, Culture24**  
**May 2023**

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# Collaborate with and learn from a supportive, engaged community of peers with a shared sense of purpose

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## What is Let's Get Real?

Let's Get Real (LGR) is Culture24's flagship collaborative action research programme. Over the last eleven years we have supported ten cohorts of cultural heritage organisations<sup>1</sup> to become more relevant, resilient and responsive to digital cultural change.

Each year we gathered cohorts of people from cultural organisations to tackle different digital challenges together in a collaboratively-funded annual project. The LGR approach is always tailored to the cohort's needs and contexts and takes a human-centred design approach characterised by:

- Learning from others – we bring in a variety of voices and perspectives from within and beyond the cultural sector, to inform, support, guide and reflect on the challenges at hand
- Learning by doing – we support participants to test out and experiment with new ways of working in the context of their everyday activities
- Learning together – we create a community of supportive peers with a shared sense of purpose, actively seeking out ways to foster and promote collaborative exchange.

Our LGR projects follow the fundamentals of design thinking, which we embed into our workshops and mentoring sessions as well as encouraging the cohort to adopt this approach through their experimentation.

- Understand – pinning down the key issues/ themes in the project
- Define – relating project issues to each participant according to personal and organisational contexts
- Ideate – generating project ideas in creative and non-restrictive ways
- Plan – shaping experiments based on the best fit between the define and ideate stages
- Test – everyone runs their experiments (and iterates, if time and scope allow)
- Review – analysing where everyone is at and focus on approaches to unblock any issues or problems
- Reflect – everyone reflects on their work and key insights to support their ongoing, post LGR approach.

Each LGR project follows a structured process that combines collaborative discussion with expert input and individual practical action. All sessions build the personal confidence, understanding and digital literacy of the participating individuals.

They also give them the opportunity to collaborate with and learn from a supportive, engaged community of peers with a shared sense of purpose. You can read about the specific structure of this year's Let's Get Real project in the 'What we did' section below.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.culture24.org.uk/lets-get-real/>

# Project story

## Overview

Let's Get Real: Building a thriving hybrid working environment (LGR Hybrid) tackled a core challenge for the cultural sector in the 2020s, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The project addressed how, as a sector and a society, the pandemic forced us to fundamentally question and rethink how we work. The forced experiments with remote working in 2020 and the hybrid working reality of 2021 posed a significant threat to collaboration, resilience, inclusivity, finances and more in the cultural sector.

So, from June 2022 to February 2023 Culture24 supported nine UK cultural organisations to begin a journey of interrogating, understanding and developing their hybrid working practices.

Across the nine participating organisations, small scale experiments were conducted within their current and upcoming digital activity.

Some organisations focussed on internal practice, such as how they communicate, or the tools, platforms and skills that they use. Others opted to focus on audience-facing interventions such as weaving virtual experiences into their in-person programmes.

The project brought together a community of people and organisations with a shared sense of purpose to foster open, honest and collaborative learning between participants as we began to emerge from one of the most turbulent times our sector has ever faced.

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## Partnership

We developed and ran LGR Hybrid in partnership with [Birmingham Museums Trust](https://www.birminghammuseums.org.uk/)<sup>2</sup> (BMT) Co-CEO and Culture24 trustee, Zak Mensah.

Zak has been focussing on BMT's hybrid working practices since the start of the pandemic and had previously been vocal about his thoughts on the [future of work in the sector](https://www.museumnext.com/article/the-future-of-working-together-purposefully-deconstructing-why-we-gather/)<sup>3</sup>.



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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.birminghammuseums.org.uk/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.museumnext.com/article/the-future-of-working-together-purposefully-deconstructing-why-we-gather/>

## Participating organisations

Nine arts and heritage organisations took part in this collaboratively-funded project, each contributing between £495 and £1,500 depending on their size. We wanted to encourage smaller organisations to take part in the project and so a subsidised place was given for a fee of £180. The organisations that signed up to take part in the project were:

- Birmingham Museums Trust - <https://www.birminghammuseums.org.uk/>
- Bodleian Libraries - <https://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/home>
- Bluecoat - <https://www.thebluecoat.org.uk/>
- Bristol Museums - <https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/>
- Engage - <https://engage.org/>
- Gardens, Libraries and Museums, University of Oxford - <https://www.glam.ox.ac.uk/>
- Manchester Art Gallery - <https://manchesterartgallery.org/>
- Royal Armouries - <https://royalarmouries.org/>
- The Bowes Museum - <https://thebowesmuseum.org.uk/>
- Libraries and Museums, University of St Andrews - <https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/museums/> & <https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/library/>



# Framing the question - Culture24

To help frame the question and understand what our participating organisations were grappling with, we began to research hybrid working within and beyond the cultural sector. Between 2020 and 2022 a number of influential reports and surveys were published which helped to frame our thinking.

At the time, Culture24 was grappling with our own hybrid working practice so we wanted to use the preliminary research to help understand our own challenges and opportunities too.

Particularly useful in our framing of the question was Microsoft's 2021 report '[The Next Great Disruption Is Hybrid Work—Are We Ready?](https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/hybrid-work)'<sup>4</sup>; research from the [NCVO in 2022 into flexible working](https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/ti-me-to-flex/#/)<sup>5</sup> and a [survey from the Chartered Management Institute in 2021](https://www.managers.org.uk/knowledge-and-insights/article/what-you-think-about-wfh-flexible-and-hybrid-working-the-results-are-in/)<sup>6</sup> on working from home, flexible working and hybrid working.

Much of the research available was conducted outside the cultural sector, so in December 2021 we ran an open survey exploring the impact of hybrid on working practice, specifically for cultural heritage organisations. We received 98 responses to that survey and the data enabled us to paint a clear picture of the challenges, opportunities, fears and hopes for hybrid working in a cultural context<sup>7</sup>. This research told us that the most significant opportunities offered by hybrid working for cultural organisations, to help fulfil their missions were:

- The ability to work with people from further afield – regionally and internationally
- To increase digital skills, literacies and confidence within the organisation
- To improve communication and collaboration between team members
- To improve the diversification of audiences online.

The survey results also showed us that people were concerned about pressures around the expectation to 'always be online'. Others highlighted missing the spontaneity of conversations with colleagues, or the challenge of integrating into new teams when doing so remotely.

What we discovered through the survey led to the central question for this project - **How can arts and culture organisations build thriving hybrid working environments?**

The data showed us that hybrid working has great potential to improve the way we all work together, but it also showed some of the ways that, if not properly addressed, hybridity can negatively impact an organisation's working culture. The focus for this project would allow the participating organisations to interrogate their own working practices and culture and to experiment with hybrid working to create positive change.

We ask all of our participants in Let's Get Real projects to find a hunch to test or explore, something that has come up through their work which they would like to unpack, understand and evidence. For us, we wanted to better understand our own hybrid working practice, as a geographically spread team with an office based in Brighton. How could we build on our own hybrid working practice alongside the cohort, through the project?

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4

<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/hybrid-work>

5

<https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/ti-me-to-flex/#/>

6

<https://www.managers.org.uk/knowledge-and-insights/article/what-you-think-about-wfh-flexible-and-hybrid-working-the-results-are-in/>

7

<https://www.culture24.org.uk/lets-get-real-understanding-hybrid/>

# Have we learned nothing?

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Not working in communal offices has existed for many years. Those that chose the 'work from home/remote' approach considered it carefully and planned how they would work accordingly. They proactively considered the culture, individual work spaces and their tools, including how they'd communicate as a collective and everyone signed up willingly.

