

Career development needs of people working in the arts industry in New Zealand.

Abstract

This presentation represents my findings of previous and current career research relating to the career development needs of artists.

I produced a qualitative research report for my Masters in Career Development at AUT. I attempted to find out from the creative sector what issues artists have, and how they view their career development.

An holistic approach was applied to ensure not only careers but also in the broader sense, that of their life role, lifespan, and contextual interactions. My research involved looking at these issues, which were then noted as phenomena affecting artists in their career. These phenomena were then described as themes, which were examined within the body of my work. Career practitioners and researchers are aware of and understand these key issues affecting artists in their world of work.

I investigated the experiences of artists with data collected through a focus group interview. My paper summarised the findings of this research, the phenomena addressed as themes of their career development needs, the metaphors of the artists and, in particular, strategies for sustaining careers in the arts.

The position of the artist is documented as an integral member of a community and the findings will add to the growing literature on careers which is fairly scarce in the arts industry.

Introduction

The first part of my research involved conducting a literature review to understand the why of an arts career.

Literature Review

The literature review analysed the historical career development of artists from ancient times – cave painters of our ancestors to the monumental builders of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia and the murals of Crete and Greece. These were predominantly men skilled in a specialised trade, practising it full time and making a living from it. (Janson and Janson, 2006).

When undertaking this research one of the first issues I encountered was the phenomenon of amateur artists versus professional artists. To understand this I needed to take an historical journey to see how that phenomenon was birthed and what was underpinning this assumption.

This research was based on the Western context when after the Roman Empire collapsed in the 5th century the professional artist disappeared in Europe. The

next revival of Western culture/arts came under Charlemagne about 800 AD, before that it was confined to monastic enclaves which mainly kept alive the traditions of written literature.

Meanwhile in the East, the Byzantine Empire, art had been kept alive by the Church who was a great patron of the artists as they were employed to elaborate and illustrate their buildings. Charlemagne gave full honour to learning and the arts. He encouraged the founding and growth of monasteries, where this learning and the practice of the arts were mainly fostered (Janson and Janson, 2006).

Another phenomenon, was that artists began movements. Charlemagne brought in the Carolingian renaissance, then the artists brought us the Romanesque period followed by the Gothic period. It was mainly the churches who employed journeymen masons and carvers during this era. Historically here the artists were craftspersons-artisans and earning a living by their trade, not a profession.

By the fourteenth century in Italy the prestige of the artist started to build with the Renaissance, then the Baroque of the seventeenth and the Rococo of the eighteenth century periods. These artists served the church, state, nobility and created pictures to satisfy the widening market for works of art (Kemp, 2000). Successful Baroque artists lived like princes as they were employed by the wealthy, such as the bankers of Florence who had great wealth and patronised the arts.

I then researched the phenomena of the rise of professionalism of the artist and the introduction of guilds and elitism.

The start of this elitism began primarily in France with the Academie Royale which was founded in 1648.

Another contributing factor to elitism, although it is not seen as much today, is the omni-competence of artists and their abilities to work as a painter, architect or decorator. Those who were the brightest culminated their training in the arts, therefore, when they produced artwork it was well revered due to the status and genius of the artist. Here we can think of Leonardo da Vinci and Giulio.

This elevated status of the artist was much revered in the golden age of France, Holland, Italy and Spain.

Artists in the Twentieth Century

In the twentieth century the Germans changed the art scene via the impact of the Bauhaus art movement. The Germans Bruno Paul and Walter Gropius believed that art schools had a responsibility not only to the artists but also society; that was train artists not only in their chosen fields but also in an area where they could earn a living and be socially useful. After World War I the Berlin Academy of Art would not admit anyone into art school unless they have first learned a trade in a workshop or trade school (Janson and Janson, 2006).

Private patronage became available to the rising bourgeoisie, especially due to the rise of the art market through exhibiting institutions, dealers and auction houses (Grana, 1964).

Painters began to produce works to be sold in the markets for the first time in Holland in the seventeenth century. Patronage did not stop, but alternative ways of earning a living were experimented with. In most other arts the artist became an entrepreneur by the late sixteenth century (Janson, 2006).

In the nineteenth century a number of artists attempted to capitalise directly on their own work, not by selling individual paintings to particular buyers, but by exhibiting them for a fee to a mass audience. The career needs of the artist were again evolving and developing into markets where they could earn a living.

What is happening today?

Today the principle of government support for the arts is widely accepted. Most European and western countries have state theatres and opera houses, and they support symphony, orchestra, ballet companies, and other groups of artists (Fineberg, 1995). In New Zealand the government through its agency Creative New Zealand provide funds and grants to various arts projects.

Roles of the institutions and literary industries of art became increasingly dominant. The patron was replaced by the networks of collectors and dealers, while the state tended to play its role through the funding of intermediate agencies for the exhibition of art and for the financial support of approved practitioners (Kemp, 2000). It would appear new career needs for artists were centering around those of influence – the collectors and dealers, and the granting of public funds.

There is an excess supply of artists which seems to be a structural trait associated with the emergence and the expansion of a free market organisation of the arts (Menger, 1999). This poses the most critical issue for artists as their world is highly competitive. Belonging to the right scene and people increases their chances of work.

One of the main career patterns for artists is the short-term contractual or sub contractual relationship which prevails in artistic labour markets (Towse, 1993).

Another pattern among artists is their ability to be connected with dealer galleries in order to sell their work. This relationship is crucial but is often unstable. Some galleries have short life spans, and with the economic recession many have fallen under. This affects artists as they become members of a gallery, and the gallery then represents the artist, both in terms of publicity and in the actual handling of sales.

