

Cultural Value Project: preliminary assessment of workshops

Simon Bell. 19th November 2013

Introduction

In our research we are looking for a cultural value Model or model or CVM for identifying and understanding the components of cultural value and assessing the value of diverse projects in and across organizations.

This is the starting point for this overview of the first Workshops element of the research.

Briefly, in October and November the research team ran two workshops – one for stakeholders and members of the World Service and one for a similar group from the British Council. This document contains some reflections on these events.

Background on thinking about Cultural Value Model

My working and contestable thinking at the outset of this project is that a cultural value model is necessarily a supporting conceptual structure intended to enable a clear understanding of a complex set of perceptions about the changing nature of cultural value. But, it is more than this. For pragmatics it needs to be an instrument for interpreting contrasting and changing formulations and experiences of value. In this sense the CVM is both a sense-making device for questioning and a interpretational instrument for comparing practice and experience of Cultural Value or CV.

But, in social research the methods we use are themselves problematic. To explain, I have been struck by the work of Savage et al on the social life of methods (Law, Ruppert, & Savage, 2011; Savage, 2013) and how this contrasts with my own past thinking (with Steve Morse) on the ‘tyranny of methodology’ (S Bell, 1994; Simon Bell & Morse, 2011). The social life of methods and the tyranny of methodology both speak about the methods we use in research as emerging from the processes which they are intended to assess. Method is not objective or value free. Another key paper was that produced by Holden for Demos in 2004 (Holden, 2004) in which the author makes a powerful and evidential case for the limitations of metrics in the assessment of cultural value.

There are a number of points which I need to reflect on prior to setting out the overview of the workshop outcomes. I need to say a little about methods and a little about conventional assessment of value.

Methods: health warning

First, methods and, specifically methods for assessing cultural value.

Methods have a tendency to quantification as the primary means to assess value. Holden worried about this and looked for other channels noting that quantification implies objectivity, neutral data and evidence-based assessment. However, objectivity and data are never neutral and evidential assessment is subject to a range of distortions. Regarding objectivity and quantification, Savage (2013) suggests:

“It could suit scientists to say that they were only providing neutral tools because this then allowed them to abdicate responsibility for their use and application. And it could suit humanities scholars to say that they ultimately had more to say about the purpose of social life than scientists could”. Savage p. 15.

Methods come from a social place and are formulated by the nature of that social place. They are not neutral or objective and they measure that which is already defined as being measurable.

Implicit in objective, neutral data-based evidence are a matrix of value judgments (such as the choice of research question, the manner of assessment, the nature of that which is measured, etc.) Value judgments cannot be avoided but they can be ignored and the methods (and outcomes of use) can be positioned as being ‘true’.

In the following text I will be constantly on the edge of method in both my approach and the CVM which is our objective. The perils of claiming methods to be objective and deal with ‘facts’ needs to be kept in mind.

A conventional assessment of value: Value Drivers health warning

The health warning about methods has implications for the assessment of value.

There are many ways of considering value but Tanner in his report (Tanner, 2012) set out five useful ‘value drivers’ in the measurement of digital resources.

“Utility Value - People value the utility afforded through use of the digital resources now or sometime in the future.

Existence and/or Prestige Value - People derive value and benefit from knowing that a digital resource is cherished by persons living inside and outside their community. This value exists whether the resource is personally used or not.

Education Value - People are aware that digital resources contribute to their own or to other people’s sense of culture, education, knowledge and heritage and therefore value them.

Community Value - People benefit from the experience of being part of a community that is afforded by the digital resource.

Inheritance / Bequest Value - People derive benefit from the inheritance passed down to them and satisfaction from the fact that their descendants and other members of the community will in the future be able to enjoy a digital resource, if they so choose.”.

Tanner’s Balanced Value Framework is formidable and convincing. The five categories he suggests are generic enough to be acceptable without too much critical assessment. Tanner says:

“Other Value Drivers may be established by the organization if desired, but these 5 Value Drivers should at least be addressed in full.” Tanner page 45.

Why should they be addressed in full? Presumably because they are important and self-evidentially of generic importance. In this project we shall test these value drivers and, if needed, add to/ delete/amend them.

Whilst recognizing generic value drivers as useful sense-making devices , it is easy, when provided with a convincing method or model to accommodate the facts found in primary research into the method prepared. In this sense a Balanced Value Impact Model might be said to prejudge the nature of the value it is trying to assess in terms of the generic drivers it

presents. This could be an example of a method looking for evidence of the things it has already suggested are important.

