



# STRENGTHENING THE SECTOR

A business support and development programme for cultural organisations in Belfast

## Business Efficiency Toolkit



**Belfast**  
City Council

# Introduction

This toolkit is designed to complement the “Business Efficiency” workshop delivered by Anne Orr from Greenlight Consulting. Anne helps organisations design process and operational solutions that meet their strategic goals by combining project management experience with process and customer focussed tools, including Six Sigma and ISO. Anne has delivered strategic business planning projects and operational change management projects in various sectors including utilities, arts, IT and recruitment.

This toolkit will help you to adopt and adapt tools used in the commercial and public sectors to allow you to successfully apply them within the arts sectors to help reduce costs and increase impacts. Alongside a practical step-by-step guide, this toolkit features an expert interview, glossary and a select list of further reading – from useful case studies to tools and frameworks to help you translate this high level business practice into a helpful model for developing the work and the long term sustainability of your organisation.

*“Efficiency is concerned with doing things right.  
Effectiveness is doing the right things.”  
Peter Drucker.*

# Business Efficiency FAQ's

## What is business efficiency?

Business efficiency is a broad term that describes processes of change that make any aspect of your business more effective – in terms of cost, quality, staff well being, and customer experience. Efficiencies can be made in business functions from finance to human resources, customer care to sales. An efficient business successfully makes the best use of available resources to maximise output – which for arts organisations may mean more workshops, larger audiences, or more shows.

## What is productivity?

Productivity is the total output per worker. It is a term derived from factories but can also be a useful concept for arts organisations. Crucially the key driver to increased productivity is better management of staff time as such it is something that can be driven in house and with little expense. Productivity can often be increased as a direct result of the introduction of new systems, processes and technologies. For example an online booking system might free up one day a week of your admin officers time and allow them to focus on other more pressing matters.

## Is efficiency not just management speak for job cuts?

No, and it's important all employees understand why your organisation has decided to move towards a more efficient operational model. Invite all staff in for a meeting, and ask what they think would help them become more productive – often it's those carrying out the daily operations be that finance, HR or outreach that will be able to identify potential efficiency savings. In an arts organisation, increased productivity should mean more time working on creative output and less time on admin and back end services. The challenge arts organisations face is trying to develop systems and processes that support a shift in emphasis from management to service delivery and creative output.

## It sounds like it will be a costly and time-consuming process to transform our organisation into a more efficient and productive team?

The key to becoming a more efficient and productive organisation on low to no budget – is to invite ideas from across your staff team and then test these ideas out. If someone suggests a franking machine would save four hours a week on post office trips – can you borrow a machine and trial it out? Even better, can you trial digital franking and print stamps in house? If you ask for feedback at your events and it takes three weeks at the end of your festival to compile these, could staff ask for feedback via a smartphone during the festival? These are all little steps, that require all in your organisation to step back and question, why you do what you've always done. As the saying goes, if you always do, what you've always done, you'll always get, what you've always got.

# Driving Efficiency in your Organisation: A Step-by-Step Guide

## 1. Who does what?

Ask staff to make a note of how they spend their time for one week. Note this isn't an "audit" on their personal performance, instead the idea of this exercise is to get a better understanding of how your organisation operates.

## 2. What slows you down?

- Have a meeting with individual members of staff and ask them to identify processes or technologies that slow them down. This could be a dodgy photocopier that they spend an hour a day fixing, or not having an electronic intercom system meaning someone has to leave their desk 10 times a day to let visitors in. How can this fault be fixed, what is the potential time saving, and what is the cost outlay.

### 3. Why do you do it that way?

Map out everyday work processes, and identify blockages and problem transactions in the system.

A simple diagram can help identify blockages and see ways to ease audience transactions.

Audience Leave show

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Member of staff asks for feedback

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Audience gives feedback (5 minutes per interaction)

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member of staff collects feedback from 3 groups in 15 minutes

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venue empties – only 5% of audience were approached about feedback

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Member of staff brings feedback form to office

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Form gets filed

>

1 week later marketing officer types up feedback forms – some are unusable as handwriting is illegible (5 days work).

>

Feedback shapes next years festival

In the above diagram we can see that the blockage is in the amount of time it takes to get feedback from one group. The challenge therefore is how to make this interaction more efficient. It takes time for a staff member to bring the feedback to the office, to file it, and then for it to be typed up. Feedback via smartphone could make this process more efficient. Being able to share the feedback to help ticket sales for the evening show could make this process more effective.



**Create a process diagram for an activity that is regularly carried out in  
your organisation:**

## 4. Service Design

A quick Google will bring up 1000's of service design and action research methodologies. Different models work for different people, these are three tried, tested, quick and effective models:

### **Design with Intent Toolkit:**

This visual toolkit is a really nice aid for arts organisations, it asks managers to place themselves in the footsteps of service users. It's visual, it's practical and it's pretty low on business jargon. It's free to use.

