Together Alone: conditions for sustainability in Australian independent theatre

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STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICITY

I, Jane Elizabeth Kreis, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Jane Elizabeth Kreis
30 June, 2010.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................................................................................. ii

STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICITY ......................................................................................... iv

COPYRIGHT AGREEMENT ....................................................................................................... iv

TABLE OF CONTENTS ............................................................................................................. v

LIST OF TABLES ...................................................................................................................... xiv

KEYWORDS .............................................................................................................................. xv

ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................................... xvi

CHAPTER 1 ............................................................................................................................... 19

1 Setting The Scene .................................................................................................................. 19

1.1 An Introduction to the Thesis .......................................................................................... 19

1.2 Situating the Hermeneutic Research Process .................................................................. 20

1.3 Situating the Researcher .................................................................................................. 21

1.4 Part A: Developing an Independent Voice ........................................................................ 22

1.4.1 Definition of Sustainability ......................................................................................... 23

1.5 Description of Chapters .................................................................................................... 24

1.5.1 Chapter 2 ...................................................................................................................... 24

1.5.2 Chapter 3 ...................................................................................................................... 25

1.5.3 Chapter 4 ...................................................................................................................... 26

1.5.4 Chapter 5 ...................................................................................................................... 26

1.5.5 Chapter 6 ...................................................................................................................... 27

1.5.6 Definition of Holism .................................................................................................... 27

1.6 Part B: Conditions for sustainability in Australian independent theatre ............ 27
PART A.................................................................................................................................................. 33

CHAPTER 2 ............................................................................................................................................ 33

2 More Than Economics: Developing a context for independent theatre and sustainability ............................................................ 33

2.1 An Ongoing Literature Review ........................................................................................................ 33

2.2 The Language of the Thesis ............................................................................................................. 34

2.3 Developing the Research Question .................................................................................................. 34

2.4 Relevant Early Literature ................................................................................................................ 36

2.4.1 Australian Government and Related Publications 1980 – 2008 .............................................. 36

2.4.2 A Brief History of the Australia Council for the Arts .............................................................. 36

2.5 The Economic Agenda: Funding shifts ............................................................................................ 38

2.5.1 Early Online Marketing and Business Development .............................................................. 41

2.5.2 Theatre How-To Manuals ........................................................................................................... 42

2.6 Defining the Scope of the Research ................................................................................................ 43

2.7 The Language of Global Theory .................................................................................................... 45

2.7.1 Globalisation .................................................................................................................................. 46

2.7.2 Glocalisation ................................................................................................................................. 48

2.7.3 Creative Industries: a glocalised, economic framework ............................................................ 49

2.8 Interconnection in the Theatre World ............................................................................................... 54

2.9 Conclusion ......................................................................................................................................... 59

CHAPTER 3 ............................................................................................................................................ 68

3 Grounding an Interpretive Research Process ..................................................................................... 68

3.1 Methodology: an introduction .......................................................................................................... 68

3.2 Grounded Theory ............................................................................................................................. 68
4.2 Data Analysis and Conceptual Development: a Cycle of Ongoing Research and Review

4.3 Tracking Sector Characteristics and Energy

4.4 The Concept of Energy as Dynamic and Holistic

4.5 Diversity not Divisiveness for Improved Sustainability

4.6 The Effect of Distance on Australian Theatre

4.7 Exclusion: Perceived barriers to sharing in the independent sector

4.8 Previous Attempts at Cohesive Identification of the Sector

4.9 Self-reliance and Realistic Parameters of Identification

4.10 A Shared Identity: Common characteristics of Australian independent theatre

4.10.1 Passion and Dedication for Independent Art

4.10.2 Emphasis on Creativity and Innovation in all Aspects of Theatre Work

4.10.3 Flexible, Organic and Intuitive

4.10.4 Short-term, Reactive Approach

4.10.5 Operating in Niche Markets

4.10.6 Resourceful and Multi-skilled in the Face of Constant Adversity

4.11 Conclusion: Energy - the heart and flow of independent theatre

CHAPTER 5

5 Sustainable or Not?

5.1 Sustainability via Government Funding

5.2 Impact of Limited Available Funds

5.3 Economic Cycles: a non-sustainable model for independent practitioners

5.3.1 The Struggle to Determine Sustainability within Hierarchical Models
7.2 An Inclusive Framework ................................................................. 184
7.3 Applying the Framework to all Elements of Theatre Practice .......... 185

CHAPTER 8 ............................................................................................. 188

8 Oneness ............................................................................................... 188
8.1 Oneness ........................................................................................... 188
8.2 Defining Oneness .............................................................................. 188
8.3 Describing Oneness .......................................................................... 188
8.3.1 Reducing Anti-Flow in Practice ...................................................... 190
8.4 Staying Motivated ........................................................................... 193
8.5 Concrete Distractions: Environment and Resources ....................... 195
8.5.1 Improving Thinking Time ............................................................... 196
8.6 Perceived Distractions ...................................................................... 197
8.7 Positive Examples of Oneness Across Independent Theatre Practice .... 200
8.8 Developing, Not Losing, Consciousness ............................................ 203
8.8.1 Oneness within Ensembles and Collaborations .............................. 204
8.9 Conclusion ......................................................................................... 206

CHAPTER 9 ............................................................................................. 211

9 Clear Goals ........................................................................................... 211
9.1 Introduction ....................................................................................... 211
9.2 Maintaining Purpose in Creative Practice ......................................... 211
9.3 Developing Creative Goals in line with Capacity ............................... 215
9.4 Shared Expectations, Flexibility and Values: Positive Examples ......... 218
9.4.1 Defining Goals through ‘Aerated’ Processes and Profile Building .... 218
9.4.2 Flexible Frameworks for Sustainability and Clear Goals ............... 220
9.4.3 Proactive Approaches to Clear Goals ........................................... 221
12.5 Obstacles and Opportunities for Dialogue ..................................................... 267

12.5.1 Mentoring: A Promising Start ................................................................. 270

12.6 Building A Cohesive Approach through Sharing and Flexibility ................. 271

12.7 Conclusion ................................................................................................... 274

CHAPTER 13 ...................................................................................................... 278

13 Conclusion: An Independent Future ............................................................... 278

13.1 Revisiting the Research Aims ...................................................................... 278

13.1 The Unique Nature of the Findings ............................................................. 279

13.2 Overview of the Research Findings ............................................................. 280

13.3 Recommendations for Future Research .................................................... 282

13.4 Encouraging a Sustainable Future .............................................................. 282

APPENDICES ...................................................................................................... 285

Appendix 1 Participant Consent Form ................................................................. 285

Appendix 2 Participant Information Form ........................................................... 286

Appendix 3 Information & Questions for Interviewees ...................................... 288

Appendix 4 Information & Questions for Policy Makers & Commentators ........ 294

Appendix 5 Interviewees for Together Alone ..................................................... 299

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................................................................. 308
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Research Cycle</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Energy Pathways in Australian Independent Theatre</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Conditions for Flow for Sustainable Practice</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>Dynamic Balance</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>Growth of Complexity through Flow</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 Together Alone Interviewees (2004) ............................................. 80
Table 3.2 Together Alone Interviewees – 2004-2009 ...................................... 84
Table 4.1 Independent Theatre Funding Structures .......................................... 109
KEYWORDS

The following is a list of keywords that appear within this thesis or are associated with the thesis topic. These keywords have been listed for cataloguing purposes.

Keywords that apply to this study are:
ABSTRACT

Together Alone: Conditions for sustainability in Australian independent theatre

With subsidy culture on the wane and entrepreneurial, often globalised, culture becoming a necessity for survival, this thesis explores vital questions of long term career and company sustainability. How might Australian independent theatre practitioners develop sustainable companies and careers? A secondary question in relation to this subject asks how independents might develop a common approach to sustainability while remaining true to their individual style, values and vision?

The major outcome of this research is the development of a non-economic and non-funding reliant framework for improved sustainability of Australian independent theatre careers and companies. Constructivist grounded theory is used to collect, analyse and interlink a unique collection of data from the fields of independent theatre and positive psychology. This process generates a theoretical set of conditions for improving career and company sustainability that is tailored to the dynamic ecology and energies of independent theatre.

This thesis gathers and interprets unique interview material with leading Australian theatre practitioners who collaboratively devise their own product/s with an aim to create live performance which reflects the social, political, and cultural influences of its time. The data from these primary sources and from secondary literature sources underlines the rich, diverse, yet often exhausting careers independent theatre practitioners manage. This exhaustion leads to cycles of drop out and dispersion. Energy, and its flow, is a universal emergent theme from the data and relates not just to physical energy but to all forms of energy that practitioners expend and receive in their day to day and long term work. Independent practitioners constantly juggle administrative, financial and creative processes while facing fragmented resources and a highly competitive, ‘glocal’ environment. Many cannot envisage a long term future in the sector. The concept of energy and its flow emerged as a major hurdle for career and company sustainability in the sector. These findings meant this thesis was no longer looking simply at the data as a general way to discover issues and trends but as a way of
tracing energy flow in, out, and through the considered work span of an independent theatre practitioner or company.

This thesis calls for an identification and assessment of the Australian independent theatre sector in other than economic terms. Given the divisiveness generated through existing economic frameworks, *Together Alone* acknowledges the positive impacts that a diverse independent theatre sector has on our culture but suggests shared, non-economic and potentially strengthening characteristics as a basis for building a more cohesive approach to sustainability. Key characteristics emerging from the data indicate that Australian independents are passionate, creative, flexible, intuitive, resourceful, and reactive. They focus strongly on their own artistic style and process, audience, and achievements. And although they need to earn a living, career satisfaction is developed through a dedication and contribution to Australian performing arts rather than through making money.

The data indicates ongoing tensions in the independent theatre sector between concepts of risk and sustainability, between diversity and shared experiences, as well as between independence and collaboration. This thesis proposes that these tensions are only part of the picture relating to sustainability. Rather than taking a purely economic approach, *Together Alone* develops a definition of sustainability that reflects the energy and conditions inherent to Australian independent theatre.

The thesis is in two parts: A and B. In broad terms, Part A discusses the context for sustainable careers and companies in independent theatre in Australia and introduces the thesis’ findings in relation to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s flow theory. Part B uses the data outlined in Part A to develop a projected framework of conditions for improved sustainability that is responsive to the sector’s values and dynamics. The five conditions of flow that this thesis proposes can facilitate sustainability in Australian independent theatre are:

- a sense of oneness (a sense of being at one with one’s self, and one’s processes and environment);
- clear goals;
- a feeling of control;
- a dynamic balance of capacities with challenges (or opportunities); and
- immediate feedback.

This thesis’ framework for sustainability interlinks the independent theatre data with the above conditions for promoting flow in independent theatre. The correlations between Csikszentmihalyi’s flow theory or optimal experience theory and the themes of the independent theatre data emerge through the hermeneutic and ongoing processes of data collation, evaluation and conceptual development of constructivist grounded theory methodology. Such connections are not arbitrary. They form an interrelated response to the original research question about how Australian independent theatre might sustain its practitioners and companies.
CHAPTER 1

1 SETTING THE SCENE

1.1 An Introduction to the Thesis

‘the price of true individuality is isolation’: John Bailey, *Going It Alone: Ruminations on Recent Melbourne Theatre and Dance.*

Innovative. Influential. Creative. These are fundamental terms used to describe Australian independent theatre from both within and without the sector. Yet this diverse sector also experiences a high turnover in companies and practitioners and is widely recognised as being under supported and underpaid. What impacts do the current wane in subsidy culture and increase in entrepreneurial, globalised culture have on independent theatre’s resources and capabilities? How can independents, whose sector is distinguished by constant flux, sustain their companies and careers in such an environment?

Theatre relies on energy. It is a specialised artform that thrives on ‘liveness’ and interaction. Jacques Lecoq refers to theatrical energy as the moteur (motor), a term which is often translated as ‘the driving force’ of performance. This driving force is in play across all aspects of a theatre company or an individual theatre practitioner’s career. The definition of energy, for the purposes of this thesis, is a holistic one that refers to ‘the capacity for doing work which exists in various forms’; i.e. the capability of a person, a performance, a structure or an organisation to ‘produce action or effect’. Practitioners expend energy to develop, fund, promote, and give a future to the performance and those who create it. They also receive physical and mental energy through stimuli, resourcing, feedback and personal satisfaction. Such interactive energy processes form a major part of the practitioner’s or company’s daily business. This thesis’s methodology employs constructivist grounded theory to trace this energy and its relationship to sustainability. In so doing, it develops a new understanding of, and approach to, sustainability in Australian independent theatre. Data collected as part of
this research confirm that these energies within Australian independent theatre are poorly balanced and that this imbalance impacts on the sector’s sustainability.

This thesis argues that whilst theatre practitioners have a strong focus on energy output, there is little input coming in through resources, support, or inspiration. Existing recommendations that seek to address this situation, such as the *Report to Ministers on an Examination of The Small to Medium Performing Arts Sector* or *Love Your Work: Training, retaining and connecting artists in theatre* take the form of government commissioned reports. Such recommendations focus on economic rationalist and commercial structures, and/or funding re-structuring. This thesis, however, uses data developed through interviews with artists and companies to propose an accessible and practical framework: a framework of conditions developed from the emergent strengths and positive energies that exist within the sector itself.

1.2 Situating the Hermeneutic Research Process
The use of the term ‘independent’ in relation to this thesis emerged from that research data and represents a broad cross-section of Australian theatre practitioners. The concept of an independent theatre sector typically refers to specific networks of ‘non-mainstream’ theatres and venues. Other practitioners may define themselves in terms of fringe theatre, contemporary performance, hybrid performance, physical and/or dance theatre, text-based theatre, live art, and other classifications. The definition of independent theatre, in this thesis, refers to small performance companies seeking income from varied sources, where profitability is not the primary motive for creating work.

This thesis is not confined to the field of independent theatre, but through the ongoing and hermeneutic processes of data analysis and conceptual development crosses into the fields of positive psychology and creativity theory – particularly the area of flow theory as developed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi – and the conditions required for optimal experience in creative careers. In late 2008, Tim Joss, Director of the Rayne Foundation, made a similar connection between flow theory and the arts in an online book entitled *New Flow: A Better Future for Artists, Citizens and the State*. This
publication argues that ‘artists know flow’9 but are not able to achieve it given the current cultural and political attitude to the arts. ‘Can you feel the vast potential?’ he asks.10

We started with the artist, and I come back to the artist. With the right structures, with the right people and organisations connecting artists and citizens (when it’s not artists themselves), with the right forms of state involvement, such latent power would be released and we would have Csikszentmihályi’s flow.11

Joss’s book, which was published late in the development of this thesis, makes the link between artists and flow but argues that the current arts environment is ‘a long way’12 from enabling flow. The research and literature relating to fields of flow theory and optimal experience is constantly developing. In order to highlight the interactive processes involved in grounded theory and optimal experience, this introduction (Chapter 1), the context for this thesis (Chapter 2), and the research methodology (Chapter 3) are designed to be read in conjunction with one another.

The interactive and qualitative research process forms the fertile basis from which this thesis’ data analysis and hypothesis grew. The constructivist direction of the thesis methodology particularly depends on the researcher’s interaction with the data. As a result, it is important in this introduction, to present the background for this research and my position as researcher within that process.

1.3 Situating the Researcher
My research into independent theatre and issues of sustainability began before this thesis was conceived. My career in Australian theatre and arts management influenced, as per the constructivist grounded methodology detailed in Chapter 3, my original proposal and its subsequent research. My arts career stems from my passionate involvement in performance and speech and drama studies from a young age tempered by a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism and an Honours degree in French with the University of Queensland. In my early twenties I decided to get myself a ‘real job’ and went on to work as an administrator, marketer and manager in cultural centres,
academic institutions and community arts, but still felt creatively unfulfilled. Over the last twelve years (1997 – 2009) I’ve juggled arts management and administration work with professional acting and creative development projects with companies and collaborative enterprises including Jigsaw Theatre Company, Splash Theatre Company, Stopera, Culturally Innovative Arts (CIA), and La Mama Theatre. Realising that creating and developing my own work was more important to me than getting acting gigs, I decided to enhance my professional knowledge by completing a Masters of Arts (Research) with the Creative Industries Research and Applications Centre, Queensland University of Technology. This research culminated in a thesis on key principles of performance presence and developed my passion for identifying issues relevant to optimal theatrical practice in Australia. Subsequently, I entered into the process of doctoral research with the University of Wollongong and an examination of the concerns of those theatre companies and practitioners dedicated to making new work and to the development of Australian theatre. I undertook approximately three months research into key areas of concern in Australian independent theatre practise in order to develop my research proposal. This initial research underscored the research question and its key themes including a background investigation into issues of sustainability in Australian performance companies (Chapter 2).

1.4 Part A: Developing an Independent Voice
Part A of this thesis establishes the background, arguments, definitions and language of ‘common cause’ relevant to the thesis question. The central thesis question asks, ‘How might Australian independent theatre practitioners develop sustainable companies and careers?’ Given the diversity and ongoing changes within the Australian theatre sector, Part A provides essential background prior to Part B’s argument for the incorporation of flow conditions within Australian independent theatre. Part B incorporates the individual and collective voices that emerged from the theatre data into a system for improved sustainability. As Melbourne theatre writer, director, and La Trobe University Research Fellow, Julian Meyrick writes, ‘artists working in Australian theatre are connected by myriad invisible wires, and each of these sings with specific, but nevertheless, shared experience’. The words of the interviewees and other data sources
are expressly used to construct a language and writing style of common cause. Their independent voices determine the thesis’ common and connecting themes.

Independent artists channel their individual and collective creativity, artistic sensibility and passion in an environment that is resource poor and that is a major challenge for the structures of government funding bodies. Sometimes the energy required of independent practitioners to develop, thrive or simply maintain their theatre careers burns out. Sustaining individual and collective careers is an issue that is heavily debated but still unresolved.

1.4.1 Definition of Sustainability

Sustainability for the purposes of this thesis refers to the individual or the company’s ability to ‘keep up’ their theatre career ‘as an action or process’ rather than developing ongoing ‘means or funds’ from such practice. The issues of long-term sustainability that emerged from the theatre data were closely linked to issues of energy including energy loss, creative energy, physical and mental energy. Government funding bodies have primarily situated the sustainability of Australian independent theatre within economic frameworks including business and creative industries models. Variations on economic interpretations of sustainability and their relevance to the arts industry, have become more relevant to arts discourse and our society’s cultural wellbeing as evidenced by the 2008 publication of *A Sustainable Arts Sector: What Will It Take?*. A sustainable existence, for the purposes of this thesis, relates to the practitioner’s or company’s ability to ‘keep up’ a theatre career. ‘The emphasis is not on economic growth … but rather on “qualitative

Sustainability in the arts is about much more than money. It suggests a willingness to learn and a commitment to the long-term. While in economic terms it means sustained success in competition, publicly funded arts define success as producing something society values.
improvement in human well-being” or “unfolding of human potential”, as discussed by the ecological economist, Herman Daly’. As per the Bellagio Principles, a set of holistic principles for sustainable development determined by the International Institute for Sustainable Development, this thesis’ understanding of sustainability via ‘socially equitable development’ is applicable to a diverse range of practitioners and ways of working. The theatre and sustainability data stress the ‘importance of the non-economic, social aspects of sustainability …[which] enter through social equity and many components of human well-being that cannot be described by economic indicators alone’. This thesis proposes that although these sustaining aspects of human health ‘can be influenced to some degree by economic conditions, they are clearly determined to a large degree by social structure and institutions’.

1.5 Description of Chapters

1.5.1 Chapter 2

Chapter 2 also discusses the background issues that shape the context and definitions of Australian independent theatre in relation to sustainability. In recent years many independent theatre practitioners have, as Chapter 2 will describe in more detail, been referred to by government agencies under the umbrella term, ‘small to medium performing arts sector’ or more colloquially as the ‘S2M’. While some theatre workers interviewed for this thesis accepted the S2M terminology, others felt marginalised by its usage and preferred the more positive descriptor, ‘independent’.

The data collected and analysed as part of this thesis incorporates a diverse range of theatre styles and company structures. Some are beginning their careers while others are moving out of theatre practice as a main source of income; some are attached to particular venues and others aren’t. Some have been successful in developing profitable companies; some work in a non-profit capacity; some have received triennial or long-term funding; and others receive no funding at all. Most companies’ income is derived from a range of sources. Distinctions between profitable or non-profitable, funded or non-funded models of operation don’t reflect the complexity of how most companies survive. The broad cross-section of theatre practitioners interviewed for this thesis share a common outlook, irrespective of their style, organisational structure or economic
means, relevant to researching new ways of viewing and improving sustainability. Such practitioners are an important reference for this thesis because they share a dedication to independent art practice in that they are, or ultimately strive to be, ‘independent’, defined as:

adj 1. not influenced by others in matters of opinion, conduct, etc.; thinking or acting for oneself: an independent person. 2. not subject to another’s authority or jurisdiction; autonomous; free. 3. not influenced by the thought or action of others: independent research. 4. not dependent; not depending or contingent on something else for existence, operation, etc. … 9. expressive of a spirit of independence; self-confident; unconstrained.24

In addition to being ‘independent’ these practitioners have experience in theatre or interdisciplinary performance presented primarily as theatre. Further details of the practitioners researched as part of this thesis are covered in Chapter 3.

Chapter 2 investigates gaps in the existing literature and the impact that this has had on the direction of this thesis’ research. It tracks the development of the central research question which asks how Australian independent theatre practitioners can develop sustainable careers and companies. Later chapters include literature that emerged during and after the collection of seminal interview material from the field and subsequent data analysis.

1.5.2 Chapter 3

Chapter 3 focuses on the research’s constructivist grounded theory methodology (GT or GTM) and its rigorous yet interpretive qualities. This GT methodology underscores the research process and the development of concepts as they emerge from the data. This chapter grounds the thesis’ research and development of a new, non-economic framework for considering and improving sustainability in independent theatre.
1.5.3 Chapter 4

Chapter 4 explores not only the diversity of opinions and performance styles that distinguish independent theatre, but also its shared strengths and characteristics that emerge from the data. Some of these shared characteristics include: driving energy; commitment to the arts; and the capacity to develop and produce work on little more than an intuitive and innovative ability to draw in necessary resources, energy and ideas. However the energy spent in constantly struggling and scraping to bring it all together is a major concern for all artists seeking sustainability. Chapter 4 focuses on this energy to introduce the argument for a non-economic model of sustainability for the theatre industry based on flow theory. This model is based on the sector’s characteristics and concerns and responds to the sector’s natural processes, values, and energy. It is a model that is well suited to a diverse, independent sector because it enables smaller organisations and individuals to apply the theory according to their own needs and resources.

1.5.4 Chapter 5

Chapter 5 explores the history and impact of government funding and policy from 1990 – 2008. It draws on current trends and dialogues to build a clearer picture of the complex ecology of Australian independent theatre sector. The government and its agencies provide regular but limited amounts of funding and support, but this cannot be relied upon to serve all artists all of the time. Ultimately it is up to independent companies and artists to determine how they maintain their practice whilst continuing to put food on the table. Some, as the research data reveals, do this more successfully than others. All, however, still struggle with issues of sustainability.

Chapter 5 draws on the experiences and theories provided in the literature and interview data to examine the flow of energy throughout the independent theatre sector.
1.5.5 Chapter 6

Chapter 6 continues to follow the Independent Theatre sector’s energy trail into the field of positive psychology and, in particular, to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s optimal experience theory. Chapter 6 explains flow theory and defines the conditions for sustainability derived from this theory and the independent theatre data. This chapter also provides examples of flow theory’s use in improving sustainable practice in fields other than theatre. Flow’s holistic approach examines external and internal elements of the data to develop a framework for sustainability based on improved conditions for wellbeing and an optimal state of productive ‘harmony’ or ‘feedback’.25

1.5.6 Definition of Holism

Holism, for the purposes of this thesis, assumes that individuals are indivisible from their surroundings. The conditions for Csikszentmihalyi’s ‘flow’, which I have revised for the purpose of discussing the independent theatre sector, are holistic and developed through both internal and external means. The Macquarie Dictionary definition of holism explains that ‘wholes (which are more than the mere sums of their parts) are fundamental aspects of the real’.26 True to this definition, this thesis describes both theatre (careers, companies, and performances) and the flow state as holistic because both are more profound and encompassing than the conditions and relationships that create them. Holism, in philosophical terms, ‘claims that reality is an interconnected, interdependent whole, which radically changes the nature of each element within it’.27 In the same way, the holistic state of flow or optimal experience is unique to each individual but reflective of the external conditions in which they operate.

1.6 Part B: Conditions for sustainability in Australian independent theatre

If Part A describes the context and central issues surrounding sustainability in Australian independent theatre, Part B proposes conditions for improved sustainability in this sector. These conditions are a unique set of recommendations based on the correlation between sustainability in independent theatre, energy as it emerged from the data, and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s flow or optimal experience theory. Each chapter in Part B refers to a particular condition, how it relates to sustainability in Australian
independent theatre, and also provides examples of these conditions being implemented in Australian independent theatre practice.

Independent theatre practitioners are capable of supporting themselves economically and this thesis provides examples of how this has been, and is being done in Australia. Some successfully seek arts funding, whilst others develop income generating strategies such as theatre schools, corporate performances (for private companies, venues and events); or commissions to sell or hire sets, props, special effects, and other assets. Some hire out their services as consultants or trainers for corporate organisations, and some subsidise their theatre careers through non-arts related jobs. Most must juggle various projects or jobs at once and over extended periods of time. In order to do so, independents expend large levels of energy. Part B proposes that without supportive conditions in place to help balance this energy outflow, many practitioners burn out. Part B also provides examples from the data where energy is being maintained or fed back to the company or practitioner.

This research puts forward five core conditions for the enhancement of sustainability in the diverse and highly creative independent theatre sector. These five conditions primarily serve to improve a practitioner’s or a company’s energies and to improve their overall working experience. They reflect the natural strengths of Australian independent theatre as well as the glocalised, a merging of both the global and local, (Chapter 2, 2.8.2 Glocalisation) climate in which it operates. These conditions acknowledge the importance of government funding and other forms of financial support, but their positive psychology origins construct a non-economic and more ecological framework.

Although ‘ecology’ is originally a biological term, its application to this thesis helps explore the gamut of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that impact on any individual and in which the individual is situated. Ecological metaphors for arts industries have been established by a number of commentators including Keith Gallasch and John Knell. Rather than devalue research findings by framing them within ‘incompatible’ business models or corporate/commercial frameworks that ‘irritate’ some within the sector – this thesis determines conditions for improved sustainability that emanate from the
complex and unique ecology of independent theatre itself. The five conditions, as outlined in this thesis are:

Chapter 8: Oneness (being at one with one’s self, and one’s processes and environment);
Chapter 9: Feeling of Control;
Chapter 10: A Dynamic Balance of Capacities with Challenges (or Opportunities);
Chapter 11: Immediate Feedback;
Chapter 12: Clear Goals.

Individually, artists and companies are intuitive and creative. Collectively the sector has the capacity to be more resourceful and in tune with the rest of their artistic community. This thesis draws together the individual and collective ideas of Australian independent theatre as well as theories surrounding creativity, energy, optimal experience, and sustainability to determine conditions for improved sustainability. Together Alone provides a ‘rethink on how we can all support artists to make their unique and valuable contribution to our humanity and our lives’. In particular, it seeks to identify and describe conditions for Australian independent theatre that incorporate the sector’s inherent strengths and energies, and that might enable independent artists to collectively and individually revise their future.
Notes

1 John Bailey, "Going It Alone: Ruminations on Recent Melbourne Theatre and Dance," Real Time August-September 2008: 8.


9 Joss, 97.

10 Joss, 115.

11 Joss, 115.

12 Joss, 98.

14 Meyrick, *Trapped by the Past*: Why Our Theatre is Facing Paralysis 52.

15 Delbridge, Bernard, Blair, Butler, Peters and Yallop, eds., 1893.


17 Hunt and Shaw, Back Cover.


19 Delbridge, Bernard, Blair, Butler, Peters and Yallop, eds., 1893.

20 Diesendorf in Colboyd Dunphy, Benveniste, Griffiths and Sutton, eds., 23.

<http://www.iisd.org/measure/principles/progress/bellagio.asp>

22 Colboyd Dunphy, Benveniste, Griffiths and Sutton, eds., 24.

23 Colboyd Dunphy, Benveniste, Griffiths and Sutton, eds., 24.


26 Delbridge, Bernard, Blair, Butler, Peters and Yallop, eds., 906.


30 Bailey, 8.

31 Joss, 115.
PART A
CHAPTER 2

MORE THAN ECONOMICS: DEVELOPING A CONTEXT FOR INDEPENDENT THEATRE AND SUSTAINABILITY

Chapter 2 explores the literature used to define and develop the research question: *How might Australian independent theatre practitioners develop sustainable companies and careers?* It then goes on to examine academic documents, government reports, online resources, and other literature to help define and contextualise Australian independent theatre and issues of sustainability. In addition this chapter establishes trends and gaps in the literature that determine the direction and subsequent findings of this thesis. Chapter 2 also clarifies, in a philosophical as well as pragmatic sense, some of the more contested terminology that emerged from the literature and the thesis’ primary data.

Research that is associated with grounded theory methodology (see Chapter 3) is particularly important in order to ‘discover relevant categories and the relationships among them; to put together categories in new, rather than standard ways’. A grounded theory literature review encourages and develops a researcher’s sensitivity to the investigative field which in turn helps determine the research focus, discover and develop themes from within the data, and generate theories.

2.1 An Ongoing Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to flesh out the original research question as well as foregrounding the context and terminology involved in its response. Data and literature that explains and supports this response are covered in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. Literature concerning energy, sustainability and optimal experience is embedded along with the interview data in the Chapters 5 and 6 of Part A and throughout Part B. This more flexible thesis structure, in accordance with constructivist grounded theory, reveals a richer and denser understanding of the contexts and concepts of this thesis as they emerged during the research process.
2.2 The Language of the Thesis

Often the language used by government and funding bodies, academic texts and policy documents is completely at odds with the language, and indeed the very nature, of independent theatre. The challenge for this thesis has been to use academic writing to discuss and formalise the ‘down to earth’, creative and fluctuating nature and processes of independent theatre companies and practitioners. Another issue is that the limited number of media advocates and critics in the sector combined with what Playwriting Australia’s Chris Mead describes as ‘the legacy of an ad hoc industry’ have contributed to a lack of formal discourse. Yet, by using a combination of institutional and independent theatre references, this thesis is able to bridge the gap between the more rigid requirements of academia and the fast-paced, creative world of theatre and company practice. It strives to create a language of ‘common cause’ as argued for by Julian Meyrick, author and Associate Director of Melbourne Theatre Company.

In addition, this thesis introduces the perhaps unfamiliar terminology related to flow theory or optimal experience from the fields of psychology and health. This equally creative language, and its relevance to issues of sustainability as they pertain to Australian independent theatre, will be introduced in Chapter 6.

2.3 Developing the Research Question

In 2003 I posed an initial thesis research question that was different to my final research question (Chapter 1, 1.4). The original question, *How can small to medium Australian theatre companies collaboratively devise, produce and sustain ‘successful’, live performance in the ever-increasing globalised climate?*, was revised to better define what was considered successful and sustainable from the point of view of independent theatre practitioners and to examine ways this could be achieved. The original question also included the impact of funding agencies and other influential organisations, globalisation, and improved technologies on creative collaboration, theatre and its long-term management. These were part of the theatre discourse at the time this research began and are still relevant to the context in which the research took place.
As discussed in Chapter 3 and later chapters, the original question became more streamlined as the research developed. Although the central focus on sustainability in Australian independent theatre remained, the thesis moved away from issues of globalisation and economic models of understanding sustainability and into the realm of positive psychology and ecological frameworks. Thus, the question became more about the sustainability of careers and companies rather than the financial and creative success of performances. As a result, the final question for the thesis is:

*How might Australian independent theatre practitioners develop sustainable companies and careers?*

Research into the literature from 1990 to 2003 concerning the central themes of this question highlighted the large gaps in information from and on the independent theatre sector. It also became clear that there was a desire among theatre and other arts practitioners to develop realistic solutions. Solutions were sought which move away from economic rationalist imperatives to provide achievable alternatives appropriate to individual practitioner and company needs. The proposal to interview theatre practitioners and experts in the field was devised as a way to collect data that would help fill those gaps and provide data for future practitioners to access and use as they see fit. Once the data was collected, the ongoing process of analysis and research became more defined. This hermeneutic process and its findings established:

- a common desire by theatre practitioners for independent sustainability;
- a need to evaluate current understandings of sustainability in Australian independent theatre.

This chapter primarily focuses on those extant research reports into Australian independent theatre available during 1990 - 2003. However it will also incorporate some later literature that outlines the need for an understanding of sustainability in other than an economic or hierarchical context. Such literature calls for a more intuitive and pragmatic re-thinking of sustainability of the Australian theatre sector which ‘depends on the ongoing health of the Australian theatre 'ecology', which encompasses independent theatre artists, small, medium and large companies, venues and festivals’.5

35
2.4 Relevant Early Literature

2.4.1 Australian Government and Related Publications 1980 – 2008

For the majority of Australia’s history since European settlement, theatre companies managed their survival instinctively, without recourse to formal frameworks and policies. Careers developed and changed as opportunities, or lack thereof, emerged. Many companies or practitioners still operate in this way. As a result there is little material on arts or career management prior to the 1980’s. There exists a much longer and more intellectual tradition of literature on the creative processes of theatre than there is on theatre business management. In the early 1980’s overseas publications such as Joann Green’s *The Small Theatre Handbook*, published in 1981, prodded the development of formal business practices for theatre. Green writes that for small theatres to survive they must realise ‘[t]heatre is a business, and it is an art. These stand not in opposition to each other, but hand in hand; the only reason for one is the existence of the other’. 6

Until the turn of this century in Australia there was very little available literature on the general independent theatre sector let alone the particular issue of making a sustainable career within that sector. Australia’s first and primary funding body, The Australian Council for the Arts was established in 1975 at the initiative of Dr H.C. Coombs, the then Governor of the Commonwealth Bank, and later of the Reserve Bank. This agency had the means to publish the earliest range of Australian literature on theatre and through such literature has arguably, until recent times, directed the country’s formal arts discourse.