In the world 'working from home' was generally frowned upon or used by micro-businesses just getting started until they could grow up and get an office like everyone else. The office was seen as 'the way'. The start of the pandemic in 2020 forced most people to experiment with home working. There was little to no time to plan the transition and nearly everyone had to be at home regardless of the suitability of their home environment or infrastructure.

I remember the fraught days of trying to homeschool, work with 90%+ colleagues who didn't even have a corporate computer and make sense of the pandemic. Suddenly location and time became largely irrelevant. Normally to make a shift of this nature would take a well-funded change programme implemented over many months.

Once restrictions were lifted many came to enjoy at least some aspects of location flexibility and 'hybrid working' was (re)born.

Our mental model of working was that work happened at a specific place, during defined hours, using corporate infrastructure and rules and that we all knew our place. Not everyone loved the traditional model but we knew where we stood.

As most jobs used computers anyway we were able to largely salvage our traditional ways of working. We mostly copied how we used to work into a new label called hybrid. Meetings largely now happen over video calls, emails still get sent and we use online collaboration tools to feel part of the organisational culture.

In short the medium changed but we mostly didn't. For a brief moment those who fear change (neophobes) raged against even basic foundational changes and wanted everyone back to the office. At the macro level a new era of disruption started and will take many years to fully play out. At the core of the disruption is that fundamentally the way things get done is now up for grabs and we need to get used to constant change.

Those of us who see this moment in time as a catalyst for improving how we operate, asked the question: **Surely the future of how we operate (work) isn't just doing what we have always done?**

At the time of writing in 2023 I would say the typical organisation accepts that hybrid working is here to stay and we can be productive away from the office. But beyond a hastily written hybrid policy little has been done to get to grips with the new normal. People want greater flexibility in every aspect of their work life in order to thrive. In order to achieve this we actively need people with an interest in constant positive change (neophile characteristics). Organisations must seek people who will iterate and seek to innovate around three broad themes: constant change of



all aspects of the culture/ business environment, infrastructure, and ways of collaborating (a key element being internal communication). When you begin to poke the box you raise questions that will need answers such as:

- What is productivity in the new era?,
- What serves our internal community?
- How do you foster social trust?
- What is time (synchronous v asynchronous)?
- What infrastructure and technology allows new ways of working?
- Who are we excluding? (ie manual/on site roles v management?)
- How can we help career development?
- What is a good home office setup?
- What is the purpose of meeting face to face?
- What wider societal changes will impact us?
- What's a safe hybrid environment including ergonomics for hybrid workers?
- How do you knit together a workforce that is distributed?

The reward will be an organisation that can cope with the shocks that are sure to come. Working live vs offgrid. And thanks to projects like Culture24's Let's Get Real we can begin to answer these questions and know they'll evolve over time. Onwards.

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## What we did

Throughout LGR Hybrid we looked outward to the sector and beyond for best practice examples, inspiration and approaches. As hybrid working has been a relatively recent development for the sector we took care to ensure any examples would relate to the specific context of arts and cultural organisations' work. We took a ground-up approach to understanding this relationship, defined by the thinking and practice of our participating organisations. This ensured our understanding was always rooted in the specific contexts and nature of their work.

We used a tried and tested structure to support the cohort in their research and learning. This consisted of:

- Five online workshops, and one in-person workshop, between June 2022 and January 2023
- A series of five mentoring / support sessions for each participating organisation
- Regular self-led research periods between workshops
- Six online social drop-ins and one coordinated 'Air your thoughts' meet-up where the cohort were paired up and encouraged to meet for a talk, either in-person or on the phone, in an outdoor setting
- Three troubleshooting sessions on specific topics related to participant experiments and two short online content sessions
- Online collaboration between all participants via Mighty Networks platform.

# LGR9 Programme structure:

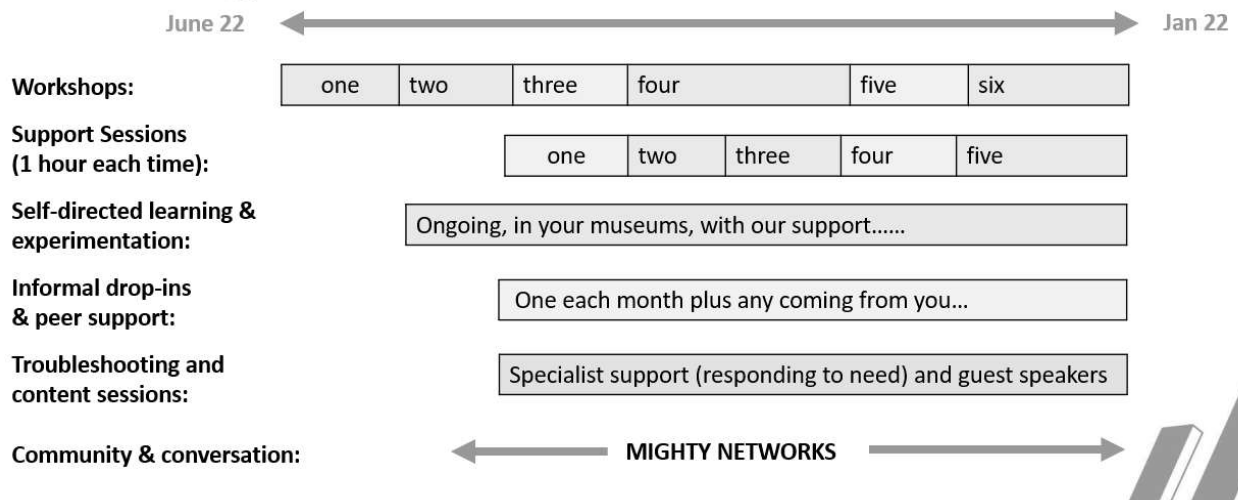






Diagram setting out the LGR Hybrid programme structure and timeline.


## Posts in this Section

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**Setting up notifications (vital!) ⓘ**  
You're in, welcome to the Let's Get Real 9: Building a thriving hybrid working environment programme. This is a...
- 

**Programme structure & timings ⓘ**  
This is an at-a-glance summary of the Let's Get Real 9 programme summary with dates & timings listed in...
- 

**Who we all are ⓘ**  
An overview of the project team's roles and specialisms and the museums in the cohort. If you're not sure who to get...
- 

**How to use Mighty Networks ⓘ**  
Hopefully you're gradually getting to know this online community space (Mighty Networks is the name of the host...
- 

**Your organisations' Padlets ⓘ**  
Each organisation has its own dedicated mapping and planning Padlet for you to reflect back on after workshops and to...

Screenshot from LGR Hybrid's collaborative and private Mighty Networks space.

## Learning from others

In LGR Hybrid we worked with talented, knowledgeable and experienced leaders, researchers and practitioners to support the project. Each brought interesting and insightful perspectives on the subject and helped to build a strong foundation of ideas, thinking and examples.

### **Dr Sophie Frost**

**Associate for Culture24, Lecturer in Creative Leadership at University of the Creative Arts, and Research Fellow in the Institute for Digital Culture at University of Leicester.**

Sophie is a consultant, researcher, podcaster and writer working across the creative, cultural and heritage sectors, with a focus on digital leadership and skills.

