

Atelier: Crafting collaboration and context

This workshop presentation will discuss the evolution of Atelier, a textile making space in Stroud, Gloucestershire. Atelier is set up to support textile practice for amateurs and professionals, but it also provides a platform for a variety of creative work, hosting performance, exhibitions and workshops. With creativity providing a central focus, it has become a hub for community activism, with a strong focus on sustainability. Atelier has been set up to provide a convivial environment in which everyday social interaction and more formal modes of discourse and exchange are nurtured in a generative context, amidst the means and the evidence of creative production. Atelier recognises that creativity is often the product of social encounter, rather than a special quality centred in an individual.

In a similar way, although Atelier has evolved from the interests and singular vision of an individual, it could be seen as exemplifying a form of 'distributed' leadership, in which leadership is not regarded as a skillset or attribute possessed by an individual, but rather as something that arises within the relationships and interactions of multiple actors and the context in which they operate.

Open workshops where makers share tools and knowledge are a growing resource. The role of such spaces in fostering innovation and peer learning is widely recognised and written about. In this paper we seek to understand the wider leadership roles that they might play in their communities. Reflecting on Atelier as a case study, and locating it within a broader theoretical discourse, this presentation will seek to understand the model of leadership that emerges out of such contexts and the vital role played by creative work in creating that context.