2.4.2 A Brief History of the Australia Council for the Arts

Since its 1975 inception, the Australia Council, as it is more commonly referred to, and its state government counterparts, have played pivotal roles in setting the frameworks and debates concerning arts management and Australia’s social responsibility in supporting art and artists. ‘Then as now, artists were doing it tough, yet somehow they managed to continue producing art while the politicians, administrators, bureaucrats, academics, journalists and the rest of the arts community argued the toss’. 7 In his essay
on Australia’s need for a cultural policy, Throsby outlines four elements of arts policy that ‘have been more or less common to both major political parties over the last twenty or thirty years, though the actual levels of funding have risen and fallen around the trend line in response to short-term political mood swings in favour of, or opposed to, the arts’. These characteristics can be summarised as:

1. legitimacy of Federal Government funding for the arts;
2. ‘acceptance of an “Australian model” for arts funding; a hybrid system that includes an independent statutory arts council founded on arm’s length and peer assessment principles (derived from the British model), some financial provision flowing directly from central government (as in European countries), and some indirect support through the tax system (in emulation of the American model)’;
3. Commonwealth responsibility for major cultural institutions;
4. acceptance of a ‘secular decline’ in such Federal funding as ‘increasing levels of support are provided by State and Territory and local governments’.

The Australia Council’s role is broad and the debates in relation to cultural policy ultimately have little effect on the day to day working lives of independent theatre practitioners. Furthermore, Throsby states:

Several opportunities have been missed in recent years for a constructive re-think and expansion of the Australia Council’s role, with the result that the Council sometimes gives the impression that it just wants to keep its head down and defend its territory.

Each artform, as categorised by the Australia Council, has its own representative board made up of staff and informed by board members. These board members are peers appointed from within the artform sector. Recent research reports and policies published by the Australia Council’s Theatre Board reflect, if not a dramatic change in its role, at least its openness to a re-think of funding allocations and their impact on independent sustainability.

The difference between the 2008 publications and the Australia Council’s earliest publications reflect a growing re-evaluation of the independent theatre sector. In the late 1970s and 1980s The Arts, Some Australian Data series, The Artist in Australia
Today: Report of the Committee for the Individual Artists Inquiry\(^{14}\) and Statistical Analysis of Subsidised Dance, Drama, and Puppetry Companies, 1974-78 \(^{15}\) provided fairly dry statistical data and reports. These reports were developed primarily for feedback on the sector to the government departments and agencies who funded it. Such reports are to be expected given that the Australia Council is formally described as ‘the Australian Government’s arts funding and advisory body’\(^{16}\) and is itself reliant on government funding and policy. A 1985 Australia Council report entitled Potential Arts Audiences, Attitudes and Practices: A Report\(^{17}\) foreshadows the 1990’s focus on business planning or marketing and audience development. This focus impacted on theatre discourse over the next fifteen to twenty years, and because of its emphasis on commercialisation, was a source of much frustration for many independent practitioners interviewed as part of this thesis’ research. These ‘independents’ felt that developing income through advertising, sponsorship and other corporate approaches was not suited to, and detracted from, their particular niche, art-making, philosophy, or business style.

2.5 The Economic Agenda: Funding shifts
The governmental shift in focus from primarily subsidised to at least partially privatised arts organisations resulted in a range of publications emphasising funding outcomes and accountability as well as a growth in public discussion about the static or shrinking pool of Australia Council funding.\(^{18}\) These publications assume an economic rationalist arts management perspective. As summarised in the Report to Ministers on an Examination of The Small to Medium Performing Arts Sector in 2002:

\[T\]here exists a continuing pressure from Government funding agencies for the Sector to become more self-sustainable whilst at the same time advance the arts through innovation.\(^{19}\)

With limited government funding available it was envisaged that if independent practitioners could become more self-sufficient via box office or other sources of revenue, the sector could sustain itself with limited agency support. Publications at this time pushed corporate marketing, sponsorship and audience development strategies as integral to the successful and ongoing management of an arts organisation or career.
Until recently, the focus of both organisation energies and funding support was product development. While this focus has allowed the development of a world-class product, innovation needs to be extended to the marketing realm.\textsuperscript{20}

As McQuire writes: ‘[T]here is a slender but significant difference in being market savvy and being market-driven…’.\textsuperscript{21} Although many theatre companies took these publications and the Arts Council’s advice seriously, this ‘strategic’, ‘sterile numerical model’\textsuperscript{22} was also viewed with a strong amount of cynicism and frustration at the increased pressure it placed on already-struggling artists. The heavy focus on economic interpretations of success for the arts that were touted in reports like *Australians and the Arts: What Do the Arts Mean to Australians?*\textsuperscript{23} were seen as devaluing the creative potential and energy of independent art. At a RealTime-Performance Space Forum in 2002 held in response to the Report to Ministers on an Examination of the Small to Medium Performing Arts Sector (or SMPA report as it is more commonly referred to); RealTime Editor, Keith Gallasch said:

\[T\]he whole Australia Council direction shifted towards the Saatchi & Saatchi demand side. It was almost like we’ve created all this product, supply if you like, but it’s not getting taken up, so now let’s look at demand, the audiences. They went about it in a funny way … it’s like nobody wants to really invest additional funds in basic artform activity, the supply side.\textsuperscript{24}

The 2000 Saatchi and Saatchi report *Australians and the Arts: What do the Arts Mean to Australians?* concluded that:

There is a wide range of perceptions among the population in relation to the arts. It is not possible to find a simple way to categorise attitudes. The question of whether or not people 'value' the arts yields different responses depending on precisely how they are asked to consider them, with people divided almost 50:50 when asked to consider the personal value of the arts. However, when people are asked to consider the question in its broadest terms - covering both personal value and value to the nation as a whole - the survey findings revealed that the population is basically split into thirds. One-third place a high value on the arts, one-third place a low or fairly low value on the arts and the remainder fall between them. This is not a 'report card' for the arts sector, but the findings provide guidance for
future strategies when the underlying motivations are examined.\textsuperscript{25}

Reluctant itself to define the value of the arts in our society, the report focused on its research findings which showed an uneven distribution of promotional and communication skills across the sector. The report argued that this resulted in a disparity of value and understanding of the arts in our society. It argued that in order to improve this situation, arts practitioners needed to communicate its value to the Australian public through education and marketing.

The emphasis on the economic business model developed by the Australia Council in the mid to late 1980s and 1990s in a bid to encourage self-sustainability for the independent theatre sector continues to this current day. This approach, as per the Saatchi and Saatchi report, focuses on more formal management structures as well as better sponsorship, marketing, and audience and subscription development in order to overcome the Australia Council’s own funding constraints.

Independent opera and theatre practitioner and current Artistic Director of Opera Australia, Lyndon Terracini, agrees that to pander to the marketing, management and business structures developed by the government and funding agency hierarchies is detrimental ‘to the creative growth of [a] company’.

Ultimately, the fundamental driver of every arts organisation is the art we make and the program we produce. If an arts organisation loses sight of that purpose and comes to believe that maintaining its own bureaucracy is its reason for being, then there is little point in it existing.\textsuperscript{26}

Terracini, and others, believe that government over-regulation and over-management ‘have taken control in some instances and are choking the life out of the process of making art’.\textsuperscript{27} Other practitioners interviewed as part of this thesis believe there is a place for both as long as they work in harmony and do not block the level of energy and passion that underscores many careers in the arts.
2.5.1 Early Online Marketing and Business Development

Partly as a way to further my research into current Australian theatre discourse and partly to incorporate developments in communication and publication, my research included online and electronic database searches.

Government publications and online sites that worked in partnership with the previously mentioned publications offered the independent sector explanations and methods for monitoring, and improving, longer term planning and economic management. The Australia Council’s Community Partnerships and Market Development Division established the Australia Council for the Arts website in 1995, and Fuel4arts in 1997. These sites provide useful, albeit sometimes demoralising, feedback on government and audience opinion of independent Australian theatre and its place in our society. The ‘so-called communications revolution’, as somewhat sceptically described by Throsby and Hollister, has provided artists with regular access to online or information technology and has also changed the way in which they might present themselves.

Many artists develop their own marketing and business style in relation to their particular creative focus. In Don’t give up your day job: an economic study of professional artists in Australia, Throsby and Hollister used a series of surveys of Australian artists, carried out in 1983, 1987, 1993 and 2003 to establish:

> When asked who does the most to promote their work as an artist the great majority of artists nominate themselves. In fact three-quarters of all artists see themselves as the most important promoters of their work. … [E]ven here, more than half of all actors rely principally on their own efforts.

Throsby and Hollister’s surveys do not question whether or not these promotional efforts are successful but they do state that ‘three-quarters of all artists regard their arrangements as satisfactory or highly satisfactory’ primarily because it enables them to be more self-reliant. Although new technologies provided artists with new creative opportunities, the continued emphasis of online resources on commercial and marketing development were not universally accepted as ‘compatible’ with the arts and
particularly with those organisations not at the ‘Big End’ of the arts spectrum. For those in the small to medium bracket, for whom patronage and box-office revenue have little relevance, the question of sustainability continued to be tackled instinctively and with limited resources and funding.

2.5.2 Theatre How-To Manuals

Lyn Wallis’ *In Good Company: A Manual for Producing Independent Theatre*, published in 2005, a year after she was interviewed for this thesis, guides producers of small-scale, professional, co-operative and amateur theatre in Australia. The book offers creative and practical knowledge for the larger and ever growing, professional independent sector operating in small to medium venues across the country. It is one of the few ‘how-to’ guides that accepts the creative challenges as well as the administrative ones.

> It's more of a rough guide. It explains how to put together a show and shape a small company from ‘go to whoa’…. I have a great love for independent theatre, and have written this manual for practitioners who are letting poor producing skills get in the way of their artistic output.

The other style of ‘how to’ publications are those books on theatre management or arts management such as *The Small Theatre Handbook: A Guide to Management and Production* or *Management and the Arts* and *The Performing Arts in a New Era*. Such publications were written for the UK or American theatre markets in the 1990s and early 2000s and, as a result, were limited in what they could offer Australians working under different economic, historical, and cultural contexts. In reality, there has been little existing literature or online support for Australian independent theatres struggling to develop sustainable practice with limited resources.

Australian publications in the last five years argue that the push for improved arts management, particularly in the larger or state arts companies, has seen ‘management displace the creators to become the powerful figures of the arts world’. Craik suggests that the ‘managerialist and economic rationalist policy formulations of recent
governments\textsuperscript{40} have increased division between national arts organisations and independents, increased competition for funding between independents themselves, and increased ‘busy-ness’\textsuperscript{41} rather than business.

To determine the relevance of economic frameworks and other emergent issues in relation to theatre sustainability and the central research question, my research turned to the practitioners themselves. My questions, formed through open yet structured interviews, required practitioners to:

- define themselves,
- define how they operate,
- characterise their strengths and weaknesses, and
- describe their understanding of sustainability.

This collection of interview material forms the major data for this thesis and works in collaboration with the literature to develop its arguments.

### 2.6 Defining the Scope of the Research

Definitions and descriptions found in Creating a Position: Education, Training and the Cultural Industries\textsuperscript{42}, Let's Tour! A Quick Guide to Exporting Australia's Performing Arts\textsuperscript{43} and Don’t Give up Your Day Job: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia\textsuperscript{44} situate independent theatre as part of the arts and performing arts sectors. These and other arts agency publications highlight the sector’s creative and passionate nature and the economic and cultural value that it could have in our society. However, the holes in independent theatre’s economic and infrastructural support reflect that independents continue to operate in a continuous state of flux.

The 2002 Report to Ministers on an Examination of the Small to Medium Performing Arts Sector or the SMPA Report as it is commonly known, investigated the artistic and economic ‘viability’ of performing artists and companies who were ‘beyond the scope of the Major Performing Arts Inquiry’\textsuperscript{45}.

Despite admitting that ‘there are many diverse performing artists, groups and organisations working on a regular basis through formal and informal structures,’\textsuperscript{46} the
SMPA Report excludes many of these artists by its definition of the sector. This definition includes:

- organisations with which at least one Government arts agency has a regular funding relationship;
- producing and service organisations where either Government arts agency has a strategic interest in the organisations’ place in the Sector; and
- organisations with a minimum turnover of $50,000 per annum for a minimum period of three years (though not necessarily consecutive years).47

Together Alone incorporates practitioners or companies surveyed as part of the SMPA report and who fall within its definition. However, because of the many professional theatre practitioners operating without government funding relationships, formal company structures, or with incomes of less than $50,000 per year, the research also broadens its scope to include practitioners who operate in different ways.

Love Your Work,48 classifies the Australian theatre sector into three broad groups:

1. Major Performing Arts Organisations (MPAs or MPOs),
2. Mid-sized Theatre (Companies which have a theatre capacity of 80 or more and are in receipt of government funding),
3. Independent Scene (includes co-operative theatre and may receive project-based funding from time to time).

The report summarises that the small-to-medium performing arts category is made up of approximately 27 Key Organisation (KO) performing companies funded by the Australia Council as well as those practitioners and companies classified in the independent scene. These KOs come from both the ‘mid-sized’ and ‘independent’ categories of Love Your Work.

Lyn Wallis is the former Artistic Director of B Sharp at Company B based at Belvoir St Theatre, and was appointed Director of the Theatre Board in late 2008. She highlights the difficulty faced even by leading Australian arts funding bodies in tracking ‘the complex and constantly shifting web of indie [Independent] companies and partnerships’.49 Many practitioners, as confirmed by the interview data, do not see
themselves as part of any sector and do not necessarily want to be pigeon-holed by bureaucratic definitions. In the interests of a more flexible and acceptable term, this thesis therefore uses the label ‘independents’ or ‘independent theatre’ to describe the diverse and fluctuating group of companies, co-operatives and individual practitioners who see particular value in creating new Australian theatre works and identified as not belonging to the ‘Big End’\textsuperscript{50} of Australian theatre. These practitioners may have extremely diverse styles, incomes, and attitudes, but this thesis’ broader understanding of independent theatre allows it to track the ‘necessary’ relationships and ‘interconnections’ that underscore the Australian theatre sector as a whole rather than by dividing it according to style, income, or attitude.\textsuperscript{51} It also includes interviews with government representatives and theatre academics. Many of these experts in arts bureaucracy and education are or have been independent theatre practitioners. Their diverse experience in the sector provide this research with a broad range of situations from which to explore the independent theatre ecology and its interconnections. The SMPA Report includes all performing arts in its brief and the published responses\textsuperscript{52} to them from the music and dance communities are relevant to the topic of sustainability and the performing arts generally. This thesis, however, limits its research to theatre practice. In relation to the definition of theatre, this thesis agrees with the Love Your Work’s explanation that the theatre artform covers ‘the spectrum of theatre practice, ranging from devised work to text-based work and narrative to non-narrative work’.\textsuperscript{53}

\section*{2.7 The Language of Global Theory}
As Chapter 4 will elaborate, the Australian independent theatre sector is defined by a complex set of characteristics created by the sector’s external influences and the practitioners themselves. These characteristics, which emerge from both the interview data and the literature, describe the ways in which independent theatre practitioners interact with the world around them. The central question of theatre’s sustainability is explored in this thesis through the local and global ecology of independent theatre. The notion of a theatre ecology (Chapter 5) is the only term this research has found that does not divide the theatre practitioner from the complex and organic environment within which they are situated. It is not an ideal metaphor in that it brings with it unhelpful scientific connotations but for the purposes of this thesis, it allows for improved
discussion of the emergent interconnections and energy pathways that terms like ‘environment’, ‘culture’ or ‘context’ on their own cannot. It also, as Chapters 6 and 7 will explain further, allows this thesis to move away from purely economic solutions to theatre sustainability.

Discourses relating to globalisation, glocalisation, and the cultural or creative industries have established strong arguments for new ways of valuing Australian arts in an economic sense. These arguments set a context from which the emergent data in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 developed and from which this thesis’ ecological approach to cultural, career sustainability developed.

2.7.1 Globalisation

In recent times globalisation has been seen as having both a beneficial and negative impact on culture and the arts. From a positive perspective, a global understanding of the world enables artists to communicate and collaborate on a broader scale. A global approach encourages artists to establish larger markets for their work including at festivals and internationally. Europe, for example, has a much larger audience potential and each town is in relatively close proximity to one another which makes touring a far more viable income source than it is in Australia. The international festival circuit has the potential to provide an income all year round for those companies and artists who are sought after or producing the right sort of work at the right time.

Performing arts companies operating in a global marketplace have the potential to increase audiences. Operating in a global marketplace for performing arts companies may increase audience potential and prestige but it also requires more long-term planning and costly travel, accommodation and freight expenses. ‘…[T]here are tensions inherent in artists wanting to be a part of the global marketplace, because they do not always have the means or structures to participate in the international scene’. Many practitioners interviewed as part of this thesis believe that the small to medium or independent sector is as relevant to the international performing arts marketplace as Australia’s larger companies. However much of the literature regarding the arts and international markets is delivered in economic and creative industries frameworks. Such
literature is relevant to the larger, more mainstream art forms and organisations that already operate with those structures but often lacks pertinent options for the day to day and long term issues facing independent theatre practitioners.

During the negotiations surrounding the 2003 Australia-US Trade Agreement, the Commonwealth Government emphasised Australia’s cultural profile and focussed on improving the arts industry’s financial stability through new overseas markets and technologies. Australia Council publications from that period\textsuperscript{56} and its OzArts website\textsuperscript{57} promote Australian performance companies that are deemed to have international appeal or have successfully accessed overseas markets. Let’s Tour! A Quick Guide to Exporting Australia's Performing Arts, an Arts Council and Arts Victoria publication,\textsuperscript{58} provides case studies of companies who have toured overseas but also reflects the discrepancies in Australian performance funding and sustainability through overseas markets. These discrepancies are often overlooked in global or economic frameworks. The case studies in Let’s Tour! indicate that smaller companies often receive less funding and/or support in order to access potential overseas markets than larger or higher profile companies.

All sectors are influenced by globalisation, with workers in the cultural industries facing difficulties in rural and remote areas of Australia; all sectors are being affected by popular culture, with many struggling to define their boundaries and secure audiences; all sectors are struggling to balance their commercial and artistic imperatives.\textsuperscript{59}

Some companies manage to do work in both local and global realms but most companies have to choose where to focus their limited resources.

Volume is the key to profit and this is a scenario that all niche markets, not simply the arts, face. Unless they have something that everyone wants, most local businesses cannot survive. Australia is just not a big enough market to support the sale of niche luxuries like high art. Large subsidies are required, and even those who receive them have no guarantee of survival.\textsuperscript{60}

For some theatre/performance companies, globalisation has the potential to form a homogenised, sterile culture led by those countries with the most money and power to
the exclusion and possible extinction of important and identifying local arts and artists.\textsuperscript{61} Similarly, the idea of a ‘national’ culture or homogenised theatre causes increased instability and wariness amongst independent theatre practitioners who value difference and their own way of creating art. In this way, the theatre industry works against itself, sometimes creating or continuing division rather than shared experience or cohesion. Distrust of the ‘mainstream’\textsuperscript{62} continued to emerge from the independent theatre data as this thesis developed. However, literature relating to the creative industries and arts ecologies\textsuperscript{63} argue for supportive networks and an increased connectivity to strengthen Australian arts and culture.

\subsection*{2.7.2 Glocalisation}

Philip Auslander writes that the current nature of live performance must be examined ‘not as a global, undifferentiated phenomenon but with specific cultural and social contexts’.\textsuperscript{64} Views such as Auslander’s led this research to a ‘glocal’ rather than purely ‘global’ understanding of arts ecologies. The term glocal was coined in the early 1990’s as a way of avoiding the homogenised concept of culture often identified with globalisation. Professor Roland Roberson, Chair in Sociology & Global Society with the University of Aberdeen, writes:

\begin{quote}
According to The Oxford Dictionary of New Words (1991:34) the term 'glocal' and the process noun 'glocalization' are 'formed by telescoping global and local to make a blend.\textsuperscript{65}
\end{quote}

Robertson maintains that:

\begin{quote}
From my own analytic and interpretative standpoint the concept of globalization has involved the simultaneity and the interpenetration of what are conventionally called the global and the local, or - in a more abstract vein - the universal and the particular. … [I]t may even become necessary to substitute the term 'glocalization' in order to make my argument more precise.\textsuperscript{66}
\end{quote}

The concept of ‘glocalisation’ provides a more flexible understanding of the way independent theatre operates and of the ‘individuals, companies and organisations that
constantly renew the arts’ who are ‘central to the arts ecosystem however far they are dispersed within it, however established or emerging’. Glocalisation provides this thesis with a much clearer understanding of how culture develops locally and globally in an organic, non-hierarchical framework. It allows those individuals and companies to find their place within the local and the global networks that are vital to sustaining their creative work and careers across the unique physical and psychological distance imposed by our country. It fits well with their characteristic niche audiences and flexible, innovative working models that are explored in Chapter 3. Glocalisation, unlike the term ‘ecology’, still relies heavily on economic frameworks.

2.7.3 Creative Industries: a glocalised, economic framework

In the 1990’s in Australia there was increased discussion about the cultural industries, now also called the creative industries and its impact on the sustainability of arts. Creative industries took on government recognition when it was incorporated as a model into the UK Department of Culture, Media and Sport’s 2001 mapping document. In 2002-2003 a three-stage Creative Industries Cluster Study was undertaken jointly by the (then) Australian Government Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) and the National Office for the Information Economy (NOIE). Exactly which professional fields are included in the Australian Government’s definition of creative industries varies depending on the author or policy, but in Australia the Creative Industries may include advertising, publishing and multimedia, audio-visual, cinematography, architecture, visual and performing arts, fashion, writing, computer and communications technology, manufacturing of musical instruments, advertising and cultural tourism, as well as craft and design. ‘Each,’ writes Professor Stuart Cunningham, Director of the Creative Industries Research and Applications Centre (CIRAC) at Queensland University of Technology, ‘has its origin in individual skill, creativity and talent, and each has the potential for wealth through intellectual property’. Richard Florida, Professor of Business and Creativity at the Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto, summarises that such a broad alliance of industries draws together the ‘spheres of innovation (technological creativity), business (economic creativity) and culture (artistic and cultural creativity) into one another, in more intimate and powerful combinations than ever’. The flipside
of this argument is presented by Nicholas Garnham, Director of the Centre for Communication and Information at the University of Westminster, as creating ‘a coalition of disparate interests around the extension of intellectual property rights’.  

So despite their continued relevance in our national and international economic environment, there is much debate about the benefits of a creative industries approach for the arts sector. This debate increases division between the ‘haves’ (those practitioners that generate their own income as a matter of course) and the ‘have nots’, as well as reinforcing the independents’ mistrust of government and hierarchical organisations. ‘They [critics] do, and will, worry that it [a creative economy] might marginalise the traditional arts sectors and introduce and an untoward economism into rationales for support for culture’.  

The ‘cultural industries’ have become a more popular area of research in recent years, especially within economic geography, as the significance and complex role of creative pursuits such as music, visual arts and film production within urban economies is recognized.

The ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation, receives $7 million dollars from the federal government for the period 2005-2010 to develop ‘Australia's capacity to maximise the national economic and cultural benefits of digital content industries’. The centre’s economic and digital creative focus, administered through the Queensland University of Technology and directed by Professors Stuart Cunningham and John Hartley, has been viewed with interest by many of the practitioners interviewed for this thesis but some felt it was not particularly applicable to their style of practice. The independent theatre industry does not, as Chapter 3 will examine, have a high digital content and nor is it driven by economic values. However, other elements of the creative industries discourse such as creative workforce mapping and the overall focus on creativity are vital to all in the arts and creative sectors.

In What Price a Creative Economy Cunningham argues for a system which would:

…emphasise a small-business and demand-driven ethos as a strong complement to the charismatic, supply-side ethos of the
national artistic leadership. This places emphasis on career development and opportunities through occupation as much as industry sector - combining the arts with market-driven, commercial ventures and employment and emphasising sustainability and impact as functions of an economy-wide vision.\textsuperscript{74}

The price paid for such a system, he says is that creativity becomes the central value of the entire economy and society rather than solely that of arts and culture.\textsuperscript{75}

Florida, like Cunningham, views creativity as not belonging solely to any particular industry but as an inherent part of the glocalised world. He describes this as a ‘new mainstream’:\textsuperscript{76}

The melding has become so deep that the old components are no longer recognizable; the old categories no longer apply at all. The people of the Big Morph see themselves simply as "creative people" with creative values, working in increasingly creative workplaces, living essentially creative lifestyle. And, in this sense, they represent a new mainstream setting the norms and pace for much of society.\textsuperscript{77}

Over the last 15 years this type of thinking has heavily influenced Australian government, government funding agencies and industries seeking accountable, outcome-based arguments for changes in policy and funding. The ‘hardening of economic policy’\textsuperscript{78} argues David Throsby, effects the way we perceive and value the world around us and was a major catalyst for the development of creative industries and the subsequent creative economy. The creative economy and its resultant policy and funding shifts encompass independent artists and arts organisations and has been positive in changing opinions of artistic practice and its role in Australian society. However these less ‘mainstream’\textsuperscript{79} organisations are not necessarily able to find a comfortable place to within such frameworks. Many Australian theatre and policy experts are dubious of the creative economy terminology and creative industries attempts to work within an economic framework. A framework they feel is out of sync with their own understanding and evaluation of theatre.
Economic jargon has permeated our lives ... When we go to see a play we are not members of the audience but consumers providing financial input to the theatre company's bottom line. There has been inexorable movement in Australia, as in a number of Western countries, from the public to the private, from the collective to the individual, from concerns about equity and fairness to an obsession with efficiency...  

The increasing use of jargon or 'weasel words', argues Dr Don Watson, is driven primarily by the economic and other business models that 'triumph' in our global societies.  

It [jargon] happens in democracies, and in businesses and government departments. Today it is found everywhere the language of the information age is (compulsorily) spoken; everywhere the management revolution has been; everywhere marketing goes. This is language without possibility. It cannot convey humour, fancy, feelings, nuance or the varieties of experience. It is cut off and cuts us off from provenance – it has no past.  

To not partake in such language or in such systems is to be excluded. Cultural or creative industries models centre around economics, new technologies and a focus on ‘measurable outputs’ in an environment that many independent theatre practitioners feel is the completely at odds with their professional and artistic values. As John Baylis and Phyllida Shaw commented at the 2008 launch of A Sustainable Arts Sector: What Will It Take, although the creative industries model suits some of the many industries it encapsulates, theatre and the cultural value it holds in our society ‘struggles’ with the commercial aspects of this. Andrew Ross points out in his article Nice Work if you Can Get it, that such models ‘ought to present some new, long-term opportunities for cultural workers, but in practice they seem more likely to universalise the traditionally precarious work profile of artists’. In their book, Creativity, Communication and Cultural Value, Negus and Pickering argue that creative industries’ economic imperatives creates a dichotomy between industries that have economic value and highly artistic industries, such as independent theatre, that promote other values.  

[T]he increasingly conglomerate corporate organisation of cultural production has very little to do with artistic creativity. It
can exploit it, package it, and even impede its development, but large corporate institutions can't act as facilitators of the creative process. From such an angle the phrase 'the creative industries' is an oxymoron. ... The authors see the term 'creative industries' as failing 'to acknowledge a set of value judgements. The qualifying term 'creative' operates as more than a descriptive category when applied to industries. The use of the label creativity provides a means of according value, and establishing a cultural hierarchy. It provides a means of evaluation, a way of positioning people against one another.\textsuperscript{86}

It is, this thesis maintains, exactly such hierarchies that allow division and distrust in the cultural sector to grow and much needed interconnections to fade. Although creative industries and the creative economy is a viable model for improved sustainability in sectors heavily involved in digital content and new technologies, it is not necessarily well suited to the overall sustainability of Australian independent theatre. As Chapter 4 identifies, this sector relies on creative passion over income, resourcefulness, informal networks, niche markets, multi-tasking, and an intuitive, flexible working style. In Art in a Cold Climate – Rethinking the Australia Council, RealTime Editor Keith Gallasch discusses the prospect of an ecological model that would avoid the ‘limiting set of managerial metaphors, born of neo-liberal economic theory’\textsuperscript{87} that emerged from the literature on glocalisation and the creative industries. An ecological model, Gallasch suggests, is ‘open-ended and relates to the way systems actually operate’.\textsuperscript{88}

It can contemplate the very things the managerial model cannot: innovation, emergence, excellence ('best practice' excepted, of course) and history, and do it with nuance and, as Robyn Archer demands, dialectically.\textsuperscript{89}

Like Gallasch, most independent artists value the flexibility and creativity of their profession. This is one of the main reasons they continue to work in increasingly difficult circumstances. A model for sustainability based on economic inputs and outputs and which continues to view their work as a ‘product’ rather than the result of creative process is not generally acceptable to independent practitioners. This thesis has taken another approach. It develops an ecological model that can be inclusive of creative industries approaches but that is reliant on the natural characteristics, pathways
and interconnections that emerge from the sector’s data rather than a focus on the economic models discussed in this chapter.

2.8 Interconnection in the Theatre World

Given the rapid advancements in communication and other technology that allow people to work across time and space, one might have expected an equal improvement in Australian theatre networks and resources. The recent *Love Your Work* report cites the importance of ‘meaningful’ connections that stimulate ideas and get practitioners ‘excited’ about the work.\(^9\) It is precisely this stimulation and excitement that creates the driving energy behind most practitioners’ careers. The report also confirms that connections across artform, e.g. between text-based theatre and performance-based theatre, are ‘weak’ and that improving these connections would be of ‘benefit to the theatre artform’.\(^9\)

However, over the six years this doctoral research was carried out, there has been little advancement in support networks or shared resourcing for theatre. Where inter-sector communication might provide feedback and advice, material and non-material support, or simply a link with other artists that time and Australia’s geography does not allow; there is an overwhelming void. This adds to the decline in career-sustaining energy.

Although the issues of distance, funding and division are relevant to the lack of support networks another issue is that the independent sector is too overworked to organise and sustain their own network and there is no advocacy body or other centralised organisation funded to do it on their behalf. The *Love Your Work* report supports this thesis’ finding that ‘the theatre sector does not have a single professional association and artistic directors and directors do not regularly meet or communicate, nor is there a central industry publication to support communication about new works’.\(^9\)

There are, of course, independent websites that practitioners can hook into. ArtsHub Australia (www.artshub.com.au) is probably the most well-known and it has sister sites in the UK and USA. It is primarily a job and events site for the entertainment and creative industries including performing arts, visual arts and crafts, writing and
publishing, media/radio/television, design, and culture and heritage. However any online resources can only be accessed through subscription so that members can seek jobs and events information. It is not a support, advocacy, sharing or networking site and its audience is extremely broad. Performing Arts News (http://www.performingartsnews.com) provides an online forum for those in the performing arts. However, this forum is for those in all the performing arts including film, music, writing, dance and other professions rather than theatre alone and is rarely used. Performing Arts News is also a website that is more suited to the dissemination of news and members’ websites rather than creating co-operative networks. Another generic site is AussieTheatre.com (http://www.aussietheatre.com.au) which offers pages on advice, opinion and forums. However, with the exception of companies like Sydney Theatre Company and publicity for some Sydney theatre venues, it targets the musical theatre market. Merelyplayers, an online site which aims to ‘act as a conduit though which creative practitioners from all creative disciplines can cross-pollinate’, tends to focus primarily on promotion of productions rather than developing networks for arts practitioners. The Independent Theatre Association of Western Australia Inc. has developed a website which does attempt to create a specific online theatre community. The Association is an umbrella organisation for community and amateur theatre throughout Western Australia. Its website encourages Australian theatre practitioners to work ‘together to promote each other's work’ in order to ‘build a culture of participation in the performing arts that will yield benefits for us all’. It provides free membership and access to its services which include forums, company and production information, venue information, news and blogs. However despite maximising ‘opportunities for visitor input’ much of the interactive content of the website is limited to members’ promotional material or reviews rather than true community building. The reasons for this are unclear but the site was developed and maintained without funding or support from leading arts agencies or organisations. Despite its ‘dedicated workers’, in March 2008 it lost the sponsorship of its service provider and, like the independent theatre practitioners it attempts to support, is under pressure to sustain itself. Perhaps the lack of support and formalised networks that underpins the independent theatre sector is responsible for the lack of online support and community available independently online.
Support and networks do not necessarily need to be online resources. Although most theatre practitioners interviewed for this thesis used the telephone and the internet for administrative correspondence and with collaborators in different locations, they preferred the energy and resonance of communicating and collaborating in the same space and time.\(^96\) AusStage is an online database developed by a conglomerate of universities and the Australian Research Council (ARC) in 2003 to build research information on performing arts events in Australia. AusStage states that ‘live interaction’ is essential to the ‘cultural life of the nation’\(^97\) and its database was developed to record and investigate live performance. However, this organisation and its website are primarily built for researchers, not practitioners, and acts as a listing of live performance rather than a platform for interaction. The Australian Performing Arts Market (APAM), festivals and the rare conferences and formal discussion forums provide a wonderful opportunity for independent theatre to develop vital networks, to maintain existing ones, to see other companies’ works and to renew their creative energy, drive and professionalism. Respondents in the Love Your Work report confirm the importance of such opportunities.

The artistic directors all expressed the importance of meaningful networking opportunities, such as provided by the Australian Performing Arts Market, Long Paddock and the National Play Festival. These forums provide artistic directors with an opportunity to meet and ‘get excited’ about each others’ work, which is, everyone agreed, the essential ingredient to a successful co-production or commission. The communication and relationships between the second tier company artistic staff (literary managers, artistic associates and associate directors) at these and other forums are often as, or more, vital to the connections between companies and the success of cross-sector initiatives and resolution of issues.\(^98\)

However given the distances and the cost of travel or attendance at such events, independent theatre practitioners, particularly those outside the metropolitan areas, can rarely afford to attend. In general those in the sector seek out peers and contacts in person and in an ad hoc way that depends on their current location, time, funding and project/s. Even international networks tend to be created in person at festival gatherings or while on tour and as such can only occur on an irregular basis. This reinforces a
reactive response to developing ideas and professional partnerships rather than a proactive one that is important to the concept of sustainability.

Other specialised and well-recognised organisations such as the Australian Government Culture and Recreation Portal, Australian Fuel4Arts, Arts Access, Young People and the Arts Australia (YPAA) or venue-based organisations such as Performance Space, Metro Arts, B Sharp and Full Tilt have their own e-bulletins, not to mention their own websites. Individual theatre companies also have their own websites and email bulletins. But these sites are primarily for the marketing of those organisations and their productions rather than the development of performing arts networks. What is lacking is a communal, accessible and well-resourced space on which to build support, cooperation and stimulation for independent theatre practitioners. Some individual companies operate independently and successfully online in a glocal world and have created their own networks. However the independent theatre sector does not have ready access to an association let alone cohesive, interrelated support networks vital to stimulating and sustaining their resource and time poor profession.