Sophie spoke about mapping digital labour at our second short content session, introducing the concepts of hidden digital labour and digital courage to the cohort. She discussed the keywords that emerged from her time spent interviewing museum people for her podcast [People. Change. Museums.](#)<sup>8</sup>



Sophie then introduced her concept of [The Hidden Constellation](#)<sup>9</sup> which outlines the five key types of digital labour within an organisation. Sophie explored the idea that the only way digital confidence can be achieved is through systemic behavioural change and how this is a core part of our hybrid working practices.

### **Adam Koszary**

**Head of Digital at The Audience Agency**

[The Audience Agency](#)<sup>10</sup> provides knowledge, data and insight enabling cultural organisations to increase their relevance, reach and resilience. Adam has over ten years' experience primarily in galleries, libraries, archives and museums, including The Museum of English Rural Life where he catapulted the museum to global fame through a number of viral social media campaigns.

Adam spoke to the cohort about data, impact and understanding value. His workshop was designed to support the cohort in ways of measuring and understanding the success of their experiments. Adam also spoke about digital literacy and data literacy, outlining how the most important question to ask is 'why?' when it comes to collecting data. He then explored the data available to us as individuals and organisations and how it can be used to make better decisions. Finally, Adam discussed how you can make sense of all the data and framed it within an activity around creating a basic data dashboard.



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<sup>8</sup> <https://open.spotify.com/show/66Pk1HVrHiMRiEfrTv1wM>

<sup>9</sup> <https://open.spotify.com/show/7CYYN45Gb0tue2T6taayPl>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.theaudienceagency.org/>

**Matt Locke**  
**Director at Storythings**

Storythings<sup>11</sup> is a strategy and content company which aims to help good people tell important stories that get attention. Before founding Storythings in 2011, Matt worked for over a decade in senior digital roles at Channel 4 and the BBC, including roles as Head of Innovation at BBC and Head of Multiplatform at Channel 4.

Matt spoke to the cohort about three interrelated and compelling ideas around attention, rhythm and collaboration. He shared changes in the ways audiences give their attention to content, outlining how audiences are now spoilt for choice with different kinds of digital media.

Matt also spoke about how digital innovation almost always fails because it doesn't align with the rhythms of an organisation. Finally, he covered the ways collaboration can be dictated (and inhibited) by different rhythms within organisations.



**Rhythm**

*Strategy is the explicit plan about what we're going to do*

*Culture is the implicit value that defines why we do something*

*Rhythm is the deeper structure that defines how work gets done*

**Story|things**

One of Matt's presentation slides on organisational rhythm. © Storythings.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://storythings.com/>

**John Stack**  
**Digital Director of the Science Museum Group**

John joined the [Science Museum Group](https://www.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/)<sup>12</sup> in 2015 and is responsible for setting and delivering the Group’s digital strategy. John manages the Digital department which encompasses the museums’ websites, digitised collections, apps, games and in gallery digital media.

Prior to joining the Science Museum Group, he was Head of Digital at Tate for ten years during which time he participated in several LGR cohorts.



John provided a pre-recorded case study for one of our short content sessions, focusing on digital strategy. John introduced the way he develops, iterates and delivers the Science Museum Group’s digital strategy, outlining the context, the steps he takes, the questions to ask yourself to help frame a strategy, and the lenses to look through for prioritisation and refinement. John ended his case study by introducing some ‘safe bets’ to focus on within digital strategy.

**Kevin Bacon**  
**Digital Manager at Brighton & Hove Museums**

Kevin is responsible for managing digital publishing, digital skill development and information management, along with supporting digital marketing activity. He is also a qualified data protection practitioner and has been involved in Let’s Get Real on a number of occasions, both as a participant and in a supporting role.

Kevin spoke to the cohort about [Brighton & Hove Museums](https://brightonmuseums.org.uk/)<sup>13</sup>, approach to hybrid, from online to in-person. He highlighted some of their recent digital activities, such as the Horizon 2020 funded [GIFT](https://www.culture24.org.uk/gift/)<sup>14</sup> project, and their storytelling app [One Minute](https://gifting.digital/one-minute-experience/)<sup>15</sup> developed by ITU Copenhagen.



These projects illustrate the opportunities of creating hybrid experiences for their visitors, mixing the physical experience with digital content in a blended way.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://brightonmuseums.org.uk/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.culture24.org.uk/gift/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://gifting.digital/one-minute-experience/>

# Learning by doing

The Culture24 team supported each organisational pair to develop, plan, track and assess their own experiments. To do this we used agile-based methodologies, focussing on clear objectives, audience and organisational involvement, a willingness to create and iterate and a culture of accepting and learning from failures. This approach was supported by workshops, meet-ups, networking and mentoring.

All of the experiments had the following characteristics:

- They sought to answer a question or address a hunch
- They involved practical actions
- They were simple and small in scale
- They used existing resources, content, channels and technologies
- They were time-bound
- They had feedback or tracking mechanisms built in.

Culture24 /		Experiment Planner
<b>Goal</b>	Our experiment will test...	
<b>Action</b>	To test this we will...	
<b>When</b>	We will start this on and complete it by..	
<b>Who</b>	This will be done by and with...	
<b>Success</b>	If the experiment succeeds it will...	
<b>Evaluation</b>	We will evaluate the experiment by..	
<b>Next steps</b>	Our practical next steps are...	

Picture of LGR experiment planning card

## Learning together

A core component of the Let's Get Real approach is to create a sense of community and shared purpose for the participants. We foster open, honest and collaborative learning between the participants as a cohort of peers. This is the second Let's Get Real programme to be delivered predominantly online, through a combination of Zoom and our Mighty Networks community space. Through these online tools we encouraged and supported the cohort to share their experiences, their concerns, their successes and their failures. We supported this through structured discussions, predominantly through Zoom, and unstructured chats mostly facilitated through Mighty Networks.

We experimented with a hybrid approach to the programme, encouraging the cohort to get together through organised 'Air your thoughts' meet-ups between participants in an outdoor setting and we concluded the programme with a face-to-face workshop in Birmingham.

As with previous Let's Get Real projects, we suggested that each organisation sign up with two participants. This helped to create a larger pool of potential collaborators on the project and it aimed to increase the likelihood of embedding change within the organisations, by having a partner to advocate for the work and approach.

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We foster open, honest and collaborative learning

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## The experiments: a summary

Organisation	Experiment summary
Birmingham Museums Trust	Tested attitudes across the business around transitioning to a model of hybrid working (for non customer-facing roles), after a significant period of working from home since Covid.
Bluecoat	Explored the best ways to facilitate hybrid meetings, understanding staff needs, the technology and platforms and the requirements of the physical space.
Bodleian Libraries	Attempted to reach a more geographically diverse audience through hybrid online activity, by broadcasting elements of their in-person events.
Bristol Museums	Explored a variety of mechanisms designed to increase the uptake in Microsoft SharePoint, so as to enable staff to adopt more efficient ways of hybrid working and increased confidence.
Engage	Built understanding of how digital platforms and systems can support greater collaboration and more efficient remote working practices in a small and relatively new team.
Gardens, Libraries and Museums, University of Oxford	Investigated whether hybrid working and digitised processes have a positive, negative or negligible effect on attracting or retaining staff as well as understanding the needs for new starters joining the organisation.
Manchester Art Gallery	Explored how having all the internal communications and information in one place can cut down excessive emailing, help to programme and build confidence in staff, focussing on incoming requests to the communications team.
The Bowes Museum	Built understanding of their current working practices and explored a variety of cloud based options that they could use to improve collaboration, efficient use of time and effective ways of working.
Libraries and Museums, University of St Andrews	Unpacked the practices, equipment and policies needed to put in place to create a successful shared office space in the Main Library as part of their overall hybrid working practice.