In our research we need to be wary of the power of existing methods – the dominance, tyranny even, impact and indicators, of the sample survey and interview methods, of the and related Models to predispose our research to preconceived concepts and measures of value.

Value Drivers from the World Service and British Council Workshops

The workshops undertaken by the World Service and the British Council on the 29th October and the 5th November respectively were designed to answer the following questions:

“We want to understand your views on the history and legacy of cultural value within World Service broadcasting and identify ways we might think about what the organizations provide going forward.”, and:

“We want to understand your views on the cultural value of the British Council, past and present, and to identify new ways of engaging users at home and abroad.”

Essentially the question is similar – what are your views on cultural value past, present and future? We made use of an abbreviated version of the Imagine methodology on the day. We placed this within the Triple Task Methodology.

We presented the participants with a minimal set of information to prompt them in their conversations and let them go. In the table below I reflect items which arose which were distinct to each group and which were generic to both.

Table 1. Outcomes from the Workshops

World Service issues	Shared Issues <i>Sustainability?</i>	British Council issues
The importance of ‘Broadcast’ over internet	<i>Digital tensions and opportunities</i>	Trust in the British Council
A mirror to opinion or opinion leader?	<i>The impact and lasting power of cultural legacy</i>	Leaders in thought and innovation?
News or information providers	<i>Scale – local to people but with global reach – how and who pays for this?</i>	Flexible to changes?
Anxiety over relevance to a changing world	<i>Measuring what is done: impact and value</i>	Commodification of culture

(Full details of the research workshops outcomes are given in Appendix 1 – for the British Council – and Appendix 2 – for the BBC World Service).

Whilst Tanner’s five drivers: utility, prestige, education, community and inheritance can be inferred across this set they are different and I would suggest allowing the difference to dominate our thinking – not attempt to retrofit generic values over those expressed here.

A summary of the table might be read as follows: The shared issues which both of these agencies experience are predictable but they are nevertheless very important. Overarching both Workshops was the notion of sustainability. Both organizations are in a precarious position (as a historical observation) – sustainability looms large. In changing times and times of austerity and reduction in the global power of the UK, anxiety and strong sentiments and contestation over the nature of the cultural legacy of each organization is to

be expected. The lasting influence of this legacy would be a predictable issue for each organization as it goes forward. Similarly, with the rapid and massive expansion of digital technologies and the lack of a clear and understood development path for their use, this would again appear (to global agencies) a cause for concern. Scale too is predictable. Both the World Service and the British Council operate organizations with global reach but with localized experience. They are national and transnational organizations - and the significance of diasporas in some cases as cultural intermediaries is growing. The BC operates in country, in region and often in project. But the BC as a whole addresses issue and finance chains which link them to other global players. Similarly, the World Service has global reach but clusters in language and interest groups. The equating of global, national/regional and local within budget is a tremendous issue of scale.

All performance is assessed by measurement of impact and value. These measurements are often intangible and vague but operate as both a threat and a reward.

On the specifics for each organization:

the WS issues follow up in detail on some of the generic /shared issues: the internet and linked to this (and the Twitter generation) news or information? Two more specific issues to the WS are the nature of the role of editorial control – mirror or leading and (possibly linked to this item) relevance in the changing world.

For the BC there was also a question of leadership but rather than this relating to a potential duality of leadership or mirroring leadership from elsewhere; the BC are concerned with leading thought and innovation as opposed to being channels for such influences. The BC was also concerned with trust (a legacy issue?), flexibility to change and the commodification of culture.

Brief Reflections

Thinking back to the initial thoughts which set this essay up I am pondering both a sense-making device for posing questions and an interpretative instrument for comparing practices and experiences. At the same time I am concerned with two key components of cultural value: international understanding and reflective individuals but I do not wish to impose a tyranny of a CVM masquerading as objectivity or truth. We need to be responsive to the specifics of the WS and the BC.

Based on this my initial and tentative thoughts about the CVM are as follows. First a question:

What CVM features would be of use to the WS and the BC in terms of plotting their progress over coming years in the achievement, delivery and sustaining of cultural value?

Here are some tentative thoughts:

- A CVM which allows the users and audience, funders, government, as well as the members of the organizations themselves to determine the assessment of value – for example CV could be derived from a blend of on-line survey, questionnaire, virtual and periodic face-to-face workshops. This could build on and extend the kinds of issues we see in Table 1.
- This assessment would be quantitative and qualitative and specific in terms of understanding segregated and shared values of the audience, customers and stakeholders and not an imposition upon those groups.
- Emerging and agreed measures of cultural value could be expressed as indicators – for example culture drivers such as adoption of digital technologies, observed

renewal of cultural legacy, observed and monitored extensions of reach (questions of scale).