There are advocacy organisations and strong networks for other arts sectors such as the Australian Dance Council (Ausdance) (http://www.ausdance.org.au) for dance, National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA) (http://www.visualarts.net.au) for visual arts, Music Council of Australia for music (MCA) (http://www.mca.org.au), and writing’s Playwriting Australia (http://www.pwa.org.au) for playwrights, but there exists nothing similar as yet for independent theatre. NAVA has also gone on to develop the artistcareer.com.au in partnership with the Australia Business Arts Foundation (AbaF) to provide ‘business information and advice for visual art, craft and design practitioners’. This site is well-resourced and networked with useful information and programs. The site provides a functional, online model but the content is primarily suited to visual artists rather than to theatre practitioners or all arts practitioners. CREATE\textsuperscript{100} in 2001 noted that ‘unlike many other industries in Australia there is no single organisation which represents all sectors of the arts “either promoting the value of the arts to the general public or advocating on behalf of the arts to the government”’. Years later, there still does not exist such an organisation on behalf of either the arts in general or independent theatre specifically. Australian Circus and Physical Theatre
Association (ACAPTA) was established in Melbourne in 1999. The Association aims to promote a dialogue between performers, directors, teachers, designers and managers in circus and physical theatre’ and its website (currently in development) intends to provide information about conferences, events, training and resources. This website may be useful to those specifically working in the field of circus and physical theatre but a theatre-wide association is still lacking. This noticeable absence increases the professional isolation and pressure on those working across all aspects of theatre but particularly on those in the independent sector.

Without a support or advocacy organisation being developed with government assistance such responsibility falls to the sector itself. The 2008 Love Your Work report wrote that:

The theatre practitioners interviewed in the course of this research agreed that the solutions to these issues must come from the theatre sector itself, from concerted effort to ensure that the sector has the people it needs to keep it vibrant and alive. The Australia Council can support the sector’s activities, but ultimately it is theatre practitioners who can best act to support the sector’s future.

During the 2002 forum however, diverse company styles and funding competition were cited as potential barriers to developing its own association or support organisation. Harley Stumm, previously Company Manager with Urban Theatre Projects, believes that any networking, lobbying or advocacy group for the independents could be driven by those companies who share a common interest and have the means to work really hard on it. ‘But there would be times when we have common interests and times when we’d be in competition’, he says. A decision to build a network based on those in attendance at the RealTime-Performance Space forum was reported but was never referred to again either formally or informally.

Six years later, recommendations from the Love Your Work report propose that:

- KO’s consider forming ‘a professional association or an informal network of their own, to address and advocate on issues affecting their profession, such as career planning, wage structures and training needs. Such networks could be in
conjunction with associations such as the Australian Screen Directors Association, or be established as separate entities with a specific theatre focus’;\textsuperscript{104}

- The Australia Council supports an annual theatre forum which would include ‘artistic directors of the MPA and small-to-medium companies, representatives of freelance creative workers (directors, designers, production managers) and the heads of training institutions’\textsuperscript{105}. The forum\textsuperscript{1} proceedings cited a need for ‘greater representation of Independent practitioners’ to attend future events. The proceedings also stated that ‘forums and artists discussion groups that are non competitive ... allow artists to develop strategies and languages for lobbying policy makers’ and to ‘instigate change’;\textsuperscript{106}

- MPA’s and the Australia Council Theatre Board should ‘actively develop deeper relationships with the rest of the sector as a means of advancing the artform, taking advantage of fresh approaches and connecting with a greater diversity of Australian artists and audiences’. Connections, which the report state are ‘essential to the vitality of theatre in Australia’.\textsuperscript{107}

Finally the Love Your Work paper asks for further research into the issues relating to ‘artistic vibrancy and innovation in theatre and diversity in theatre’ and their relationship to ‘training, retraining and connecting’ theatre practitioners.\textsuperscript{108} This is a timely request in light of this thesis’s exploration and findings in regard to these themes.

2.9 Conclusion
The literature in this chapter describes a diverse and dynamic sector that is constrained by Australia’s funding history and reliance on economic, hierarchical models of

\textsuperscript{1} The Australia Council established the first Australian Theatre Forum in May 2009. The forum is expected to become a biennial event and it has used new technological resources to maintain and improve theatre sector discussion. The forum was hosted in conjunction with Open Space, ‘a self organising conferencing method’ (http://www.australiantheatreforum.com.au/) which enables discussion and publication of a wide range of opinions and actions. Ongoing postings had over 200 participants as at the end of September 2009 but later, repeated attempts to connect to the forum database via its homepage were unsuccessful.
management as well as the industry’s lack of a cohesive, networked, glocal community. Theatre practitioners are driven, both independently and collaboratively, by their energy and passion to create new and significant work but lack regular access to the resources and support structures needed to sustain themselves into the long term.

This chapter describes deficiencies that exist not only in the definitions and publications relating to Australian independent theatre but also in the supportive, informative and collaborative networks needed to sustain the sector. This thesis intends to address those absences through further research, analysis and interpretation.

Although current Australian government policy and funding is based on an economic, outcomes-based culture, the independent artists operating within that environment seek to sustain their practice not just financially but through creative and professional satisfaction and through the energy such satisfaction can provide. This thesis’ data confirms that, despite great expenditure of individual resources and creativity, independent theatre practitioners are regularly confronted and frustrated by the sheer struggle to survive.

The next chapter sets out a methodology to develop a new model of sustainability for independent theatre practitioners and their companies. Rather than an economic model, the model theorised is an ecological one that considers both the global and local environments in which independent theatre companies exist.
Notes

3 Meyrick, Trapped by the Past: Why Our Theatre is Facing Paralysis 61.
4 Csikszentmihalyi, Flow.
8 Throsby, 10.
9 Throsby, 9.
10 Throsby, 9.
11 Throsby, 37.


27 Terracini, 38.
31 Throsby and Hollister, Don’t Give Up Your Day Job: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia 53.
32 Throsby and Hollister, Don’t Give Up Your Day Job: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia.
36 Craik, 20.
40 Craik, 20.
42 CREATE.
44 Throsby and Hollister, *Don’t Give Up Your Day Job: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia*.
50 Craik, 20.
54 Positive Solutions, Arts Victoria and Australia Council for the Arts, 2.
55 CREATE, 2.
58 Positive Solutions, Arts Victoria and Australia Council for the Arts.
59 CREATE, 13.
60 Latham, 36.

Archer.


Auslander, 3.


Gallasch, Art in a Cold Climate - Rethinking the Australia Council 55.


Cunningham, 43.


Cunningham, 44.

Cunningham, 44.
Florida, 211.

Florida, 211.


Archer, 2.


Watson, 2.

Garnham.


Gallasch, Art in a Cold Climate - Rethinking the Australia Council 7.

Gallasch, Art in a Cold Climate - Rethinking the Australia Council 7.

Gallasch, Art in a Cold Climate - Rethinking the Australia Council 7.


Independent Theatre Association of WA Inc.

Auslander.


66


100 CREATE, 22.


3.1 Methodology: an introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the research process and conceptual development as applied in this thesis. Although constructivist grounded theory is an accepted qualitative research methodology, the way in which it interacts with research data requires rigorous and careful monitoring.¹ As a result this chapter explains not only the methodological theory but its particular application in the context of researching Australian independent theatre. Along this journey, the research draws on and responds to the data through the development of a unique relationship between Australian independent theatre, sustainability, and Csikszentmihalyi’s flow theory.

…[T]here is no single interpretive “truth.” All truths are partial and incomplete. There will be no single conventional paradigm … to which all…might ascribe. We occupy a historical moment marked by multivocality, contested meanings, paradigmatic controversies, and new textural forms.²

3.2 Grounded Theory

Given the range of qualitative paradigms open to researchers, ‘[i]nquiry methodology can no longer be treated as a set of universally applicable rules’ write Guba and Lincoln.³ Rather, methodology inevitably interacts and develops from the phenomena studied and the researcher involved. First and foremost the research methodology must suit the phenomena it sets out to study. This thesis’ research utilises a constructivist grounded theory approach to methodology to interlink the complex field of Australian independent theatre with that of Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi’s conditions for flow or optimal experience. Whilst the issue of sustainability in the Australian independent theatre sector set the initial study in motion, the resultant data drew the researcher’s attention to the interlinked issue of energy flow within that sector and its correlation to sustainability. This, in turn led to the coupling of Csikszentmihalyi’s flow theories to
the initial research proposal (as illustrated in Figure 3.1) which is examined in Chapter 6. This data-led conceptual development generated new ways of understanding career and company sustainability in Australian independent theatre.

**Figure 3.1  Research Cycle**

The ongoing cycle of conceptual development throughout the research broadens and enriches the research.

3.3 Questioning Grounded Theory

Grounded theory and its application proved useful in my earlier Master of Arts thesis. Investigation revealed it as a methodology that encouraged exploration and reflection during the writing process as well as during data gathering. Although I examined other potential research methods, grounded theory re-emerged as a qualitative methodology complex enough to encompass the dynamic and evolving nature of my doctoral research question: *How might Australian independent theatre practitioners develop sustainable companies and careers?* Its method of constant questioning, contemplation and conceptual development was ideally suited to the dynamic nature of both the
independent theatre sector and the conditions required for improved energy flow and sustainability.

Having confirmed grounded theory’s emphasis on generation of theory and work-in-process, this research’s methodology incorporated an ongoing review of the interaction between the primary and secondary data and conceptualisation. This process not only defined the field of investigation but also developed ‘plausible relationships’ between the research material and ‘effective theory’ relating to all aspects of independent theatre development, sustainability and energy flow.

As described in Chapter 2, independent theatre in Australia is an extremely dynamic and innovative sector that is stretched to its limits in terms of finances, staffing, resources and time. The diversity and shifting energies of this sector and the environment in which it operates requires a suitably open, interactive and qualitative method of research. Grounded theory has been used effectively by the social sciences and humanities to generate ‘greater clarity and transparency’ for diverse, ‘complex and sensitive’ research of social, cultural and even interdisciplinary fields. It has facilitated interaction between a complex and unique range of data including individual interviews and literature from academic, business and artistic fields. As such, the concepts that have risen from this interaction are equally complex and unique.

3.4 The Rigour of Grounded Theory
Despite its flexible approach, grounded theory requires rigorous measures of its user. Interactive, grounded research was developed by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s as a viable alternative to quantitative, positivist methodology and, as a result it was constructed to be viably systematic and to deflect criticism. Its positivist roots defined the grounded theory approach as a ‘qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon’.

Initially grounded theory provided detailed and systematic procedures for data collection, analysis and theorising, but it is also concerned with the quality of emergent
theory. Although grounded theory focuses on generating theory rather than proving it, the validity and value of the generated theory relies on strong procedural direction and constant scrutiny in order to avoid culminating ‘in mundane descriptions’.\textsuperscript{10}

Strauss and Corbin\textsuperscript{11} state that there are four primary requirements for judging a good grounded theory. They, and other positivist grounded theoreticians, believe that if these requirements are met the research can be legitimised. The requirements they prescribe in order to increase the value and quality of grounded theory research are ‘fit, relevance, workability, and modifiability’.\textsuperscript{12} Glaser and Strauss’ four legitimising requirements are summarised in this thesis as follows:

1. Fit, as the term suggests, reflects how closely the developed concepts fit with the phenomena they are representing. This is monitored by the process of constant comparison of diverse and rich empirical materials or data;
2. A relevant study deals with the real concern of participants in the field of study and is not only of academic interest. It should provide understanding, and be understandable;
3. Because the data is comprehensive, it should be able to be applied generally, not just in specific situations. A theory is ‘workable’ when it explains how the problem is being solved with extensive variation and is abstract enough to be applicable to a wide variety of contexts;
4. A modifiable theory can be altered when new, relevant data is compared to existing data. This also provides a control, in the sense that in stating the conditions under which the theory applies the research it is judged as not right or wrong but as interactive with current data.

3.5 Constructivist Grounded Theory

Approaches to qualitative research have shifted over the years. Glaser, Strauss and Corbin’s positivistic procedures emphasising objectivity, logic, and analytic and comparative procedures were re-evaluated by other grounded theory scholars and practitioners such as Kathy Charmaz\textsuperscript{13} who developed a more constructivist approach leading to a more holistic and interactive methodology. Since its inception in the late 1960s, grounded theory has been developed and disseminated to the point where it is accepted and applied in both qualitative and quantitative streams of research. However, as Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln have noted, there are risks in the increasing popularity of grounded theory because many researchers cited did not yet ‘understand
important aspects of the methodology’. Denzin and Lincoln’s main concern is that researchers concentrate on analysing data rather than developing theories from it. To overcome this misunderstanding, later overviews of the method re-emphasised the advantages of a researcher’s theoretical sensitivity, and in particular, how this sensitivity might help the researcher develop salient theory from their own experience and knowledge as well as from continuing emergent data. ‘To reach these ends requires maintaining a balance among the attributes of creativity, rigor, persistence and, above all, theoretical sensitivity’. This hermeneutic approach highlights rather than conceals the researcher’s role in interpreting data. Sensitivity, as incorporated in a constructivist approach, is encouraged not as a way of forcing the data into controllable categories but to open the researcher to concepts and understandings that emerge during the research process. It is for this reason that researchers are encouraged to memo their preconceptions, remain honest about their involvement in the process and to avoid closed interviewing or data-gathering techniques.

The constructivist approach that is applied in this thesis accepts that the ‘categories, concepts, and theoretical level of an analysis emerge from the researcher’s interactions within the field and questions about the data’. In my research I have adopted the positivist judging criteria or ‘guidelines as tools’, but my constructivist approach accepts the researcher as a ‘passionate participant’ who is reinterpreting the ‘studied phenomenon’. The theories developed in this thesis arise directly from the data, and my own interaction with the data and practice surrounding live theatre. These theories are firmly grounded in my research, but form a synthesised or constructed interpretation of the data. Certainly Charmaz’s view does not abandon the traditional positivist quest for strong empirical detail but her constructivist methodology applies it ‘without the cloak of neutrality and passivity enshrouding mid-century positivism’. I believe this hermeneutic approach to grounded theory is particularly important when examining the interactive and non-traditionalist phenomenon of collaborative, independent Australian theatre.
3.6 Extending Conceptual Boundaries through Grounded Theory

As synthesised in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of this thesis, initial themes that emerged from the independent theatre data on sustainability revealed an increasing emphasis on energy. Discussion topics in the interviews and in other literature ranged from: physical and mental wellbeing, creative processes, management processes, and collaborative relationships; through to networks, venues, audiences, performance quality, income, age, lifestyle, and of course, the overall ability to exist in the theatre industry at all. Yet energy, and in particular the positive and negative challenges to the sustaining of energy, emerged as common themes across all these discussion areas. The conceptual link between energy and sustainability became stronger as these themes investigated a wider literature review researching new fields such as positive psychology, creativity theory and organisational management.

The most important property of conceptualization for GT [Grounded Theory] is that it is abstract of time, place, and people. This transcendence also, by consequence, makes GT abstract of any one substantive field, routine perceptions or perceptions of others, since there is always a perception of a perception, and an abstraction from any type of data whether qualitative or quantitative. Hence, GT is a general method. Thus GT conceptualization transcends.

In this way the general GT or Grounded Theory method allowed the themes of energy to extend the field of independent theatre and to explore correlations in the data. These correlations, between energy, sustainability and the Csikszentmihalyi’s conditions for flow or optimal experience, generated new concepts that related to the thesis’ original question on sustainability and independent theatre. Thus the data concerning independent theatre practice and flow theory intertwined and their emergent themes allowed for the generation of a distinctive and accessible set of conditions for improved sustainability in Australian independent theatre. Grounded theory, GT, GTA or GTM as it is also referred to, is a qualitative and interactive methodology capable of encompassing concepts and theories from different disciplines.

GT’s ability to elicit new insights is also noted in an article on Grounded Theory Method in Management Research: Users’ Perspectives:
Consider GTM no less than an essential research method for the development of new insights into social phenomena. Both its key concepts, that of “constant comparison,” in which data collection and analysis are an iterative process, and that of “theoretical sampling,” in which data collection decisions are progressional and subject to the theory in construction.\textsuperscript{22}

The importance of allowing the data to lead the research into new and often unforeseen areas is reflected in Sousa and Hendriks’ article \textit{The Diving Bell and the Butterfly: The Need for Grounded Theory in Developing a Knowledge-Based View of Organizations}. In this article, Sousa and Hendriks argue that ‘if theory is to be relevant and useful both to the academic community and to laymen alike, theory generation should be intimately related with, though conceptually independent from, data’.\textsuperscript{23}

Thus grounded theory’s inductive processes of constant reflection and integration of data from different fields can enrich conceptual development. It is a methodology capable of researching and measuring complex and changing human behaviour, underlying patterns and meanings, and it is ‘interactive with the broader environment’.\textsuperscript{24} This enables the methodology to cross traditional professional and academic fields and to be open to new concepts as they emerge from the data. As a result, conclude Reed and Runquist in their article \textit{Reformulation of a Methodological Concept in Grounded Theory}, grounded theory categories and concepts can emerge ‘without forced construction; their order of emergence is nonlinear; and their number is unlimited’.\textsuperscript{25}

### 3.7 Interlinking Different Research Fields

The integration of all emergent traits of the data, whether negative or positive, is important in a hermeneutic grounded methodology. The connections between positive psychology’s flow theory, organisational management, academic research and Australian independent theatre in this thesis are not arbitrary. They form an interrelated response, developed through a grounded theory methodology, to the original research question about how Australian independent theatre might sustain its practitioners and companies. Grounded methodology was chosen because it ‘supports theorizing in new substantive areas, it links well to practice’,\textsuperscript{26} and ‘adapts well to capturing
complexities’. Although flow theory has been applied to organisational management, wellbeing, creativity and collaboration this is the first time flow theory has been developed in line with the issues of sustainability in Australian independent theatre. As Steven Pace wrote in his 2004 article *A Grounded Theory of the Flow Experiences of Web Users*:

The grounded theory research method that was employed in this study is a primarily inductive investigative process in which the researcher formulates a theory about a phenomenon by systematically gathering and analysing relevant data. The aim of this research method is building theory, not testing theory.

Building theory, through interlinking fields that emerge through the research data, develops new insights into existing situations and professions. In *The Humanistic Psychology and Positive Psychology Connection: Implications for Psychotherapy* the authors argue for a more interactive approach to psychology using ‘process-oriented research methodologies’. Process-oriented methodologies, they believe, are well suited to process-oriented professions such as psychology and art and allow for positive research connections. Connections, they propose, that build deeper insight into ‘the full range of human experience’. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and other ‘research-oriented positive psychologists’ assert that such positive connectivity ‘amplifies the strengths’ of the subject/s or field of research. This argument is particularly interesting in light of this thesis’ interlinking of the Australian independent theatre sector and its strengths and energies, with the conditions for flow that Csikszentmihalyi developed.

The aim of positive psychology - a branch of psychology launched in 1998 by Martin E.P. Seligman during his term as president of the American Psychological Association - is to ‘to catalyze a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities’ that allow individuals, communities, and societies to ‘flourish’. Similarly, the aim of this thesis is to use the research data to develop flourishing and more sustainable independent theatre practice that understands, yet does not rely on, economic models of management. This thesis aims to do this through the use of interactive yet rigorous, ‘traditional theory-building processes’ inherent to grounded theory methodology: a methodology which
allows the data to emerge in a balanced and constructive manner. A manner which is reflected in Luthans and Youssef’s review of positive psychology in the workplace:

An integrative approach is necessary for a fuller understanding of the dynamics of success and failure in today’s flat-world environment. We would argue that much is lost when either the positive or the negative is slighted or forgotten, and each in isolation of the other leaves much to be desired.\textsuperscript{34}

3.8 Developing Practical Theory

The quality of research is crucial if its developing theory is to be usefully applied to the real world. Quality and practicality were both important in the choice of methodology and its eventual findings relating to energy, flow and sustainability in Australian independent theatre. Fendt and Sachs address the issue of quality in grounded theory and make several ‘pragmatic suggestions’\textsuperscript{35} for its use. Four of these suggestions,\textsuperscript{36} which became particularly relevant to the interaction in the data between flow theory and Australian independent theatre can be summarised as:

1. Defining a procedural stance that fits the research topic and the researcher’s personality and prior experience so as to take the best possible advantage of these assets. ...
2. Maintaining the broad, interdisciplinary literature exploration.
3. Putting quality and usefulness before procedure.
4. Keep working at GTM to improve it and compare notes; set it free to evolve over time (as was the original intention).

The following points are a brief response to these suggestions as they relate to this thesis’ interactive and practical qualities.

1. The interaction between researcher and data: Research into the field of one’s own area of expertise requires careful planning and data management so that the topic becomes neither too broad nor too narrow in its focus. Grounded theory’s approach allowed me to take into consideration my existing theoretical sensitivity as a professional actor, ensemble member, writer, arts marketer and academic researcher throughout the research process while ensuring that the conceptual development emanated from the data. It also allowed me to develop further sensitivity to the topic of independent theatre practice as I continued to collect, interpret and validate data.
2. Broadening and intertwining fields of research: This sensitised approach to the field and its data also opened the thesis to new literature and theories that reflected the sector’s natural characteristics and energy pathways. These methods allowed me to create dense and precise theories that were based largely on ‘systematic statements of plausible relationships’. These ‘inductive’, probability statements or integrated conceptual hypotheses developed from ‘empirical observations or data’ as the research collection, examination and documentation continued.

3. A focus on developing useful theory: The central focus of this thesis is to question, research and make recommendations towards a more sustainable Australian independent theatre sector. In order to do this, the methodological process and its resultant concepts must represent and stand up to the scrutiny of a diverse range of stakeholders. This thesis has endeavoured to incorporate this diversity through the quality and breadth of its primary and secondary data materials. The concepts and recommendations that have been developed from this data need to be accessible to both individual practitioners and the independent theatre sector as a whole.

4. Staying open throughout the research process: My major concern in applying constructivist grounded theory was that my sensitivity to the area might force the data too heavily into a preconceived theory rather than allowing the data to generate theory. I was reassured by comments in open forums between researchers on the Grounded Theory Institute’s website. In response to a question about the impact of a researcher’s previous experience or knowledge of their research field, Vivian Martin, a Grounded Theory Institute Fellow and Associate Professor in Journalism with Central Connecticut State University wrote:

In short, the issue is about pacing and staying open. The goal is not to have people walking around ignorant or uninformed -- given the work PhD students must do to even defend a dissertation proposal it is likely they will have some knowledge of the literature. Rather, the aim is to take a more agnostic view, to not go into the project with theoretical perspectives in mind, to remain open by memoing your preconceptions and using other strategies to keep as open as possible to the feel....

In addition to journal and thesis draft writing, I wrote summaries of interviews and the literature as a method of reviewing the direction of the research. I also discussed the research with colleagues, academics and professionals in related fields as a way of opening up the conceptual development process. This and other crucial elements of the methodological journey are detailed in the next section of this chapter.
Positivist and postpositivist/constructivist GT literature, including Fendt and Sachs’ four recommendations, reinforce this thesis’ active interpretation of Csikszentmihalyi’s conditions for flow theory as it relates to the original theatre and sustainability data. In doing so, the research has followed the directives of grounded theory to generate a dynamic, holistic and connected approach to sustainability in Australian independent theatre.

3.9 The Methodological Journey
As expressed earlier, the purpose of my research is to answer the question: How might Australian independent theatre practitioners develop sustainable companies and careers? This question was a result of researching and analysing both technical and non-technical literature until I was able to define an area of research that allowed in-depth exploration but was not so broad as to become unworkable.

3.9.1 The Initial Research Outline
In applying for my PhD to the University of Wollongong, I submitted a research outline and abstract which required initial research into the area of enquiry. The abstract reads:

How can small to medium Australian theatre companies collaboratively devise, produce and sustain ‘successful’, live performance in the ever-increasing globalised climate?

This key question specifically focuses on theatre small-to-medium’s that collaboratively devise their own product/s with an aim to create live performance that reflects the socio-political and cultural influences of its time and place and that is as aesthetically and meaningfully stimulating as it is financially viable.

With subsidy culture on the wane and entrepreneurial, often globalised, culture becoming a necessity for survival, how can the smaller players continue to create vital yet viable work? The aim of my research is to use a constructivist grounded theory research methodology to develop a practical ‘map’ for small to medium Australian theatre companies to refer to as they collaboratively devise, produce and market their performance repertoire. This industry map would provide strategies for companies as they collectively plan and create new work with
content that operates across multiple and viable platforms and applications. It will offer organisations practical ideas and methods to develop and grow unique, live performance in the increasingly globalised, festival and spectacle-based markets.\textsuperscript{41}

The process of researching and writing this proposal abstract required an understanding of the key themes that went beyond my own experiences at that time. As a result, I underwent a general review of material and human resources relating to the central themes of the question prior to commencing my doctorate.

3.9.2 Choosing the Research Participants

The \textit{SMPA Report} and related documents enabled the development of some key interview and research questions by raising significant issues and describing key players in the identified S2M sector. The choice of this research’s interviewees (Table 3.1) was undertaken through familiarising myself with the large and diverse range of companies, practitioners and related organisations appearing in state and government arts publications, festival and venue programs, newspaper articles and arts magazines, online forums and publications. I also relied heavily on industry word of mouth and my own professional contacts. Professional practitioners and/or companies with profiles highlighting the development of new Australian theatre or interdisciplinary performance were a central focus of the research. Ultimately, due to financial restrictions and travel costs, this field was narrowed to include only interviewees from the Eastern states of Australia. To build a complete picture of the independent theatre sector and the complex ecology in which independents are trying to sustain themselves, it was also important for the interview participants to reflect the diversity of size, management styles and performance genres acknowledged in the existing literature and through the sector feedback. To avoid the ‘diminish[ing]’\textsuperscript{42} implications raised by the opposing classifications of ‘mainstream’ versus ‘fringe’, ‘small’ or ‘minority’, this thesis will instead refer to ‘niche’ or ‘particular’ styles and markets that are common to the independent theatre scene. The list of interview participants includes theatre practitioners as well as government, funding, and venue representatives.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Name</th>
<th>Surname</th>
<th>Position in 2004</th>
<th>Company Name in 2004</th>
<th>Genre/ Creative Niche</th>
<th>Funding/ Income/ Management Structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clare</td>
<td>Bartholomew</td>
<td>Independent Practitioner</td>
<td>Primary Companies: The Business, Five Square Metres, Melbourne's Playback Theatre.</td>
<td>Physical/ Comedy</td>
<td>Independent artist who also collaborates on other projects. Also works as Clown Doctor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Baylis</td>
<td>Director of Theatre</td>
<td>Australia Council for the Arts</td>
<td></td>
<td>Federal government arts agency - salaried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynne</td>
<td>Bradley</td>
<td>Co-Artistic Director</td>
<td>Zen Zen Zo Physical Theatre</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Non-funded company with small staff reporting to Artistic Directors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torben</td>
<td>Brookman</td>
<td>Managing Director</td>
<td>Fresh Track Productions Pty Ltd</td>
<td>Text-based theatre</td>
<td>Non-funded production company staffed by small team of founding members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Cohen</td>
<td>Co-Artistic Director</td>
<td>Theatre Kantanka</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Non-Funded company with founders as central staff and performers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renato</td>
<td>Cuocolo</td>
<td>Artistic Director</td>
<td>IRAA Theatre</td>
<td>Contemporary/ Intimate</td>
<td>Non-funded company with founders as key staff and performers. Administrative support is outsourced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susie Dee</td>
<td>Artistic Director &amp; Independent Practitioner</td>
<td>Union Theatre, Melbourne University Student Union</td>
<td>Text-based/spectacle</td>
<td>Salaried Artistic Director within a university and independent artist who also collaborates on other projects</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peter Eckersall</td>
<td>Senior Lecturer, Theatre Studies</td>
<td>School of Creative Arts, University of Melbourne</td>
<td>Physical/Contemporary</td>
<td>University lecturer - salaried. Dramaturge with NYID</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keith Gallasch</td>
<td>Managing Editor</td>
<td>Real Time Magazine</td>
<td>Free contemporary Media/Arts Magazine</td>
<td>Salaried position. Federally funded arts magazine (currently no state funding). Also generates own advertising income</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bruce Gladwin</td>
<td>Artistic Director</td>
<td>Back to Back Theatre Company</td>
<td>Contemporary</td>
<td>Triennially funded company with small staff and board</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stefan Greder</td>
<td>Theatre Fund Manager</td>
<td>Arts Queensland</td>
<td>State government arts funding agency</td>
<td>Salaried</td>
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<tr>
<td>Simon Hill</td>
<td>Independent Practitioner</td>
<td>Independent Practitioner</td>
<td>Physical/Online</td>
<td>Independent artist who also collaborates on other projects</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laz Kastanis</td>
<td>Developer, Virtual Reality Project</td>
<td>University of Queensland</td>
<td>Virtual Theatre</td>
<td>University Lecturer - salaried</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chris Mead</td>
<td>Independent Director and Theatre Writer</td>
<td>Independent Practitioner</td>
<td>Text-based theatre/Theatre writing/Contemporary</td>
<td>Independent artists who also collaborates on other projects</td>
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<td>Name</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Company Type</td>
<td>Funding Model</td>
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<td>Sean</td>
<td>Mee</td>
<td>Artistic Director</td>
<td>La Boite Theatre</td>
<td>Triennially funded</td>
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<td>venue-based company</td>
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<td>board</td>
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<td>David</td>
<td>Meggarity</td>
<td>Independent Practitioner</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Children's/ Physical/</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Practitioner</td>
<td>Music</td>
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<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>Morris</td>
<td>Independent Practitioner</td>
<td>Primary Company:</td>
<td>Independent artist who</td>
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<td>Red Cabbage,</td>
<td>also collaborates on</td>
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<td>Melbourne-based.</td>
<td>other projects and part-</td>
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<td>time Lecturer at QUT’s</td>
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<td>Creative Industries</td>
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<td>Faculty.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rosemary</td>
<td>Myers</td>
<td>Artistic Director</td>
<td>Arena Theatre</td>
<td>Triennially funded</td>
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<td>Company</td>
<td>company with small staff</td>
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<td>and board</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bruce</td>
<td>Naylor</td>
<td>Independent Practitioner</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Independent artist who</td>
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<td>Practitioner</td>
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<td>other projects</td>
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<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Nobbs</td>
<td>Co-Director</td>
<td>Frank Theatre</td>
<td>Non-funded company with</td>
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<td>Company</td>
<td>founders as staff and any</td>
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<td>casual staff or</td>
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<td>performers reporting to</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Artistic Directors</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>O'Neill</td>
<td>Independent Practitioner</td>
<td>Primary Companies:</td>
<td>Independent artist who</td>
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<td>Frank Theatre and</td>
<td>also collaborates on</td>
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<td>Brides of Frank</td>
<td>other projects</td>
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<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Pledger</td>
<td>Artistic Director</td>
<td>NYID (not yet it's</td>
<td>Physical/ Hybrid</td>
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<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Funding Status</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roderick Poole</td>
<td>Artistic Director</td>
<td>Strange Fruit</td>
<td>Physical/Spectacle</td>
<td>Non-funded company with small staff and board</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoni Prior</td>
<td>Senior Lecturer, Theatre Studies</td>
<td>School of Communication &amp; Creative Arts, Deakin University</td>
<td>Physical/Cultural</td>
<td>University Lecturer - salaried</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Richards</td>
<td>Writer &amp; Researcher</td>
<td>ARC Research Project with CIRAC, QUT and Arts Queensland</td>
<td>Theatre in Education</td>
<td>Independent Researcher and Consultant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen Rodgers</td>
<td>Production Manager</td>
<td>Performing Lines</td>
<td>Contemporary Performance</td>
<td>Government Funded National Touring Agency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca Scollen</td>
<td>Lecturer and Researcher, Theatre Studies</td>
<td>Theatre Studies, CIRAC, QUT</td>
<td>Regional Theatre</td>
<td>University Lecturer - Salaried</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alicia Talbot</td>
<td>Artistic Director</td>
<td>Urban Theatre Projects</td>
<td>Community/Contemporary</td>
<td>Triennially funded company with small staff and board</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanne Tompkins</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>English, Media and Art History Department, University of Queensland</td>
<td>Text-based Theatre/ Virtual Theatre</td>
<td>University Lecturer - salaried</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyn Wallis</td>
<td>Artistic Director</td>
<td>B Sharp, Company Belvoir</td>
<td>Venue-based organisation for contemporary</td>
<td>Funded company with small staff and board</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Whitney</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Canberra Theatre Centre</td>
<td>Venue based, state company</td>
<td>Funded national arts venue with large staff that mainly imports performances</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Williams</td>
<td>Creative Producer</td>
<td>Version 1.0</td>
<td>Contemporary</td>
<td>Collective working as a part-time ensemble. Project and self-funded</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The 35 interviews and the data that these encompass reflect practitioners’ experiences in 2004. Although this thesis was not established to track career movement, the fluctuating nature of the Australian Independent theatre sector and its impact on employment stability and overall sustainability are relevant. Where possible, all interviewees have been traced over that five year period and database records have been updated. Table 3.2, current at time of printing, shows those interview participants who underwent employment change within, or left, the sector in the five years from 2004 to 2009. This table indicates that over 25% of participants underwent significant employment change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Name</th>
<th>Surname</th>
<th>Company Name in 2004</th>
<th>2009 Position</th>
<th>Career Movement Since 2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Baylis</td>
<td>Australia Council for the Arts</td>
<td>New Position</td>
<td>Left the Australia Council in 2009 and is currently Producer, Performing Lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torben</td>
<td>Brookman</td>
<td>Fresh Track Productions Pty Ltd</td>
<td>Same but additional external company</td>
<td>Major focus now a new company: Arts Asia Pacific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>New Position</td>
<td>Comments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stefan Greder</td>
<td>Arts Queensland</td>
<td>New Position</td>
<td>Since November 2008, has worked in the position of Senior Producer at the Brisbane Festival. In March 2006 left Arts QLD to become Acting Director of the Judith Wright Centre for Contemporary Arts. In 2009 left JWC for Brisbane Festival.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Mead</td>
<td>Independent Practitioner</td>
<td>New Position</td>
<td>Artistic Director of Playwriting Australia in 2008</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean Mee</td>
<td>La Boite Theatre</td>
<td>New Position – salaried with QUT</td>
<td>Resigned in late 2008. Lecturer in Drama, Creative Industries Faculty, Queensland University of Technology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise Morris</td>
<td>Primary Company: Red Cabbage, Melbourne-based.</td>
<td>Same but additional external salary position</td>
<td>Lecturer at School of Communication &amp; Creative Arts, Deakin University</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosemary Myers</td>
<td>Arena Theatre Company</td>
<td>New Position</td>
<td>Late 2007 Myers resigned as Director with Arena after 13 years to become Artistic Director of Windmill Performing Arts in Adelaide</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Pledger</td>
<td>NYID (not yet it's difficult)</td>
<td>Same but now position is salaried</td>
<td>Position and company now financially assisted via three years Australia Council funding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roderick Poole</td>
<td>Strange Fruit</td>
<td>Left Company</td>
<td>Resigned from Strange Fruit at the end of 2005 and now Manager of Arts Across Victoria, the touring program at Regional Arts Victoria</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen Rodgers</td>
<td>Performing Lines</td>
<td>Left Company</td>
<td>No follow-up available</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca Scollen</td>
<td>Queensland University of Technology</td>
<td>Left QUT but still with University sector</td>
<td>Manager of Artworx within the Faculty of Arts, University of Southern Queensland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyn Wallis</td>
<td>B Sharp, Company Belvoir</td>
<td>Left Company</td>
<td>Resigned from Company B after 9 years in 2008 for position as Producer with Casula Powerhouse. Now Director, Theatre Board, Australia Council</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Whitney</td>
<td>Canberra Theatre Centre</td>
<td>Left Company</td>
<td>Director, ArtsACT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Williams</td>
<td>Version 1.0</td>
<td>Same but now position is salaried.</td>
<td>Position and company now financially assisted via 3 years Australia Council funding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Jessica Wilson
Terrapin Theatre
Left Company
Left Terrapin Puppet Theatre in Tasmania. Moved to Melbourne. Melbourne-based independent theatre practitioner

Fiona Winning
Performance Space, Sydney
Left Company
Returned to Independent Practice

3.9.3 The Adjusted Research Question

Although covering the same areas, the primary question in that initial abstract and some of the preconceived theories that I held in relation to it, differ slightly from the resultant question and theory of this thesis. Although both inquiries focus on devised, independent theatre as well as sustainability outcomes for practitioners in that sector, my initial objective proposed using the data differently. Originally I was seeking data that would highlight ‘successful examples’ of sustainability within the independent theatre sector. But given the real concerns and recurring themes that emerged from the interview data, the issue of sustainability became more a study of energy flow within the sector than a definition of success. These subtle changes become clearer in hindsight through the records of personal memos and early drafts kept from throughout the research process. Such procedures are seen as necessary parts of grounded theory analysis as are Strauss and Corbin’s analytic procedures which they designed to ‘build rather than test theory’ and to ‘provide the grounding, build the density, and develop the sensitivity and integration needed to generate a rich, tightly woven, explanatory theory that closely approximates the reality it represents’. Although the interview material encapsulates some of my original proposal’s key issues, the themes of energy and its flow emerged as a stronger and more holistic approach to the issue of sustainability in the independent theatre sector. Interlacing data collection and analysis in grounded theory is also designed to increase insights and clarify the parameters of the emerging theory.

