

## About CAMEo

CAMEo, the Research Institute for Cultural and Media Economies at the University of Leicester, was launched in 2016 to provide new understandings of the cultural industries, the 'creative economy', the arts and media, cultural policy, consumer culture dynamics, and the mediation and representation of cultural and economic life.

CAMEo is an interdisciplinary platform for academic research as well as for collaborations with culture and media practitioners. Together with a wide range of partners we explore the diverse and complex ways in which cultural and media economies are being defined, valued, enacted, experienced and represented.

We invite everyone interested in the cultural and media economies to join our conversations. Visit our website on [www.le.ac.uk/comeo](http://www.le.ac.uk/comeo) or get in touch via [comeo@le.ac.uk](mailto:comeo@le.ac.uk)

## CAMEo

## Where Am I? Black Asian and Minority Ethnic Role Models in Performing Arts

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The *Where am I?* project explored the importance of BAME role models for developing a more diverse workforce. It responded to growing concerns in the arts and culture, but also the general public about a lack of workforce diversity on our stages and screens, in our museums, galleries and books.

There now exists a substantive body of academic research into workforce diversity in the arts and culture, but not on BAME role models. Research elsewhere, for instance into entrepreneurs, has shown that role models are crucial for individuals' career ambitions. We also know that young people's perceptions of the cultural industries influence their likelihood of pursuing a career in this area. *Where am I?* builds on this work to develop a better understanding of just how BAME role models impact individual aspirations and can help lever more diversity in arts and culture.

*Where am I?* set out to

- explore why and how BAME role models are important in the performing arts in relation to workforce diversity;
- examine what influences are important to career entry and progression in theatre;
- analyse successful BAME and white role model careers to understand the factors that have facilitated their success;
- identify good practice examples for supporting BAME role models.

In 2017 *Where am I?* interviewed 11 cultural leaders and 33 focus group participants about being role models and working with role models. This leaflet highlights the project's key findings.

### Key findings from *Where am I?*

Role models are key for individuals developing aspirations and pursuing careers. BAME role models make BAME individuals feel included. They inspire industry entrants to be confident and ambitious, and develop their skills and networks. They encourage those already in the performing arts to persist and pursue their goals, and actively support them in doing so. For BAME workers and prospective industry entrants, authentic, visual representation of ethnicity is particularly important.

Role models appear in different forms and at different times in an individual's career. *Where am I?* discovered four different types of role models, BRIGHT LIGHTS, GUIDES, FORGERS and ENABLERS.

**BRIGHT LIGHTS** incite inspiration and insight. They often impact for only a brief moment, as a catalyst for insight and ambition. *Where am I?* interviewees often recounted the impact of a BRIGHT LIGHT role model in difficult times, when they were struggling with what to do or where to go. Visual representation in terms of ethnicity is important here: BRIGHT LIGHTS inspired our interviewees because suddenly there was someone who looked or talked like them – proof that a career in the performing arts was possible.



*“if you can't see it, you can't be it”*

(*Where am I?* interviewee)

GUIDE, FORGER and ENABLER role models tend to influence careers over a longer period.

**GUIDES** are successful in their chosen profession. They are admired for their skill and values but unlike BRIGHT LIGHTS they provide others with concrete models of what to do. Our interviewees described GUIDES they knew personally as well as GUIDES that they observed and admired from afar. In both cases though, the important impact was that GUIDES modelled behaviour that our interviewees sought to emulate. GUIDES provide powerful blueprints that can help others move forwards.

**FORGERS** open up opportunities for others. They typically have a track record of breaking down barriers, taking risks and carving a path on which others can follow. They inspire not so much because of concrete actions but because of their trajectory, often into leadership positions. FORGERS tend to be aware of their trailblazing and, importantly, do not close the door behind them.

**ENABLERS** are the most involved role models. Our interviewees described them as giving strength, support, insight, knowledge, encouragement, permission and access, often in very concrete situations. ENABLERS demystified the theatre sector and supported career progression. Not dissimilar to mentors,

ENABLER role models are conscious of their impact on others' careers.