- Such indicators could be presented as sustainable value over time

Some of the challenges related to such a CVM project include:

- Coherence and sustaining communication within the BC/WS. A CVM if invested in, would need to be a sustainable artifact and one that was 'hard-wired' into the practices of organization. If this is not the case, then the coherence of the activity breaks down and the communication of results fails to be seen as relevant or informing.
- General acceptance of a CVM protocol with budget for operation
- The legitimacy of stakeholder-derived indicators at all levels of scale and
- The establishment of related theories of change (e.g. if an indicator in one area and relating to one group is informative, what is the change it implies? What is the subsequent response to this?).
- Tolerance by stakeholders of indicators
- Recognition that CVM has impacts on organization policy

References.

Bell, S. (1994). *Methods and Mindsets: towards an understanding of the tyranny of methodology*. In *BCS/ LSE Conference "Are Methodologies Exportable."* LSE, London.

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Holden, J. (2004). *The value of culture cannot be expressed only with statistics . Audience numbers give us a poor picture of how culture enriches us* (p. 67). London.

Law, J., Ruppert, E., & Savage, M. (2011). *The Double Social Life of Methods* (Vol. 44). Milton Keynes.

Savage, M. (2013). The "Social Life of Methods": A Critical Introduction. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 30(4), 3–21. doi:10.1177/0263276413486160

Tanner, S. (2012). *Measuring the Impact of Digital Resources : The Balanced Value Impact Model King ' s College London* (p. 113). London.

Appendix 1. British council data from workshop

Tasks 1, 2 and 3 analysis of BC groups

Group 1.

6 members.

Task 1: Imagine. In this brief report, Task 1: Imagine is assessed in terms of key themes emerging from the final act of the workshop.

Major themes:

- innovation – The Council is anchor in changing world. Flexible responsiveness. This is the brand idea
- The role of the BC in convening dialogue in UK and without, between stakeholders
- Global learning - the UK can gain from BC. Bring lessons back home.
- Trying to maintain trust in the institution

Task 2 is assessed on a 7 point scale where 1 is reflective practice and 7 is tyranny.

Task 2 score morning 1: 4344

Task 2 score morning 2: 4223

Overall conflicted and contesting. Big personalities. Hard to manage.

Task 3 is assessed on unanimously agreed points by the group.

The group self-assessed positively on two items and were unanimous is being unsure about their self management.

Task 1 indicates a range of interesting themes focusing around two items: flexibility and trust

Task 2 and 3 indicate a contested group with little consensus.

Overall: edgy, contesting but provocatively interesting. CV is highly centered on trust.

Group 2.

6 members

Task 1: Imagine. In this brief report, Task 1: Imagine is assessed in terms of key themes emerging from the final act of the workshop.

Major themes:

- Focus on education and the arts and how these meld in experience of BC abroad
- Digital changes, Increasing accessibility, control/Trust
- UK government and BC relations /- funding and who gets it, restrictions that come with it.
- Perceptions of the purpose of the BC – for profit? UK values abroad?
- Impact of technology - how to assess value? How to monetize
- Education exports
- Partnership and monetization - what is impact of specific projects/ initiatives.
- Trusted advisory role with foreign governments

Task 2 is assessed on a 7 point scale where 1 is reflective practice and 7 is tyranny.

Task 2 score morning 1: 3323

Task 2 score morning 2: 2233

Overall a well managed group who presented as largely consensual and moved more that way over the morning.

Task 3 is assessed on unanimously agreed points by the group.

The group self-assessed positively on four items. They were unanimous in being able to assert their views.

Task 1 indicates High focus on trust, technology and partnership.

Task 2 and 3 indicate a consistently positive group with a high self regard for assertion.

Overall: assertive and positive focusing on digital change and partnership.

Group 3.

6 members

Lloyd Anderson (arrived late, missed introduction to Imagine)

Task 1: Imagine. In this brief report, Task 1: Imagine is assessed in terms of key themes emerging from the final act of the workshop.

Major themes:

- Big versus small. Are we trying to reach everyone or just a few folks? In a commercial way? How does digital, impact on this?
- BC as “marmite”? Is it OK to be thought leaders and show what BC think?
- Clarify position with FCO
- Visibility – how to measure what we do? Market intelligence and methodology. Cultural relations and change are hard to measure
- These process-type things have to be done – but are Boring but businesslike.