3.9.4 Use of the Research Literature

At the same time, the method supports the actions of initial data collection and preliminary analyses before attempting to incorporate previous research literature. This is supposed to guarantee that the analysis is based in the data and that pre-existing constructs do not influence the analysis and/or the
subsequent formation of the theory. If existing theoretical constructs are utilized, they must be justified in the data’. 44

The interaction of data collation and theory development needs to be strongly integrated – one informs the other and helps provide ‘conceptual density [which refers to the] richness of concept development and relationships’. 45

A literature review not only helps develop categories and concepts, it can also be used as secondary data and to help qualify theories. The literature should inform and be driven by the research and, in the case of constructivist grounded theory, by the interaction of the researcher with it. In the case of this thesis, the literature review, in conjunction with collection of primary data from Australian theatre practitioners and experts in the independent theatre sector, was used not only as crucial data but also to question and develop theories. Similarly, in Mapping the Process: an Exemplar of Process and Challenge in Grounded Theory Analysis, the authors outline how they used their original data to reconfirm their emerging theories:

The second way that we tested the themes was to apply them to all interview and observational data. Our questions then became (a) To what extent do we observe evidence of these themes in our data? and (b) What additional themes emerge from our observational data? …This process resulted in a lengthy but much more fine-grained set of codes that detailed various aspects of each theme. 46

This flexible and constructivist approach is comprised not of static steps but of a recursive journey of data gathering, processing, validation and redevelopment. This flexibility allowed constant questioning and recategorisation of the data as it emerged.

Because they [grounded theories] embrace the interaction of multiple actors, and because they emphasize temporality and process, they indeed have a striking fluidity. They call for exploration of each new situation to see if they fit, how they might fit, and how they might not fit. 47
During the process of data collection and analysis earlier themes such as success and new creative processes became less relevant to my core question. A new area of interest was emerging – the flow of energy within Australian independent theatre.

3.9.5 The Balance between Primary and Secondary Data

The primary data comprises personal and in-depth interviews with 35 performers, theatre directors, theatre managers, theatre producers, venue coordinators, drama and theatre educators and funding body representatives from across Australia. These interviews followed an unstructured approach whose open and empathic style suited the non-neutral constructivist paradigm. However secondary data was just as important – sometimes for what it omitted rather than what it presented. I based my research on extensive, ongoing literature review that covered:

- existing theatre and communications textbooks;
- festival and conference papers
- government and arts agency reports;
- funding body manuals;
- policy documents;
- annual reports and promotional material;
- journal articles;
- biographies;
- transcripts or notes by authors other than myself of theatre processes and developments;
- online information;
- newspaper and magazine articles; and
- recorded information (video, DVD, audio).

There were very few texts that attempted to provide accessible and viable solutions to the issues raised by those working in the sector. Although the 2002 Report to Ministers on an Examination of the Small to Medium Performing Arts Sector,\textsuperscript{48} its questions and findings were important to my early research, it was not the primary reason for, nor the central focus of my research. Critics maligned the report for its inability to provide positive options for long term support for the independent sector. Overall, there was very little secondary data that considered the possibility of the sector building on its inherent strengths to enhance sustainability. Existing documentation of the sector also
reflected conflicts in the terminology applied to the sector. The terms ‘small to medium’ and ‘creative industries’, for example, conflicted with some data’s definition of the sector in which they work and had a major impact on the writing not just of the thesis, but of its primary question.

3.9.6 Extended Literature Review: Flow or optimal experience

As the correlation between energy and sustainability emerged, new theories and frameworks and their link to the Australian independent theatre data became more central to my thesis and its ongoing literature review. Csikszentmihalyi’s flow theory\textsuperscript{49} as well as other creativity theories,\textsuperscript{50} globalisation and creative industries theories,\textsuperscript{51} systems theories,\textsuperscript{52} collaborative theories,\textsuperscript{53} organisational management and psychological theories,\textsuperscript{54} all added to new and wider perspectives on the issue of sustainability for Australian independent theatre companies. Integration and synthesis of the literature was important to the development and verification of my thesis and was incorporated throughout the research process as per Charmaz’s outline of constructivist grounded theory:

… (a) simultaneous collection and analysis of data, (b) a two-step data coding process, (c) comparative methods, (d) memo writing aimed at the construction of conceptual analysis, (e) sampling to refine the researcher’s emerging theoretical ideas, and (f) integration of the theoretical framework.\textsuperscript{55}

3.9.7 Coding or Analysis of Data

My research set out to develop a more detailed perspective of the issues and opportunities facing the Australian independent theatre sector and to provide more accessible methods for career sustainability for the broad range of practitioners working within this sector. At one stage of my research I had over 200 questions I felt were pertinent to potential interviewees from the field. Gradually however, the research method’s cycle of writing and analysis, reflection, and validation through other literature and discussions with colleagues and supervisors, allowed me to narrow the number of central questions to a more viable and clearly defined yet flexible set of thirty questions (see Appendix 3).
Grounded theory is often perceived as a method which separates theory and data but the method actually combines the two. Data collection, analysis and theory formulation are undeniably connected in a reciprocal sense, and the grounded theory approach incorporates explicit procedures to guide this. This is especially evident in that according to grounded theory, the processes of asking questions and making comparisons are specifically detailed to inform and guide analysis and to facilitate theorizing process. For example, it is specifically stated that the research questions must be open and general rather than formed as specific hypotheses, and that the emergent theory should account for a phenomenon that is relevant to participants.\footnote{56}

During the time I developed my interview process, I also researched and defined the interviewees who would provide my thesis’ primary data. My original proposal outlined an extremely broad range of performing arts specialists that included international festival operators and theatre companies as well as Australian practitioners. However as I moved from this proposal to the reality of data gathering, it became obvious that an international field was too large for the scope of a doctoral thesis. My increasing interaction with my field of research as well as discussion with peers and supervisors helped narrow the field to a sector of largely undocumented professional independents (occasional reviews, annual reports, and promotional copy were available for some of those interviewed but personal interview data from this sector was rare).

3.9.8 The Pragmatics of the Data Collection

There are limitations placed on all research projects and this particular thesis is no exception. Not all of the originally chosen interview candidates could participate in the research and I was financially limited in how far I could travel for the face-to-face interviews stipulated in my University of Wollongong ethical clearance agreement. I interviewed independent theatre practitioners and specialists from Tasmania, Victoria, New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory and Queensland but was not able to fund research trips to South Australia, the Northern Territory or Western Australia. Nevertheless, the final group of 35 interviewees (see Appendix 5) is a well-recognised and diverse group of people whose work or company ethos fits well within the
characteristics of independent theatre. Given the nature of the independent theatre profession, at least ¾ of interviewees have experience in two or more areas of the theatre or related arts industries. However interviewee categories include at least:

- Twelve founders and members of longstanding independent companies including La Boite, NYID (not yet it’s difficult), Erth, Kantanka, Zen Zen Zo, Frank, Back To Back, Strange Fruit and Terrapin;
- Five long-standing individual practitioners including Susie Dee, Bruce Naylor, and Lisa O’Neill;
- Four relative new-comers who are creating new companies as well as working independently including Clare Bartholomew, Louise Morris, and Torben Brookman;
- Three theatre/venue managers or directors including Lyn Wallis of Company B, David Whitney of Canberra Theatre Trust, and Fiona Winning of Performance Space.
- Three representatives from arts agencies including the Australia Council for the Arts, Arts Queensland and Touring Australia. These representatives have also worked with independent arts companies;
- One arts media representative - Keith Gallasch, Managing Editor of RealTime magazine (a federal and state government funded publication that also generates its own advertising income) who has also worked as an independent artist;
- Eight academics specialising in fields such as independent theatre, regional theatre, online performance technologies, international and touring theatre as well as general theatre production and processes including Peter Ecckersall, Yoni Prior, Rebecca Scollen, and Joanne Tompkins. These academics were included because of their specialist knowledge in Australian theatre but most were, and some still are, theatre practitioners with significant experience.

3.9.9 Interview Techniques

I interviewed 35 practitioners from Eastern Australia over an eighteen month period and during this time I watched for similar or different viewpoints in other interviews, traced any developing theories back through the supporting literature and arts networks, and worked at predicting the applicability of my developing theories across a range of different performance practices and management structures. Flexibility was crucial, not only to the conceptualisation process but also to the interview process itself. Questions were broadly grouped into categories of practice and process, sector value, funding and other income, work situations, globalisation, and solutions. In that way the interview process was semi-structured. However, the questions were not asked in any particular
order and certain questions were more relevant to some interviewees rather than others. If new topics emerged during the interview, these were explored. Sometimes, as is characteristic of the organic and highly interactive nature of theatre, other colleagues or artists entered the interview space and offered their own opinions or engaged in discussion with the interviewee. Introductions were usually comfortable and in a place of the interviewee’s choosing. The first few questions and an open, empathetic approach would usually spur the interviewee to talk about their own work and experiences resulting in a more unstructured style of interview and data collection. I was, therefore, pleased to have this open interviewing technique confirmed as an important part of grounded theory research by Dr Vivienne Martin of the Grounded Theory Institute.

Not deviating from an interview schedule violates the spirit of grounded theory and many qualitative methods. By sticking to the script you block some concerns from emerging during the course of the interview, which is more problematic than advance reading of the general literature in the area, to my mind at least.  

The one-on-one interviews were all recorded digitally via an ARWizard program onto a laptop and stored. Re-listening to these interviews and lengthy, detailed transcription processes provided this thesis with a complex interpretation of the data’s pathways and patterns. Endnote VI, and subsequently Endnote XI, were used to summarise the data and collect keywords, abstracts and research notes and provided useful tools for streamlining and investigating themes and emerging ideas. As a result the original interview material underpinned further online or library searches as well as research into fields where similar issues and patterns had been discussed.

3.9.10 Emerging Patterns in the Data

Lengthy interviews with practitioners and experts in the field explored the ways that independent practitioners and companies operate, collaborate, devise and produce work, network, motivate themselves, juggle their commitments, view their work and others work, manage their finances and creative values, and how they see their future. In-depth discussion of these processes and issues generated underlying patterns and themes that linked sustainability with practitioners’ creative energies and career or company
energies. For instance, in response to a question about his company’s first funding, Scott Wright, Artistic Director of Erth Visual and Physical Inc. gave a detailed response that exposed an example of the correlation in the interview data between career drive and creative passion. The core members of Erth, he said, were originally ‘motivated by issues (environmental and social)’ rather than funding, and this gave them ‘drive, additional goals and ambition’. However Wright reflected, this drive alone was ‘not necessarily sustainable’ and relying only on this passion for long-term sustainability instead of other resources could ‘be quite taxing on your own psyche or your soul because you’re not lightening up’.\textsuperscript{58} The interweaving themes of passion and sustainability emanated directly from the complex interview discussions. These themes, as detailed later in Chapter 6, led the research into more positive sustainability theories.

Some of the key patterns that emerged from my interaction with the data were:

a) Parallel yet often conflicting views between the independent theatre sector and the current policy and funding sectors in relation to best management practice, particularly in relation to long term sustainability.

b) Agreement in both the primary and secondary data that the independent theatre sector was time, funding and resource poor; motivated but with little outside support or support networks; was creative and innovative; was reactive to problems rather than proactive; suffered periods of high project-based energy followed by burn-out; and had no clear long term financial or career pathways.

c) When not discussing the pragmatic positive or negative traits of working in the sector, themes returned time and again to more holistic and dynamic principles of human experience including energy, interaction, creation and a sense of passion and where these occur.

These patterns indicated that although the sector encompasses companies and individual practitioners with very different creative and management styles, there were also many overarching similarities. These similarities are explored in Chapter 4. What became clear from the data was that Australian independent theatre practitioners were driven by a type of energy that they valued highly and when this energy was lacking, so was the belief in their long term careers as artists. They and the companies they work with expended enormous energy creating new works, promoting them, and trying to make a living from them. Energy and motivation was restored back to them through international and local respect for their work, festivals and networks that allowed
increased opportunities with some occasional and much sought after funding or earned income. However the data also indicated that for most independent theatre companies and practitioners, the energy expended to make a living out of creating theatre far outweighed the energy they needed and received in order to sustain themselves. How to find the energy necessary to continue to create whilst sustaining a career or a company was a recurring theme that emerged from the interview data.

What also became clear from the data was that independents were perfectly willing to overcome a number of hurdles as long as they felt there was the potential to feel energised in the not too distant future. As this thesis elaborates in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, theatre revolves around energy: physical and mental, individual and collaborative, locally and sector-wide. The concept of energy and its flow emerged as a major hurdle for career and company sustainability in the sector. These findings meant that the research was no longer looking simply at the data as a general way of discovering issues and trends but as a way of tracing energy flows in and out, and through the work span of an independent theatre practitioner or company.

3.10 Broader Constructs

The empirical data had, through my own investigation of it, generated the key elements of the research question. Grounded theory methodology guided the shift from an examination of the material and human resources involved in the consideration of any practitioner’s career sustainability to:

- placing that practitioner or company in the wider context of the Australian independent theatre field;
- viewing the energy inputs and outputs involved in such environment; and
- examining the impacts that this energy flow, or lack thereof, has on an individual’s ability to energise and sustain their careers.

For a sector that often solves its own problems by working laterally and creatively, it was perhaps inevitable that this thesis had to follow a similar path. For although much of the literature examined the issues affecting the sector, and in a few cases, attempted to provide short-term solutions to particular issues, none of it looked beyond the short
term particularities or economic constraints to a more accessible and potentially sustainable solution.

As *RealTime* Editor, Keith Gallasch, explains:

We [independent performing artists] don't have a lot in the way of continuity. We need a theory or a different kind of metaphor which is more explanatory. We need something that's a bit bigger, that can incorporate business into the arts. What hurts the small to medium sector is lack in Australia of a big picture.  

3.11 An Alternative Model for Sustainability

There are many models or metaphors that could be applied to the independent performing arts in Australia but very few that could adequately respond to the diverse needs of each artist or company and the overarching themes of energy flow, energy loss and sustainability that emerged from the data. Grounded theory’s inductive, sensitised approach allows these themes to extend the research into the realms of career management, flow theory, creativity theory and business. Subsequently, this thesis’ conceptual development is reflective of the complex issues of sustainability particular to the Australian independent theatre. The conditions for flow as employed in Part B of this thesis provide a holistic and positive experiential framework rather than a purely economic one from which to address the issues and strengths of the sector. These conditions are well suited to the resource-poor and creatively-rich independent theatre sector and aim to provide practitioners with a flexible, pragmatic and accessible framework from which to develop optimal energy flow and improved sustainability.

3.12 Correlations in the Data: Independent Theatre, Energy and Flow Theory

Although initially unsure about flow theory’s applicability as a tool to improve conditions for sustainability in Australian independent theatre, further research confirmed the theory’s acceptance and regular application in career and organisational improvement across a range of professions including the corporate, government and psychology sectors. However the strongest affirmation for its inclusion in this thesis came from constant re-evaluation against the data which correlated the conditions
through which flow theory operates according to Csikszentmihalyi, and the sense of invigoration and energy that enables practitioners to continue with their work and careers. Through extensive reading and comparison of key topics and categories, I became aware of strong similarities between the conditions for and descriptions of flow theory, and the conditions and descriptions that emerged in relation to the independent theatre industry in Australia. Both were described as holistic, organic, dynamic and evolving. Both focussed on energy pathways that related not only to the individual but to their activities and environment. Flow theory emerged from the literature review to serve two purposes. It offered both an accessible framework for my research question that was grounded in the methodology and it provided a ‘fresh lens’ through which to examine and interpret the data.

In order to reflect on and substantiate these new directions of my research, I sought out and conferred with Australian experts in the field and those who have applied flow theory or Csikszentmihalyi’s findings in their own research and professional fields. These experts included:

- Peter O’Keefe: O’Keefe is currently Lecturer in Innovation, Leadership and International Human Resource Management at the ANU. He was formerly Director of People Development at CSIRO where he led an international research project on how innovation can be optimised through human resource practices. His research explored individual, group and organisational attributes that impact on creativity and innovation in over 50 of the worlds leading innovative organisations over a period of 8 years. O’Keefe clarified central components of flow theory and their relationship with other aspects of positive psychology, creativity and organisational development.

- Jennifer O’Donnell: O’Donnell is a psychologist and organisational consultant. She uses the concepts and practice of Csikszentmihalyi’s flow theory in both fields.

- Margaret Botticchio: Botticchio is an artist and teacher of art. She completed her Doctor of Education with the University of Wollongong in 2006 and is interested in how creativity works across both artistic and educational disciplines. The purpose of Botticchio’s doctoral research was to make a contribution to a viable theory of creativity that was more inclusive of women from different fields and to provide a more comprehensive understanding of creative phenomena.
Discussions with these experts, in association with further research, helped clarify the ways in which flow theory could be applied to career as well as mental and physical sustainability particularly in an industry that is income poor but creatively rich. The correlations between such applications and this research enriched my understanding of flow theory and resulted in the development of a non-economic set of conditions for improving sustainability in the independent theatre industry.

3.13 Conclusion
The constructivist grounded methodology of this thesis develops a conceptual theory for career and company sustainability in Australian independent theatre based on the interaction between researcher and data as well as the interaction between the fields of theatre and psychology. Although this interactive grounded approach is not new, the interaction between flow theory and the question of sustainability in independent theatre is. Flow theory and the creative arts have been linked through Csikszentmihalyi’s work and through other researchers such as Joss, Bickerstaff, Botticchio and Sawyer. These researchers used Flow theory to examine arts policy, collaborative performance development, and artist creativity. Both grounded theory and flow theory have been jointly used before in Pace’s A Grounded Theory of the Flow Experiences of Web Users, which uses GT methodology to explore flow theory in web users. This thesis however uses grounded theory to investigate sustainability in independent theatre, and through the data developed correlations and recommendations between this sustainability and the conditions for flow theory. The research’s interrelated approach may only ‘claim to have interpreted a reality’ yet this interpretation is deeply embedded in the emergent data and grounded theory processes and as a result, reflects the complex, creative, and lateral thinking characteristic of Australian independent theatre. This approach enriches the research and its findings but also reinforces the strengths of both independent theatre and qualitative research.
Notes


3 Denzin and Lincoln, eds., *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* 191.


6 Denzin and Lincoln, eds., *Handbook of Qualitative Research* 278.


9 Strauss and Corbin in Denzin and Lincoln, eds., *Handbook of Qualitative Research* 24.

10 Charmaz in Denzin and Lincoln, eds., *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* 511.


12 Glaser and Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research.*


14 Denzin and Lincoln, eds., *Handbook of Qualitative Research* 277.

98
15 Strauss and Corbin, Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques 58.
16 Denzin and Lincoln, eds., Handbook of Qualitative Research 522.
17 Denzin and Lincoln, eds., The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research 509.
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20 Denzin and Lincoln, eds., The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research 511.
25 Reed and Runquist: 120.
26 Sousa and Hendriks: 334.
30 Resnick, Warmoth and Serlin: 83.
31 Resnick, Warmoth and Serlin: 85.
37 Denzin and Lincoln, eds., Handbook of Qualitative Research 279.
40 Beth, Sturges and Klingner; Adele Clarke, Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory After the Postmodern Turn (SAGE, 2005); Denzin and Lincoln, eds., The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research: Fendt and Sachs; Glaser, "Conceptualization: On Theory and Theorizing Using Grounded Theory."; Reed and Runquist; Sousa and Hendriks; Strauss and Corbin, eds., Grounded Theory in Practice.
42 Archer, 2.
43 Strauss and Corbin, Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques 57.
45 Denzin and Lincoln, eds., Handbook of Qualitative Research 274.
47 Denzin and Lincoln, eds., Handbook of Qualitative Research 279.
49 Csikszentmihalyi, Creativity; Csikszentmihalyi, Flow; Csikszentmihalyi, Good Business: Leadership. Flow, and the Making of Meaning.


Denzin and Lincoln, eds., *Handbook of Qualitative Research* 510.


Grounded Theory Institute.

Scott Wright. Personal interview. 5 March 2004.

Keith Gallasch. Personal interview. 29 April 2004.


Bickerstaff; Sawyer, Group Creativity: Music, Theater, Collaboration.

Botticchio.

Pace.

Charmaz in Denzin and Lincoln, eds., The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research 523.
CHAPTER 4

4 CHARACTERISTICS AND PATHWAYS OF AUSTRALIAN INDEPENDENT THEATRE

4.1 Introducing the Data

The purpose of Chapter 4 is to detail:

- the intrinsic and extrinsic factors operating on independent practitioners;
- the unifying characteristics of Australian independent theatre and their connection to topics of energy and sustainability as revealed through the data.

In accordance with the accepted nature of constructivist grounded theory, this chapter reflects the ongoing collection, interpretation and conceptualisation of the primary (interviews) and secondary (literature) data reviewed and analysed throughout the research process.

4.2 Data Analysis and Conceptual Development: a Cycle of Ongoing Research and Review

The primary data comprises 35 interviews providing approximately 630 pages of transcript. I undertook two full reviews of each transcript before entering the data into an Endnote XI database in both a full transcript and a summary format. The use of an Endnote program allowed me to repeatedly review and compare the information and to categorise the data according to keywords and concepts that emerged. This process of constant comparison, as referred to in Chapter 3, is a useful tool for determining patterns within the data.\(^1\) If for example, an interviewee spoke about the importance of collaboration in their work, I could enter search terms such as ‘collaboration’, ‘collaborate’ or ‘collaborative’ into Endnote and find all transcripts that included that terminology. Similar words to search under might have included ‘group’, ‘team’, ‘together’, or ‘partnership’. If for example, an interview mentioned policy or venues, physical theatre, festivals or cultural industries; I could search under those keywords or related phrases and see what the interviewee had to say in relation to those topics. I
could also group numbers of interviewees in accordance with particular keywords or themes that they raised.

Once certain keywords were defined and reduced to categories and subcategories, I could analyse each transcript or Endnote summary to verify the context in which the terminology was raised and whether it was relevant to the research’s focus on sustainability in Australian independent theatre. This process simultaneously provided me with an overview of the shared characteristics of the sector and enabled me to discern a common theme of energy that emanated from much of the interview material. Energy, as previously defined in Chapter 1, refers to the capacity a person, situation or object has to work or stimulate work. The processes for identifying characteristics of the sector and the emerging theme of energy from the data were part of the same constructivist grounded methodology that ‘cautiously unifies disparate pattern processes across diverse contexts and experiences of the phenomenon’. ²

4.3 Tracking Sector Characteristics and Energy

I tracked through the interview data and back again, in both the original transcript and Endnote formats, constantly sifting the material for any references to shared attitudes, processes, positive and negative features of the sector. These references were eventually narrowed down to a group of characteristics that were shared by interviewees and confirmed by the literature. It is important to clarify that these characteristics, which form the basis of this chapter, do not represent personality traits of theatre practitioners. These characteristics represent particular traits that emerged from the data and reflect the nature of the independent theatre sector. These characteristics reflect the sector’s diversity, the pressures and inherent opportunities of operating in this unique cultural environment, as well as indicating significant trends in career cycles and sustainability.

In addition to these sector characteristics, I also sifted the data for references to themes relating to energy so that I might confirm or deny the commonality of the concerns in regard to each practitioner’s energy use in sustaining their theatre career or company. With each step in this data review, the emergent concepts became clearer and more detailed so that at a certain point in the cycle (see Figure 3.1, Chapter 3) I was able to
determine fundamental and shared characteristics of the sector. Ongoing research and data analysis also determined how energy is used in independent theatre practice and the ties between energy usage and sustainability.

The first half of this chapter explores the existing diversity and division within the independent theatre ecology, while the second half establishes the unifying characteristics of Australian independent theatre. Both halves are relevant to this thesis’ argument for an accessible and non-economic understanding of sustainability.

4.4 The Concept of Energy as Dynamic and Holistic

The concept of energy as dynamic and holistic was referred to in the data through a multitude of metaphors and anecdotes, and covered situations ranging from creative processes, collaborations, and use and sustainability of venues, through to managerial or financial discussions. Some examples included the identification of:

- Driving energy: ‘huge passion and belief’\(^3\) as the driving force for career and company longevity;
- Balancing Energy: ‘simmering’\(^4\) energy required to prepare and maintain an ongoing set of creative projects with the potential to provide a company’s or an artist’s income;
- Loss of Energy: relationships between fatigue, family commitments, age, touring, burnout, and the break up of companies;\(^5\)
- Energy Saving: saving energy through the sharing of conceptual, infrastructural and human resources;\(^6\) or
- Invigorating and Sustaining Energy: revitalising and inspirational energy inherent in the ‘loops’ and ‘living forms’\(^7\) of a more unified and process-driven sector.

From such examples, I developed a list of metaphors and synonyms for energy as they emerged from the data. References to this energy-based vocabulary were categorised and mapped to reveal the movement of energy and its impact on sustainability across the diverse practice of Australian independent theatre (see Figure 4.1, Energy Pathways in Australian Independent Theatre: Input and Output). References to energy, as defined in this thesis, were traced throughout the sector and identified as central to the sector’s driving force. When such energy was blocked or constrained, practitioners had a
tendency to take extended leave from their theatre work or consider new career paths altogether.

Each of the factors listed on the left hand side of Figure 4.1 were discussed at least once by interviewees. Recurring factors that interviewees identified as providing the inspiration or energy to keep functioning included: discussion and collaboration with other artists or mentors; having time to think and nut out ideas; meeting challenges (artistic and business) in creative, lateral ways; audience or other feedback; flexible work environments and structures. These factors both fed and improved energy and the practitioner’s ability to sustain their practice. Likewise, on the right-hand side of Figure 4.1, are listed common factors that deplete or create obstacles in the energy, careers, and companies of independent theatre practitioners. These included insufficient:

- access to suitable working spaces;
- capacity (time, resources, skills, staff) to respond to extrinsic and intrinsic demands;
- feedback and sector cohesion needed to provide long-term inspiration, learning and support.

4.5 Diversity not Divisiveness for Improved Sustainability

The Australian independent arts and theatre sectors have largely been described in previous literature as too varied and ‘diverse’ to develop a workable understanding of shared and potentially unifying characteristics.8

Strong commitment and independence are major identifiers of the independent sector and each practitioner’s particular values and passion emerged from the both the literature review and the interview data as critical components of career drive.9

Ironically, this independence and individuality has made it difficult for external organisations and funding bodies to define the sector. It also affects independents’ ability to develop cohesive and supportive action within their own sector.
Limited amounts of long-term, infrastructural funding are heavily competed for, not easy to obtain, and not a likely solution for the majority of Australian independent theatre practitioners. The funding structure and/or source of income of each theatre company and individual practitioner interviewed for this research are listed in Table 4.1
Independent Theatre Funding Structures. This information was collected through both interview material and secondary literature.

Table 4.1 Independent Theatre Funding Structures

*Companies in the ‘non-funded’ category may or may not receive project or other one-off funding. N.B. The New Work Production grant category now requires applicants to have a presenting partner involved in their projects.

*In light of the Make It New? consultations, there were Australia Council theatre category changes in 2008 including:

General Program Grants: One-year General Program grants will be replaced by the new Emerging Key Organisations grants (see below).

Presenter Program Grants: Presenter Program grants will be offered to assist the presentation of programs of new high quality contemporary theatre work. Presenter Program grants are not for organisations that primarily exist to create their own work and which are led by the key artists involved in the work presented.

EKO (Emerging Key Organisations): Replace Annual Program Grants. The purpose of these grants is to create a clear pathway for organisations aspiring to receive key organisations triennial funding. They will be for organisations creating high-quality contemporary theatre work themselves or creating the opportunities for others to do so. These grants are for 12 months only.

KO (Key Organisations): Key organisation funding has replaced what were formally known as triennial funding. As of 2008 there are three strands within the key organisations triennial category, with an extra criterion for each strand: Artistic Hubs, Artistic Explorers, National Service Organisations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Name</th>
<th>Surname</th>
<th>Company Name in 2004</th>
<th>Funding/Income/Management Structure</th>
<th>Funding/Organisational Change Post 2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clare</td>
<td>Bartholomew</td>
<td>Primary Companies: The Business, Five Square Metres, Melbourne’s Playback Theatre</td>
<td>Independent artist who also collaborates on other projects. Also works as Clown Doctor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Baylis</td>
<td>Australia Council for the Arts</td>
<td>Federal government arts agency – salaried</td>
<td>Director of Theatre is now Lyn Wallis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynne</td>
<td>Bradley</td>
<td>Zen Zen Zo Physical Theatre</td>
<td>Non-funded company with small staff reporting to Artistic Directors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torben</td>
<td>Brookman</td>
<td>Fresh Track Productions Pty Ltd</td>
<td>Non-funded production company staffed by small team of founding members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Company/Institution</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Cohen</td>
<td>Theatre Director</td>
<td>Kantanka</td>
<td>Non-Funded company with founders as central staff and performers. Receives occasional project funding (no infrastructure)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renato Cuocolo</td>
<td>Theatre Director</td>
<td>IRAA Theatre</td>
<td>Non-funded company with founders as key staff and performers. Administrative support is outsourced. Receives occasional project funding (no infrastructure)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susie Dee</td>
<td>Salaried Artistic Director</td>
<td>Union Theatre, Melbourne University Student Union</td>
<td>Salaried Artistic Director within a university and independent artist who also collaborates on other projects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Eckersall</td>
<td>University Lecturer</td>
<td>School of Creative Arts, University of Melbourne</td>
<td>University lecturer - salaried. Dramaturge with NYID</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keith Gallasch</td>
<td>Salaried Editor</td>
<td>Real Time Magazine</td>
<td>Salaried position. Federally funded arts magazine (currently no state funding). Also generates own advertising income.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruce Gladwin</td>
<td>Theatre Director</td>
<td>Back to Back Theatre Company</td>
<td>Triennially funded company with small staff and board</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stefan Greder</td>
<td>Salaried</td>
<td>Arts Queensland</td>
<td>Salaried</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RealTime Staffing: 2 x Co-managing editors: full-time, assoc. editor [inc sales, web management] : 7/10 time, admin assistant: 2/10, online producer: 1/3 time
| Simon Hill | Independent Practitioner | Independent artist who also collaborates on other projects |
| Laz Kastanis | University of Queensland | University Lecturer - salaried |
| Chris Mead | Independent Practitioner | Independent artists who also collaborates on other projects |
| Sean Mee | La Boite Theatre | Triennially funded venue-based company with mid-size staff and board |
| David Meggarity | Independent Practitioner | Independent artist who also collaborates on other projects and part-time Lecturer in Drama at QUT |
| Louise Morris | Primary Company: Red Cabbage, Melbourne-based | Independent artist who also collaborates on other projects |
| Rosemary Myers | Arena Theatre Company | Triennially funded company with small staff and board |

Salaried Director with Playwriting Australia - Funded advocacy agency for Australian playwrights with small staff who reports to board. Australia Council multi-year funding granted in 2009.

La Boite's A.D. now David Berthold. OzCo multi-year funding cut ($156,000) in 2008. The cut represents only 7% of total income but 30% of funding, with the rest coming from Arts Queensland. It cut one play, *The Peach Season*, from its 2009 season.