# Project insights

As we reflected on the learning across LGR Hybrid, from the workshops, mentoring sessions, participant experiments, troubleshooting sessions and cohort discussions, three key insights began to emerge. These are interconnected and aren't unique to hybrid working practices. However, they play a significant role in the approach to, challenges and opportunities for arts and heritage organisations that want to investigate, understand and develop their hybrid working practices.

## Insight 1: rhythms, culture and change

Since as far back as 2018, Matt Locke, Director of Storythings, has been talking about organisational rhythm as the 'most important thing about your organisation that you don't understand'<sup>16</sup>. Matt has been developing his thinking in this area, and he came and spoke to our cohort about rhythm as a core challenge to enacting any kind of change. He also highlighted how the pandemic has accelerated this challenge.

The pandemic was a major rhythm disruptor, as we were thrust into the realities of remote working with little preparation or choice. It was also a major challenge to organisational culture, compromising the way things had always been done. This was a key focus and finding for almost all of the participating organisations in this year's LGR project.

Rhythms might be dictated by funding or exhibition cycles, how often you have team or executive meetings, the regularity of performance reviews or project discussions. Culture could be perpetuated by key individuals, by organisational norms around communication, by the structure of teams or management. Through the project, we quickly understood that challenges around rhythms and culture are context specific. They do, however, relate heavily to the other themes of hybrid working and we will unpack that more in the conclusion.

Through their experiment the Libraries and Museums team at the University of St Andrews were investigating the elements needed to create a successful shared hybrid office space. They used staff interviews to help form a code of practice for hybrid working, to be used alongside a seat booking system in their shared spaces. They found that staff were engaged with the research and whilst they struggled to find consensus on specific policies or behaviours, there was significant agreement around the need for tolerance, dialogue and shared values in shared hybrid spaces. Their findings very much relate to the culture of their organisation. One of the team's key insights is that 'your proposed solution (for hybrid working) will need to be in harmony with the overall culture and values of the teams you are working with'.

Rhythms, culture and change came up as obstacles in all of the cohort's experiments. For example, Manchester Art Gallery mentioned the challenge of people reverting 'back to old habits'. Engage highlighted how the 'potential for collaboration as a team was dictated by rhythms / working patterns' which needed to be properly addressed for their experiment to iterate and move forward. And the Bodleian Libraries team, through their experimentation with hybrid audience engagement, showed how their organisation has a culture that is open to and supportive of experimentation.

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<sup>16</sup>

<https://storytelling.comnetwork.org/explore/120/rhythm-the-most-important-thing-about-your-organization-that-you-don-t-understand>

## Insight 2: skills, platforms and systems

The majority of cultural heritage organisations were not prepared for the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. For most organisations, it was a considerable effort to even get to a position where staff and volunteers were able to work remotely during lockdowns. Whilst finances, governance and emergency planning play a significant part in this challenge, many of the issues come back to the digital skills required to work remotely and the technical platforms and systems that are needed to facilitate and support that work.

The digital skills of the team was a core focus for Engage's experiment. They began their experiment by auditing their team's digital skills, usage and understanding through a survey. They discovered that some of the team had a range of digital skills and literacies that could be useful for their hybrid working practices, and their work more generally. Through that discovery, they realised that they could better utilise those skills to help train other members of the team and future new starters.

Digital skills are intrinsically linked to platforms and systems. An individual's lack of understanding of how to properly use their tools to work effectively outside of the office environment can lead to breakdowns in communication and silos which stifle collaboration and creativity. The Bluecoat team, who focused on improving their hybrid meeting facilities, also grappled with staff digital skills. Through their experiment, they identified training needs for the apps and platforms they used as an organisation so that everybody could become confident in using them and their features.

The Bowes Museum spent a good portion of their experiment understanding the platforms and systems that staff and volunteers use across the organisation. Through this, they wanted to improve collaboration and use of time and to create more effective ways of working. For The Bowes Museum team, the route to achieving this was through surveying staff and volunteers to discover areas of need, how platforms are used for different tasks, time spent using them and their effectiveness.

The Bowes Museum discovered that confidence in using platforms for video conferencing and recording activities, places and objects was fairly high, but that confidence in using platforms for collaborative work was much lower. This is a theme that we've seen running across the sector and not just through this project. Digital confidence, skills and literacies are varied across organisations, with some individuals keen and able to use their skills in conjunction with digital platforms for effective collaboration, with others lacking the confidence and capabilities to effectively join in.

In their case study, the Manchester Art Gallery team shared a key insight around the importance of knowing 'your systems and the level of digital skills of your team'. Whilst this may seem obvious, in reality staff often use a multitude of platforms in their daily work without organisational consensus or knowledge. Staff often have skill sets that they use within their roles which may go unseen, and they also build and develop relevant skills outside their work. Building a base level understanding of all of the platforms your teams use and the skills that individuals have should be a key starting point for any venture into understanding hybrid working practices.

## Insight 3: communicating as a team

The majority of the challenges around organisations' hybrid working practices haven't been caused by hybrid working itself. Instead, it appears that those challenges were always there - hybrid working merely drew attention to them in a profound way. In Zak Mensah's aforementioned article on [the future of working together](#),<sup>17</sup> he says that internal communication was a problem before the pandemic, 'but we simply couldn't see the wood for the trees'.

These challenges were highlighted by Manchester Art Gallery's experiment. The team focussed on creating a one-way system for handling external communications requests, due to the challenges of excessive emailing requesting space in the communications calendar. The Gallery's Digital team built an internal communications platform with a free website building platform ([Wix](#)<sup>18</sup>) to share core messages, activities, engagement stats and a staff forum that could serve as a more interactive version of a standard broadcast intranet. This was obtained by integrating the page with project management software ([monday.com](#)<sup>19</sup>) and having, as a core feature, the ability to submit content requests directly to the communications team in a structured way that would hopefully be manageable and time effective.

When they were planning their experiment, they had concerns that people wouldn't be willing to 'adapt their working practices / rhythms to use the new system'. Initially the platform was used positively and proactively, particularly by new starters and enthusiastic members of the organisation. It enabled the communications team to effectively plan and manage where they

were spending the most and least time with departments for communications needs and, at the same time, the front-of-house staff to have an up-to-date checking point for information and planning. While the new system for 'submission request' for comms content has been adopted by everyone and is demonstrating an invaluable strategic asset for the digital team, as time went on people began to revert to old habits, favouring emails instead of the internal communication page. The team felt that they were unable to change the culture around communications without greater strategic buy-in, and the data that they have collected on the usage of the platform confirms this.

We've had similar conversations with museum staff through a project we are running on supporting smaller museums with their digital transformation. They speak of poor culture around communication with emails coming in late at night, being bombarded by messages, and too many communications platforms with no clear direction around how they should be used on an organisational level.

