

Structure Shapes Culture: Change Management as a Founda- tion for Transformation in Music Mediation

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Abstract

This article draws on practice-based insights from seven years of organisational leadership in a public symphony orchestra (2018–2025) to propose a change management model for music mediation. The core argument is that cultural transformation does not start with normative targets but with co-created structures that make new practices possible and sustainable. Using the model project “Kompetenzzentrum für Musik” as a case, the article outlines a participatory process architecture (time allocation, transparent stages from idea to evaluation, shared governance, and external evaluation) designed to redistribute responsibility within the organisation. It further introduces the “Ludwigshafen Impact Model” and its later development into a “Sustainable Impact Model” as reflective instruments that connect artistic intuition with evidence across organisational perspectives. Music mediation is framed as an intra-organisational strategy that reshapes relationships, decision-making, and concepts of quality.

Dieser Artikel stützt sich auf praxisbezogene Erkenntnisse aus sieben Jahren Leitungserfahrung in einem öffentlichen Symphonieorchester (2018-2025) und entwickelt ein Change-Management-Modell für Musikvermittlung. Das zentrale Argument besteht darin, dass kulturelle Transformation nicht durch normative Zielvorgaben initiiert werden kann, sondern mit gemeinschaftlich gestalteten Strukturen beginnt, die neue Praktiken ermöglichen und nachhaltig verankern. Am Beispiel des Modellprojekts “Kompetenzzentrum für Musik” skizziert der Beitrag eine partizipative Prozessarchitektur (zeitliche Ressourcen, transparente Prozessstufen von der Idee bis zur Evaluation, geteilte Steuerung sowie externe Evaluation), die darauf abzielt, Verantwortung innerhalb der Organisation

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neu zu verteilen. Darüber hinaus wird das „Ludwigshafener Wirkungsmodell“ in seiner Weiterentwicklung zum „Sustainable Impact Model“ als Reflexionsinstrument vorgestellt, das künstlerische Intuition mit evidenzbasierten Befunden aus unterschiedlichen organisationalen Perspektiven verbindet. Musikvermittlung wird dabei als organisationsinterne Strategie verstanden, die Beziehungen, Entscheidungsprozesse und Qualitätskonzepte neu strukturiert.

Cet article s'appuie sur des connaissances pratiques issues de sept années d'un orchestre symphonique public (2018–2025) développe un modèle de gestion du changement appliqué à la médiation de la musique. Son argument central est que la transformation culturelle ne commence pas par des objectifs normatifs, mais par la co-construction de structures qui rendent possibles et durables de nouvelles pratiques. En prenant pour exemple le projet pilote „Kompetenzzentrum für Musik“, l'article esquisse une architecture de processus participative (allocation du temps, étapes transparentes allant de l'idée à l'évaluation, gouvernance partagée et évaluation externe) conçue pour redistribuer les responsabilités au sein de l'organisation. Il introduit également le „Modèle d'impact de Ludwigshafen“, puis son évolution vers un „Modèle d'impact durable“, en tant qu'outils réflexifs reliant l'intuition artistique à des données probantes selon différentes perspectives organisationnelles. La médiation de la musique y est envisagée comme une stratégie intra-organisationnelle qui transforme les relations, les processus décisionnels et les conceptions de la qualité.

Keywords

change management, organisational transformation, music mediation, orchestras, impact evaluation

Introduction: Transformation as a Shared Responsibility

Cultural institutions operate in times of social, political, and ecological uncertainty. In this context, publicly funded orchestras are often expected to play a dual role: they are both agents and mirrors of transformation. Music mediation is increasingly discussed as a field that can reconfigure relationships between artists, audiences, and institutions. Yet its structural potential frequently remains underused when mediation is confined to preparatory formats or presented as an add-on to an otherwise unchanged core (Mörsch, 2009, pp. 9–10; Wimmer, 2022, p. 131). Building on these debates, this article advocates an understanding of transformation that does not start with isolated formats or outreach programmes. Instead, it frames music mediation as a contextual and relational practice rooted in attitudes, organisational structures, and conditions of enablement.

The article is written as a reflection on practice with scholarly intent. It draws on seven years of leadership experience (2018–2025) at the Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz and on the design logic of a participatory model project that sought to shift the orchestra's everyday routines, not merely its external offerings (Fehlmann, 2025; Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz, 2024). The goal is to make a transferable argument: transformation becomes sustainable when structures are designed in ways that allow new cultural practices to emerge, stabilise, and be revised over time.