Arena's funding category has changed (now multi-year funding 2009-2011) but structure inherently the same. Under KO Funding.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Company/Project Description</th>
<th>Benefits and Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bruce Naylor</td>
<td>Independent Practitioner</td>
<td>Independent artist who also collaborates on other projects</td>
<td>(which replaced Triennial Funding). Has Multi Year Funding which can be reapplied for in 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Nobbs</td>
<td>Frank Theatre Company</td>
<td>Non-funded company with founders as staff and any casual staff or performers reporting to Artistic Directors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa O'Neill</td>
<td>Primary Companies: Frank Theatre and Brides of Frank</td>
<td>Independent artist who also collaborates on other projects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Pledger</td>
<td>NYID (not yet it's difficult)</td>
<td>Non-funded company with small staff reporting to Artistic Director</td>
<td>2006-07 OzCo Program Grant: receive 12 mths funding and encouraged to progress to Emerging KO funding, which then opens the door for potential multiyear KO funding. Granted multiyear funding KO in 'artistic explorer' category 2009 – 11, $600,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roderick Poole</td>
<td>Strange Fruit</td>
<td>Non-funded company with small staff and board. Has received project funding</td>
<td>Recipient of 2006-07 OzCo Program Grant. Recipients receive 12 months funding and encouraged to progress to Emerging KO funding which then opens the door for potential multiyear KO funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>Funding/Role</td>
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<tr>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoni Prior</td>
<td>University Lecturer - salaried</td>
<td>School of Communication &amp; Creative Arts, Deakin University</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Richards</td>
<td>Independent Researcher and Consultant</td>
<td>ARC Research Project with CIRAC, QUT and Arts Queensland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen Rodgers</td>
<td>Government Funded National Touring Agency</td>
<td>Performing Lines</td>
<td>Australia Council multi-year funding received 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca Scollen</td>
<td>University Lecturer – Salaried</td>
<td>Theatre Studies, CIRAC, QUT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alicia Talbot</td>
<td>Triennially funded company with small staff and board</td>
<td>Urban Theatre Projects</td>
<td>Fundraising category has changed (now Multi-year funding 2009-2001) but structure inherently the same. Under KO Funding (which replaced Triennial Funding). Has Multi Year Funding which can be reapplied for in 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanne Tompkins</td>
<td>University Lecturer - salaried</td>
<td>English, Media and Art History Department, University of Queensland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyn Wallis</td>
<td>Funded company with small staff and board</td>
<td>B Sharp, Company Belvoir</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Whitney</td>
<td>Funded national arts venue with large staff that mainly imports performances</td>
<td>Canberra Theatre Centre</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Williams</td>
<td>Collective working as a part-time ensemble. Project and self-funded</td>
<td>Version 1.0</td>
<td>Key organisation - Artistic Hub 2009 – 2011, $450,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>Funding Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Wilson</td>
<td>Terrapin Theatre</td>
<td>Funded company with small staff and board. Terrapin’s funding category has changed but structure inherently the same. Under KO Funding (which replaced Triennial Funding). Has Multi Year Funding which can be reapplied for in 2011.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>Winning</td>
<td>Performance Space, Sydney</td>
<td>Funded Sydney-based contemporary arts producing, presenting, and research development venue with small staff and board. Performance Space received Program Presenters grant of $150,000/annum for the presentation of a selected group of works across multiple performance languages within the Performance Space program for 2009-2011.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott</td>
<td>Wright</td>
<td>Erth Visual and Physical Inc.</td>
<td>Non-funded company with core members as staff and performers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This thesis’ interview group has four main categories of income source:

- Long-term government funding which is particularly applicable to theatre companies and organisations that have their own venues and that can act in partnership or as a project hub for other independents. Companies with Australia Council long-term funding were previously referred to as triennially funded organisations (TFO’s) but are now known as key organisations or KO’s;  
- Companies and/or practitioners who operate on a ‘full-time’ basis and may receive project funding from government agencies, but not infrastructural or triennial funding. These companies earn their primary income through other means such as production, educational streams, corporate work, or touring;  
- Companies and/or practitioners who operate on a less than ‘full-time’ basis because they must earn their income through sources external to their primary theatre practice. These incomes may be from the arts industry, or may be completely separate;  
- Theatre specialists who no longer work in creative practice on a ‘full-time’ basis but who receive salaries through working for organisations in related arts fields such as research, education, funding.
Table 4.1 indicates that over 30 percent of the interviewees or their companies underwent a change in funding or management structure in the period 2004 to 2008. On closer inspection however, these changes mainly relate to a variation in the name of the Australia Council funding category the company receives, rather than a change in the style of funding or management structure. There are several exceptions to this including: not yet it’s difficult (NYID), Strange Fruit, Version 1.0, and La Boite. Both NYID and Strange Fruit received program grants in 2006-2007 (the predecessor to Emerging Key Organisation funding) which moves them into a position from which they are eligible to apply for triennial or key organisation funding in the near future. Version 1.0 was granted key organisation funding while La Boite, a long-term TFO, lost its triennial funding. Discussion of these changes occurs later in this chapter. Other changes refer to individuals getting salaried positions with companies that have different income and management styles such as Chris Mead and his new position at Playwriting Australia (see Table 3.2 for detail on changes for other interviewees). The majority of interviewees however are still operating under similar income and management structures as at 2004. For a full overview of interviewee information contained in Tables 3.1, 3.2 and 4.1 see Appendix 5. The entire transcription of all interviews was too large to include in this thesis but can be made available by the author of this thesis for interested researchers.

This chapter argues that differences in income, size, audience, and genre are often cited as causing division and a lack of unity within the sector. At a 2002 RealTime-Performance Space forum in Sydney, Performing Lines Producer, Harley Stumm pointed out that:

There are flagship theatre companies, ballet, opera. They all run on basically the same model. They can actually all get together and do a strategic plan. There are 280 [official small to medium performing arts organisations as at 2002]…. Okay, the work is probably most similar and that’s diverse enough but if you look at the structures - one company is touring internationally and doesn’t have triennial funding and this one runs a venue and that one doesn’t…. There are so many differences’.

115
These differences were reflected in the data through the description of each company’s or practitioner’s:

- scale of operation;
- creative and management styles;
- means of income; as well as
- respective niche markets.

Such differences, the data shows, can lead to divisiveness in the resource-poor, creative, and self-reliant independent theatre sector. Often, as Julian Meyrick writes in his *Platform Paper*,¹² ‘[d]ebate about theatre in Australia today means either arguments over resources and/or spats about personalities’ rather than constructive discussion. Despite a desire to improve career potential and the artistic integrity of independent theatre, the diversity of perceived needs and continual frustration with hierarchical organisations often leaves practitioners feeling more alone and unheard than ever. Certainly the sector is diverse but diversity need not necessarily lead to divisiveness.

### 4.6 The Effect of Distance on Australian Theatre

Australia’s lack of population and limited networks compared to its vast geography and isolation from Europe and the USA has severely limited the touring and audience potential that non-funded performing companies in Europe rely on. Similarly, the state-funded or subscription-based theatre models that exist in Europe have much higher audience potential and cultural value. ‘The limits of time, money and patience; the pressure to perform; the odiousness of competitive creativity that the system must perforce exploit; the variability of materials, human and textual - all make the world of repertory compromised, tough, occasionally desperate,’ writes Julian Meyrick in his history of Australian theatre.¹³ As a result Australia has developed styles of performance making that is reactive and flexible regardless of its genre.

Australian independent theatre has its roots in both the ‘slap it up’,¹⁴ touring style of early vaudeville and circus as well as the more formal, state subsidised, subscription-based style of the English speaking ‘repertory system’.¹⁵ Both these styles have had a large impact on the ways independent theatre has developed. Both styles, unlike their
European counterparts, are incompatible with the limited population, large distances and cultural indifference to live theatre processes. ‘[I]n Australia’ says independent practitioner Bruce Naylor ‘you don't have a framework to support you’.

There is no ‘Growtowski’ niche. There's no regional company you can go to ... where you can take over a company in a small … town and fill it with your own people and just work for 3-4 years and develop your stuff. [In Australia] they had to produce a repertoire.\textsuperscript{16}

Australian independent theatre’s history of limited support is, like Canada’s, based on our ‘settler status’\textsuperscript{17} and is reinforced by the larger distances and smaller populations than those of Europe. Canada’s circumstances differ from Australia’s however, because the majority of Canada's population lives within approximately 200 miles of the American border which gives its artists valuable access to larger populations in Canada and the USA that Australia does not have.\textsuperscript{18} In an interview with Associate Professor Joanne Tompkins from the University of Queensland’s School of English, Media Studies and Art History, she outlined the way in which culture can be read spatially and the way culture reflects our past and present attitudes and environment. Tompkins believes that limited arts agency funding can be applied more effectively in geographically smaller countries in the Asia-Pacific region such as New Zealand and Singapore but says that in Australia the isolation from markets like Asia, Europe and the US combined with vast ‘distance is just working against it’.\textsuperscript{19}

As a way of overcoming issues of distance and cost on theatrical touring, Tompkins developed a \textit{Virtual Theatre Project} in partnership with Laz Kastanis of the Advanced Computational Modelling Centre, University of Queensland. This project aimed to create online and interactive replicas of theatre spaces so that touring productions could see and interact with spaces in a virtual environment. This would allow theatre practitioners to explore a range of spaces in which they can design and produce shows prior to physically getting access to them. It would allow practitioners to move virtual objects, staging and people around the space and to manage any impacts the new space might have on the work they are touring. This \textit{Virtual Theatre Project} might be of benefit for theatre practitioners who frequently only have a short amount of pre-
performance time to establish their production in a new space. However, the political and cultural conditioning in Australia set several unexpected challenges for the project team. Some of the hurdles the project encountered in its development were: distrust amongst larger-scale Australian performance venues who felt their spaces might be devalued if shared with others; developing an online environment that was useful and detailed yet accessible to theatre practitioners who were not technologically savvy; and the cost of participation was prohibitive for smaller companies.  

Ian McGregor, Administrator of the online site Performing Arts News (PAN), agrees that Australian ‘theatre professionals also like to keep their cards pretty close to their chest’ and that very few share their networks on the PAN website he developed to encourage online networks. The history of divisiveness in the Australian theatre scene is reflected in the limited response towards McGregor’s and other online or networking projects. The Australian Theatre Forum, established early in 2009, offers another opportunity for Australian theatre practitioners to share and ‘offer useful practical tips on survival in different circumstances’ online. In the three months since its inception there have been 16 forum postings. However less than half of those postings have received responses and less than half of those again have had more than one response. No news or announcements have been posted at the time of writing this thesis but hopefully this might change as more people become aware of the site. Joanne Tompkins explains that her Virtual Theatre Project’s attempt to reduce the impact of distance and cost on theatre production and touring has not been readily accepted. She believes this is, in part, due to the ‘huge divide between people working in the academy and people working in the theatre’ because theatre designers seem to think ‘we [researchers and academics] are trying to replace design. ... In fact, everything I'm trying to promote with the project is to show that it can be an adjunct to the work. So it's to help, not to replace’. Tompkins statement highlights many theatre practitioners’ fears that new technologies might replace live theatre; that sharing ideas, skills, and resources in a resource-poor and funding-competitive industry will devalue their own career or company.
4.7 Exclusion: Perceived barriers to sharing in the independent sector

The largely unsupportive, uncertain environment in Australia has created a cynical, ‘savvy’ independent theatre that has had to quickly develop creative, unique theatre and careers ‘on the smell of an oily rag’ and is reluctant or unable to share. Its survival so far has been cyclical and based on intermittent funding, individual passion and drive. It is an industry whose constant struggle to survive ‘use[s] people up like firewood’ and features a ‘constant circulation of talent … as people take 'time out' to recover after their project just breaks even’.27

Division in the sector can occur over issues such as funding, structure or performance style and quality. Scott Wright of Erth provided one such example of unnecessary division:

I don’t think the Australia Council [funding] should be what everybody else wants. This is not to say that it’s a bad thing, it’s just saying that there is a [funding] structure that is dominating our industry and it can be increasingly frustrating if you don’t fit within that. You can be accused of being too corporate…. Some people who receive consistent funding poo-poo Erth because Erth gets its money elsewhere. Regardless of where we get our money, we’re still making art.28

Independent theatre’s flexibility and innovation is often sought after for international markets or to promote Australian creative talent.29 ‘The relative ease’, writes Meyrick, ‘with which some of these [cross-art form, physical, visually-based or new circus theatre] companies tour internationally - no language barrier, low costs, niche marketing appeal - has given them avenues of growth outside of the domestic market’.30 The interview data also highlights division between these styles of performance and other styles that did not have access to international or well-paying markets. Over 57 percent of interviewees also note a common, Australian, cultural assumption that companies or practitioners who tour internationally have a higher quality of work. This perception contributes to a sense of division between those in ‘the club’31 and those that are not. Such views are led, in part, by funding agencies and festivals being able to fund only a
small percentage of independent companies and having to choose where that money will go.

Belonging is one of the key components of community strengths and although independent theatre practitioners may belong to their own micro-international and/or local community, they lack a cohesive professional community and the peer support and critical discourse that come with it. Many feel that the allocation of government funding changes according to the political agendas of the day and division can occur over which grant category appears to be ‘flavour of the month’. Joanne Tompkins reports that at one Australian Performing Arts Market (APAM) she attended some years ago:

[T]he Australia Council was actually putting a lot of money into promoting Australian performance but the performance mode that they chose was physical theatre. So if you were a physical theatre company and you had a show that was transportable you were likely going to get it picked up. If you had any other kind of theatre, sorry no need to apply. They just weren’t interested.

As Meyrick and others point out, much of the work that tours well is work that can easily overcome language barriers and prohibitive touring costs. The Australian Performing Arts Market or APAM, introduced in Chapter 2, was cited by arts agencies as a useful networking, inspirational and promotional event.

The Australian Performing Arts Markets (established by the Australia Council and supported by most States/Territories) provide an important platform for international promotion of the Small to Medium Performing Arts Sector: 80 - 90% of the 'Spotlight' performances at the last four Markets featured [Independent] Sector organisations.

However, this thesis’ interview data reveals that attending APAM or other similar events is a costly exercise in terms of transport and accommodation. Although independents recognise these events are a vital tool for communication, promotion, and inspiration, to attend or present at them is a massive drain on their already limited resources and energy. Independent theatre practitioner Clare Bartholomew explained that:
Even the last Adelaide Festival and Arts Market, I wanted the book with all the delegates in it...because we couldn't afford the [APAM] registration. [As independents we] need to get those contacts and email them and say 'hey, we've got this show.'

Zen Zen Zo's Lyn Bradley recounted similar frustrations:

Every time we do the Brisbane Festival, it's like, "Well this production should tour Australia." It's like, "Ok who's actually going to do the work? Who's got time?" None of us have time! We went to one [APAM] market and, "Yay!" we got a tour out of it which was very exciting but it didn't go through. It was fantastic except even to get ourselves to that market we forked out a huge amount of money to pay for the stall, to pay for all the actors to go down to perform... We did a show while we were there, obviously to sell ourselves, and we had to fund it. And when we don't have infrastructural funding, we can't do that. It's such a vicious circle.

In addition, although independent work is valued enough to gain one-off access to a venue, festival or other event, maintaining longer term access is an arduous, often impossible, task. The irony of this situation is not lost on independent practitioners. Independent, David Megarrity commented:

Whenever I've approached the [Queensland] Arts Council with ideas that might go outside that commitment like school holiday showings, [and] international connections ... there's actually no response. So the theatre companies, and I'm quite bitter about this, tend not to be interested in marketing the shows after a certain point. ...It's not in their charter to hammer home children's theatre and the only reason that both the shows are going to the Sydney Opera House is because of promotional materials that I organised and sent to the venue who then came back to me and ... I had to go to the company that owned them [the shows were made in collaboration] and of course they said 'yes' because it looks good for them. So I mean it would be nice not to have to do that.

Just as there is perceived division between different styles of theatre, there is also strongly perceived division between which companies are funded and how they are funded. Despite the 'invaluable' benefits of closer networking between the Major Performing Arts organisations (MPA's), triennially funded organisations or KO's,
project-funded companies, and non-funded companies, strong division between the haves and the have nots prevents this from being an inherent practice. Sean Mee, previously Director of La Boite Theatre Company, believes La Boite’s triennial funding made it more similar to the Australia Council’s MPA’s than to the small to medium sector. ‘[W]e don’t think it’s actually useful for us to continue to be put with these other companies because these are much more dynamic, much more short-term. We are an institution’.\(^{39}\) Being an institution is no guarantee of funding however, and La Boite’s relationship with the Australia Council, as explained later in this chapter, was about to change. Division between the MPA’s, triennial and non-triennial companies is based largely on their differing income and management structures. Despite long-term funded companies’ claims that they do not ‘have the space to make [risky] creative mistakes’;\(^{40}\) all funded and non-funded theatre companies claim to create innovative, contemporary work created with local artists.

The limitations of government funding, and the cyclical changes in government focus destabilises the arts industry and increases divisiveness between practitioners. In the *Make It New? Discussion Forum*,\(^{41}\) Yaron Lifschitz, Artistic Director of Circa, asked for improved funding structures that were based on positive traits and merits.

I too want a vibrant ecosystem for the arts, where companies rise and fall on merit, where there is flexibility and room for opportunity. But I fail to see how the structure you have proposed delivers this. It replaces one framework with another and it locks the theatre board into funding companies because they look like companies that should be funded, rather than funding companies with unique merits and strengths. Replacing one category with another would seem to inevitably lead to the same constraints you currently face, albeit with different names.

Newspaper reports of the recent *Make It New*? funding allocations came to the same conclusion. In late 2008 both The Australian and the Sydney Morning Herald reported on the ‘funding upheaval’.\(^{42}\)

The new system asks companies to compete for funding every three years, a model that offers opportunities to young groups but potentially undermines the security of the old. "I think it's short-sighted, because there is a lot of experience in the older
companies which we are set to lose," Mamouney [Artistic Director of 29 year old Sydney company Sidetrack Performance Group] said.43

The new funding changes again divided the sector between the haves and the have not’s. Sydney-based company Version 1.0, which specialises in contemporary documentary theatre, received long-term funding and Artistic Director, David Williams, was one of this thesis’ interviewees. ‘The $150,000 annual grant, offered for three years, allows the 10-year-old company to plan in advance, says Williams. It also pays him a salary for the first time, although the $35,000 wage is far less than he gets as a flyman at the Sydney Opera House, his present day job’.44

The flipside of funding 11 new companies is that 11 companies had their three-year funding terminated. Another company that is represented in this thesis’ interviews is La Boite Theatre in Brisbane.

Founded in 1925, La Boite is Brisbane's second biggest theatre company and its funding cut was a jolt to the larger theatre community. It was particularly bad timing for incoming artistic director David Berthold, who joined the company less than three weeks after the announcement. As a former artistic director of Sydney's Griffin Theatre Company and a freelance director he had embraced the council's proposed changes. … He adds his voice to a growing concern about the pathways back to triennial funding, which involves applying for annual funding for three years as an emerging key organisation. "It seems odd that an 83-year-old theatre company like La Boite should be applying as an emerging company," he says.45

John Baylis, the then head of Theatre with the Australia Council and who was interviewed as part of this thesis, said that the funding reallocations were a ‘complex process’ which did not necessarily reflect the quality of a company’s work but rather the level of competition in the industry. However Baylis also admitted that ‘if we've made a dreadful mistake we won't know for two or three years’.46

If government responses cannot adequately address the diversity of the sector and the impact of such diversity on independent theatre’s cohesiveness and sustainability, it is ultimately up to the sector itself to develop its own conditions for improvement. This
reasoning is reinforced by the 2008 *Love Your Work* paper. Yet, the independent sector is already forced into reactive coping strategies and has limited energy and cohesive power to develop tenable solutions. Division amongst practitioners does little to improve this situation. Online reports of a 2002 RealTime Performance Space forum indicate that although a formal advocacy or lobbying group might be useful to the independent sector politically, it was unlikely to happen given the ‘disparate’ nature of performing arts companies. Rebecca Scollen, a researcher and theatre lecturer with Queensland University of Technology at the time of the interview, commented on the industry’s funding structures and the impact of these on the sector’s ability to develop shared support and advocacy frameworks:

[I]t seems as if there's a hesitancy in the arts industry to share to some degree. Like someone's going to steal or copy. I think it's the notion of competition that because we're not heavily subsidised like some other countries do with their artists and their companies, there's a sense, ‘Well I've got to get it or you will, the little scrap of funding that's there, and if I tell you all my amazing stuff you're going to put in something and you'll get it! And then I'll have nothing.’ To me that's really sad that maybe that it's such a huge structural shift, to be able to say, ‘We're all in this together guys. Let's all help each other out for the benefit of the whole nation's cultural endeavours.’ But then you've got to have a structure that supports that way of thinking.

These negative motivations for competition and diversity emerged from the data as obstacles to theatre practitioners developing a better balance of energy in their work environments.

### 4.8 Previous Attempts at Cohesive Identification of the Sector

David Throsby writes in his 2006 essay *Does Australia Need a Cultural Policy?*, that Australia has no cultural policy. He calls for a development of shared cultural identity. This demand for cultural understanding is reflected in this thesis’ findings which call for a collective identification and understanding of Australian independent theatre and one that expresses the sector’s value in other than economic terms. Given the divisiveness generated through existing economic frameworks, this thesis acknowledges the positive
impacts a diverse independent theatre sector has on our culture but suggests shared, non-economic and potentially strengthening characteristics as a basis for building a more cohesive approach to sustainability.

Chapter 2 discussed the 2002 Report to Ministers on an Examination of the Small to Medium Performing Arts Sector (SMPA Report)’s strongly economic definition of the sector. Only companies or practitioners who had received government funding or earned an annual turnover of above $50,000 for three years were included in the report. This definition excluded unfunded independent practitioners, and the annual turnover was overwhelmingly beyond the meagre $7300 median annual income of many independent artists cited in the 2003 Don’t Give up Your Day Job: an Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia. In contrast, interviewees and others working in the independent arts defined their industry less formally and in non-financial terms. Many referred to the report’s ‘small to medium sector’ terminology as bureaucratic jargon rather than a term they identified with. They felt the government primarily used the report and the term ‘small to medium’ to differentiate between the financial and cultural values of independent Australian arts and the elite Major Performing Arts Organisations associated with the Australia Council for the Arts. The limited recommendations of the SMPA Reports deepened the divide between the ‘31 major performing arts companies’ outlined in the 1999 Securing the Future: Major Performing Arts Inquiry Final Report, or Nugent Report, and the independent sector. ‘It [the term ‘small to medium performing arts sector’] exists as much as it's useful for it to exist, and by that I mean in terms of lobbying governments or collecting data which can then be used to lobby governments’, says Kantanka theatre member and independent practitioner Michael Cohen. The report’s inability to clearly identify independent theatre’s cohesive and individual company strengths is neatly reflected in Keith Gallasch’s comments in October 2005:

I hear that the Australia Council has decided to stop using the phrase ‘small-to-medium arts sector’. Depending on what it’s got in mind as an alternative, this looks like a wise move. While accurate in identifying the relative size of its individual inhabitants compared with the major organisations, the phrase fails to convey the sheer size of the sector. It does nothing to
acknowledge its energy and diversity, and the fact that it is the breeding ground of talent and innovation. It is the future.\textsuperscript{55}

4.9 Self-reliance and Realistic Parameters of Identification

Dividing the already diverse independent sector according to style, funding, or operating system does not assist in developing an inclusive and accessible framework to improve sustainability. Categorising independents by their position title such as ‘director’ or ‘actor’ is equally difficult because of the multitude of tasks and career changes independents encounter. This thesis uses the term ‘theatre practitioner’ rather than more specific identification in order to reflect the multiplicity and diversity of roles people accept in their theatre careers. An example of the impact of position classification on the theatre sector was the ‘amazing 40% decline in the number of people calling themselves “actors” between the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001 and 2006 censuses’.\textsuperscript{56} Jeremy Eccles wrote of this decline in a 2008 \textit{RealTime} article \textit{The Job-Ready Graduate: Acting and a Lot More} and expressed the opinion that ‘relentless attacks by governments of all ilks on the “elitism” of artists has forced all but the courageous 1,213 who called themselves actors to re-identify elsewhere as “cultural industry workers”\textsuperscript{57} or other terminology less specific to their artform.

The \textit{SMPA Report}’s original brief describes independent practitioners and their sector as making a vital contribution to:

\begin{quote}
… artistic advancement and further notes that the Sector plays a fundamental role in research and development, experimentation, innovation and risk-taking with a commitment to new Australian work and diversity of artistic form. The Sector is seen within the arts more broadly as the crucible for new ideas and approaches to creating and presenting work.\textsuperscript{58}
\end{quote}

The independent sector is identified by government and funding bodies as crucial to the development of new art experience and new artists. Yet it is difficult for this same sector to sustain these experiences and artists into the long-term. Even the MPA face ‘financial stringency’ that has ‘squeezed out their role in skills development for artists’.\textsuperscript{59} This role is now primarily the responsibility of the under-resourced
independent arts sector and the performing arts education sector. In order to prepare students for the reality of limited employment in Australian theatre, schools and universities now place greater emphasis on ‘fostering artist self-reliance’. Yet theatre student numbers continue to increase. ‘Despite limited resources for both arts practice and arts education,’ says Version 1.0’s David Williams, ‘there is clearly an exciting blend of energy and pragmatism’ that exists in the sector.

4.10 A Shared Identity: Common characteristics of Australian independent theatre

The following shared characteristics of the independent theatre sector identified in this thesis, are based on careful analysis of the primary data gathered in individual interviews as well as existing literature including the SMPA, CREATE, and Love Your Work reports previously mentioned. Grounded in the process of constant data comparison, the independent characteristics have emerged and can be identified as:

- passion for and dedication to the independent performing arts and their value in our society;
- strong emphasis on creativity and innovation;
- flexible, organic and intuitive development;
- short-term, reactive development despite wanting to achieve longer-term sustainability;
- niche markets;
- resourcefulness in the face of constant adversity which in turn results in multiskilling and multitasking.

To better understand the complex workings of Australian theatre ‘as an artistic, economic and institutional entity’, Julian Meyrick suggests ‘we need to synthesise all such understandings and reflect on the results’. This chapter and chapters 5 and 6 develop this synthesis as a first step in determining conditions for sustainability.

[T]he most important changes that face Australian theatre are internal, dispositional and inexpensive in dollar terms. … So, for the final time: we must, as theatre artists, take responsibility for the present situation by fashioning a language of common cause that, while respecting differences, will allow the industry to
present itself in a united way and not just as a snake pit of competing needs.\textsuperscript{64}

Meyrick’ as well as Shaw and Hunt’s \textit{Platform Paper} ask for an analysis of the theatre and arts industry. ‘Understanding the ecology [of the arts sector] and providing a “helicopter” view of the sector is paramount. Once that is understood, then developing plans and strategies co-operatively with those with a future stake becomes mandatory.’\textsuperscript{65} By collecting and mapping data that gives a ‘helicopter’ view of independent theatre, this thesis develops a concept for career sustainability in the arts that is accessible and flexible enough to work across the diverse spectrum of independent arts.

The next section of this chapter examines the shared characteristics, one by one, as they emerged from the interview material and the literature.

\subsection*{4.10.1 Passion and Dedication for Independent Art}

Over 94 percent of interviewees spoke of their drive, passion, dedication or ‘extraordinary commitment’\textsuperscript{66} to their artistic field and suggested it was the primary reason they had joined and were still involved in the arts. Lesley Watson, Founding Director of Actors College of Theatre and Television (ACTT), affirms that ‘acting is less a job than a life commitment,’ and it is this commitment that helps characterise the independent theatre sector.\textsuperscript{67} In her 1998 Rex Cramphorn Memorial Lecture at Playbox Theatre, Lindy Davies strove to remind listeners of independent theatre’s achievements in the face of economic rationalism, cultural cringe and Australia’s inability to create a diverse yet cohesive theatre discourse. She attributed these achievements to the passion and dedication of independent theatre practitioners.

This talk is dedicated to every person who’s gone before us, who with their love of theatre has struggled in sitting rooms, amateur theatre companies, church halls, warehouses and rehearsal rooms to ensure that Australia has had a living theatre. To every person whose love of this art form has transcended the surrounding indifference and ignorance that has often caused the death of many flourishing ventures.\textsuperscript{68}
The independent theatre sector offers scope to theatre practitioners who want to create and develop new work or new modes of performance. Despite the sector’s limited resources, it appeals to many artists’ career and company ideals. ‘Small is beautiful. I was talking to someone about it, [about] just polishing work, just letting it mature much more slowly or taking more time, doing less but less is more,’ says independent, Simon Hill, of his transition from a larger company to working as an independent collaborator. Lisa O’Neill, an independent performer who is also a core member of Frank Theatre Company, attributes that company’s longevity to a shared desire and creative ‘vision’. ‘We survive purely because of eight people wanting to be together regardless of money,’ she says.

Most practitioners relish invigoration and change but this does not necessarily mean they want to develop into a larger company or to leave their current company or career. ‘These people’ says Marcus Westbury of independent artists, ‘are not making art to be let in somewhere’. Rather, such artists:

- enjoy the freedom of the sector that they work in;
- feel an intense passion for the vulnerability and quality of their art; and
- want ‘to be challenged according to their own definitions rather than the kind of definition that might be placed on them’ if they worked in other sectors.

Bruce Gladwin, Artistic Director of Geelong-based, Back to Back Theatre, believes that the passion for creating independent work irrespective of its economic or box office value is integral to independent practitioner’s raison d’être.

I don't think its easy work that we make. And, in a way, it's like we don't want to get too big otherwise it's kind of like we're missing the whole point of why we exist in the first place.

As Arts Queensland representative Stephen Greder confirms: ‘…they're not in it for the money. If they were in it for the money, they would all be real estate agents. So it's about pursuing something else apart from money that drives them…’.
4.10.2 Emphasis on Creativity and Innovation in all Aspects of Theatre Work

Creativity, innovation, and being open to new ideas are central to this sector and 100 percent of interviewees believed it was vital to their field, to the work that they devise, and to their companies and careers. Not only was it vital to their work, nearly all practitioners spoke about how much they ‘enjoy’ the developmental, creative, and usually collaborative, processes. In contrast, the *SMPA Report* noted that despite the independent sector’s creative and innovative value to the broader Australia’s arts industry, government support for such processes was limited:

[T]here exists a continuing pressure from Government funding agencies for the Sector to become more self-sustainable whilst at the same time advance the arts through innovation. ... The interplay between these two apparently competing objectives represents the underlying challenge of the relationship between Government and the Sector. "

There is a noticeable lack of resources available to support innovation in performance or artistic practice compared with support for innovation in business and managerial processes. In 2005 Robin Usher in *The Age* wrote; ‘across Australia, small and medium-sized theatre companies are failing to attract enough funding to produce new work. The result could be disastrous for Australian culture as a whole’. Although this was one of the first times this issue was brought into the mainstream media, it was not news to the independent theatre industry who had been struggling to survive for decades. Funding allocations and policy developments are often developed as part of a ‘quiet and private process, with at most a focus group to throw around some ideas with a few external stakeholders’ that, says Fiona Winning, ‘...leaves a chasm between the policy makers and the sector’. "

Creative management and the examples of self-sustainability in this thesis are often the extension of the intuitive, innovative, and resourceful ways many practitioners already develop and produce their artistic work. As a result most practitioners, even those with strong business and management skills, prefer to manage their careers and companies in an organic way rather than through a formal economic model. Organic, in this context, does not imply a lack of organisation. Instead it indicates that management is developed in a holistic manner and in relation to the surrounding needs and environment.
The sector’s commitment and its role as a ‘crucible’ for the development of new ideas and practices is often at odds with the funding policies and economic realities of ‘putting food on the table’. Independent practitioner Louise Morris suggests that this is primarily due to the value placed on new work. Australia doesn’t have a history of loving and supporting the arts’, she says. Morris believes economic evaluations of ‘theatre being made to please people is very dangerous - that's entertainment, not art’. As a result artists spend a large amount of their time having to explain what they do.

[Y]ou have to take what it is you are doing in its raw form and then try and explain it. This frustrates the whole process. Why does a duck walk through the middle of something? Life is unpredictable. But if you can't explain what you are doing it is deemed too 'arty-farty' and indulgent. It leaves very little room for the 'risk and innovation' they supposedly want because often you are trying to confront value systems. I think that is more specific to the performing arts than it is to the visual arts. The visual arts sector is far more open to risk-taking as a legitimate avenue.

Although ‘innovation’ is often identified as overly-used political jargon by practitioners, they admit that they are energised by the creative and experimental processes of their work. David Pledger, Artistic Director of not yet it’s difficult (NYID), describes this contradiction best:

I don't like the word ‘innovation’. I think it's a corporate word. And 'risk' - I don't know what that means other than in a bureaucratic, policy way. I mean how much more risky can you be by making a living making art?

In business, government, and organisational management sectors there is currently a strong focus on developing creativity and innovation as a way to improve career and company sustainability. In contrast, the arts sector which is recognised for its inherent creativity and driving energy struggles with these issues.
Organisations in the Small to Medium Performing Arts Sector have highly flexible structures that support creative processes and multi-skilled management. There is a range of working models in this sector, including examples of organisations successfully discarding one model and re-inventing themselves in response to a changing external environment.\textsuperscript{87}

The sector’s organic and intuitive nature allows companies and artists to be very flexible while still maintaining quality standards. 80 percent of interviewees highlighted the flexible nature of their company or organisational approach. The same number of interviewees was also aware of the important balance between ‘high artistic quality’ and being flexible and adaptable to ‘a range of different venues’ and contexts.\textsuperscript{88} Such flexibility is seen as another of the sector’s strengths, not least as a benefit for touring or last minute project arrangements that more structured performing companies might not be able to undertake.