Challenges around how and why we all communicate when working came up in nearly all of the experiments, even if it wasn't the core focus. As part of Bluecoat's experiment, they created an etiquette policy for hybrid meetings, which covered topics like behaviours, eating and drinking, backgrounds and more. This helped them to create a consensus around how they communicate during hybrid meetings and it was an aspect of how they learnt to properly facilitate meetings. Communication challenges also featured in the University of St Andrews' creation of a code of practice and in The Bowes Museum's attempt to draft a hybrid working policy, for example. Hybrid working offers the potential for greater communication and collaboration, unbound by geographical location, but if the culture around communication isn't correct then it will be reflected in the way in which staff and volunteers use the platforms and systems at their disposal.

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<sup>17</sup>

<https://www.museumnext.com/article/the-future-of-working-together-purposefully-deconstructing-why-we-gather/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.wix.com/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://monday.com/>

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Experimentation provided people with a space to try something different that could, in some ways, be free of existing rhythms and culture.

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## In conclusion

The challenges brought into the spotlight during this year's LGR Hybrid project are not new to our sector. Poor internal communication, missing staff skills, lack of access to equipment and difficulties in getting buy-in to platforms are all issues that have not only come up in past LGR projects but will be familiar to many.

What became clear is that these challenges were not caused by the forced hybrid working during the pandemic, they were always present within the working rhythms and culture of each organisation. The changing working practices of the last few years has exacerbated what were already difficult situations for many. It was through the act of experimenting that our cohort was able to highlight their own rhythms and begin to understand their organisational culture and how to address challenges.

Experimentation provided people with a space to try something different that could, in some ways, be free of existing rhythms and culture. This experimental space encourages reflection and understanding about what those rhythms are and how they shape the culture around work.

To address the challenges of hybrid working we all need to be free of any disruptive rhythms and attempt to challenge negative culture, or we must work consciously within them. This year's cohort have shown that small changes, implemented through experimentation, can build up, help and support more significant change. There are few better vehicles to change poor culture or disruptive rhythms than addressing the way we communicate, collaborate and work together.

Hybrid working is here to stay and through this project we have seen the importance of consciously addressing the lack of staff digital skills and literacies, careful analysis of the effectiveness of the platforms/systems you use to collaborate, and understanding your own and your organisation's communication practices.

Below, we have outlined five recommendations for positive change and developing your organisation's hybrid working practices. Within these we suggest that the best route to addressing your challenges lies in investigation and experimentation. This will give you a space that can be free of any disruptive rhythms and potential negative culture, or at the very least it can be designed to work within them.

As we know well from past LGR projects, there is never a one-size-fits-all answer but there is always a way to frame your thinking and approach to help you find your own way. This is what LGR does well, thanks to its methodology of experimentation and its roots in human-centered design.

# Recommendations

1. Take time to reflect on your organisational rhythms and cultures as they pertain to your working practices - think about how you communicate, collaborate, and work together as an organisation.
2. Build a clear picture of staff digital skills, attitudes and confidence through open discussion. Use as many avenues and resources as you can - surveys, audits, meetings, performance reviews - to start those conversations (and use [this method of framing and mapping digital skills](#)<sup>20</sup> to support that work).
3. Understand and interrogate the platforms and tools that staff use as individuals and teams to collaborate and communicate with each other. How can you use those, or different ones, to create a better culture of communication? How can you use data to make evidence-driven decisions about those platforms and tools?
4. Nurture digital skills-building within your organisation by supporting formal and informal training. Identify people with useful digital skills and good habits around their working practice - enable them to share those with others in pragmatic, purposeful ways.
5. Ensure that the organisation and the people within it don't slip back into the old ways of working. Don't allow the old rhythms and culture to seep back in.



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<sup>20</sup> <https://digipathways.co.uk/resources/understanding-and-mapping-digital-skills/> - framing developed as part of University of Leicester & Culture24 work in One by One project (<https://one-by-one.uk/>)

# Hybrid museum work: revolutionary or just exhausting?

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While the move to hybrid working across the cultural and heritage sectors has undoubtedly escalated since the pandemic, it is a change that has been on the horizon for many years, heralded by novel forms of digital technology for communicating and collaborating with colleagues, teams, audiences, and other organisations. Yet, in an industry primarily concerned with promoting the collection, care, education, and enjoyment of material objects and buildings, how has hybrid working impacted our experience of doing museum work? How has it revolutionised it, and how has it limited it?

In late 2020, at the height of the global response to Covid-19, I interviewed museum practitioners and technologists from across the northern hemisphere for *People. Change. Museums.*, a podcast series which explored the complex relationship between museums and technology at a moment of intersecting crisis. Part spoken essay, part interview, and part call to arms, I was trying to figure out how technology was helping or hindering museums in defining (and re-defining) our human values during such an unforeseen start to the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. From my interviews, several ‘keywords’ emerged that seemed to capture the challenging time of late 2020/early 2021 both for museums and for digital changemakers within them. Thorny words like

‘precarity’, ‘emotional labour’, and ‘cultural identity’ appeared alongside more hopeful words – words like ‘agency’, ‘empathy’, and ‘courage’. With everyone working from home, it was clear that the sudden, constant, and huge demand for digital expertise and digital tools was having a heavy toll on the most digitally literate staff in museums, galleries, and heritage organisations. This expertise was needed not just because buildings were closed, but to effectively connect with pressing, global issues such as Black Lives Matter and the ongoing and urgent calls of climate activists. Therefore, it was also clear that increased digital activity was having a transformational effect on some of the old power principles which had previously acted as a backbone for many of these organisations – the more formal, managerial, exclusive aspects, premised upon an unwavering belief in the expertise of curators, and on long-term affiliation and loyalty of established audiences. The nature of museum work was radically shifting, and it seemed to be shifting in a positive, if unsettling, direction.

Now, when we can finally start to be less reactive and more responsive, it has become important to reflect on how our cultural organisations have to a large extent haphazardly absorbed and adapted to hybrid working within day-to-day operations. This year’s Let’s Get Real cohort did just that,

undertaking comprehensive surveys of how staff were feeling about hybrid working (Birmingham Museums Trust) and considering how the uptake of different digital systems and platforms had knock-on effects for remote working practices (Engage). Drawing on findings from my own research at Science Museum Group, undertaken in 2022 when the organisation had a sense of getting back to normal, I wish to share two connected ideas that may help us more critically understand hybridisation in our museum work.

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## All labour becomes hidden when we're working at home

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First, the idea of **digital courage**, which I define as the practice of equality when using technology in any museum context. In the past few years, we have seen multiple micro examples of digital courage across the sector, with staff and teams embracing small-scale, low-cost digital experiments, using technology to broker new relationships, to better speak to existing and potential audiences, and to show agency in choosing digital activities and tools applicable to their setting and audience needs. Indeed, digital courage has only come about because of hybrid working, because of the growth of a different lived experience of the museum work-time-space continuum, where new kinds of reflection, interaction, and collaboration can take place through working flexibly, at home, or in different locations. Most excitingly, a founding principle of digital courage has revealed itself in the act of self-learning (or autodidacticism, depending on how articulate you're feeling). All over the UK, individual staff, volunteers, and small teams have taken the time and effort to upskill in a particular digital activity – whether it's advanced Google analytics, a Twitter exhibition, or making an audio guide. This kind of self-learning requires courage, yes, but also a certain embracing of failure, an appetite of just 'try it

and see' if it means that your cultural organisation may gain greater resonance with its communities.