Structure Precedes Culture

In management discourse, Alfred Chandler's work is often summarised by the argument that organisational outcomes follow from structural arrangements (Chandler, 1962). In adapted form, a similar logic can be observed in cultural organisations: cultural change tends to follow structural change. Values, attitudes, and visions matter, but they remain fragile when they are not supported by decision-making routines, time architectures, and legitimate governance mechanisms. In orchestra organisations marked by specialised roles and longstanding hierarchies, this relationship between structure and culture becomes particularly visible. When new expectations are introduced without aligned structures, friction, circumvention, and resistance are common outcomes. When structures are re-designed in participatory and transparent ways, cultural change can become both safer and more actionable.

A Case in Practice: The Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz

Between 2018 and 2025, the Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz pursued a transformation from a traditional repertoire institution towards a profile described as a "competence centre for music" (Fehlmann, 2025, pp. 21–24). Two strategic guiding concepts were defined as orientation points: proximity and relationship. These concepts referred to relationships with audiences and civic society, but also to internal relationships within the organisation, including communication, collaboration, and responsibility distribution.

Rather than treating these guiding concepts as a communication layer, the transformation attempted to embed them structurally. This included the development of flexible working arrangements, the creation of spaces for shared creativity, and a renewed public communication practice. The strongest structural lever, however, was a participatory model project designed to redistribute responsibility in a transparent, time-protected, and evaluable way (Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz, 2024, p. 4).

The model project as structural architecture

To make transformation workable in an orchestra context, the change process was formalised as a model project with clear structures for time, roles, decision-making, and

evaluation. It was framed as a model project because it was intentionally limited to a defined trial period and designed to lead to a binding decision on whether the working mode should be continued (Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz, 2024, p. 5).

A first structural lever was time. The project created an explicit participation architecture by reserving a share of working time for development and implementation beyond the regular orchestral core. A target allocation of 80/20 was communicated: the regular orchestral core remained primary, while up to 20 per cent of working time could be dedicated to initiatives and tasks beyond original job fields (Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz, 2024, p. 15). This time architecture was paired with formal provisions that clarified how additional tasks could be recognised and scheduled, reducing the risk that participation would depend on informal availability or personal privilege.

A second lever was procedural transparency. The model project followed a staged process from idea to evaluation. A simplified six-stage sequence was communicated: submission, publication and collective rating, further development, review by a selection committee, planning and implementation, and evaluation (Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz, 2024, p. 5). Internally, the process was designed to separate creative ideation from feasibility filtering. This separation served an important social function: it allowed ideas to be refined, merged, postponed, or stopped without framing decisions as personal rejection. Such depersonalisation of selection is a key condition for participation in tightly knit artistic teams.

A third lever was shared governance supported by external evaluation. Collective rating created broad internal resonance, while the selection committee provided a legitimacy and feasibility filter. In addition, an external evaluator accompanied the project through multiple phases, including staff and audience surveys, followed by triangulation and collective discussion of results (Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz, 2024, p. 55). The external perspective functioned as a buffer that supported feedback routines and organisational learning through aggregated results.

The project's outputs were communicated in simple, trackable figures. By the end of the model season, 78 ideas had been submitted; 63 were rated as relevant by the collective; 41 were recommended for implementation by the selection committee; 32 were implemented in the season 2023/2024; and 9 were scheduled for 2024/2025 and beyond. A binding continuation decision was made via postal ballot (6–18 June 2024) with a turnout of 96 per cent: 72 votes supported continuation and 12 supported termination (one invalid vote). Concrete examples included dementia-sensitive concerts with adapted duration and repertoire, home-based chamber music visits for people who can no longer attend the hall, and music-making in hospitals and psychiatric settings in collaboration with therapeutic staff (Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz, 2024, p. 18). In other words, the model project not only generated new formats; it also established a repeatable organisational routine through which responsibilities, relationships, and quality criteria could be negotiated and revised over time.

Info-Box: The Model in Brief

Purpose: to shift from a repertoire-focused orchestra to a competence centre for music by enabling staff members to initiate and implement change (Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz, 2024).

Time structure: up to 20% time contingent for project work beyond the regular orchestral core (Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz, 2024).

Process: staged sequence from idea to evaluation (submission; collective rating; development; selection committee review; planning and implementation; evaluation) (Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz, 2024).

Governance: collective rating plus a selection committee, supported by external evaluation (Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz, 2024).

Results (2023/2024): 78 ideas submitted; 63 rated as relevant; 41 recommended; 32 implemented; 9 scheduled (Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz, 2024).

Decision: binding continuation ballot (6–18 June 2024) with 96% turnout; 72 votes to continue, 12 to end (one invalid vote) (Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz, 2024).