Evolving and adapting in response to intuition and professional experience\textsuperscript{89} was cited by all of the interviewees as a way to develop and sustain their careers in independent theatre. ‘Artists are adaptable to change through the necessity to survive as there is never any guarantee of success on any level in the performing arts, a flexible artist and environment is a given,’ wrote Neil Hunt in his submission to the Make it new? 2007 discussion forum.\textsuperscript{90} David Pledger agrees that independents survive primarily through their energy, creativity and intuition rather than through specific marketing or organisational structures:

The amount of collateral that we get as a country internationally through our culture is extraordinary and enormous. We [independents] are, for our size, unbelievably perceived in the most incredible ways overseas. …The sense of those [Australian independent] companies having a presence is dictated by frequency of output or when they do something that captures people's imagination. So in that way it's [cultural collateral] not about marketing, it’s more about having a feel for what's going on.\textsuperscript{91}
4.10.4 Short-term, Reactive Approach

Resource and time limitations, combined with the nature of creative work, necessitate independent theatre practitioners being reactive to issues and ideas rather than proactive. They often rely on their ‘gut feeling’\(^92\) to make future plans. This adds to their dynamic nature but makes sustainability difficult. Longer term planning or career goals are rare yet highly sought after. ‘[M]any of these companies receive little support for core operations and are usually funded on a project-by-project basis. It is therefore difficult to draw conclusions or make comparisons on these companies from year to year’ stated the SMPA Report.\(^93\) Independent theatre practitioners work frequently on a short-term, project basis and are often unable to plan for the long term. Version 1.0’s David Williams views this as both a positive and a negative of his work:

…[A]s a survival strategy, as a way of making sustainable practice … people have to be available to do a lot of things at any given time…. So being project-based is the key predominantly because that's the only way we could financially sustain the endeavour. … We're project-based by choice and by accident. We couldn't choose to be otherwise but that in itself is a choice that opens up things rather than closes down things.\(^94\)

Many interviewees believed the independent theatre industry’s ability to react creatively to external and internal pressures on their work was one of its strengths and formative element of the sector’s risk-taking reputation. John Baylis, formerly Director with Urban Theatre Projects and of the Australia Council’s Theatre Board, has witnessed both the short term and long term impacts of this trend:

[U]sually those smaller groupings are driven by very strong artistic agendas. They come together to make work, they come together to make a certain type of work. So the immediate consideration is creating the circumstances in which they can get a show up and so it should be.\(^95\)

However although this way of working is sustainable for one or two or three projects, says Baylis, ultimately it is not sustainable long-term and leads to individual burn out and/or company dispersement.
Many project-reliant independent practitioners and companies may go for months without work only to find that when they have work it clashes with another potential project or job. Theatre practitioners, as always, have developed some workable solutions to this but there are still limitations. David Williams\(^96\) believes the ‘reason that there are no ensembles in Sydney - ongoing, permanent or even part-time ensembles - is that it's not a sustainable model of practice’. In 2004 Version 1.0 members juggled other jobs such as teaching or technical work in order to supplement their limited artistic income. Such employment clashed with the possibility of a full-time ensemble so Version 1.0 evolved as a project based ensemble. Independent, Clare Bartholomew juggles jobs and several theatre groups. She believes her longest-running co-operative troupe, The Business, is ‘permanent in that we haven't disbanded since we started, but it's not permanent in that we don't work all the time and we've gone through big stretches when we haven't been able to’.\(^97\) She, like many others in the industry, sees great value in ensemble work but admits that the energy The Business members can give ‘has ebbed and flowed over the years’.\(^98\) David Pledger agrees that juggling jobs impacts enormously on the way a company operates. ‘People that work in cross-artform roles always juggle jobs and occasionally you find yourself with bottlenecks and you just have to deal with that,’ he says. ‘I mean in my previous role I was actually doing three different jobs simultaneously: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday here; Thursday there; and Friday somewhere else’.\(^99\)

4.10.5 Operating in Niche Markets

Creative problem solving and performance style have led most independent companies to develop and operate in niche areas of performance rather than working in a broad audience market. ‘I think you could look at each of those small to medium sized companies and say, "They've really got a specific audience that's their primary concern”,’ explains Back to Back Theatre’s Bruce Gladwin.\(^100\)

Rosemary Myers, former Artistic Director of Arena Theatre Company, explains how having particular audience types can actually invigorate and empower theatre makers:
I'm very excited about the audience that we create the work for. I love the audience for many reasons and the way that we work with our audience is really diverse. …I guess that our work is an opportunity for them to have a philosophical reflection in a world where there's not a lot of scope for that. I mean it [our audience] defines what we can do in very many ways but in all those ways are really exciting, great things. I never feel restricted by that at all. And I don't feel like we have to compromise the artistic practice at all. I feel quite the reverse.101

Over 60 percent of interviewees for this thesis said they presented works to recurring and particular audiences and also pointed out that trying to work to a broader audience appeal often lead to what Robyn Archer referred to as ‘reductive marketing’102 or the marketing of only mainstream ideas. The same amount of interviewees felt that community and arts agencies expected them to develop a more mainstream approach to their work. Archer’s essay The Myth of the Mainstream: Politics and the Performing Arts in Australia Today, ‘is a lament for the dialectic in our society’.103 This ‘absence of dialectic, or even simple debate’104 means that the myth of a mainstream, and conversely, the ‘fantasies about those who are not part of the mainstream’,105 cannot be questioned. Australia’s cultural understanding of the term ‘mainstream’ tends to devalue niche markets, and by association independent theatre, in both economic and non-economic ways. As Archer argues, ‘The word “minority” is not just descriptive: it diminishes the social status of its subject’.106

4.10.6 Resourceful and Multi-skilled in the Face of Constant Adversity

Independent theatre’s aforementioned intuitive and reactive capabilities develop an inherent resourcefulness which, for better or for worse, often relies on multiskilling and multitasking in order to get the job done. David Pledger describes the Australian independent sector as:

Underfunded. Overworked. Innovative. Internationally acclaimed in the way that no other sector in Australian arts is. Very resourceful. It's probably where the greatest chance of cultural survival in performance actually is: it is not with the top-end companies.107
Over 80 percent of interviewees discussed the need to be resourceful and savvy in order to survive in the independent theatre sector. The downside of this resourcefulness is that it creates an expectation that independents will always be capable of surviving or getting the job done regardless of how little time, money, resources or support they may have. As a result independent practitioners and companies are repeatedly driven to the limits of their physical and creative possibilities. Lyn Bradley, Co-Artistic Director of Zen Zen Zo Physical Theatre in Brisbane, provided an example of the kind of practical resource that might lead to a sustainable practice, but which most independent practitioners struggle to achieve:

We're actually applying for [funding for] a van because we've had a huge demand from the regions for schools, productions and workshops but we don't have transport. We also need computers because these [current office] are all QPAC [Queensland Performing Arts Centre] ones. … And having been here [Queensland Theatre Company-In-Residence], we have produced so much work because we have had three desks, three computers, three phone lines and access to technological services. It's been a really fantastic residency and it's made us realise that if we either put the money into the resources or get funding for more resources our productivity will increase.

The independent theatre sector’s resourcefulness and current productivity relies heavily on individual, often exhaustive, multitasking. The Artistic Director in an independent company is also often the Marketing Manager, Administrative Officer, and the Production Manager. Like many of the artists interviewed, Susie Dee, a Melbourne-based theatre practitioner, says that although collaboration with other artists is healthy, passionate and inspiring, the management side of any project ultimately comes down to one or two key people. Eventually, these practitioners use up all their sustaining energy and cannot continue. Alternatively, Dee says, there are too few available partners or resources to manage and streamline the workload. The toll of having to be everything to everyone, and the ongoing energy output this requires, becomes more of a problem as arts practitioners age, have families or other commitments.

It's a tricky one because I'm not a young bunny anymore and the people I work with are from very different disciplines and a lot of them have other jobs and run sculptural places and one's
going off to India or Germany. …We love the idea of working together and always the creative stages are fantastic. We fire off each other [and] ... it's a really healthy, creative time. But it doesn't feel really collaborative because … it really ends up with me and one other person doing all the hard yards and organising everything.\textsuperscript{109}

Many practitioners are forced to stretch such multitasking even further in order to supplement their artistic careers with jobs in other fields. In 2003 the final of Throsby and Hollister’s four-part overview of artistic careers in Australia reported that:

[I]ncome also plays a more specific and subtle role in artists’ working lives. For many professional artists work at the arts is not sufficiently remunerative to provide an adequate living, so the pattern of artists’ time allocation—how much time they can devote to their creative practice, how much time they have to spend doing other things—is often profoundly influenced by financial considerations. Half of all the artists in our survey had creative incomes of less than $7300, even though the average or mean creative income was just over $17,000.\textsuperscript{107}

The availability of paid theatre work in Australia is extremely limited. To pursue creative interests and make ends meet, means many practitioners develop lateral careers in education or academia. Interviewees in such positions include Susie Dee and Peter Eckersall at Melbourne University, Louise Morris at Deakin University, David Williams at University of Sydney and David Meggarity at Queensland University of Technology. Others, such as Lynn Wallis, Torben Brookman and Michael Cohen, choose arts, theatre or festival management so that they can have input into an area they feel passionate about while earning a regular income. Other theatre practitioners simply divide their working lives into distinct parts: one part theatre and the other part a steady source of income whether it be taxi driving or hospitality. Issues of career and company sustainability occur for theatre practitioners when one job’s timelines or requirements clash with another’s. Constant juggling and eventual exhaustion mean many must make a choice between remaining primarily in theatre and letting their theatre careers take a back seat to a more financially reliable job. As Throsby and Hollister point out ‘lack of availability of work and insufficient income from work are by far the most important factors in preventing artists from undertaking more arts work in general, and their most artistically desired work in particular’.\textsuperscript{111}
4.11 Conclusion: Energy - the heart and flow of independent theatre

The interview material collected as part of this thesis covers the way diverse independent theatre companies and practitioners operate in Australia. These interviews explore the way practitioners and their respective companies collaborate, network, motivate themselves, juggle their commitments, view their work and the work of other, oversee their finances and creative values, and perceive their future on a personal as well as professional level. For many both the professional and personal aspects of their lives are intricately linked. Despite the sector’s admitted diversity and division, the data that emerged from these interviews builds a picture of a complex ecology that surprisingly, contains a number of shared and potentially strengthening characteristics.

These characteristics, which are an important outcome of this thesis’ research, reveal the sector’s common passion for and commitment to the independent performing arts and their value in our society; an emphasis on creativity and innovation; flexible, organic and intuitive work processes; short-term, reactive development of careers and companies; a focus on niche audiences; and a reliance on multitasking and resourcefulness to meet challenges. What also became clear, was that regardless of existing division and differences in opinion as to how they could or should create a more sustainable future for themselves, independent theatre practitioners are driven by a passionate, palpable, and all encompassing energy in relation to their work. Practitioners placed a high value on this energy and indicated that their ability to sustain their careers and companies declined when this energy was continuously over-used or not being renewed.

Energy, as a theme, emerged from the data in discussions ranging from physical and mental wellbeing, creative processes, management processes, and collaborative relationships. This energy was integral to concepts of networks, venues, audiences, performance quality, income, age, lifestyle, and the overall ability to exist and survive in the theatre industry.

According to this thesis’ data analysis and findings (Figure 4.1), theatre practitioners expended energy creating new works, promoting them, and trying to make a living from
them. Energy and motivation was restored to them through international and local respect for their work, festivals and networks that allowed increased opportunities for new ideas, and highly sought after funding or box-office and other income. Current conditions, in Australian independent theatre (Chapters 2 and 4) make it difficult for practitioners to balance the incoming and outgoing energies required to develop optimal sustainability. The energy required to repeatedly create new work and sustain a career was a recurring theme in the interviews I undertook.

What also became clear was that practitioners were perfectly willing to overcome a number of hurdles as long as they felt there was the potential to feel ‘energised’ or to experience the ‘intense’\textsuperscript{112} feeling of being ‘in the moment’.\textsuperscript{113} As Bruce Naylor put it most clearly: ‘Theatre is an energy.’ He hastened to add that ‘it is a business but this business needs to be integrated with the energy. You can't just have purely one or the other. … You need to take this ball of energy and keeping it rolling.’\textsuperscript{114} Chapter 4’s findings outline collective characteristics of Australian independent theatre and introduces the underpinning theme of energy that impacts on the sector’s career and company sustainability.
Notes


2 Reed and Runquist: 120.


4 Bruce Naylor. Personal interview. 29 January 2004.

5 Peter Eckersall. Personal interview. 2 March 2004.


7 Keith Gallasch. Personal interview. 29 April 2004.


12 Meyrick, Trapped by the Past: Why Our Theatre is Facing Paralysis 1.

13 Meyrick, Trapped by the Past: Why Our Theatre is Facing Paralysis 23.

14 Naylor.

15 Meyrick, Trapped by the Past: Why Our Theatre is Facing Paralysis 21.

16 Naylor.

17 Joanne Tompkins. Personal interview. 9 July, 2004


19 Tompkins.


23 Australian Theatre Forum.
24 Tompkins.
26 Latham, 42.
27 Latham, 42.
28 Wright.
30 Meyrick, *Trapped by the Past : Why Our Theatre is Facing Paralysis* 50.
32 Marcus Westbury at 2020: Arbitrary Figures and Advocating Real Cultural Change.
33 Tompkins.
36 Bradley.
37 David Megarrity. Personal interview. 16 May 2004.
43 Schwartzkoff.
44 Fiona Gruber, "Fresh Touch Key to Australia Council Funds", The Australian 22 December 2008.
45 Gruber.
46 Gruber.
48 Baxter and Gallasch.
49 Rebecca Scollen. Personal interview. 4 June 2004
50 Throsby, Does Australia Need a Cultural Policy? 4-5.
51 Throsby and Hollister, Don’t Give Up Your Day Job: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia 45.
52 Information Technology and the Arts Commonwealth Department of Communications, Securing the Future: Major Performing Arts Inquiry Final Report (Canberra: Commonwealth Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, 1999).
54 Cohen.
55 Gallasch, Art in a Cold Climate - Rethinking the Australia Council 55.
57 Eccles: 4.
59 Eccles: 4.
61 Eccles.
63 Meyrick, Trapped by the Past : Why Our Theatre is Facing Paralysis 1.
64 Meyrick, Trapped by the Past : Why Our Theatre is Facing Paralysis 61.
65 Hunt and Shaw, 43.
67 Eccles: 4.
69 Simon Hill. Personal interview. 4 February 2004.
70 O'Neill.
71 O'Neill.
72 Westbury.
73 Stefan Greder. Personal interview. 18 May 2004.
74 Bruce Gladwin. Personal Interview. 8 September 2004.
75 Greder.
76 Megarrity.
79 Winning, "How Things Are Done in the Arts Sector."
80 Close and Donovan.
82 Patrick Jones at 2020: Arbitrary Figures and Advocating Real Cultural Change.
83 Louise Morris. Personal interview. 10 December 2003.
84 Morris.
Megarrity.

Hill.


Pledger.

Roderick Poole. Personal interview. 6 September 2004.


David Williams. Personal interview. 27 April 2004.

John Baylis. Personal interview. 27 April 2004.

Williams. Personal interview.

Bartholomew.

Bartholomew.

Pledger.

Gladwin.

Rose Myers. Personal interview. 9 October 2004.

Archer, 4.

Archer, 1.

Archer, 3.

Archer, 2.

Archer, 2.

Gladwin.

Bradley.

Susie Dee. Personal interview. 10 September 2004.


Throsby and Hollister, Don’t Give Up Your Day Job: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia 42.


Morris.

Naylor.
CHAPTER 5

5 SUSTAINABLE OR NOT?

5.1 Sustainability via Government Funding
In the last chapter the research data revealed that the energy provided to independent theatre practitioners is often less than the energy expended in meeting practitioners’ work challenges. More income can clearly greatly alter this balance. As indicated through the definition of sustainability in Chapter 1 and the discussion of global theory in Chapter 2 (The Language of Global Theory), global economic trends have created new attitudes towards sustainability in the arts. Outcomes-based funding policies from major government funding institutions dominate the funding environment for independent practitioners. A focus on government funding and economic frameworks does not promote a complete understanding of Australian independent theatre and its sustainability.

5.2 Impact of Limited Available Funds
The economic rationalist and creative industries attitudes discussed in Chapter 2 have had an enormous impact on the ways in which theatre practitioners are expected to operate, the work they can create and sustain, and where such productions are developed and presented. David Pledger, Artistic Director of ‘not yet it’s difficult’ (NYID), believes that the impact of economic rationalism on Australian arts policy and funding has created a value shift away from ‘creative capital’ into ‘organisation capital’. David Throsby, Professor with Macquarie University’s Department of Economics and Chair of NSW Arts Advisory Council, also comments on the negative impact on our cultural sector’s creativity that economic rationalism can generate. ‘… [T]he danger of valuing the arts through solely economic value is that it devalues cultural vitality and community benefits’ writes Throsby. Independent theatre companies and practitioners are valued by governments and the cultural sector for their capacity for innovative research and development, creativity, and flexibility. Yet the literature and the interview data shows that these values are not always in sync with the economic imperatives of
governments and funding agencies. Tim Rowse, Senior Research Fellow with the History Program of The Australian National University, argues that the lobbying power of the arts is restricted by Australia’s strong cultural tradition of viewing industry as a hub of employment, potential income, and pride. As a result, government agencies are forced to move the limited available funding from one part of the arts sector to another in order to support the particular area that appears most culturally and economically worthy at the time. Pledger believes that Australians do like the arts, but that ‘there is a certain leadership that government needs to provide’ in order to develop broader community support. Winning believes that the Australia Council for the Arts is in the ideal position to do this because of its ‘extraordinary access to information, opportunity to observe, join up the dots, and analyse to make sense of the information and to make intelligent and timely interventions’.

Funding organisations like the Australia Council, often hampered by their own government structures, require extensive submission and reporting processes which can be frustrating to time and resource-poor artists. This thesis argues that relying on funding organisations for economic sustainability is not a long term option as there is never enough money to cover each practitioner’s needs. As David Marr said in his 2005 Philip Parsons Lecture:

Expensive as they are, the arts need more money—not for the sake of the companies, certainly not for the bureaucrats, and not only for the sake of the artists. For our sake. To release this country’s imagination by mining the creativity that’s there, waiting to be discovered. In its private soul searching late last year, the Australia Council gave a figure that would transform the arts in this country: another $40 million a year.

Without such a large and ongoing funding increase, most theatre practitioners can not rely on government subsidy as a primary source for sustainability. Most arts practitioners are realistic enough to understand that the best that can be hoped for is a re-juggling of existing arts funding in a way that might benefit their particular artform. Funding limitations encourages cycles of funding allocation that gives certain companies a reprieve but leaves others still struggling.
Even though the *SMPA Report* and the Australia Council identified limited funding as an issue for independent arts organisations, ‘the “policy climate” created by governments over the past 20 years’\(^6\) has created an agenda that doesn’t allow the Australia Council and other arts agencies to offer any more significant funding. The Australia Council Theatre division’s final *Make It New? Communiqué*\(^7\) states:

*Make It New?* began in late 2005 as an investigation of new ways to use our funds in an increasingly tight financial environment. While the Australia Council was at the time seeking more investment from government in the small-to-medium performing arts, we knew that we needed to go forward regardless of the results of these efforts.\(^8\)

The Theatre Board’s aim with the *Make It New?* policy, is to encourage contemporary theatre practice in Australia through increased networks, to develop artistic hubs within existing organisations, and to enable increased infrastructure where possible. One initiative, *Managing and Producing Services* (MAPS), is described as an ‘experiment’\(^9\) in developing artist administration and production via partnerships with funded managing and producing organisations. Such funding structure redevelopment allows artists to access funds in new ways but the reality is that there is not enough arts funding for the needs of the entire Australian theatre sector. Redirecting limited funds, and other consequences of having to stretch limited funding to try and improve arts sector sustainability, is explained in the following description of the MAPS scheme in a 2008 *RealTime* article.

While there are high hopes for the project and negotiations with other States and Territories continue, John Baylis cites a sobering list of potential pitfalls, including, ‘artists’ unrealistic expectations on what are very lean infrastructures; producers mistaking their role as creative partner for that of an artistic director; artists receiving only project-by-project support, when the real need is long-term planning and commitment; producer burnout; an unthinking imperative to grow, in the mistaken belief that to stay small is to stagnate; funding body complacency that a few MAPS entities around the country has ‘solved’ the small-to-medium infrastructure issue; and the needs of the producing organisation becoming more of a driver than the original aim—supporting artists better.\(^10\)
Another recently funded project, Mobile States, was established in 2004 to address the lack of national touring connections for independents. Mobile States is run by a consortium of Australia’s major independent contemporary performance presenters. Although it is said to enable ‘audiences across the country to experience performance from outside their hometowns’, it also helps practitioners extend the life of their projects through touring and enables them to explore other communities and networks. Fiona Winning describes Mobile States as a ‘nimble way’ of ‘dispersing resources’ because it devolves ‘funds to a consortium that in turn have to make it work. And have real incentive to on every level’. Mobile States however is limited by its own funding and management structures and necessarily excludes the majority of independent practitioners. Since 2004, there have been a maximum of two tours chosen each year. Although a positive program, it can only support a very small number of practitioners.

Existing national touring funding is not only restricted in the number of companies it can support, but also the style and size of shows that it can include. Zen Zen Zo Physical Theatre, whose company aesthetic is chorus based, often incorporates up to fifteen performers per show in their home city of Brisbane. Zen Zen Zo often cuts cast numbers back to eight or fewer for touring shows but that amount is ‘still big for Australia, absolutely’ says Co-Director Lynne Bradley.

And when we’ve approached companies or festivals to tour us, they want us to decrease that number even more to five or three and it's our company's aesthetic is the big chorus. So that's one of the reasons that we haven't been picked up by someone like Performing Lines, who's very interested in us. But they keep saying, "When you produce a work with five actors or three actors, give us a call." If we wanted to tour it, we have to change [the creative vision of the work]. And even when we went to Singapore Festival the year before last, we had to downsize the chorus from eight to four which is just not as powerful, is it? So it's not as good a work, is it?

In an attempt to provide richer community hubs, some Australian performance venues such as Performance Space in Sydney, one of Mobile States core members, also offer
residencies and other artist development programs for independent practitioners. Fiona Winning, the Performance Space’s previous Director, says:

[W]e offer a residency program so that people who are in collaborative teams can come and work in the space and test ideas. ... A lot of the residencies are local artists. But we deliberately make that a national program to encourage artists from different parts of Australia to come and be in residence here. The reason for that are these artists are getting something else, it's not just the space. We offer very little in terms of cash to those artists. What we offer is space, some technical support, sometimes some dramaturgical support, some technical equipment and sometimes some cash to make something or create something. ... So with the artists who are not from Sydney, what they're getting out of it is, I guess, exposure to and inclusion in a different community of artists to their hometown. For example, pvi collective which is a fantastic group from Perth…, [t]hey're getting a picture of the connections and difference between their practice and their community of practitioners in Perth and those here.\(^\text{15}\)

Residencies are offered at other performing arts venues such as Queensland Performing Arts Centre, the Judith Wright Centre for Performing Arts, and Full Tilt at the Victorian Arts Centre. These residencies vary, depending on the venue’s funding and the accepted proposals, from a short period of creative development of one to six weeks or may cover one year of a practitioners work.

Another Australia Council initiative as part of the Make It New? policy is the Local Stages initiative. This three-year (2006-2009) partnership between Illawarra Performing Arts Centre, Bathurst Memorial Entertainment Centre and Griffith Regional Theatre, aims to ‘develop hot-houses for the performing arts in regional communities – providing a platform for local performing artists to create and stage their works’.\(^\text{16}\) Such residencies offer practitioners a taste of shared connections and resources as well as dedicated time to developing their theatre careers at a creative and management level. However, 28 percent of this thesis’ interviewees believe that it was difficult to sustain their work outside of such residencies because they no longer had regular access to the infrastructure, regular feedback and interaction the venues provided them. Yet the
venues cannot support artists indefinitely because they are limited by their own funding.

With increasing expectations and little reliable funding from either governments or the marketplace, independent practitioners simply keep going as best they can. Audience and panel members of the RealTime/Performance Space Size Matters forum highlighted the inability of funding to address all relevant aspects of independent theatre sustainability:

In the 90’s sponsorship was going to solve everything and look where that got us. Now, just when the sector needs a significant injection of funds, we get business plans and better communication. As important as these are, especially if a ‘whole government’ approach to the arts can be developed, they cannot deal with the diminishing capacity of the sector to be the nation's creative laboratory.17

5.3 Economic Cycles: a non-sustainable model for independent practitioners
As part of the Australia Council’s Make It New? forum discussion, John Baylis responded to concerns about a reliance on funding for the sustainability of all elements of the independent theatre sector. He suggested a need for ‘other assumptions, such as that organisations may have finite vibrant life and then depart the scene (voluntarily would be nice) to allow for new ones’.18 Baylis argues that the ‘vulnerability’19 of the independent sector ‘should be seen as its strength: it is not a fixed collection of cultural institutions, but should be a field of dynamic and changing platforms responsive to continually emerging creative energies’.20 He posits that artists need to be able to reinvent their own organisations, makes space for emerging artists and develop their own structures. Stephan Greder agrees that unless independent theatre companies can determine their own sustainability; cycles of emergence, fragmentation and demise will continue to be a common part of the economic reality.

…[E]veryone has to be willing to accept that some things will be relatively stable within that ecology and some things will be incredibly dynamic but without both of them, you don't really have an ecology because there's no capacity for renewal. Nothing changes.21
In response to the notion of a ‘finite lifecycle’, Yaron Lifschitz, Artistic Director of Circa, feels that the current funding models and the economic climate in which they exist are not flexible enough to allow companies to rise and fall on their own merit. The constant cycles in funding and government policy, the constant cycles of ‘starting again’, the constant cycles of energy and company burn out, he says; create ‘destabilisation’ and ‘vulnerability’.22

5.3.1 The Struggle to Determine Sustainability within Hierarchical Models

Baylis, Greder and Lifschitz all seek a dynamic and viable independent performance scene that allows for both individual and collective innovation as well as enough sustainability to encourage the sector’s strength and growth. None however are able to determine a mutually agreeable solution for independent theatre sustainability within the current economic confines.

The relationship between funded culture and the creative industries is sometimes simple, sometimes complex; and certainly one that is not yet adequately understood, and one where a better understanding would, as this paper concludes, offer much learning to the development of policies both for the creative industries and for the arts.23

In A Regional State of Mind: Making Art Outside Metropolitan Australia Lyndon Terracini proposes a different, more egalitarian model that might improve this relationship.

The fact is that we have built for ourselves a top-down bureaucratic system of arts and cultural methodology and, unless we reverse it, we will continue to be frustrated by the state of the profession to which so many of us have given the best years of our lives. So many of the wonderful Australian works we have had the privilege to perform will be lost. ... The broad-based [cultural] pyramid will sink into a suburban desert.24

Terracini’s model is still situated within economic understandings of sustainability but is based on a cultural pyramid that:
[W]ill provide the foundation for a new model of cultural and artistic democracy, one that is much more sympathetic to Australian thinking than the hierarchy we have at present - and one that will insist that our cultural identity be defined by the community.25

Terracini’s concept of a broad-based, cultural pyramid rises out of Australia’s cultural and community needs rather than be dictated by an ‘outcome-based’ hierarchy or by a select group of professional companies.26 Nevertheless, he admits that this cultural pyramid structure would have to be sustained through government funding and that some small arts organisations would find it difficult to implement.

In Art in a Cold Climate - Rethinking the Australia Council, Keith Gallasch argues that the reliance on government funding has inadvertently resulted in an ‘interplay with resource-controlling top-down forces - co-operative or resistant’ which overshadow Australia’s cultural ecosystem. He adds that despite the hierarchical image this implies, ‘…hierarchy sometimes turns out to be the right image, if a problematic one. We are dealing with power’.27

Independent theatre, working from a local, grass roots level, lies at the bottom of the hierarchical funding culture led by government and as such receives a ‘relatively small proportion of overall cultural funding at the Commonwealth level that is channelled through the Council’.28

5.3.2 Assessing the Damage

Both Independent theatre interviewees as well as government agency reports29 and guides30 confirm that the independent performing arts sector includes some of our major exporters of performing arts, makes up at least 50 percent of all Australian producing organisations, presents opportunities for emerging artists, and develops cost-effective innovation in performance and management. Despite this, the sector exists in an unstable and fractured working environment unconducive to sustainability.
Australia’s limited arts funding and the pressure on independent practitioners to develop new ways of sustaining themselves, is exacerbated by government agencies’ emphasis on economic and innovation outcomes. As Lyndon Terrancini has said:

The more new work we produce, the less likely we are to place high expectations on it. We seem to be obsessed with creating 'masterpieces', and look to every new work to justify its existence by being an instant success. The expectation that every new work will be a 'product', and not simply part of an ongoing creative 'process', can put intolerable pressure on artists. The fault, however, lies not with the arts community but with their funding bodies and with an economy that would rather finance in a one-off, ad hoc manner than provide continuing support to ongoing research and developmental work.31

Most independents admit that because it is so difficult to obtain long-term funding or resources they are only able to plan a few years into the future at most. Many independents operate from month to month or project to project. As outlined in Chapters 2 and 4, infrastructure, networks, and resources continue to be a hindrance to increased growth in this sector.

David Whitney agrees that resource fragmentation and the constant struggle to survive leaves many independent companies ‘lurching from one project round to the next’,32 too exhausted to contemplate more sustainable solutions:

And what arts workers tend to do is when the money gets tight is they just work longer and they work harder and they take on more and more roles. ...There are clearly companies that are more than project companies. There are companies that have a life that is a little more permanent in the performing arts world [but] there are very few of those companies and most of them are quite niche.33

Fiona Winning describes Make It New? as a positive example of externalised policy development that ‘at the very least … reveals the thinking behind the proposal, invites debate and importantly prepares the field for change’. The process invited debate but this debate also highlighted ongoing divisiveness concerning funding decisions and the policy that surround them.34 A more cohesive approach to supporting the independent
sector requires a shift away from models that rely on government-funding or on overly-bureaucratic systems.

As noted in Chapter 4, many independent theatre practitioners link their ability to sustain a career in theatre to the mental and physical energy they have to keep going. Their original passion and impetus for working in theatre is limited or drained by effects including:

- government funding and competition;
- limited resources, time and/or staff;
- shared vision and support for their ideas;
- lack of opportunities to create a proper culture of dialogue between artists;
- general fatigue from juggling tasks and conflicting commitments; and
- distance and cultural expectation.

Ultimately, as Fiona Winning says ‘…we all, in the field and at the Australia Council, have to rise above the business of busy-ness to make sure we engage in these processes and give each other permission to change. To leave behind some of the accumulateds so that we might look to the fresh opportunities’.35 This call for a more cohesive understanding of sustainability is a central element of this thesis’ ecological framework.

5.4 Overcoming the Impacts of Funding and Fragmentation

In recent years there has been a growing interest by practitioners and arts organisations to overcome exhaustion and burnout in the industry but for many, the overly corporate or funding-reliant solutions or models creates yet another job that they, as independently resourced organisations, struggle with alone.

Keith Gallasch, in his article ‘The S Word’, argues that the independent arts sector cannot be made ‘sustainable only in terms of what its functional value is’.36 Gallasch uses an ecological metaphor to argue that although current discourse and changes in government policy might embrace the language of ecology, this language is still situated within the economic values of the ‘art-as-business model’.37 This thesis argues that in order to make real change, the sector might look to non-economic models of sustainability. Ecological models recognise the interrelatedness of the individual and their environment. Others in the arts industry support ecological models because of their
ability to develop more flexible and inclusive approaches to sustainability and their ability to encompass all of the sector’s characteristics and influences. ‘I think the best thing is that if you look at the performing arts as an ecology, genuinely as an ecology. So it’s not just a simple circle but things come and go in it’ says Arts Queensland’s Stefan Greder.38

Keith Gallasch highlights the lack of sustainability in independent arts and uses the ecology metaphor as a better model for sustainability than the current business model.

In these [independent] companies, people's work might be very innovative but how much longer can they be innovative if they don't have the resources, if they can't keep ongoing ensembles? That's what art should be about, ongoiness. …So I think fragmentation is one of the biggest problems. …This is what I'm working on over the next few months, building a different model of how we read the arts. It's to do with looking at a different model because I think we've got a clatter of models and metaphors and we need to have a look at this in a different way. There is no shared way of thinking about the arts. The dominant model is the business model, profitability, viability, performance agreements.39

Gallasch’s model is particularly important to this thesis because of its focus on ‘shared thinking’, overcoming ‘fragmentation’, and moving away from existing business models.

My aim is to replace a limiting set of managerial metaphors, born of neo-liberal economic theory, with another that is open-ended and relates to the way systems actually operate. It can contemplate the very things the managerial model cannot: innovation, emergence, excellence ('best practice' excepted, of course) and history, and do it with nuance and, as Robyn Archer demands, dialectically.40

5.5 Energy and Sustainability within the Theatre Ecology
Issues of long-term sustainability that emerged from the data were closely linked to issues of energy and included energy loss, creative energy, physical and mental energy. As John Baylis, commented:
So there tends to be a bit of a journey that they [independent artists or collaborative groups] go on where there's pure enthusiasm that sustains them for a year or two…. I think that's where a lot of them die off. They can't get to that next step and it's partly individual's career paths. You can live on the dole and a little bit of extra money for a certain period, especially if you're young. You reach a certain point where you just can't, especially when you begin to get a big picture of how the whole sector works and you realise that it isn't a matter of toughing it out until things get better. ... For a lot of people it won't get better.41

Companies as well as individual practitioners struggle to refine their focus and energies because they currently have to be everything: artists, administrators, producers, marketers and much more. Their working environment, being resource poor, encourages multi-tasking to unsustainable levels. Self-dependency in such an environment can force practitioners into a vacuum where they work in highly reactive ways or without enough resources. These conditions cause over-stress and energy depletion. Simon Hill, an independent practitioner and former member of The Men Who Knew Too Much (TMWKTM), says that the constant act of surviving as an artist means ‘you sometimes get exhausted because you feel like you're reinventing the wheel each time’. He admits that this is part of the artistic journey of being an artist but he also believes that artists in Australia are isolated and that support networks and good communication, in person or online, are crucial to sustainability. Chris Mead, Artistic Director of Playwriting Australia, believes that the sector’s ‘failure’ to give back is indicative of the amount of energy each company or practitioner has to spend with ‘the everyday nonsense of being in a company’. As a result, he says, there is ‘no genuine mentoring of anyone. There's just this dog eat dog. Who's the next big thing?’42 The attrition of artists means fewer experienced practitioners and a constant cycle of emerging artists having to develop their own ways of surviving.