Our *Where am I?* interviews provided ample evidence of just how important role models are, how they help BAME workers to get in and on in the performing arts. Role models are clearly an important lever for workforce diversity in the performing arts.

However, our interviews also showed that there are not enough BAME role models in the performing arts. And because more BAME role models would mean more inspiration, opportunity and support for talent from BAME backgrounds, a key industry task now is to increase the number of BAME role models in the performing arts.

At this point the different role model types take centre stage. *Where am I?* has shown that role models are not perfect, multi-tasking super-humans who successfully deal with every imaginable situation. Role models fulfil very different functions as BRIGHT LIGHTS, GUIDES, FORGERS and ENABLERS. This discovery opens up new opportunities

- for BAME workers to understand themselves as role models; and
- for BAME workers to look for and work with role models.

### What next?

*Where am I?* has shown that role models are important facilitators of workforce diversity. Of course, having more BAME role models will not fix all diversity issues in the performing arts. But actively supporting BAME role models throughout the sector and encouraging individuals to work with role models has the potential to make a genuine difference.

The profiles of BRIGHT LIGHTS, GUIDES, FORGERS and ENABLERS provide succinct insight into who role models are, what they do and how they inspire and support BAME talent. The profiles can help recognise role models – a vital first step to better supporting them. The profiles emphasise that role models act and affect in different ways, making it easier for individuals to understand themselves as role models in one way or another. Lastly, the profiles encourage individuals to seek out role models for particular qualities and contributions rather than as a 'super-hero to admire'.

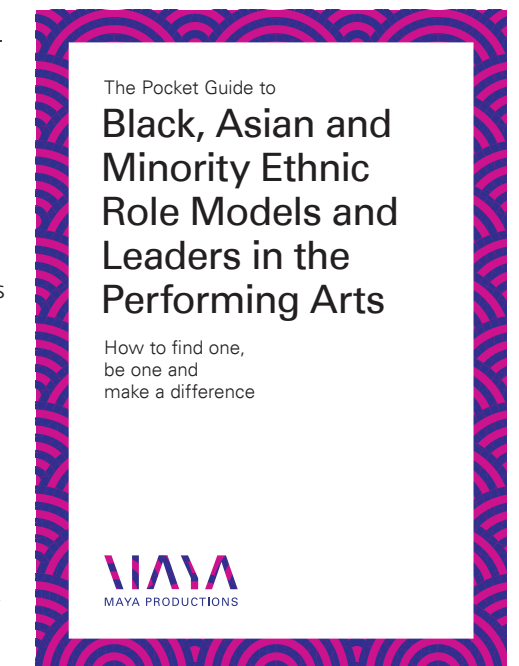
With these different types of role models the performing arts can more easily start raising awareness through:

- showcasing BAME role models at industry events, e.g. conferences, symposia or round table discussions;
- facilitating conversations with organisations, drama schools, gatekeepers or policy makers about workforce diversity, bias, role models and ethnicity;
- incorporating recognised role model qualities into job descriptions;
- developing an online toolkit for BAME students and workers that enables individuals to reflect on their own practices as a basis for career progression and for supporting others.

Supporting BAME role models enables them to recognize the significance of their own role within the performing arts and allows them to become the BRIGHT LIGHTS, GUIDES, FORGERS and ENABLERS for future generations of BAME workers and performers.

For more concrete tips on how to support BAME role models, be a role model or work with one, *Where am I?* has developed *The Pocket Guide to BAME Role Models in the Performing Arts*.

Download your free copy from [insert URL]



For more information on *Where am I?* and to download the full project report, please visit [www.le.ac.uk/cameo](http://www.le.ac.uk/cameo)

*Where am I?* was led by Suzanne Gorman for Maya Productions [www.mayaproductions.co.uk](http://www.mayaproductions.co.uk) and undertaken in collaboration with the CAMEo Research Institute for Cultural and Media Economies, University of Leicester.