On the flipside, the second idea I want to share is **hidden digital labour**. This I regard to be the emotional, psycho-social, and physical cost attached to much digital transformation work. During the pandemic this was explored by Nesta's Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre in a paper<sup>21</sup> describing how those working in digital delivery were at the 'sharp end' of museum work. It linked "the support of management and perceptions of the role of digital work" in museums and galleries with frequent "references to mental health issues and burnout" (2021: 21). Whether you're an archivist, a data collections officer, or a learning manager, digital technology adds extra layers of emotional and physical effort to your job role – between the sheer quantity of emails you receive on a daily basis, task switching between multiple, often non-interoperable programmes, the backlog of data you're being asked to wrangle and resolve, and supporting someone (or several people) with their own digital needs – digital change work is messy, time-consuming, and generally hidden from view. This has become even more heightened due to hybrid working as Anra Kennedy, Partnerships Director at Culture24, has pointed out, all labour becomes hidden when we're working at home.

So, while digital courage is very well and good, we must not forget the associated cost of hidden digital labour. As far as I can see, the only way to effectively harness the former whilst tackling the latter is to regularly acknowledge – out loud, as forensically as possible – the different forms of digital labour involved in all our job roles. Only then might we create equitable hybrid working practices that position the cultural sector as a model for workforce equity across all sectors.

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<sup>21</sup> PEC, 2021. [Discussion Paper 2021/11: Implications of the Covid-19 digital 'pivot' in museums and galleries: lessons from practitioners](#)



## Appendix 1: The experiments in full

	<p><b>Birmingham Museums Trust</b>  <b>Jo Graham</b>  <b>People and Culture Business Partner</b></p>
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<p>What was the research question behind your experiment?</p>	<p>Our experiment tested the attitudes/support across BMT, towards transitioning to a model of hybrid working (for non-customer facing roles), as detailed in the new Hybrid Working policy, after a significant period of working from home since Covid.</p>
<p>Why was this important to your organisation?</p>	<p>Transitioning to hybrid working after an extended period working from home.</p>
<p>What did you do?</p>	<p>To test this, we surveyed team members, through completion of an online survey covering the following themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Attitude/experience of working from home, including challenges and benefits</li> <li>● Attitude to moving to a hybrid working model, including challenges and benefits</li> <li>● Levels of support by leaders and IT to team members working a hybrid model.</li> </ul>
<p>What happened?</p>	<p>We evaluated the experiment by completion of the surveys and value of the data received, in regards to the four criteria listed above.</p>
<p>What did you learn, as individuals?</p>	<p>More about digital practices; attitudes of the staff towards the transition to hybrid working. Staff attitudes towards hybrid working.</p>
<p>What did your organisation learn?</p>	<p>Staff attitudes towards hybrid working. We learned that team members were enjoying a return to the office, mainly for social reasons, including the opportunity to re-connect with colleagues' face to face. We also established that team members were largely satisfied with the opportunity to work according to a hybrid working pattern. The feedback from the survey was the hybrid model should operate even more flexibly than the 60% of working time to be spent on site and 40% working from home. Interest was expressed in 80% being worked at home and 20% onsite. We elected to take this proposal to the employee forum for wider discussion.</p>





What's next?	Take some of the actions established through analysis of findings to the Employee Forum for consideration.
What quick takeaways would you share?	Manage the time! Start the experiment promptly. Have greater clarity on the purposes of the project, as the concepts of digital practice and hybrid working were used interchangeably at times and it would have helped to have this more clear at the start.

	<p><b>Bluecoat</b>  <b>Mary Cloake</b>  <b>Chief Executive</b></p>		<p><b>Sue Baker</b>  <b>Head of Projects / Operations</b></p>
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What was the research question behind your experiment?	That there is a demand for hybrid meeting facilities going forward. Our aim is to have the best technology and environment setting in which to hold/host meetings. To develop a code of conduct for staff when working or attending not in person meetings or events.
Why was this important to your organisation?	There were many benefits to hybrid working and how we delivered events and engaged with audiences which we did not want to lose.
What did you do?	<p>We sampled staff across the organisation who regularly hold hybrid meetings asking about their experiences. What works well, what doesn't, challenges and benefits. We sampled staff who attend (not host) and ask the same questions. We spoke to a small number of event organisers who have hosted hybrid public events. and organisations who have used hybrid format to hold company events/AGM/Board Meetings.</p> <p>The sampling was done by a questionnaire with the offer of a short meeting with those who host, organise or actively participate in hybrid meetings. Our Technical Manager was asked the same questions, and common issues, problems etc.</p>
What happened?	<p>We gathered feedback and formulated a plan as to how best address issues raised. This included a booking system for rooms with best acoustics and lowest background noise. We streamlined and identified training needs for the apps we used so everybody could become confident in using them and their features.</p> <p>Staff were most anxious about using interactive platforms. We developed an etiquette policy around conduct and behaviour including background, eating and drinking, how to interact etc.</p>


	We learned how to facilitate meetings, appointing a Chair/meeting lead, and support on who would admit guests, monitor the chat etc. We drew up a tech list of kit to support different types of events.
What did you learn, as individuals?	I think neither of us thought there were so many challenges to overcome but thankfully as we are the decision makers in a smallish organisation we could implement changes quite quickly. Sue - 'I underestimated the lack of IT expertise we have and that most staff are self taught'.
What did your organisation learn?	We had to find a balance as a public venue with hybrid working. We had to communicate to staff the benefits of hybrid working. We found higher engagement in some cases as people didn't have to factor in travel time for example.
What's next?	We want to build on what we have learnt. We will sense-check new staff and participants to ensure they are confident before attending a not in person meeting so they feel able to participate. We will fully equip our event spaces with technology to support hybrid events.
What quick takeaways would you share?	Go for a cross-section of staff across as many areas of your organisation as you can. List all the different platforms and apps that your organisation uses and streamline if possible. Don't assume that staff know how to use all the features of an app inc sharing docs.

	<p><b>The Bodleian Library</b> Neil Stevenson Public Engagement Manager</p>		<p><b>Helen Cook</b> Public Engagement Officer</p>
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What was the research question behind your experiment?	Can we reach a more geographically diverse audience through online activity? What is the effectiveness of different formats? What cost-effective measures can we use to broaden our reach?
Why was this important to your organisation?	Moving to more in-person activity during the past 18 months has presented the Bodleian Public Engagement team with the challenge of how to maintain contact and programming for digital audiences that were developed during the Covid pandemic. We decided that the most suitable way to balance these two different types of activity was to plan a series of hybrid experiments.