Younger or emerging artists often have the physical and mental stamina required to sustain them for certain periods of time in such an environment. But many interviewees were more concerned with longer term sustainability and discussed how hard it was to continue in the industry past a certain age. ‘Well you can't survive in this industry for
too long. People who are still hanging around in their forties and fifties, have got to have some strategy going on,’ says independent Lisa O’Neill.\textsuperscript{43} Peter Eckersall, also a former member of The Men Who Knew Too Much (TMWKTM), says that academic commitments combined with the ‘pressures’ of performing and touring as he got older ultimately led to him leaving the group.\textsuperscript{44} This drop out of older, more experienced, artists creates a vacuum in the professional and informational pathways for younger artists who have the energy the sector needs to sustain itself. Jeff Khan of Next Wave festival explains that ‘younger and emerging practitioners, who may be unaware of the broader drives and directives of the sector at large or are unable to access the infrastructure of established presenters’ and other networks and need a more ‘supportive and critically rigorous environment’\textsuperscript{45} in order to develop sustainable careers.

The metaphor of the arts industry as an ecosystem or ecology allows this thesis to analyse the energy cycles and pathways that exist within the independent theatre sector in new ways. It also allows this thesis to look beyond existing economic frameworks and to develop a model that is inclusive of, but not situated within, government funding or creative industries models.
Notes

1 Pledger.

2 Throsby, Does Australia Need a Cultural Policy? 36.

3 Pledger.


6 Meyrick in Usher.

7 Australia Council for the Arts, Make it New? Communiqué 3.

8 Australia Council for the Arts, Make it New? Communiqué 3.


12 Performing Lines, Mobile States.

13 Winning, How Things are Done in the Arts Sector.


15 Winning, How Things are Done in the Arts Sector.


17 Baxter and Gallasch.


21 Greder.
24 Terracini, 34.
25 Terracini, 46-47.
26 Terracini, 29.
27 Gallasch, Art in a Cold Climate - Rethinking the Australia Council 8.
28 Throsby, Does Australia Need a Cultural Policy? 37.
30 RealTime and Australia Council for the Arts, In Repertoire; RealTime and Australia Council for the Arts, In Repertoire: A Guide to Australian Performance for Young People.
31 Terracini, 28-29.
33 Whitney.
34 Schwartzkoff; Gruber.
35 Winning, How Things are Done in the Arts Sector.
36 Gallasch, "The 'S' Word." 12, 42.
37 Gallasch, "The 'S' Word."
38 Greder.
39 Gallasch.
40 Gallasch, Art in a Cold Climate - Rethinking the Australia Council 7.
41 Baylis.
42 Chris Mead. Personal interview. 7 April 2004.
43 O'Neill.
44 Eckersall.
6.1 Introducing Flow

This thesis’ focus on energy pathways within the Independent theatre sector has been discussed so far in terms of the sector’s concerns such as division, funding structures, isolation and exclusion, audience and marketing expectations, and lack of a more cohesive approach to independent theatre’s sustainability. The benefit of examining sustainability through emerging energy patterns is that these patterns are determined by the sector’s own traits and behaviour rather than external economic or business management structures which the independent sector is often at odds with. Ironically, this approach to improving performance is now accepted within highly corporate and international fields because it focuses on developing already inherent resources and energies that may have been dulled or forgotten in today’s harried, professional environment. This approach led the research to the study of positive psychology and to the particular field of flow or optimal experience. As previously noted, flow is a well respected framework in a range of professional fields. Chapter 6 explains flow theory’s application to these fields in more detail and provides examples that are relevant to the theatre industry’s shared characteristics and concerns as outlined in Chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 6 is designed to ground the reader in flow theory, the conditions of flow theory, and the theory’s applications in sustainable practice of careers and companies. Chapter 6 reviews flow theory, and in particular the conditions for flow, within the context of an inclusive framework for improved sustainability that can respond and interact with the sector’s concerns, energy flow, and inherent characteristics. Central to this energy-centric framework and its ability to sustain independent theatre practice is the feeling of flow or optimal experience.

6.2 What is Flow?

Flow, or optimal experience as it is also known, is a state or experience where the person feels fully immersed in what s/he is doing. It is often described as a feeling of
energised focus and full involvement in an activity. Csikszentmihalyi’s flow theory, like this thesis, is concerned with the movement of energy in a system – whether a person, or a management structure or an activity.

The main dimensions of flow – intense involvement, deep concentration, clarity of goals and feedback, loss of a sense of time, lack of self-consciousness and transcendence of a sense of self, leading to an autotelic, that is, intrinsically rewarding experience – are recognised in more or less the same form by people the world over. … Nor do age, gender, or social class make a difference in the perception of flow.¹

In *Flow: The Classic Work on How to Achieve Happiness*, Csikszentmihalyi describes the flow experience as when we are ‘in control of our actions, masters of our own fate. On the rare occasions that it happens, we feel a sense of exhilaration, a deep sense of enjoyment that is long cherished and that becomes a landmark in memory for what life should be like,’² Csikszentmihalyi also explains that flow need not be experienced only on rare occasions. Rather, it can be developed and encouraged to improve all aspects of life, including work, through the positive strengths of each individual or company and their integration with a set of flow conditions. The conditions required to experience flow can be developed to extend beyond one moment or activity and across a practitioner’s entire practice, potentially providing sustainable support to theatre practitioners throughout their careers. Csikszentmihalyi’s flow theory and its potential to improve wellbeing across a range of environments and experiences, provides this thesis with a set of conditions from which to better understand the connection between the energies and sustainability of independent practitioners. Csikszentmihalyi’s conditions for flow can be summarised as follows:

- clear goals;
- immediate feedback;
- a balance between challenges and skills that encourage stimulation and growth but which do not cause too much stress or anxiety;
- a merging of action and awareness;
- no distractions;
- a disappearance of self-consciousness;
- a shift in awareness of time or environmental impacts on outcomes; and
- the activity becoming the goal itself.³
6.3 Revising the Conditions of Flow for Independent Theatre

These conditions relate not only to the activities conducive for flow but the environment and intrinsic motivations of the participants. These conditions create the framework for achieving flow. But their particular relevance to this thesis is their correlation with the themes and impacts on energy and sustainability that emerged from the independent theatre data. As a result of these correlations as well as extensive research into the field of flow theory itself, this thesis has revised Csikszentmihalyi’s original eight conditions into five which have been defined as:

- a sense of oneness (a sense of being at one with one’s self, and one’s processes and environment);
- clear goals;
- a feeling of control;
- a dynamic balance of capacities with challenges (or opportunities); and
- immediate feedback.

The aim of Part B of this thesis is to situate the conditions for flow within a system for improving energy and sustainable practice in Australian independent theatre. This system is an interpretation of the data through the interdisciplinary and holistic conditions for optimal experience which emerged from my interaction with the independent theatre data, its key themes, and their correlation with theories from positive psychology.

The summarising of Csikszentmihalyi’s original eight conditions into five was determined by the relevance of data to the characteristics and ecology of Australian independent theatre. The current ecology of Australian independent theatre as identified in this thesis, depicts a creative, highly motivated, energised and passionate sector that is stifled by past and current cultural, geographic, and economic contexts. As Fiona Winning sagely summarised:

I think if all of these organisations and their affiliated artists and workers were to stand in the same room and examine our work collectively, we would see an enormous output of new work, innovation, new ways of seeing and doing. We would see a diverse array of artists, technicians, producers, project managers, volunteer board members and other volunteers driven by passion, belief, vision and skill (albeit in varying percentages). We would see an adventurous, ambitious mob consistently
pushing for the new. A group that is savvy … and completely overstretched.

The business of busy-ness is exciting for a while, but in the long term it stunts our capacity for fresh thinking, for reflection, for imagining and for having calm and respectful debate. Which I believe, sits at the heart of a healthy arts sector.4

The revised conditions for flow or optimal experience offer a fresh opportunity for this overstretched and diverse group to review and encourage longer term sustainability. Csikszentmihayli says:

To improve the quality of life through work, two complementary strategies are necessary. On the one hand jobs should be redesigned so that they resemble as closely as possible flow activities … but it will also be necessary to help people develop autotelic [formalised activity or creative work having an end or purpose in itself] personalities… by training them to recognize opportunities for action, to hone their skills, to set reachable goals. Neither of these strategies is likely to make work much more enjoyable by itself; in combination, they should contribute to optimal experience.5

Gillian Stamp, a psychologist and consultant specialising in Career Path Appreciation (CPA) and capacity building for individuals and institutions, confirms that 'sustainability is about being able to/allowed to express the capability that they [people] have to create flow. The person can generate those circumstances themselves'. This thesis argues that in order to generate those circumstances Australian independent theatre needs to:

• understand and identify the major sustainability issues;
• understand and identify their internal and external characteristics and energies; and then
• develop conditions that enable those circumstances to occur.

Flow may happen spontaneously, writes Csikszentmihalyi, 'but it is much more likely that flow will result either from a structured activity, or from an individual's ability to make flow occur, or both'.7
6.4 History of Flow Theory

Csikszentmihalyi’s flow or optimal experience theory is a well-recognised form of positive psychology, a field of psychology that aims to characterise, measure and cultivate positive qualities to develop individual and communal wellbeing. Flow or optimal experience theory has been taught and applied in the fields of psychology, music, sport, education, information technology, and business, and organisational management⁸.

Csikszentmihalyi first presented the concept of flow in his 1975 work Beyond Boredom and Anxiety⁹, but this concept only became popularised after the success of his 1992 book, Flow, the Psychology of Happiness,¹⁰ which was the precursor to many more publications including Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention¹¹ and Optimal Experience: Psychological Studies of Flow in Consciousness.¹² Professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi studied at the University of Chicago and was Professor of Psychology there from 1971 to 1999. He then moved to Claremont Graduate University (CGU) where he established and is still Co-director of the Quality of Life Research Center (QLRC) at the Peter F. Drucker School of Management. The QLRC is a non-profit research institute that studies positive psychology; that is, human strengths such as optimism, creativity, intrinsic motivation, and responsibility.

In his 2002 publication Flow: The Classic Work on How to Achieve Happiness,¹³ Csikszentmihalyi refers to flow as summarising ‘decades of research on the positive aspects of human experience – joy, creativity, the process of total involvement with life I call flow’. He is aware however that it is easy with such terminology to become ‘careless or overly enthusiastic’,¹⁴ and he cautions readers and researchers against treating the theory and related publications as recipe books for happiness.

6.5 A Holistic Approach: Navigating the individual and the collective

Csikszentmihalyi’s theory correlates with this thesis’ holistic approach to sustainable independent theatre careers and companies in that it incorporates both the internal and external energies of human experience. The theory interrelates the individual with their environment. In their 1988 study on the compartmentalisation of work versus leisure,
Allison and Duncan draw attention to early flow research as leading the way in holistic approaches to wellbeing because it focussed on the individual as well as their living and working environment. In his 1975 *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety*\(^{15}\) Csikszentmihalyi:

\[\text{\ldots \ [T]}\text{ried to understand the essential nature of enjoyment, or "flow," by identifying (1) the experiential components of phenomenological features that characterize the flow state, (2) the nature of the activity engaged in during the experience, and (3) the degree of flow experienced by individuals. By focusing on the subjective conditions first, rather than on the context, he identified similarities in both work and play environments that did elicit the flow state. \ldots [I]t demonstrates that the entire range of emotions, from joy to absolute boredom and frustration, can be experienced either in work or leisure. Although this premise seems somewhat obvious now, past research in the area did not really allow for the possibility.}^{16}\]

This thesis argues that independent theatre’s ongoing energies and sustainability are hindered in part by the effects of diversity, distance, and fragmentation of resources and networks. Conversely, one of the independent theatre sector’s strengths is also its diversity. Another potential strength is its capacity for developing and sharing innovative cultural experiences. This, as the authors of *Creativity, Communication and Cultural Value*, Keith Negus and Michael Pickering, point out, is an inherent part of the creative process which drives theatre makers and their careers.

What we are suggesting is that experience is not realised, is not given meaning and significance, until it has achieved its communicative form. Achieving this form in ways which reach others and resonate within their own experience completes the creative process. ...[T]he creative process is recognised. Conceiving the experience of creativity in this way means we cannot confine creativity to the artist or cultural producer alone. Creativity entails a communicative experience which is cross-relational. It is an intersubjective and interactive dialogue bringing its participants together in the activity of the interpretation, exchange and understanding.\(^{17}\)

Because of theatre’s reliance on external culture, either through its creative and organisational processes or through its need for government or audience support, independent theatre practitioners are caught somewhere between identifying with their
community while also striving to be unique and outstanding from it. Ian McGrath highlights the dynamic ecology in which independent artists struggle for sustainability in his book, *Caretaker of a Vision* in which he writes that ‘theatre artists must collaborate, sometimes suppressing a need for “self-expression” in order that the whole has the opportunity of becoming greater than the individual parts’. Such collaboration relies on accepting diversity of capabilities and opinions while working collectively towards a shared vision.

6.6  The Application of Csikszentmihalyi’s Theories in Creative Fields

Flow theory’s holistic approach has been applied to issues of vitality in a diverse range of creative professions and environments. Flow is studied and applied in performance related fields including music and sport, and more broadly in areas such as organisational management, leadership and business skills, and creative development. Recent publications by Csikszentmihalyi such as *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*, Flow in Sports, and *Good Business: Leadership. Flow, and the Making of Meaning* are indicative of the growing interest in flow theory from professional fields outside of positive psychology. Csikszentmihalyi’s theories relating to creativity have been applied to theatre and the visual arts in two recent theses.

Jimmy Bickerstaff’s 2000 thesis titled *The Collaborative Artist: Creativity Theory for Theatre Production* primarily uses Csikszentmihalyi and Dr Teresa Amabile’s definitions of creativity described as being the result of complex interaction between the person and their environment. This concept of creativity is particularly useful to his study of creative processes in theatre production because it allows for the impact of other theatre collaborators within the environmental context. ‘Theatre,’ he writes ‘is a complex manifestation of creative behaviour, one that includes individual, collaborative, and cultural levels’. Using a three-tiered systems approach Bickerstaff is able to ‘characterize’ the [collaborative] production system by interpreting its creative process through a brief summary of the [research] observations. It is clear however that Bickerstaff’s thesis relates solely to the creative processes inherent in the collaborative production of theatre performance. His research does not apply flow theory to other aspects of theatre work such as career or company management which are also
significant to career, company and production development as well as theatre practitioners’ livelihoods. Such processes are just as relevant to this thesis’ examination of independent theatre sustainability as the artistic processes used in developing and performing theatre.

Margaret Botticchio\textsuperscript{27} also applies Csikszentmihalyi’s creativity theories to her case studies of six Australian women visual artists. By focussing on the creative experiences of individual women working in distinct domains, Botticchio builds a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of creative phenomena particularly in the arts field. Botticchio makes one particular point in relation to the arts industry that Bickerstaff does not and which resonates with some of the data collected in this thesis: creativity relies on the arts sector having the necessary resources for it to function.

6.7 **Significant Concepts from Positive Psychology and Creativity Theory**

There are particular psychologists,\textsuperscript{ii} including Csikszentmihalyi, working in fields of Positive Psychology or Creativity Theory whose research and publications enabled this thesis to develop a broader understanding of the theories involved and how they might be applied to specific examples. These specialists also helped determine the relationship between flow and the internal and external conditions inherent to creative professions such as independent theatre. 'In general, creativity can be defined as the capacity to produce novel, original work that fits with task constraints' write Lubart and Guignard in *The Generality-Specificity of Creativity: A Multivariate Approach*.\textsuperscript{28} Such specialists, many of whom have been cited by and/or published with Csikszentmihalyi, seem equally concerned by the range of internal and external energies that affect creativity as well as the relationship between these energies and workplace wellbeing.

Since creativity and creative involvement are valuable to organizations and often sought after, researchers have become increasingly interested in identifying conditions at both the

\textsuperscript{ii} These include: Teresa Amabile, Anne Cummings, Steven Farmer, George Graen, Elena Grigorenko, Vera John-Steiner, Bernard Nijstad, Greg Oldham, Paul Paulus, Jill Perry-Smith, Keith Sawyer, Jerome Singer, Martin Seligman, Robert Sternberg, Pamela Tierney.
organization and individual levels that influence employee creative behaviors (e.g., Oldham & Cummings, 1996; Perry-Smith, 2006; Tierney, Farmer, & Graen, 1999).

One of these conditions is the work environment, which has mostly been studied in terms of support for creativity, the extent to which individuals are encouraged to engage in creative work or display creative behaviors (Amabile et al., 1996; Madjar, Oldham, & Pratt, 2002), or in terms of social networks (Perry-Smith, 2006; Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003).29

6.7.1 Positive Individuals, Institutions and their Ability to Thrive

Dr Martin Seligman, based at the University of Pennsylvania, developed a theory of ‘learned helplessness’30 and ‘learned optimism’31 within the field of positive psychology as a response to an ‘exclusive focus on pathology that’ he and Csikszentmihalyi felt dominated the psychology discipline.32 Dr Seligman has since established the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania to examine Positive Psychology’s three central concerns: ‘positive emotions, positive individual traits, and positive institutions’33 and their ability to ‘enable individuals and communities to thrive’.34 Seligman’s theories were important to this research because of the way they developed ‘frameworks for a science of positive psychology’.35 Rather than focus on negative traits and their individual repair, these frameworks are developed through the identification of positive strengths within a shared ecology.

6.7.2 Enabling External and Internal Conditions for Creativity

Dr Teresa Amabile’s ongoing research and findings detail the impact of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation on creativity and other characteristics of positive psychology. Amabile began her research in the 1970s originally focussing on individual creativity. Over 30 years, however, Amabile’s research has broadened to include team creativity and organisational innovation. Much of this work is published in the 1996 edition of her book, Creativity in Context.36 ‘Her current research program focuses on the psychology of everyday work life: how events in the work environment influence subjective experience and performance’.37 Her revision of the Intrinsic Motivation Principle of Creativity is particularly relevant to this thesis’ understanding of individual and environmental conditions. Intrinsic motivation is conducive to creativity; controlling
extrinsic motivations is detrimental to creativity, but informational or enabling extrinsic motivation can be conducive, particularly if initial levels of intrinsic motivation are high”. Formerly extrinsic motivation had been assumed to have a solely negative impact on creativity but Amabile’s revision allows for a new way of developing and managing creativity, particularly in the workplace where the role and value of positive extrinsic motivators could be reconsidered. This theory is extremely valuable to practitioners and organisations, such as those in independent theatre that focus heavily on research and development, and the creativity that such tasks require.

6.7.3 The Benefits of Collaboration and Psychology for Creative Professions

Keith Sawyer’s work on collaborative creativity and creativity in performance, along with other creativity specialists such as Vera John-Steiner, Robert Sternberg, Paul Paulus and Bernard Nijstad, has explored and developed theories relating to the development and applications of creativity in different settings. Creativity and Development, a 2003 publication includes chapters by Csikszentmihalyi, Sternberg and John-Steiner that explore the connections and tensions between creativity research and developmental psychology: two fields that have progressed, largely independently of each other.

The key connection that this book makes is that both creativity and development are ‘processes’: ‘processes of emergence in complex systems; this focus is shared among approaches ranging from Piagetian developmental theory to Csikszentmihalyi’s systems model of creativity.

Some of the themes covered in this book are the dynamic processes that develop creativity, the interrelation between individual and social processes, and the role of society and peers in developmental and creative processes. Sawyer’s study of creativity across disciplines has become quite focussed on the collaborative nature of creativity and on the creative energy that emerges from collaborative, networked environments. In his 2007 book Group Genius: The Creative Power of Collaboration, Sawyer lays out the research from which he and other psychologists developed methods for improving
creativity in group settings, improving organisational dynamics, and tapping into creative energy.

Sawyer believes that the strong correlation between creative professions such as the performing arts and the field of psychology has the ability to create a ‘truly interdisciplinary’

approach to improving creative energy and innovative models of organisational management. This approach reflects the intertwined nature of performance, creativity and energy, and supports the use of performance processes in psychological theory, just as this thesis applies psychological theory to the world of independent theatre.

Psychology can draw on research in these disciplines, as it begins to extend creativity theory to the study of performance creativity. These other disciplines can, in turn, benefit from relevant research in the psychology of creativity.

Flow is just one theory in the ever-growing field of positive psychology and creativity theory. Csikszentmihalyi’s flow theory is particularly relevant to Australian independent theatre because many of the practitioners interviewed for this research are already implementing or seeking to implement the holistic conditions for flow as a way of sustaining their careers or companies. Creativity, a key focus of Sawyer and Amabile’s work, is central to the values and motivations of most arts practitioners. However, as data from this thesis reveals, creativity is not the only form of energy that affects the sustainability of Australian independent theatre. Many theatre practitioners have the creative forces needed to build a career in theatre but some external and internal impacts that are characteristic of the sector make it difficult for them to summon or reinvigorate this energy when required. Weakened energy, rather than weakened creativity, was the overwhelming theme that emerged from this research’s data.

Experiencing flow is based on conditions that enable the individual or group to feel sustained and energised without experiencing overwhelming complexity or stress. It creates ‘a unified flowing from one moment to the next, in which we feel in control of our actions, and in which there is little distinction between self and environment;
between stimulus and response; or between past, present, and future’. Flow does occur naturally, as many theatre practitioners can testify, but it can be encouraged and conditioned.

### 6.8 Flow Theory’s Correlation with Energy and Sustainability in other Fields

Flow theory’s application across so wide a diversity of fields is based on its ability to channel and improve energy, creativity, positivism, and wellbeing based on a range of conditions rather than a given subject.

#### 6.8.1 Organisational Management

Management-related disciplines, which apply a wide range of positive psychology theories, cover areas such as human resource management, professional development, organisational behaviour, and human performance. But recent reports use the particular concepts of Csikszentmihalyi’s flow or optimal experience theory as a framework for improving energy and performance at work.

Senior Lecturer in Human Resources (HR) at Massey University, New Zealand, Phillip Ramsey, emphasises flow theory in his courses relating to ‘organisational learning and human resource development’. Human Capital Magazine writes in its article on ‘Revolutionary Management Theories’ in Human Relations, that flow is one management theory that ‘should be getting the attention of HR practitioners,’. And it is.

Many business or corporate training providers such as the International Society for Performance Improvement, Gerson Goodson Inc., and BIOSS use flow theory as part of workplace support and training programs for corporate clients. These clients range from independent businesspeople to large corporations such as American Express and General Electric. In *A New Paradigm of Thought for HPT* [Human Performance Technology] Richard Gerson describes performance psychology as adapting techniques used in sports psychology (5.12.4 Sports and Health) ‘and uses them in many other performance-related area, such as music, leadership, arts, sales, and teaching’.
6.8.2 Information Technology (IT) and Online Experiences

Information technology ‘researchers have suggested that flow is a useful construct for describing our interactions with computers’\(^{58}\) and it has been specifically applied in many projects and organisations as an innovative method for improving the interactive experiences of website and software users.\(^{59}\) The implementation of flow theory has also been applied to improve outcomes for IT companies and the working experiences of their employees.

6.8.3 Education and Professional Burnout

In education, optimal experience or flow theory has been used widely to improve learning and teaching experiences. In *Spaces of Learning That Promote Insightful and Creative Mathematical Behaviour: a Theoretical Framework,*\(^{60}\) University of Melbourne’s Gaye Williams links the conditions of flow to channelling positive mathematical learning in students. The Key Learning Community (KLC), which is part of the Indianapolis Public Schools, has developed a ‘Flow Center’ based on Csikszentmihalyi’s theories and their relationship to education. This centre is not only one of the central aspects of the program but the KLC feels it has ‘validity in the educational curriculum and it adds to the enhancement of the student's education and gives them experience in interpersonal relationships’.\(^{61}\) Flow theory has been influential in educational programs and research findings for its ability to enhance learning processes.\(^{62}\)

An education article on professional burnout in teachers highlights the interrelation between flow and energy that is of particular note to this thesis. *Burnout in Teachers: Shattered Dreams of Impeccable Professional Performance*\(^{63}\) identifies burnout as a ‘work-related syndrome stemming from the individual's perception of a significant gap between expectations of successful professional performance and an observed, far less satisfying reality’.\(^{64}\) The symptoms of burnout consist of exhaustion, depersonalisation and a feeling of professional failure. The article uses Csikszentmihalyi’s conditions for flow to establish a link between burnout, professional expectations, lack of supportive
frameworks, and increasing stress. These themes correlate strongly with those that emerged from my research into independent theatre and these correlations reinforces this thesis’ application of flow conditions for improved career and company sustainability.

Similarly, a recent 2006 journal article on career development and satisfaction in nursing used selected aspects of Csikszentmihalyi’s motivational theories to discuss nursing shortages and the need to focus as much on nurses’ job satisfaction and retention as on recruitment and education.

6.8.4 Sports and Health

Sport and health practitioners have also used flow theory to improve psychology, performance and general practice. Published in 1999, Flow in Sports, is the first book devoted to the application of flow theory in sports. Authors Csikszentmihalyi and Jackson identify flow, the conditions associated with it, and recommend actions that athletes and coaches can engage in to set the stage for flow to occur during training sessions and performances. In Latent Variable Modelling of the Relationship between Flow and Exercise-Induced Feelings: An Intuitive Appraisal Perspective studies found that the ‘higher-order flow factor was positively associated with post-exercise positive engagement, revitalization and tranquillity, but not with physical exhaustion.’ The article also recommends that physical educators facilitate the flow experience during lessons that involve structured exercise in order to improve and sustain physical performance. The journal article Factors Influencing the Occurrence of Flow State in Elite Athletes investigates ‘factors which may influence the occurrence of flow in elite athletes’ and determines several relevant factors including preparation, confidence, focus, monitoring of the performance, motivation and arousal level. The factors that facilitate flow, which are similar in classification to the conditions for flow established in this thesis, are deemed by the majority of athletes involved in the study to be ‘controllable or potentially within their control’.
In Back to Basics: Learning About Employee Energy and Motivation from Running on my Treadmill, the authors go one step further in making the connection between flow in athletes and the improvement of sustainability and performance in the workplace. Welbourne, Andrews and Andrews’ research has been applied with positive performance outcomes in more than 75 large and small organisations from diverse industries.

Consistent with what we know about athletic performance, we found that energy is an optimization construct and that variation in employee energy at work has detrimental consequences for performance and satisfaction.

As a result of these and other findings, the relationship between energy and performance or workplace enhancement, has become the subject of attention in other performance-based industries.

Music is one particular performance-based profession of significance to this thesis where the application of flow has been recorded. Publications in this area primarily apply flow to improve musical composition or training rather than career or performance development. In the introduction to their research titled Creativity and Flow in Musical Composition: An Empirical Investigation, MacDonald, Byrne and Carlton write:

Although an extensive literature exists on creativity and music, there is a lack of published research investigating possible links between musical creativity and Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of flow or optimal experience. This article examines a group composition task to study the relationships between creativity, flow and the quality of the compositions produced. … The study provides an example of a research method that can be used to further our understanding of the processes and outcomes of group music composition tasks. The discussion also considers a number of important ways that the concept of flow can be utilized within a music education context.

Flow theory’s application to performance in music and sport can also applied to my research’s investigation of sustainable work performance in the independent theatre sector.
6.9 Conclusion: Flow’s application to independent theatre

Flow or optimal experience, as described throughout this thesis, reflects an optimal state of internal and external energy and consciousness that is characterised by a sense of freedom, enjoyment, fulfilment, and for which ‘many practical applications have been found’. Recent evaluations of positive psychological processes such as flow indicate that ‘these methods tend to leave participants more energized and excited about their work’.\(^7\) In *New Scientist*’s review of Csikszentmihalyi’s *Optimal Experience: Psychological Studies of Flow in Consciousness*, Professor of Ethnology, John Crook wrote that ‘if happiness depends on finding such situations,’ as optimal experience or flow then ‘the creation of social conditions enabling them is of considerable importance,’\(^8\).

It is the conditions that establish flow that are of particular interest to this thesis and to its proposed framework for improved sustainability in Australian independent theatre. Chapter 6 has established connections between flow theory and improved sustainability and wellbeing in professional, creative fields. Chapter 7 uses flow conditions to introduce a holistic, cost-effective, accessible and creative framework to alleviate the sector’s identified sustainability concerns while still allowing for the sector’s diversity and identified characteristics.

Australian independent theatre is a valuable and creative sector with many shared characteristics and strengths. However, as Part A of this thesis reveals, fragmentation of the industry, funding, resources, and energy has had a severe impact on its career and company sustainability. This unique ecology cannot currently sustain itself through economic rationalist or hierarchical, funding structures.\(^9\) Such structures cannot adequately incorporate independent theatre’s holistic energies, positive qualities, and dynamic ecology. Unless proposed sustainability frameworks are accessible, easily comprehensible and achievable for a diverse range of theatre practitioners, they will only serve a small percentage of the hundreds of Australian independents in existence at any given time. This thesis proposes a framework for sustainability based on the
conditions for flow being implemented across a practitioner’s or a company’s entire practice.

Flow is a model developed for the individual but its holistic approach incorporates both intrinsic and extrinsic conditions which can improve collaborative energy and wellbeing. The conditions for flow or optimal experience do not necessarily rely on funding or large amounts of time and provide a holistic framework for developing an energy-centric understanding of sustainability in Australian independent theatre.

A person must …feel that his or her talents are fully employed, that he is able to develop his potentialities, and that his every day life is not stressful or boring, but holds deeply enjoyable experiences. Chapter 3 describes how flow - as I call this subjective experience of full involvement with life - can be achieved. … However, a good life consists of more than simply the totality of enjoyable experiences. It must also have a meaningful pattern, a trajectory of growth that results in the development of increasing emotional, cognitive and social complexity.80

Rather than rely on economic frameworks, flow depends on a dedication to improving wellbeing and career sustainability; experiences, which the data suggests are highly sought after by the highly-stressed and under-resourced independent theatre sector. The conditions for flow that will be examined in detail in Part B, relate not only to activities conducive for flow but to the external and internal motivations of the individuals and organisations involved. The conditions for flow have emerged from correlated themes within the data to create a positive ecological model for improving sustainability in Australian independent theatre.
Notes

2 Csikszentmihalyi, Flow 3.
3 Csikszentmihalyi, Creativity; Csikszentmihalyi, Flow.
4 Winning, How Things are Done in the Arts Sector.
5 Csikszentmihalyi, Flow 157.
6 Stamp.
7 Csikszentmihalyi, Flow 71.
11 Csikszentmihalyi, Creativity.
13 (Flow xi) Csikszentmihalyi, Flow.
14 (Flow xi) Csikszentmihalyi, Flow.
15 Csikszentmihalyi, Beyond Boredom and Anxiety.
16 Allison and Duncan, 119-20.
17 Negus and Pickering, 23.
19 Csikszentmihalyi, Creativity.
20 Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi, Flow in Sports.
22 Bickerstaff; Botticchio.
23 Bickerstaff.
24 Bickerstaff, 265.
25 Bickerstaff, 266.
27 Botticchio.
34 University of Pennsylvania.
36 Amabile.

Amabile, 119.


Sawyer, John-Steiner, Moran, Sternberg, Feldman, Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi, Creativity and Development.

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Sawyer, "The Interdisciplinary Study of Creativity in Performance."

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63 Friedman.

64 Friedman: Introduction.

65 Friedman: 597.

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72 Welbourne, Andrews and Andrews.


74 Freer; Raymond MacDonald, Charles Byrne and Lana Carlton, "Creativity and Flow in Musical Composition: An Empirical Investigation," Psychology of Music 34.3 (2006); Sawyer, Group Creativity: Music, Theater, Collaboration.

75 MacDonald, Byrne and Carlton: 277.


77 Preskill and Donaldson: 116.


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PART B
CHAPTER 7
7 DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE INDEPENDENT THEATRE PRACTICE

7.1 Introduction to Part B

This thesis’ investigation of flow theory offers new inspiration in regard to issues of sustainability. It also offers an accessible, cost-effective and practical set of conditions that can be situated in ‘the daily contexts’ of independent theatre practice rather than in external economic values. If Chapter 6 introduced the concept that ‘experiencing flow encourages a person to persist in and return to an activity because of the experiential rewards it promises’, it also provided examples of the various professional and research contexts in which flow theory has been applied. The type of applications that are most pertinent to this thesis are those ‘seeking to shape activity structures and environments so that they foster flow or obstruct it less’ and includes those interventions which aim to ‘make work a greater source of flow’. Part B places the revised set of conditions introduced in Chapter 6 within the ecology of Australian independent theatre so that companies and practitioners may better understand how to implement such conditions into their own unique practice as a way of improving sustainability.

Although Part B references Csikszentmihalyi’s research and its applications, the five conditions that form part of the framework for sustainability arise from specific correlations between the theatre data and Csikszentmihalyi’s conditions for flow or optimal experience. All five conditions have been developed and explored in this thesis as part of an indivisible, holistic framework for improved flow and improved sustainability. The conditions proposed in this thesis support the sustainability of practitioners’ careers and companies because they are part of both the individual and shared components of the independent theatre ecology.
7.2 An Inclusive Framework

Although reliable sources of income are valuable for all small businesses, the independent theatre data shows that most practitioners are capable of sustaining themselves financially through a variety of methods, and that they value this flexibility. However, the data also reveals that in order to do this practitioners currently expend unsustainable levels of energy. The articles, Corporate Sustainability: Challenge to managerial orthodoxies and Careers and Organisations: a figure-ground problem, recognise that ‘careers develop through tensions between organisational and social structure, and individual agency’. When these tensions become too great, career and organisational breakdown can occur. One noticeable tension that these articles observe is the ‘marked contrast between the two competing philosophies of neo-conservatism (economic rationalism) and the emerging philosophy of sustainability’. Research findings in these articles indicate that non-traditional, self and organisational sustainability models are more effective in supporting career dynamics and energising organisations than economic rationalist models.

One example of flow conditions being successfully implemented to improve company sustainability is that of the Swedish, state-owned transportation company GreenCargo. In 2003 former Ericsson’s Vice President of Strategic Business Innovation, Stefan Falk joined GreenCargo. GreenCargo had not recorded a profit since its foundation over a century ago in 1889 and work performance was low. In order to turn this around, Falk implemented a flow-based management overhaul based on flow theory’s necessary preconditions which include having clear goals, more immediate feedback and a reasonable expectation of completing the task at hand. People must also have the ability to concentrate, and actually possess the skills needed for that type of work. Falk’s new framework at GreenCargo included monthly meetings between managers and employees (150 of these managers were sent Csikszentmihalyi’s Flow: the Classic Work on How to Achieve Happiness to read as part of a six-day training process). Managers were trained to identify worker’s distinctive strengths, determine clear goals, provide timely feedback and find the appropriate level of challenges. ‘Activities are then followed up and results are continuously communicated to those concerned on noticeboards and at workplace gatherings’. Although managers initially felt that these conditions required more effort on their behalf, they soon accepted and later embraced
their implementation. ‘In 2004, the firm was profitable for the first time in 115 years and the flow-based program was credited as an important factor in the transformation’.