What determines artist's profiles above others is what level they are on in the stratum of galleries. They navigate by moving upward and downward often in repeated cycles with the gallery defining the prestige of the artist and their

current position (Guiffre, 1999). Galleries in turn increase their own prestige by acquiring high-elite artists from the major art schools.

There is an art world hierarchy, and status is even more complicated in that the personal prestige of the occupant of a position enhances the status of the position itself. The career ladder often reveals itself rather as a career sand pile, where each person's footsteps in attempting to get to the top affect the shape of the climb (Guiffre, 1999).

Guiffre's sand piles are a good metaphor in describing career patterns of the artist.

Other research revealed that there are two types of rewards for artists: one is financial and the other 'psychic income' (non-monetary rewards). Menger (1999) defines psychic income as job satisfaction, a high level of personal autonomy, the opportunity to use a wide range of abilities and a high degree of social recognition for the artist.

Two theories I looked at were Rosen (1986) who suggests a dynamic occupational choice model. This is useful to explain how workers accumulate skills through experience and learning-by-doing. As non-routine work implies a steady human capital investment, it takes place in a matching process where jobs are "tied packages of work and learning" (Rosen, 1986).

The other theory was a rational behavioural model. This means the expected risky occupational outcomes should be experienced in a way quite similar to that predicted by the theory of option pricing in finance (Rosen, 1986). What this means, is that it is rational to choose the job with the greater risk first and to switch to a less risky alternative if the outcome turns out to be unfavourable.

Other areas I researched into were the characteristics of artists, the span of an artistic career in relation to an artist's career life span, and other issues such as the oversupply of artists,

Methodology

I conducted a focus group where information elicited provided me with a more rigorous qualitative research method to better understand the phenomena presented from the literature review details that I have just explained. This included the ability to assess a greater insight as participants were not restricted to A, B or C answers, but were allowed to say anything they feel was relevant.

This approach allowed me to listen, not just to the content, but also to understand the emotions, ironies, contradictions, and tensions. It allowed for the production of insight. Focus groups are not set up to generalise in the same way as a survey research would (Fern, 2001). What this means is that the focus group needed to be with people who were very similar with each other, i.e. power, status, job, income, education and personal characteristics; this was to avoid individuals censoring their ideas in the presence of other people. All

participants were male aged between 20 – 35 being New Zealand European and all had studied at Elam School of Fine Arts, The Auckland University.

Participants were issued with consent forms which were signed. They were then asked a number of stimulus questions or issues. This was to gain further knowledge of their career needs and to look at the connection between a theme and various phenomena presented in the literature review and in the focus group. This was then strengthened by multiple instances of empirical evidence gleaned from the data.

The methods employed were analytic comparisons, and coding using both thematic and axial (Neuman, 2000).

Data Findings and Data Analysis

The focus group was recorded and then this was transcribed. The transcribed recording was documented so that it could be analysed into categories based on themes, concepts and metaphors.

I employed qualitative coding systems including axial coding looking at the strategies and processes that artists make and how those themes cluster together (Neuman, 2000). The interview findings from the focus group were organised into conceptual categories where themes were created which were then used to analyse the data, guided by the research questions.

The themes were aligned to the themes I had uncovered in my literature review and they were: career needs, challenges, networking/connections, return on investment, influential people, elitism and advancement, protectionism in the art industry, co-operative and collectives, financial support for artists, characteristics of artists, reputation of the artist, oversupply of artists, descriptions as an artist (metaphors), and career success.

Axial Coding Concepts

From the themes and concepts outlined above I then conducted a second pass of the data, but this time focusing on the preliminary concepts outlined.

This process is known as axial coding and involved myself identifying the axis of key concepts in the analysis. Here I am looking at other concepts that started to cluster together.

I raised questions such as “Can I divide existing concepts into sub dimensions or subcategories?” “Can I combine several closely related concepts into one more general one?”

Some of the new ideas that emerged during this pass, with those questions in mind, were inspiration (how does the artist get this?), conflict of job orientation,

values of the artist, fine art versus popular culture art, lack of patrons, and reviewing policies on art schools

Conclusion: Implications for Career Counsellors

In concluding, this research validates the need for career counsellors to be cognizant of the strategies and pathways that help assist their creative/artistic clients to a more productive and profitable lifestyle choice. It is important for career counsellors to be knowledgeable of the values and opinions of the artist in helping them make career strategies for their future.

My research shows that the contemporary artistic scene is more contestable than mainstream work opportunities. Uncertainty plays a major and highly ambiguous role. This means that art is a risky business.

Clients need to be encouraged to seek what funding is available to them. Both local and national governments provide funds and grants in New Zealand. For a functioning artist being on board a funding round is important for their survival. Funding initiatives, however, are often beyond what can be realistically tackled by an individual artist. This is because the focus is on 'community' and artists would do well to set up co-operatives or artist collectives to acquire these funds. Funds are targeted towards organisations rather than individuals.

Many artists do not possess the skills and political knowledge to write such proposals for funding. Also the political element relates to managing a programme of social change, which again, artists have little knowledge impairing their ability to write successful proposals.

Other issues affecting artists is that they need to require a solid understanding of economic and social strategies within the corporatised world of the Arts (Bennett, 2007).

Artists are in the workforce where casualisation and multiple employments are rife (Bennett, 2007). The traditional, linear career model has little relevance to the cultural sector. This sector manages their careers in what we call a protean model, or they may think of their career as a portfolio of various work opportunities.

Overall, career counsellors can encourage their artistic clients to view their lifestyles as being more of self employed practitioners or freelancers. By introducing them into definitions of a protean career and the strategies outlined in this research they will be better able to navigate many of the 'sand dunes' which lie ahead.

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