<p>What did you do?</p>	<p>We identified opportunities within the planned programme to introduce and experiment with hybrid formats. These included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Recording, editing and sharing a series of live talks and demonstrations</li> <li>● Running curator-led exhibition tours on Twitter</li> <li>● Livestreaming a panel discussion within an in-person event</li> <li>● Adding live content to TikTok and YouTube.</li> </ul>
<p>What happened?</p>	<p>We recorded six live events from the Bodleian Libraries’ Festival of Bookbinding. These sessions were fully booked so being able to provide access to those who could not attend was valuable for sharing expertise and providing a legacy for the Festival.</p> <p>Rather than livestreaming the exhibition tour we scheduled posts on Twitter to share the curator’s perspective on highlighted objects in the exhibition Sensational Books. The tweets went out during an after-hours event exploring the exhibition themes which encouraged those on site to visit the gallery and generated discussion with online users. We followed up with a second Twitter tour, of the exhibition Tutankhamun: Excavating the Archive, which featured curator responses to questions gathered from visitors of all ages about their favourite exhibition items and again stimulated engagement online.</p> <p>During the Zine Fair we hosted a panel discussion exploring the question ‘When are zines the answer?’ in-person and via Zoom. Several of the featured zine makers have subscribers globally so this was a good opportunity to reach a wider geographical audience. At the same event we shared live content via TikTok which was a new platform for the Public Engagement team</p>
<p>What did you learn, as individuals?</p>	<p>We learnt how to use specific tools and platforms, for example Twitter, TikTok, YouTube. While these were not new to the organisation, planning and experimenting for this project developed skills within the team.</p> <p>The project showed us it is vital to consider the objectives for each event and the best tools, digital or otherwise, to achieve these so that they are appropriate and cost-effective.</p> <p>We realised we need to complete an audit of staff skills at the planning stage so that any training requirements are built into the project plan. We are learning more about how to measure digital engagement and what success looks like.</p>
<p>What did your organisation learn?</p>	<p>As with individual learning, considering the event objectives and the appropriate tools to achieve these, will help with time and budget planning across the organisation. Knowing where training is needed from the start of the project will enable us to use in-house expertise where we can, which will be more cost-effective for the organisation.</p> <p>The remote audience for livestreamed events is low compared to in-person events. This conclusion is echoed by other Bodleian live activity such as</p>

	<p>exhibition opening panel events and literary readings. Promotion for recorded activity needs to be embedded into the overall event plan to ensure the investment is worthwhile.</p> <p>Experimenting with new forms of practice takes time, money and people. Cost, time and resource needs to be proportionate and assessed against audience and reach. There is an audience for online curator tours and using curator expertise increases staff capacity.</p>
What's next?	<p>We will continue to experiment with Exhibition Curator Tours as these had a good level of engagement and were achievable within the programme timeframe and the capacity of the team.</p> <p>We will share our learning with colleagues in the Bodleian Public Engagement team and with PE/Learning staff across the university's Gardens, Libraries and Archives.</p>
What quick takeaways would you share?	<p>Allow enough time to research different approaches, to plan for upskilling the team and to test the technology.</p> <p>Be realistic about your goal – we found it better to try something on a smaller scale so we could review the experiment and implement learning quickly.</p> <p>Ensure everyone's expectations are clear for all partners in the project to avoid misunderstandings about how and where hybrid events will be broadcast – this can be an issue with copyrighted material.</p>

	<p><b>The Bowes Museum</b></p> <p><b>Rachael Fletcher</b> Audiences Manager</p> <p><b>Leigh Mylchreest</b> Operations Manager</p>
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What was the research question behind your experiment?	To understand the current working practices and explore a variety of cloud based options that we can use to improve collaboration, efficient use of time and effective ways of working
Why was this important to your organisation?	Because we don't have a hybrid policy in place.

<p>What did you do?</p>	<p>Survey internal staff and volunteers to find out what the current situation is so we can focus on the area of need, what is currently being used for different tasks, their purpose, volume of time spent using them, their effectiveness and what is frustrating, understand staff digital skill sets, if they are interested in training and behaviours.</p>
<p>What happened?</p>	<p>Across all roles (volunteer, trustee and staff), attitudes to digital were mainly positive. Respondents to the survey were very interested in learning new digital skills for work.</p> <p>The level of digital skills was relatively high in relation to activities such as video conferencing, and digitally recording an activity, place or object but confidence in using a collaborative work space was lower.</p> <p>The majority of digital skills within the organisation has come from previous organisations and informal learning and are either informally discussed with colleagues or never discussed. Respondents are desperate for training and support with development of digital skills.</p>
<p>What did you learn, as individuals?</p>	<p>To be kind to ourselves, understand that we can't do everything.</p> <p>To work towards smaller objectives rather than undertaking huge projects. We learnt that we had to be realistic.</p>
<p>What did your organisation learn?</p>	<p>That we still need a hybrid policy and that we are not the only organisation working our way through achieving this.</p>
<p>What's next?</p>	<p>Create an innovation working group to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Understand problems</li> <li>● Brainstorm</li> <li>● Test solutions</li> <li>● Report our learnings to wider teams.</li> </ul>
<p>What quick takeaways would you share?</p>	<p>Be realistic as to what you can achieve.</p> <p>Understand your need for your organisation.</p> <p>Communicate, potentially in a face-to-face, at the beginning of the project as well as the end and online in between.</p>




**Engage**  
**Hannah Gaunt**  
**Creative Producer**



**Karen Drake**  
**Operations and Finance**  
**Manager**

<p>What was the research question behind your experiment?</p>	<p>How can digital platforms and systems support greater collaborative and more efficient remote working practices?</p>
<p>Why was this important to your organisation?</p>	<p>Following 2020, Engage has been undertaking a period of organisational change and revisioning. Let's Get Real coincided with the next 'step' in this process, as we applied to become an Arts Council England Investment Principles Support Organisation (ACE IPSO) and therefore demonstrate our readiness for the next decade of sector support.</p>
<p>What did you do?</p>	<p>We tested and trialled software and tools that might help us to streamline internal monitoring, reporting and evaluation. We focused initially on the most rudimentary approach, and progressed to more innovative and advanced software as we got to grips with what was needed. We shared learning from LGR with the staff team at an away day to introduce the thinking and process. We audited our team's digital skills, usage, and understanding through a survey. These results were then analysed.</p>
<p>What happened?</p>	<p>Through the experiment we were able to test some fairly simple collaborative approaches to the monitoring/reporting tasks. This has enabled a shared sense of responsibility across the team and made the process more efficient, though there are still improvements to be made. Through the survey we learned that there is actually a breadth of digital skills and competencies within the team that could be utilised more, and used to upskill other team members.</p>
<p>What did you learn, as individuals?</p>	<p>The terminology - a deeper understanding of the complexities of this work - for example understanding the difference between synchronous and asynchronous, hybrid vs remote, and slowly unpicking how this applies to ways that Engage works.  A realisation that embedding good digital/hybrid working practices will take some time, and needs to be built into inductions/role descriptions. We have also written further development of this into our ACE IPSO plans.  We noticed that the potential for collaboration as a remote team was dictated by rhythms / working patterns and this is something we still need to refine.  The experiment got us thinking about the whole culture of the organisation, and provided a real opportunity to shape 'how we want to work together'.</p>

What did your organisation learn?	Being a small team has its benefits, we are agile, reflexive and collaborative. However, being entirely remote is more challenging that I think we realised initially, it is not as simple as finding the right software, there has to be a real effort and motivation across the whole team to be creating and reinforcing an organisational culture that is compassionate, collaborative and ready for the change.
What's next?	We will be continuing with the experiment, with some slight adaptations to the objectives and timeline. With new team members finally settling into roles, this feels like a good time to build on what has already been done. We are also planning to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create new digital induction structures</li> <li>• Build in more 'team' time into our working week using collaboration tools</li> <li>• Offer in house digital training/upskilling based on the survey results.</li> </ul>
What quick takeaways would you share?	Start small and stay focused - having a vision/ambition is great, but we have to walk before we can run. Consider using a small intervention (the experiment) as a way of seeding bigger conversations about organisational culture/ working culture. Use the rest of the cohort, they have a wealth of insight!