Task 2 is assessed on a 7 point scale where 1 is reflective practice and 7 is tyranny.

Task 2 score morning 1: 4444

Task 2 score morning 2: 3323

Overall the group was poor in terms of self management to start with and improved marginally.

Task 3 is assessed on unanimously agreed points by the group.

The group self-assessed positively on one item.

They were unanimous in being unsure about their own management.

Task 1 indicates focus on the ambiguity of the BC role: big and small. A chaotic position to be in?

Task 2 and 3 show a contested group with little internal agreement.

Overall: a conflicted group. The focus on the conflicted role of the BC is interesting.

Group 4.

6 members

Task 1: Imagine. In this brief report, Task 1: Imagine is assessed in terms of key themes emerging from the final act of the workshop.

Major themes: 4 main inter-related issues:

- digital - as a tool in everything innovation creativity and fundamental ideas.
- relationship with government – key relationship
- partnerships with everyone else
- profile and strategy
- Transformation.
- Proud to be creative and innovative, and of achievements, historical and future
- Risk taking can stimulate innovation
- UK still no.1 for soft power - but others are coming up fast.

Task 2 is assessed on a 7 point scale where 1 is reflective practice and 7 is tyranny.

Task 2 score morning 1: 3333

Task 2 score morning 2: 2222

Overall a relatively high performing group. High degree of visible group coherence.

Task 3 is assessed on unanimously agreed points by the group. The group self-assessed positively on two items.

Task 1 indicates a focus on digital, relations with government and innovation.

Task 2 and 3 show a high performing group but with modest coherence around key themes.

Overall: a group that worked well and was very task focused. Keen on innovation and the potential of digital future.

Group 5.

5 members

Task 1: Imagine. In this brief report, Task 1: Imagine is assessed in terms of key themes emerging from the final act of the workshop.

Major themes:

- capturing our assets and tapping into them - these are our relationships/ alumni associate group
- Digital technology is a bit clunky
- Convening power of BC
- Commercial tensions
- flexibility - creating safe spaces
- Physical assets need to be wrapped around with brand.
- Credibility and trust
- Network and commonality. Network must be separate from institution.

Task 2 is assessed on a 7 point scale where 1 is reflective practice and 7 is tyranny.

Task 2 score morning 1: 3333

Task 2 score morning 2: 2222

Overall this was a high performing group who gradually improved.

Task 3 is assessed on unanimously agreed points by the group.

The group self-assessed positively on five elements.

Task 1 indicates focus on relationships, assets, flexibility, trust.

Task 2 and 3 indicate a highly cohesive group.

Overall: very cohesive group with a central interest in the BC making the most of its relationships.

Group 6.

6 members

Task 1: Imagine. In this brief report, Task 1: Imagine is assessed in terms of key themes emerging from the final act of the workshop.

Major themes:

- Communication and perception
- Externals on the table less anxious than BC folk
- Anxiety around issues of external perception, and internal purpose and meaning.
- Residue of the past
- Externals benefit from export of cultural projects
- Hostile environment for BC?
- Commodification of the product
- Centrality of London
- Internal work to be done on defining where the BC should be.

Task 2 is assessed on a 7 point scale where 1 is reflective practice and 7 is tyranny.

Task 2 score morning 1: 3343

Task 2 score morning 2: 2223

Overall a group tending from average to good in terms of group dynamic.

Task 3 is assessed on unanimously agreed points by the group.

The group self-assessed positively on three items.

Task 1 indicates a focus on external and external perception of BC, the commodification of what BC does and London centric.

Task 2 and 3 show an average group becoming better over the day.

Overall: a reasonably cohesive group with a focus on external pressures and perspectives.

Overall

Legacy

Scale – from local to global

Digital

Trust – partnership and commercial tensions

Commodification of culture is an issue of concern

Thought leaders – not just a conduit

Measuring what is done .. what impact and value are experienced

Innovation is valued

Flexibility

Appendix 2. World Service data from workshop

Tasks 1, 2 and 3 analysis of WS groups

Group 1.

6 members.

Task 1: Imagine. In this brief report, Task 1: Imagine is assessed in terms of key themes emerging from the final act of the workshop.

Major themes:

- Home front – showing value back in the UK.
- New media – broadcast .. what does it mean?
- Reaching people – two way? Interaction?
- Journalism #201 – WS getting known.

