

FRANCESCA MOODY

Co-Director of Shedinburgh Fringe Festival



ABOUT THE FESTIVAL

Shedinburgh Fringe Festival is a remote arts festival bringing together all the Fringe stalwarts of theatre, music and comedy, and the best new acts, all performed live from sheds across the country and streamed into people's homes.

“Ultimately I think in 10 years time I think I'll look back at this time and feel it stretched me in terms of problem-solving and crisis management, and that's a good thing.”

There is a natural frustration and concern about the uncertain future of the arts industry and the difficulty of safely gathering colleagues in person to share space and ideas. Despite this, Moody believes that the challenges of working through disruption provide valuable lessons for managers and leaders.

Moody describes the role of a producer as “a problem solver who works with various different teams.” Working during the Covid-19 crisis - an unprecedented series of problems to solve - has included creating and co-directing a remote arts festival and maintaining producing duties on long-term projects through our production company, Francesca Moody Productions.”

“In terms of management, this meant working with a wide array of teams who each have different expectations of her.” Moody notes that as a producer, “managing actors or ‘talent’ is different from managing, for example, venue staff such as stage managers, who are at times managing up to her. Naturally, all of this had to be conducted remotely when the lockdown was announced in March 2020.”

“There was frustration from myself and my colleagues about not being able to gather in the same shared space. In the theatre industry, as with others, ‘water-cooler’ conversations happen often and have significant value be it for team cohesion or generating ideas.”

Moody went on to say “However, the value of all-remote, all-digital working in gathering team members into a shared digital space at once - particularly for projects involving international collaborators. Additionally, the experience of necessity - of paring-back and assessing what is viable in a production context - has driven innovation and blue-sky thinking that is incredibly valuable to those in the creative industries.”

Despite some perks from pandemic-induced work styles, Moody is clear that the wider arts industry is at risk. “We have found ways to innovate - for example, by creating the Shedinburgh Fringe Festival, where productions were staged in a shed either in the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh, or the Soho Theatre, London, and livestreamed to audiences. However, not knowing if or when the wider arts sector will bounce back means difficult conversations and constantly planning and re-planning for multiple future scenarios. As a manager and leader, there is the challenge of how to communicate a variable and uncertain future to various colleagues, teams, and stakeholders. How does a manager or leader in the arts - or indeed other industries hard-hit by the Covid crisis - help their teams or other colleagues understand the severity of the situation without terrifying them? How can managers be positive but realistic at the same time?”

Moody told CMI. “My core tip for managers is to never underestimate the power of checking in with your people in a regular fashion, even those you might not usually communicate with regularly. This can include sharing thinking even when it hasn't evolved, and being honest with people about not always knowing the answer. While these practices are applicable at all times, they are especially vital when working and leading through times of disruption.”

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