	<h2 style="margin: 0;">Manchester Art Gallery</h2> <p>Chiara Ludolini Digital Manager</p> <p>Sarah Randles Digital Communications Manager</p>
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What was the research question behind your experiment?	To have all the internal communications and information in one place to cut down on excessive emailing. To help programming and building confidence in staff (especially part-timers and front of house staff). The comms team will have just the one-way system of incoming requests which will help the team to strategically plan and confidently deliver on target comms.
Why was this important to your organisation?	It helped the organisation understand where there were difficulties around communication and how this impacted the level of understanding that staff has of the organisation.
What did you do?	We built a more interactive and conversational version of a standard broadcast organisational intraweb. The platform shares what's happening, offers a staff forum, social / engagement stats, core messages, activities calendar and the ability to submit requests for content from the comms team.

What happened?	<p>New members of staff have been the most active members. Two members of staff that reacted positively to the idea in the first place are also very confident and proactive in its usage.</p> <p>Visitor Services welcomed the live track calendar but seemed to fall back on the rest of the system due to lack of structure in their team.</p> <p>For the comms team the systems helped us to look at the areas where we're spending the most and least times in regards to comms.</p>
What did you learn, as individuals?	The system helps us to address the meaning of legacy and what that means to the organisation - we can use this platform to track the lifecycle of projects. It can also be used as a demonstrable advocacy tool for our workload.
What did your organisation learn?	<p>That the level of information that a member of staff may not be adequate for their role or adapt to their working needs. Especially for front of house staff, new and part time staff that can feel that they are missing out or overwhelmed.</p> <p>Identifying what is considered 'Internal Comms' and overcoming the habits of bad practice within the organisation. After an initial jump on board to using the new platform, inevitably there was a revert-back to old habits.</p>
What's next?	<p>We are analysing the data, and this will help us to think more closely about who we target with our content / programmes, as the form allows for people to be more specific with platforms, intent and audience.</p> <p>Data confirms the initial concerns about people's willingness to adapt their working practices / rhythms to use the new system.</p>
What quick takeaways would you share?	<p>Know your system and the level of digital skill of your teams.</p> <p>Consider people's habits and different mindsets.</p> <p>Consider if you need to select champions or it can be rolled out to everyone.</p>

## Libraries and Museums, University of St Andrews



Emma Wisher, Assistant Director, Academic Engagement & Student Experience

Catriona McAra, Assistant Director, University Collections and Curation

Jennifer Loudon, Deputy Director of Libraries and Museums

What was the research question behind your experiment?	What are the elements needed to create a successful shared office space in the context of hybrid working?
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<p>Why was this important to your organisation?</p>	<p>We are at a critical point in time with staff returning to working on site post pandemic, and having got used to working alone at home with much more control over the environment than is typically possible in a shared office. Also having merged teams during pandemic (Libraries and Museums came together in summer 2020), an opportunity to reimagine how we integrate and work together. Coincided with a project to refurbish Main Library, including the shared office space where existing and new teams would come together in the same place.</p>
<p>What did you do?</p>	<p>Set up a series of semi-structured interviews with staff across teams to find out their thoughts, feelings and experiences of working in a shared office, including preferences for Teams calls, 1:1s with managers / line reports, sensory considerations and what gave them a sense of belonging in the workplace.</p>
<p>What happened?</p>	<p>Staff were very engaged and we found a high level of consensus, not so much around specific policies or behaviours, but in terms of the need for tolerance, dialogue and shared values. Assurance in terms of being able to book an appropriate space was felt to be important. We therefore put this together into a draft code of practice, as well as informing the implementation of our seat booking system.</p>
<p>What did you learn, as individuals?</p>	<p>That because one size can never fit all, the overall principle of accepting being in a space with others is more important than specific behavioural or technological practices.</p>
<p>What did your organisation learn?</p>	<p>That staff needed to feel all the elements were in place for them to enable them to work effectively before being willing to come back to the office.</p>
<p>What's next?</p>	<p>Gather feedback on how the code and seat booking system are working. Extend these and the underpinning principles to other spaces and potentially other areas of working in terms of values. Present our findings to the Service Directors Group within the University and potentially to colleagues in RLUK.</p>
<p>What quick takeaways would you share?</p>	<p>Talking to staff about their views and experiences can be very rewarding. It's important to allow enough time for this - interviewing, transcribing, analysing, synthesising all take time. Your proposed solution will need to be in harmony with the overall culture and values of the teams you are working with.</p>

## Appendix 2: Let's Get Real - the story so far

Since 2010 the Let's Get Real story has thus far led over 1,130 project participants from 670+ different organisations on a journey of open and honest enquiry. LGR began by seeking to shift the 'digital change' debate from just evaluating metrics of success or better understanding audiences, moving towards exploring how to work in more joined-up ways, building digital confidence, skills and literacies, and developing deeper human connections within our networks and for our communities.

Download all the reports at <https://weareculture24.org.uk/our-research-reports/>

### **LGR1: How to evaluate success online?**

June 2010 to September 2011

This first phase of action research brought together 24 cultural organisations to collaboratively look at the state of the sector re metrics and measuring success.

### **LGR2: A journey towards understanding and measuring digital engagement**

July 2012 to June 2013

The second phase of the project involved 22 cultural organisations and explored what digital engagement could mean for each of them. We tried in particular to better understand audiences' online behaviours and motivations.

### **LGR3: Is your content fit for purpose?**

April 2014 to December 2014

This third phase involved 29 participating cultural organisations and explored how to adapt online content to better meet the needs of audiences.

### **LGR4 and LGR North America: What's the story?**

April 2015 to December 2015

The fourth phase involved 30 cultural organisations and explored ways of helping arts and heritage organisations to respond more meaningfully to the audiences of today.

### **LGR Young Audiences**

Nov 2015 to June 2016

This new strand of LGR involved 19 arts and heritage organisations exploring ways to better reach and engage children and young people online.

### **LGR5: What's the brand?**

June 2016 to Jan 2017

This fifth phase looked at how arts and heritage organisations can better recognise, articulate and generate value from their brand and from online retail.

### **LGR6: Connecting digital practice with social purpose**

Jan 2018 to Oct 2018

This sixth phase, and the subject of this report, looked at understanding the social purpose of digital technology for arts and heritage organisations.

**LGR7: Developing deeper human connection across digital channels**

March 2019 to Nov 2019

This phase of LGR looked at how cultural organisations can generate stronger personal connections and create more meaningful relationships through their digital work.

**LGR 10 years on**

February 2021 - September 2021

This strand of LGR revisited the theme of the first LGR back in 2010, focusing on how to evaluate online success. The project ran in the shadow of the Covid-19 pandemic.



**...it's the people.**



# Credits

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## About Culture24

Culture24 is a small and dynamic team of writers, thinkers, producers and publishers who love arts and culture, understand digital and believe that cultural organisations have a vital place in a better world. We have a sophisticated knowledge of the challenges and opportunities faced by arts and heritage people working in all types and sizes of organisation in all corners of the UK.

You can find more about our work [on our website](#).

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