Impact Models as Instruments of Change Management

Structural change becomes more sustainable when an organisation can reflect on it in a shared language and across multiple dimensions. In Ludwigshafen, this need led to the development of the Ludwigshafen Impact Model and its later expansion into a Sustainable Impact Model (SIM) (Fehlmann, 2025). These models served as instruments for both guidance and evaluation. They support qualitative and quantitative reflection across nine perspectives: content, format, quality, communication, staff, development, responsibility, finances, and society. The function of such models is to connect artistic intuition with evidence and to make implicit assumptions discussable across the organisation.

In practice, these perspectives supported questions such as: Who is reached, and who is not reached? What changes within the organisation when new relationships are built? How is quality understood when proximity and participation are guiding concepts? Which resources are required, and how are they distributed fairly? By organising reflection beyond single events, impact models can function as stabilising mechanisms: they support learning routines and make it more likely that a transformation survives personnel changes, crisis situations, or shifts in public discourse.

Music Mediation as Strategic Function

Within this perspective, music mediation is not a secondary educational task but an integral part of organisational development. It influences repertoire choices, communication styles, team routines, and the framing of artistic quality. The concept of intra-music mediation captures this paradigm shift by emphasising mediation as an inward-oriented practice that transforms the organisation itself, not only its audiences (Müller-Brozović, 2024). Intra-music mediation addresses how musicians and teams relate to the music they perform, how they translate meanings into accessible encounters, and how they negotiate roles and responsibilities.

Such work can be understood through the concept of resonance. Resonant relationships are not created through persuasion or marketing; they emerge when people experience responsiveness, self-efficacy, and meaningful exchange (Rosa, 2016). In organisational terms, resonance requires time, psychological safety, and decision-making routines that allow mutual influence. The model project described above can therefore be read as a mediation structure: it designed conditions under which staff members could experience self-efficacy and negotiate relationships with audiences and with each other, with mediation becoming a core rather than a peripheral function.

Attitude and Responsibility: Leadership as Enabler

Structure alone is not sufficient. Transformation also requires attitude. In this context, leadership is less about directing and more about enabling. It involves framing processes, supporting negotiation, and tolerating irritation as part of change. In a participatory setting, leadership must also take responsibility for clarity: participation becomes credible only when rules are explicit and decisions are legitimate, especially when not every idea can be implemented.

The practice-based insight here is that participation is not the absence of leadership. It is a different form of leadership that focuses on conditions: time architectures, transparent procedures, reliable communication, and feedback routines. These conditions help prevent participation from becoming symbolic or exhausting, and they make it more likely that responsibility is shared rather than delegated downwards without support.

Critical Reflection: Between Vision and Reality

Participation can produce ownership and creativity, yet it can also generate uncertainty for team members who are used to clear hierarchies and role boundaries. In a highly specialised artistic organisation, empowerment needs reliable structures; otherwise, participation risks being perceived as additional workload rather than shared agency.

Leadership in such contexts requires continuous shifts between enabling and deciding. Maintaining fairness, pace, and accountability sometimes demands clear decisions, even when the overall ambition is shared ownership. This balancing act is not a deficit of participation, but part of its operational reality.

Not every innovation worked as intended. Some initiatives had to be revised, postponed, merged, or stopped. Treating failure as information rather than as blame required explicit feedback routines and a shared language for learning.

Finally, transferability is limited. The approach benefited from a specific socio-cultural environment and from trust built over time. What can travel, however, are design principles: time structures that protect participation, transparent processes that reduce the personalisation of rejection, shared governance, and evaluation routines that connect artistic practice with organisational learning.

Conclusion and Outlook: From Exception to Structure

The case suggests that when change is structurally embedded, a new culture can emerge. Music mediation can play a key role in this process, not only as a set of formats but as a strategy and an attitude. For cultural organisations undergoing transformation, change management should therefore focus less on declaring goals and more on designing enabling conditions: protected time, transparent procedures, shared governance, and reflective instruments that connect artistic work with evidence and learning. The aim is not the optimisation of an existing state but the creation of new spaces of possibility.

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Authors' Biography

Beat Fehlmann is Artistic Director and Managing Director of the Academy of Music Liechtenstein and Ensemble Esperanza (since 2025). From 2018 to 2025, he served as Director of the Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz, where he initiated a multi-year transformation process centred on participatory structures and music mediation as an organisational strategy. He previously held leadership positions with the South West German Philharmonic in Constance, the Graubünden Chamber Philharmonic, and the Philharmonic Orchestra of the Nations. Since 2020, he has taught orchestra management at the Frankfurt University of Music and Performing Arts. In 2022, he received the German Orchestra Culture Prize for innovative work in orchestral development.

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