[http://designwithintent.co.uk/docs/designwithintent\\_cards\\_1.0\\_draft\\_rev\\_sm.pdf](http://designwithintent.co.uk/docs/designwithintent_cards_1.0_draft_rev_sm.pdf)

### **Business Survival Toolkit:**

The Business Survival Toolkit is a fantastic resource, with a breadth of frameworks and models designed specifically for the cultural sector. One exercise that is particularly useful is their free to download PDF that talks you through mapping out business processes.

<http://business-survival-toolkit.co.uk/stage-two/business-processes/mapping-out-business-processes>

### **Service Design Toolkit:**

The Service Design Toolkit cuts the jargon and gets straight to the point with an extensive series of pdf templates which will talk you through process mapping, research and development, prototyping and implementing new more efficient processes.

<http://www.servicedesigntoolkit.org/downloads.html>

### **Microsoft Visio:**

Is a useful piece of software that allows you to easily and quickly draw workflow processes. It can be bought outright, or purchased through a subscription model.

<https://products.office.com/en-us/visio/flowchart-software>

# Expert Insight

[Lyndsey Jackson]

Lyndsey Jackson is Head of Operations at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, before taking up this role she was general manager at Kabosh

**“When considering changes and efficiency adaptations, we ensure there is a clear business case for these, to avoid reactive decisions that have not been thought through in the long term.”**

Lyndsey began working at Edinburgh Fringe in 2013 where she took up the role as Head of Operations. One of the key challenges she faced when she began in this position was the need to deliver a major organisational restructure. In this interview Lyndsey shares her experience of driving efficiencies and creating a more effective organisation by changing systems and processes and supporting staff to become key drivers of change. Lyndsey brings a valuable perspective to understanding efficiency savings as she has experience working in a small organisation with complex and site-specific productions, and also experience driving change in the largest arts festival in the world.





## **Q. As Head of Operations at Edinburgh Fringe when do you think about efficiency?**

The Fringe Society's year round operation is run by a team of 23 people, all of whom have a specific role to perform, often covering large and diverse areas of work before their seasonal teams are in place. This means the requirement for efficient and effective working is keenly felt when the pressure and workload increase at various points during the year. The Fringe Society operates in a continuous feedback loop to itself, measuring and challenging procedures and processes throughout the year to make iterative changes where improvements can be identified. Immediately. To prevent this kind of iterative change becoming 'knee jerk', key decisions are made by the Senior Management Team in a weekly meeting, where factors, such as the fit to strategic objectives or the customer journey through a process, can be considered in overview.

Alongside this, a full and thorough review of the year is undertaken post Festival Fringe, which includes departmental recommendations which are then considered and implemented (or not implemented) as part of the Autumn planning cycle. This process feeds into the budget for the following year, and staff and senior managers are requested to consider the resource implication of recommendations and changes. When considering changes and efficiency adaptations, we ensure there is a clear business case for these, to avoid reactive decisions that have not been thought through in the long term. For example, when demands on service delivery increase, the instinct is to increase the service provision, but by taking a step back and considering if other factors might be at play or the service provision needs to change, we can ensure that we're applying our limited resources effectively.

## **Q. How do you make changes in established practices?**

Implementing change in a small organisation can be challenging, but it is also a valuable opportunity to rejuvenate both procedures and people. Large process changes are developed in collaboration with staff; often the instigation for change is a result of staff feedback or recommendations, so their involvement in the design and development is key to ensuring they 'buy into' the change and it can be successfully integrated into the organisation. The Fringe Society implemented a new business plan for 2014-19, which includes ambitious objectives over the life of the plan. An all staff business planning day took place to allow staff the opportunity to interrogate and share ideas in response to the plan, working with colleagues in other departments to take a high level approach to how the Fringe Society can meet its ambitions. Organisational development is a key part of this process, and identifying changes which are then followed through to day to day operations allow staff to understand the strategic function behind changes they are working through.

On a day to day basis, encouragement of experimentation and 'test and learn' is a key change management process for the Fringe Society. The space to allow staff to develop strategies that can then be tested in iterations means change is less 'scary' and can be measured and reviewed in smaller chunks, so as to be less disruptive. There must also, always, be space to make mistakes and to understand failure as part of a learning process.

“Personally I think efficiencies come from joined up and cross departmental working (and as the person with budget responsibility I appreciate that it often saves money too!). Ensuring staff across the organisation understand the work of their colleagues in other departments is the primary step to identify areas for efficiency and collaboration.”