Task 2 is assessed on a 7 point scale where 1 is reflective practice and 7 is tyranny.

Task 2 score morning 1: 2324

Task 2 score morning 2: 2322

Overall a very animated and joyful group improving over the morning.

Task 3 is assessed on unanimously agreed points by the group.

The group self-assessed positively on 4 of the 16 criteria.

They were unanimous in being unsure on question 6: 'What we thought about was set out in terms of what we already knew and believed'. This indicates some potential for thinking on the edge.

Task 1 indicates some interesting themes around legacy, audience and media.

Task 2 and 3 concur on a positive and consensual group thinking, maybe on the edge.

Overall: an edgy and consensual group to whom CV is a matter of media and audience at home and oversea¹s.

¹ Note. All overall statements are very tentative at this stage.

Group 2.

6 members

Task 1: Imagine. In this brief report, Task 1: Imagine is assessed in terms of key themes emerging from the final act of the workshop.

Major themes:

- Who are we?
- Shadow of bowler hat - identity
- How to keep up
- Funding
- Prioritising and relating to audience
- Contemporary language to reach younger people?

Task 2 is assessed on a 7 point scale where 1 is reflective practice and 7 is tyranny.

Task 2 score morning 1: 2222

Task 2 score morning 2: 2222

Overall the group were flamboyant, cheerful cooperative and caring.

Task 3 is assessed on unanimously agreed points by the group.

The group self-assessed positively on 4 of the 16 criteria.

Task 1 indicates some questioning of self, legacy, media, competition and funding.

Task 2 and 3 concur that this was a positive group with a positive self image.

Overall: a positive group to whom CV is a matter of legacy, funding and priorities.

Group 3

6 members

Task 1: Imagine. In this brief report, Task 1: Imagine is assessed in terms of key themes emerging from the final act of the workshop.

Major themes:

- Heritage and renewal
- Primary purpose? Embrace digital.
- Good at new things, not so good at stopping
- Complex structures
- Audiences
- Governance

Task 2 is assessed on a 7 point scale where 1 is reflective practice and 7 is tyranny.

Task 2 score morning 1: 3344

Task 2 score morning 2: 3323

Overall an improving dynamic over the morning. A contesting and dominated group with much assertion and some of the more shy members appearing overwhelmed.

The group did serious stuff and often long periods of quiet..

Task 3 is assessed on unanimously agreed points by the group.

The group self-assessed positively on 2 of the 16 criteria.

Task 1 indicates focus on purpose, innovation and issues around this, structure and audience.

Task 2 and 3 concur that the group was conflicting and contested.

Overall: a conflicted and power group to whom CV is a matter of structures, purpose and governance.

Group 4.

7 members

Task 1: Imagine. In this brief report, Task 1: Imagine is assessed in terms of key themes emerging from the final act of the workshop.

Major themes:

- Vision/values defined for different groups
- Prioritising
- Strategy
- External driver/influencers (curators of content)
- Important to be nimble – flexibility and agility
- Reaching audiences in need v “showing off”
- Risk taking or keeping up
- Partnerships and differences – WS values.

Task 2 is assessed on a 7 point scale where 1 is reflective practice and 7 is tyranny.

Task 2 score morning 1: 3324

Task 2 score morning 2: 2233

Overall the scores show improvement but the group was certainly dominated by one or two kindly and agreeable leaders..

Task 2 is assessed on unanimously agreed points by the group.

The group self-assessed positively on 3 of the 16 criteria.

Task 1 indicates focus on variety of vision and value, strategic ideas, audience and risk.

Task 2 and 3 concur – a benignly dominated group but one which could function well.

Overall: a benignly dominated group to whom CV is a matter of external drivers, risk and vision.

The project team

7 members

Task 1: Imagine. In this brief report, Task 1: Imagine is assessed in terms of key themes emerging from the final act of the workshop.

Major themes:

- Relationship between WS/rest of BBC
- Advocacy
- Relationship with government/funders

Task 2 is assessed on a 7 point scale where 1 is reflective practice and 7 is tyranny.

Task 2 score morning 1: 3434

Task 2 score morning 2: 3332

Overall the scores show improvement but the group was slow to get going and unsure of its dynamic. A lot of hesitancy until individuals gained the trust to state and impose (at times) view. This condition of individuals asserting and imposing ranged around the group.

Overall

Legacy

WS as mirror rather than broadcaster

Relevance

Understanding the two way flow

Keeping what is best but being open to change