**Q. Talk us through the development and implementation of a new process designed to increase efficiency:**

The development and implementation of a new registration platform for the Fringe Society was (and continues to be) designed to improve process and procedures in all departments of the organisation. The 2009-14 business plan had a clear IT and Box Office strategy within it, which led the strategic thinking of the development. The timetable for the new software was extensive and a great deal of consideration was given to the wider implications of the work and the investment required to implement this. The need was a new registration software, of which many are available off the shelf, but in identifying that there were efficiencies to be made across the organisation it became clear that there was an opportunity to develop bespoke software that could meet multiple objectives within the IT strategy. The design process involved key staff from across the organisation to build a picture of the fully integrated, end to end user system envisioned; planning sessions were held across departments to help identify where users were using different processes to achieve the same goals. User stories and agile sprint planning were used to help individuals understand the software implementation and capabilities and an external project manager with the appropriate knowledge and skills was put in place. All of this was overseen by a project planning sub committee of the board, which included co-opted specialist skills to ensure the project was successful. Planning was over two years, with development over a further 18 months and extensive internal and external testing; development of user manuals and clear and concise customer help functions to ensure user navigation was as frictionless as possible. The software integrates with a range of other Fringe Society processes and technologies and was explicitly designed to offer seamless integration to these systems to reduce manual workload and improve efficiencies across departments. A full debrief and feedback cycle was undertaken, both internally and with external users, which led to further development in response to the real environment and the actual experience of users. The software is used in all departments of the organisation and provides a wealth of information, which, thanks to a smart database and reporting system, can be manipulated in limitless ways to provide meaningful and useful data.



“The skills of a project manager, recruited specifically for what you need, will be invaluable to both the development and implementation of your project but (and this might be the most important thing they can bring) they can also provide a new and objective point of view to challenge and interrogate, and ultimately improve, what you're trying to achieve!”

## **What advice would you give to an arts organisation wanting to examine how they could operate more efficiently?**

Change is not an overnight process. It should be planned, consulted, planned again and delivered and measured in tandem with your day to day operations. It should be flexible to everyday nuances but should seek to keep sight of its goal. The challenge many arts organisations face is that there are limited staff resources available to produce high levels of work (usually for little money!) and the time and energy invested in considering and implementing change can be overwhelming to even think about. This is where the board can be incredibly useful and I encourage all organisations to use the skills and knowledge of their board to help consider the larger, more effective changes needed. It might be hard work but if you've thought it through properly and understand the reasons why, it is always worth it. Don't be scared to ask your professional peers for advice, support, tools and options, and then don't be scared to discard all of the things you don't want.

Efficiency comes from people and organisations understanding what their purpose is, so interrogate your plans within your strategic objectives; you might find you're investing significant time and energy on activities that don't help meet your organisation's goals. Always ask 'why' first? If you can find the 'why' then you can find the 'when' and the 'how' pretty easily, and if you can't convince yourself you'll have a hard time convincing anyone else.

Don't try and improve everything at once unless you have to. Accept some areas of drag and focus on the task at hand, usually change follows change, so allow results to show themselves before you move onto the next area, as the changes required may have changed. Be inclusive to your staff, take them with you and let them work through processes in good time (but beware those who refuse to budge!) - you'll get a better output if they're onboard. Accept it might be frustrating and find a good friend to chew the ears off when it all gets a bit much; remember that people are people, and we all respond well to kindness - don't criticize unless it's useful but if it's useful don't be afraid to do so!

# Business Efficiency Glossary

## Efficiency

A process that turns the minimum amount of input (time and energy) into the maximum possible output. Essentially efficiency is about making the best use of available resources.

## Effectiveness

Is the level of results generated from the actions of employees.

## Productivity

Is a term used to define the output of individual members of staff.

## Business Process Modeling

A diagram that shows a full cycle business service: a structured series of activities and events that together creates one complete business process such as booking a ticket, or booking an artist.

## Business Architecture

The structure of an organisation, it is made up of a series of business processes that together create the operational structure of an organisation.

## Business Process Innovation

A radical restructure of established businesses processes. Think of it as wiping the slate clean and rewriting how your organisation operates from scratch.

## Business Process Improvement

A continuous and iterative process of refining existing processes with the aim of driving efficiency.

# Further Reading

“Collaboration maturity model”. Business Survival Toolkit, Date unknown <<http://business-survival-toolkit.co.uk/stage-four/partnerships-collaboration1/collaboration-maturity-model>> (Accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2015).

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“They work long hours, but what about results?”. New York Times, October 2012 <[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/07/business/measure-results-not-hours-to-improve-work-efficiency.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/07/business/measure-results-not-hours-to-improve-work-efficiency.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1)> (Accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2015).

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# Notes:

Toolkit produced by Dr Oonagh Murphy  
This programme is delivered by Arts & Business NI