In the past few years, however, many major companies, including Microsoft, Ericsson, Patagonia, and Toyota have realized that being able to control and harness this feeling is the holy grail for any manager -- or even any individual -- seeking a more productive and satisfying work experience.

These companies are now using Csikszentmihalyi’s ideas to learn how they can get the best out of their workers or create more compelling connections with their customers. Without flow, there's no creativity, says Csikszentmihalyi, and in today's innovation-centric world, creativity is a requirement, not a frill.

"To stay competitive, we have to lead the world in per-person creativity," says Jim Clifton, CEO of the Gallup Organization, which provides management consulting for 300-odd companies. "People with high flow never miss a day. They never get sick. They never wreck their cars. Their lives just work better." Clifton says flow is one ideal outcome of Gallup's consulting work.

The GreenCargo example and other examples of flow theory application (either consciously or unconsciously) described in Chapter 6 and throughout Part B indicate the potential of flow conditions in improving workplace vitality and ‘satisfaction’ across a diverse range of sectors. Flow theory, as Clifton’s testimonial highlights, is increasingly promoted in corporate circles. However Csikszentmihalyi’s flow research and findings relate primarily to career and organisational vitality and their particular goals rather than the financial gain which is a major focus of the corporate world. Therefore it is applicable not just to economically driven corporations but also to the full spectrum of practices and organisations that make up the Australian independent theatre sector.

7.3 Applying the Framework to all Elements of Theatre Practice

Part A of this thesis reveals that theatre practitioners ‘need work conditions that are as free as possible of stumbling blocks, places where they can successfully practice their craft’. This thesis identifies those conditions and offers theatre practitioners guidance in fostering them. These conditions are defined as: oneness; clear goals; a feeling of control; dynamic balance; and immediate feedback. The following chapters examine
each of the five conditions separately and gives examples of how they have been applied, either consciously or subconsciously, in independent theatre practice and how they emerged from the research data.

Chapters 8 to 12 also explores how each condition impacts on a practitioner’s or organisation’s energy flow in different ways. However, this thesis’ holistic framework requires the development of all five conditions across all elements of an individual’s or organisation’s practice including creative development and organisational management processes.

This thesis proposes that a framework built around these conditions can develop a working environment that improves the energy flow necessary for building on the opportunities or overcoming the adversity highlighted in Figure 4.1. In sum, the conditions for flow can create a positive environment around any management structure or performance style from which practitioners can better sustain their practice (see Figure 7.1).

**Figure 7.1   Conditions for Flow for Sustainable Practice**

![Diagram showing the conditions for flow and their impact on sustainable practice.](Image)
Notes


10 Marsh.

CHAPTER 8

8 ONENESS

8.1 Oneness
This chapter establishes the condition of oneness as an a priori condition for improvements in flow the environment necessary for a more sustainable practice. Chapter 8 defines this condition and discusses its relationship to flow, energy and sustainability. Obstacles to developing this condition, that is a holistic engagement with work, emerged from the theatre data in two ways:

1) environmental and infrastructural distractions;

2) perceived distractions.

This chapter provides examples of how to overcome such distractions and develop this condition across many types of independent theatre practice.

8.2 Defining Oneness
In the data that emerged from the field of independent theatre, themes relating to three of Csikszentmihalyi’s conditions for optimal experience overlapped. I have merged these three conditions into one interrelated condition for energy flow: ‘oneness’. It integrates Csikszentmihalyi’s conditions of: action and awareness or deeper concentration; avoiding distractions; and forgetting time, the self, and surroundings. The key themes of the theatre dialogue that correlate with this feeling of oneness are:

- feeling ‘in the moment’;
- connectedness in the working environment,
- being able to focus on the task at hand; as well as
- trusting collaborative ensembles/partnerships.

8.3 Describing Oneness
A sense of oneness is a state that many theatre practitioners are familiar with during optimal moments in performance. It is an experience that performers, directors and
often their audiences seek in theatre: the moment when they are completely engaged in the act of performing, directing or spectating – and relatively oblivious to everything else. ‘They become absorbed in the act of making’, says Tim Joss in his book *New Flow*:

> They lose a sense of time and surroundings and any sense of self-consciousness. They narrow down on to the artistic activity. They are driven, intuitively knowing not only where they are heading and when they are on the right course, but also when they have taken a wrong turning and often miraculously, even if it takes a while, how to get back on course.¹

Whether it is performing, directing, managing or creating theatre, many independents can cite their own examples of feeling entirely engaged, at ‘one’ or in flow with their work. For many the moment seems to occur naturally; but it actually requires great commitment and suitable conditions to create. It is harder still to sustain it across all elements of theatre practice. Positive Psychology research indicates that a sense of oneness is easier to sustain when other flow-related conditions are implemented such as appropriately matching challenges with a practitioner’s or organisation’s capabilities and desires for growth [see Chapter 11]. Richard Ryan and Edward Deci, are Positive Psychologists and specialists in Self-Determination Theory (SDT) which relates specifically to human motivation. They ‘derived and tested the ideas that (i) autonomous activities, which are those that one does willingly and congruently, are not depleting, and (ii) to the extent that activities satisfy SDT’s basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan, 1995), they maintain or enhance vitality’.² Elements of work that are overly stressful or not challenging enough impact negatively on motivation and are deemed harder to sustain.

Certain theatre companies and practitioners have learned to channel their performance energies through a variety of methods involving discipline, inspiration, individual experience, skills development, and ‘collaborative emergence’³ – a term relating to the process and outcomes of group creativity. They have done so in an attempt to improve their sense of oneness but these channels can also be cultivated to improve oneness and other conditions of flow across all facets of their theatre practice.

189
8.3.1 Reducing Anti-Flow in Practice

Artists interviewed as part of this research often cited lack of ‘thinking time’ as a major cause of stress and frustration. Where practitioners have allowed themselves the time, the resources, the skills, and the practise necessary to encourage deeper concentration in their work, they have also built working environments that are more conducive to improved energy, and well-being. Creative space is intimately linked to career drive and development. Lack of thinking time impacts on the ability to develop oneness and to create work under increasingly difficult conditions. Director Susie Dee, currently with the University of Melbourne’s Union Theatre, reflects on the importance of thinking time and its ability to reinvigorate and energise flagging artistic careers:

I was just about to quit theatre. It was about nine years ago. ...I was a freelance director and I was very frustrated with the theatre scene and I wasn't really that excited. I suppose I'd done quite a bit of touring, didn't have a great creative drive in Melbourne, and I was just tired. I just didn't get excited anymore, but ... I just had this thing about site work and these couple of ideas that just wouldn't go away.

I applied for the Edward Charr Memorial Award and it was just to say, "I want to go overseas and I want to look at these companies, I want to work with these companies and get inspired again". I believe at that point if I didn't get that award [I would have left theatre] and ... I was just on 40. So I got that award and got to go overseas and then I got offered the Melbourne Worker's Theatre job and these four ideas. ...To be able to dream, it was a luxury. I really became invigorated again. It was just having those eight weeks to get fit, to be able to write. ...People need that. Some artists don't and they just create work. But when you do it [creative work] for quite a while, you need some inspiration. ...I needed it and I got it. It was great.⁴

Dee’s obvious passion for her work and the amount of energy she has expended over her career, contrasted with the relatively small input required to reinvigorate it (eight weeks stimulation and reflection over the course of a long career), highlights the lack of time and resources independents have to investigate their own energy and career needs. Having creative time refreshed and reaffirmed her drive and ability to continue in Australian independent theatre.
Alicia Talbot, Artistic Director with Urban Theatre Projects, says her struggle to achieve a more unified approach to her artistic, company, and career responsibilities emphasises a sense of oneness with her driving passions rather than a focus on economic achievement or streamlined management. ‘If you’re eroding all the circumstances that create that top artistic product, then you begin to reduce what you’re there for in the first place’. Urban Theatre Projects (UTP) is a theatre company based in Bankstown, Sydney, but which often develops new works in partnership with local communities in non-traditional venues (more information on the UTP’s history and development is covered in Chapter 12). In terms of sustainability, Talbot reflects, ‘top artistic product’ corresponds with the core group of artists or core staff of the company having ‘enough generosity and patience to facilitate all levels of the company and have it working effectively’. Such circumstances require a continuous flow of positive energy.

Encouraging work environments promote energy and focus. In the case of the theatre practitioner, this focus is often the artistic product, the driving passion and source of career satisfaction. ‘I do think conditions for making work are vital. Struggling artistically is different from struggling to get to work’, adds Talbot. ‘When we consider that vitality and energy have been associated with greater performance and persistence, as well as psychological and physical wellness, it is clear that vitality represents an important resource whose promotion has multiple benefits’ write Ryan and Deci. ‘Given this, opportunities to support autonomy versus control behavior play an important role in developing this inner resource, as do supports for basic psychological need satisfactions’.

For many independent artists, the administrative and business dimensions of their work overwhelm their driving energy and passion for their theatre careers.

Organisations in the sector place a high level of importance on artistic and creative activities. … [W]hen undertaking artistic planning, 89% of respondent organisations rated artistic challenges and opportunities critical or very important and 95% of respondent organisations rated creative objectives as critical or very important.
Often, the struggle to find an achievable balance between artistic satisfaction, ‘logistics and what needs to be done with the company’ is simply too ‘hard yakka’\textsuperscript{10} for independents working in environments that are not supportive or flexible enough to offer the possibility of better working methods or conditions.

Allison and Duncan found that decreasing the impact of ‘antiflow’, that is removing obstacles in the path of a person’s original source of energy and passion, provided a significant first step in developing improved work conditions.\textsuperscript{11} Keith Sawyer notes that the ‘intrinsically motivating factor that keeps aspiring musicians playing through poverty, hard work, and unpleasant gigs’\textsuperscript{12} is wanting to re-experience the sense of oneness associated with a flow or ‘peak’ state. These efforts, for the most part, rely on an improved sense of oneness or unity of action and awareness that many practitioners can and do apply in performance, but that is not often considered for other components of their work. Allison and Duncan’s research into Women, Work, and Flow\textsuperscript{13} found that women from diverse employment backgrounds creatively restructure or re-imagine certain tasks in order to change their perception of work and improve work conditions. This cognitive restructuring improved short-term motivation to some extent, but in order to develop ongoing optimal energy flow, all a person’s skills and attention need to become part of the action. Levels of energy relate more often to the sense of satisfaction and challenge a person receives rather than the real amount of physical or psychic energy expended. The article Back to Basics: Learning about Employee Energy and Motivation from Running on my Treadmill, examines the concept of perceived energy levels and their relationship to flow:

The more satisfied one is with work, the less one’s energy should vary, and the less one’s energy varies, the more satisfied one will tend to be with work. This should be true regardless of the level of the energy one has—one may be more satisfied with one’s job whether one is working hard or easy as long as the demands are roughly constant. In a sense, this is analogous to an athlete who has entered the ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991), or what Perry and Jamison (1997) call “the Zone”.\textsuperscript{14}

Deeper awareness and concentration in work, therefore, does not mean losing sight of one’s environment, goals, or constraints. Rather, it means being able to distance oneself
from them in order to focus on the task at hand and obtain as much satisfaction from that task as possible. ‘So loss of self-consciousness does not involve a loss of self,’ confirms Csikszentmihalyi ‘and certainly not a loss of consciousness, but rather, only a loss of consciousness of the self’. Like being ‘in the moment’ in performance, deeper concentration and a shift in awareness allows the theatre practitioner to hone their energies and develop a sense of oneness in relation to other aspects of their work if they are able to do so. ‘Although actors are often directed to work “in the immediate moment” (Hodge, 2000: 7), if they remain in the moment and do not move in reaction to the next moment, or the dynamic flow of performance, presence is no longer there’. This definition of performance presence is relevant to the condition of oneness in that it highlights the unified yet constantly changing relationship between the practitioner, the task at hand and their environment. As Csikszentmihalyi states:

It is typical of everyday experiences that our minds are disjointed from what we do. …In flow, however, our concentration is focused on what we do. One-pointedness of mind is required by the close match between challenges and skills, and it is made possible by the clarity of goals and the constant availability of feedback.

In a Performing Arts Journal article, Canadian actor Tanja Jacobs describes the changing, dynamic nature of oneness:

It was a practice I had to develop, to struggle with…. It's that little fist-fight, the courage to stay in there until you get to a connection, and then that connection leads to another, until you've created meaning for yourself out of a work of art’.

8.4 Staying Motivated
The deepening of concentration that develops optimal working conditions incorporates the ability to avoid or exclude distractions. The condition of oneness, therefore, requires focussed personal energy that is aware of, and capable of negotiating the surrounding environment and its impacts. Teresa Amabile, is Director of Research and Professor of Business Administration in the Entrepreneurial Management Unit at Harvard University. Her research focuses on creativity, organizational innovation, and
performance, and motivation. Amabile’s theories draw a strong relationship between creativity, energy, and a person’s own passion and motivation. According to Amabile when people are in deep concentration or in flow they are highly intrinsically motivated by their passion for an activity. Amabile’s research into the impact of external motivators and distractions on such working experiences led her to develop the theory that not all external motivators have negative or distracting affects. In Creativity in Context, Amabile\textsuperscript{19} suggests a revised ‘intrinsic motivation principle of creativity’:

Intrinsic motivation is conducive to creativity; controlling extrinsic motivations is detrimental to creativity, but informational or enabling extrinsic motivation can be conducive, particularly if initial levels of intrinsic motivation are high.\textsuperscript{20}

One of the issues that emerged from the independent theatre data is that there are too many external distractions from what artists consider to be their ‘true’ passion or internal motivator: creating art. ‘It's a tricky balance’, says Susie Dee ‘maintaining a full time job as an artistic director but also developing projects that will have a life’.\textsuperscript{21} Arts Queensland’s Stefan Greder believes that most artists have the capacity to find a workable balance between their artistic and business responsibilities. ‘If you can bottle that capacity, if you can articulate how that process works, then you’ve actually got something,’ he says.\textsuperscript{22} However he also believes that many independents are currently juggling too many ‘competing interests’ and that funding processes as well as competition for this funding increase these distractions across the sector.

There’s a potential for that balance between running a sound business and good programs. The way government funding is it’s increasingly putting more pressure on that balance. I don’t think government has an intention of putting more pressure on that business program relationship. It’s simply that competition for money is on the up.\textsuperscript{23}

Distractions that emerged from the data were largely defined as time pressures; juggling tasks, schedules and projects; non-conducive working environments or having no working venue at all; as well as financial income or other administrative distractions. Such distractions develop two key points of discussion:
Firstly, there is a range of environmental and infrastructural distractions that fatigue the practitioner and limit their ability to reach their primary objectives;

Secondly, there are tasks which are inherent to the industry (particularly if staffing is limited) which are often perceived as distractions rather than processes inherent to artistic careers.

8.5 Concrete Distractions: Environment and Resources

‘Distractions interrupt flow, and … [t]he more ambitious the task, the longer it takes to lose oneself in it, and the easier it is to get distracted’.24 Many of the interviewees for this thesis spoke of particular problems with time constraints, multitasking (as well as working on multiple projects in one period), working processes and company management. Many of these problems could be reconsidered via shared or creative resourcing as UTP’s Alicia Talbot points out.

I don't think better accountability, better marketing and better management actually make better art. …The pressure of community members making work when they're trying to earn a living and do everything is really challenging. There's just no space [space in which to work from] around anymore. And I think that has profound social impact in a way if you're trying to [keep] artists who are performance fit. In that climate trying to produce conceptually rigorous, innovative art is quite challenging.25

Teresa Amabile outlines the impact that time constraints have on creativity and on distractions in general.

Time pressure stifles creativity because people can't deeply engage with the problem. Creativity requires an incubation period; people need time to soak in a problem and let the ideas bubble up. In fact, it's not so much the deadline that's the problem; it's the distractions that rob people of the time to make that creative breakthrough. People can certainly be creative when they're under the gun, but only when they're able to focus on the work. They must be protected from distractions, and they must know that the work is important and that everyone is committed to it. In too many organizations, people don't understand the reason for the urgency, other than the fact that somebody somewhere needs it done today.26
8.5.1 Improving Thinking Time

The independent theatre industry is very cognisant of the impact that time, staffing and resource constraints have on their ability to create the type of ‘top artistic’ or ‘significant’ theatre that they aspire to. In particular they raise concerns about the quality of work they can create in the short blocks of time or access to spaces through which they can develop their invigorating creative energies. ‘It’s hard to say I’ll take half a day off to think,’ said Jessica Wilson of her previous position as Artistic Director of Terrapin Puppet Theatre. ‘I just can’t do that because there are too many other tangible tasks’. The SMPA report cites the independent sector as being the ‘crucible for new ideas and approaches to creating and presenting work’; it confirms that:

While artistic risk and innovation are clearly the focus of most organisations in the Sector, over a third of survey respondents stated that there were reduced opportunities to innovate, experiment, conduct research and develop work. The effects of this included restrictions on the diversity, size and scale of repertoire; fewer new works produced and more remounts; reduced production values; reduced use of screen/digital design; shorter rehearsal, creative development and rehearsal periods; engagement of less experienced artistic personnel and reduced cast sizes.

Csikszentmihalyi links a supportive culture and environment with overcoming or avoiding distraction. The data indicates the Australian independent theatre environment is significantly impacted by time and resources, or lack of them, and that this is a major distraction for its practitioners. But, says Csikszentmihalyi, ‘most flow activities do not depend on clock time’. By being constrained by time, theatre practitioners not only lose a sense of satisfaction but they face increased stress and lose even more valuable time and energy. ‘Every time this happens,’ says Csikszentmihalyi in relation to the intrusion of constraints or distractions, ‘energy is lost trying to restore order to consciousness’. Reducing the impact of time or other external distractions in flow does not simply mean improving time management skills - although these skills are important in managing business - rather it requires the implementation of the most supportive and connected working environment possible in order to create opportunities for the merging of action and awareness, holistic consciousness, or oneness.
8.6 Perceived Distractions

*Overloaded Circuits: Why Smart People Underperform* investigates the increase in workplace ‘rain’ or ‘noise’ and its impact on a person’s capacities. Psychiatrist, Edward (Ned) Hallowell blames this ‘noise’ for the proliferation in a condition he calls ADT or ‘attention deficit trait’ amongst executives. This noise is the result of many unsympathetic work environments, not just that of corporate business, and the increased demands on the modern worker’s time and attention. The theatre industry data in this thesis is quite clear about the detrimental impact environmental ‘noise’ or ‘rain’ has on concentration, capacity and energy. Many independent practitioners consider an ‘organization’s administrative machinery is a distraction from their key value-adding activities’ or what one Harvard Business Review article, *Leading Clever People,* refers to as ‘organizational “rain” – the rules and politics associated with any big-budget activity’. Such perceived distractions can inhibit a theatre practitioner’s capacity to develop or sustain oneness.

Independents must usually deal with such ‘distractions’ on their own, and are perfectly capable of doing so, but this takes vital energy away from their drive for creative work and production. Jessica Wilson commented on the impact of external ‘rain’ on understaffed independent companies:

> They’re [funding bodies] continuously pushing us into marketing and training for marketing and seeking sponsorship. I think this is a bit of a red herring. … Having increased income from other sources [such as audience development and sponsorship] so substantially - and this is no mean feat – it is immensely difficult when you don’t have the administrative staff to do that. And government support hasn’t even risen to CPI indexes. No matter how much money they spend on training to get us to find more money I don’t think it’s going to make much more of a difference [to our sustainability].

Wilson’s role as Terrapin’s Artistic Director was to ‘choose shows, conceptualise, direct and develop shows on the floor, write grant applications, write publicity blurbs, media liaison (interviews not organizing them), articulate the vision of the company, manage
the budget and manage the staff”. She doesn’t believe that this is a sustainable role for one person, particularly for those in their mid-thirties onwards, and yet this is what many independents have to do in order to keep their company and career going. Like Wilson, many independents consider their ‘rationale for being’, is in direct contrast with the bureaucratic demands related to partnerships and funding in the sector. These are often cited as a major distraction from an independent’s central goal of creating and producing a work of theatre. Negative external demands often combined with a lack of supportive resources within their work ecology, continually distract practitioners from their driving passions and thus from developing a sense of oneness with their work. Independent Clare Bartholomew, who works with eight performance companies including The Business, cites the constant juggling between roles as a major energy drain and distraction. ‘If I could just concentrate on touring The Business and just did that and didn’t worry about the other groups that I’m in then I reckon I’d make more money. But you have to take a risk then and say ‘that's all I'm going to do’.

Wilson and Bartholomew’s examples chime with many other practitioner’s comments and with Hallowell’s own explanation of noise and its negative impact on the human brain’s ‘ability to solve problems flexibly and creatively’. Fiona Winning, former Director of The Performance Space, believes that many artists can, and do, develop organisational systems that can help them overcome distractions from their core business of making art and develop a better sense of oneness. However, she believes that the general funded model of rehearsal or development process, where artists work full time for the short periods for which they’re funded is ‘artificial’ and not conducive to improving flow conditions in independent art. Winning argues that there are as many creative processes as there are artists and that such processes do not need to be developed within particular timeframes or on a full-time basis. ‘In fact to sustain a practice, you can do it one or two nights a week as long as there are other things that you’re doing that relate to your practice in amongst that.’ Maintaining regular practice-related activities is one way of building up a sense of oneness with the artistic processes of a practitioner’s theatre career or company.

Hallowell’s describes the impact of constant distraction on a person’s concentration and optimal working state.
When you are doing well and operating at peak level, the deep centres send up messages of excitement, satisfaction and joy. They pump up your motivation, help you maintain attention, and don’t interfere with working memory, the number of data points you can keep track of at once. But when you are confronted with the sixth decision after the fifth interruption in the midst of a search for the ninth missing piece of information on the day that the third deal has collapsed and the 12th impossible request has blipped unbidden across your computer screen, your brain begins to panic, reacting just as if that sixth decision were a bloodthirsty, man-eating tiger.43

This reaction to work pressures, according to Hallowell, is confusing, draining and unhelpful in actually solving the problem. Hallowell also explains that those working in isolated environments are more likely to suffer this phenomenon and argues for a ‘trusting, connected’44 working environment that engages workers with one another and each other’s ideas and progress. The theatre data indicates that for many theatre practitioners feeling under-resourced can be attributed, in part, to the lack of reliable and regular connectedness across the Australian theatre sector. Practitioners such as Jessica Wilson, who are not able to find the sustainable support needed to counter the stress and overwork as Terrapin’s Artistic Director, often have little choice but to leave the job. In Wilson’s case she chose to relocate her career as a freelance Theatre Director to the less isolated capital of Melbourne. Bartholomew believes that the Melbourne theatre community offers her a sense of connectedness and tolerance that has been vital in sustaining a career that juggles so many theatre companies. ‘I feel connected to the community here [Melbourne]. ...It’s not so big that you can’t know other [members of the theatre community]. ...At different times you might be free and available to do things for other members who are busy and vice versa’.45

Hallowell claims that rather than being a distraction, connectedness has the ability to create a more supportive work environment where optimal experience can blossom. He also cites sleep, a good diet and exercise as critical. Rather than rushing through the range of tasks being juggled, he promotes reserving some ‘think time’ each day; tailoring work environments to encourage and maintain engagement with work tasks; breaking large tasks down into smaller ones; encouraging regular face-to-face
discussion between amicable colleagues every four to six hours, and encouraging physical movement or simple creative tasks to overcome obstacles to flow. These, as Hallowell admits, may seem like mundane or obvious solutions but they provide low-cost means for managing work pressure and other issues of sustainability as well as simple ways to stay out of the survival mode that increases ‘distracting details’ \(^{46}\). These are the types of solutions that corporate organisations are now trying to develop in order to improve creativity in the workplace and could be equally applied across the theatre sector in order to improve opportunities for thinking time and connectedness.

The theatre and organisational management data in this chapter highlights both concrete and perceived distractions that impact on workplace sustainability. Despite the independent theatre industry being ‘independent’ and lacking the resources of larger organisational or commercial culture, there exist many possibilities for limiting distractions and improving a sense of oneness. Julian Meyrick, Theatre Director and La Trobe University Research Fellow points out that despite the sector’s independent nature it is still a part of the broader culture and it is up to individuals how they interact with it. Solutions such as Hallowell’s for overcoming stress and distraction can be found in a variety of places and organisational management publications but none relate directly to independent theatre practitioners. However some in the arts sector believe that overly managed or hierarchical systems can have an equally distracting and negative effect on the creative capabilities of independent practice. \(^{47}\) As Hallowell and others indicate, the reality is that practitioners themselves must develop environments and processes that support a sense of oneness across all aspects of their work and that have the potential to improve their capacity for sustainable practice.

8.7 Positive Examples of Oneness Across Independent Theatre Practice

Despite the distractions, perceived or otherwise, some practitioners have found their own methods for implementing a sense of oneness across their theatre practice or companies.
Frank Theatre Company was founded by John Nobbs and Jacqui Carroll in 1992. Since that time the company has developed as an ensemble and clearly defined its own mission, aesthetics, philosophy and training.

The single word that would define what our company does, or two words, is ‘creating culture’. We're not just putting on shows and this would place us in a different category from nearly every other company. We create a situation where our actors develop their skills, Jacqui as director develops her skills, and me as trainer, develops my skills through this process of being in that room and undergoing a training process \([Frank/Suzuki Performance Aesthetics]\) that's very physically demanding as well as being intellectually, emotionally and psychologically demanding. All football teams train. That's what makes them a team. ...So, what we're doing as a company is actually applying those precepts to the development of an actor.\(^{48}\)

This ‘family’\(^{49}\) structure as Nobbs refers to it, with Nobbs and Carroll at its ‘parents’, enables the company and its ensemble members to develop and maintain clear goals while still exploring and developing their skills and careers either as a group or individually. Nobbs says he originally envisaged a full-time ensemble that trained, developed, and produced work within a formal structure that followed set hours every day. However the nature of working in the Australian independent theatre doesn’t easily support that style of structure and so he and Carroll have adapted their company accordingly. He admits that it is harder and harder to access government money but he also sees that this allows the Australian independent theatre to develop its own systems for sustainability. Nobbs himself had to do this in relation to Frank’s company structure. One of the important aspects he and Carroll had to consider was how to provide a holistic format that could support a diversely-aged group of ‘strong-willed’,\(^{50}\) individual performers into the long term. By setting this as a clear goal (Chapter 9), the solution presented itself to them over time.

We only train twice a week because three would be too much given our program situation. Two isn't quite enough but you can't really bridge three because it's too much commitment and time. You could probably physically do three or four times a week, you couldn't do it every day, it's too intense. But you start off with this thing and then as you do it for a long period and then it changes its actual raison d'être. It becomes more
sophisticated because you have to address it. It’s very hard to do. You say either, "It's too hard, let's pull the plug." To keep going you say, "How do I do this over a long period?" What starts off as something exciting turns into something profound in the long run.51

This current structure allows for the company to work together for specific periods. This allows them to develop work and a sense of company culture but also gives individual members the opportunity to develop their own independent practice. ‘Given the strong willed nature of our performers, they probably wouldn't want a full-time company anyway now’, says Nobbs. Frank Theatre’s inclusive yet disciplined approach to creating a company culture allows ensemble members:

- to develop a shared, holistic practice within the company;
- seek inspiration and feedback through external connections; and
- return to the company for regular training, development, and a sense of belonging/connectedness.

This process invigorates and sustains the company as individuals and as a collective.

Frank Theatre uses fundamental principles of performance training, based on the disciplined and rigorous techniques of Tadashi Suzuki, to create not only a style of performance but a sense of oneness from which both individual practitioners and the company as a whole can develop optimal experience. John Nobbs, Jacqui Carroll and Frank Theatre increase their own motivation through their ties to Tadashi Suzuki and other practice-led exchanges which energise and enrich them.

Suzuki’s our mentor. Because we do his training we are attached to this international figure who, by any measure, is one of the ten greats of all time. …We pay our respects every year; we do behave very appropriately toward him. It’s important for Jacqui and me. The actors seek us out as mentors and as primogenitors. We have to go somewhere else too; we can’t say it ends with us. …It’s respect for where we got the impetus to train and perform. We’ve adapted it and turned it into an Aussie version. But nevertheless, we must respect where we came from.52
Nobbs has extended his experience of oneness beyond short-term performance experience and into all elements of his company’s culture.

For instance, the way we talk to people, the training has a very, very great meditative aspect too about it. It's like all forms of [art], if you take a form of scales that a musician might do, they're not just musical experiences, they're philosophical experiences, and aesthetic experiences and experiences about the process itself. And doing these types of exercises, you do think profoundly about what you're doing and why you're doing and how you can do it better and all those sorts of things. …Everyone has to make an income, everyone has to make a living of course, but the reason the company survives is not because we're making lots of money but because these people believe in this process and so the inculcation of this cultural attitude, I guess, has seen this company actually prosper and thrive.\

Nobbs and Carroll’s approach to practising and developing the condition of oneness across all elements of theatre practice expands the company’s energies. It also allows energy to flow more effortlessly from one action or activity to the next. This example of oneness is engaging, encompassing and helps channel the practitioner’s energy from task to task. It is also a good example of building a more positive perception of the less likeable requirements of the job.

The example of Frank Theatre bears strong correlation with a review of Csikszentmihalyi’s suggestions for improving flow within a work environment. Such an environment should develop and maintain ‘attractive working conditions (with clear goals, feedback, etc), provide a good degree of control to stimulate the development of employees and build an organization with a long term purpose’.

8.8 Developing, Not Losing, Consciousness

Another important feature of oneness is the capacity to lose oneself in the experience. This section of the chapter addresses this aspect in relation to the intuitive, interactive and collaborative strengths of the independent theatre sector. Csikszentmihalyi clarifies that the forgetting of ego, time, and surroundings associated with a sense of oneness doesn’t mean working in isolation or losing consciousness or a sense of control. To be
more precise, oneness is about bringing together all the positive energies related to the action into a more holistic and optimal experience.

The independent sector often works collaboratively and many of those interviewed as part of this thesis are members of collaborative companies or at least collaborative projects. Scott Wright of Erth Physical and Visual Inc believes that openness and collaboration are crucial to the company’s energy, value, and the sector’s sustainability in general. By basing their office, workshop and rehearsal spaces in the same venue and by discouraging hierarchical working models, Erth is trying to create an environment that builds the company’s resources and is supportive and creative. ‘You’re in an environment where every artist in that environment is encouraged to share information’ he says. ‘You don’t have hierarchies of senior mold makers who are making certain skills a secret because they’re the only ones who know how to do it and if they teach anyone else they could be out of a job. There’s none of that’. Even working within a slightly more formal structure, former Artistic Director of Arena Theatre Company, Rosemary Myers insists that collaboration and dialogue were crucial elements of her career’s and the company’s motivation and survival.

We're really interested in engaging young people in performance but also in having a great good discourse with young people because we believe there's a lot of amazing young and emerging cultures out there than can inform artistic practice to make sure that artistic practice stays relevant to people into the future. … I don't feel there's any great threat to our company as long as we keep being a rigorous company and I think the Board and the staff here are continually rigorous. In that way I feel secure that everything will be trouble-shoted and there will be a lot of provocative questions asked about everything we do.

8.8.1 Oneness within Ensembles and Collaborations

‘To have an ensemble means that… you know people, you really can work faster, and you can trust in where a person is going. There’s not a blocking process’, that distracts from the sense of oneness associated with creative development says Jessica Wilson. Back to Back Director, Bruce Gladwin, relies on this connection and mutual trust for each program and project he makes within the unpredictable realm of independent
theatre and the even more unpredictable ‘realm of working with people with disabilities’. Back to Back Theatre has operated out of the regional centre of Geelong, Victoria since it was formed in 1987. The company is one of the few that maintains a permanent ensemble of actors and it works primarily with actors with intellectual disabilities. Gladwin finds it hard to identify why this sense of collective trust is successful and sustainable for him and the company, but feels it is driven by the organic and instinctive skill he has in ‘finding the meeting point for a collaborative team’.

I just trust that all the other collaborators, like the ensemble and anyone else we’re working with, will be coming in with an equal sort of personal interest in the work and that we’ll find some sort of unified vision for it, you know? I just trust that it’ll find that unified vision.

Consciously or subconsciously, this process seems to work well for Back to Back Theatre whose production, *small metal objects*, won The Age Critics’ Awards Special Commendation at the 2005 Melbourne International Arts Festival and the ZKB Acknowledgment Prize for extraordinary artistic achievement at the 2007 Zuercher Theater Spektakel. As Gladwin points out his and Back to Back’s collaborative processes are based on the theatre practitioner’s intuitive or developed ability to achieve oneness: an ability to tune in and immerse themselves in the task or experience at hand and in their common goals and passions.

NYID’s David Pledger sees the theatre community’s ad-hoc, collaborative creativity as almost ‘tribal’ in its development. By collaborating with ‘tribal’ members with similar goals and values, independent theatre practitioners have developed a way to challenge and develop their capabilities. The processes that work best seem to be with those collaborators who wish to follow a similar artistic or career path. ‘That you share a similar perspective and humour is pretty important to me,’ says independent Simon Hill. ‘And I guess also this sense that there are risks you’re willing to take, so I don’t think I’d be comfortable working with anyone who is very conservative about their work and that’s why all the people …[I work with] all had that preparedness to go out on a limb’. In order to improve a sense of oneness across independent theatre, tribal members may need to make such connections in a less ad-hoc way.
Yoni Prior, former independent practitioner and now Senior Lecturer in theatre with Deakin University, believes that for artists to develop life-long careers they need to either keep challenging their collaborative partners or develop new partnerships. ‘The sort of familiarity, the sort of games you develop and ways of interacting which sustain you at the beginning,’ she says ‘are indicators of, “Yes, we love and trust each other. It’s great and we can do anything in this space.” But they harden, they calcify. And then they become confining’. At that point the connected energies and support required for oneness stop.

For Pledger, Prior and many other independents, collaborations help invigorate creative ideas and sustain theatre practice. This connectedness enables artists to keep challenging themselves and each other, find solutions, and ‘challenge the norm’. Otherwise you become ‘exhausted because you sort of feel like you’re reinventing the wheel each time,’ says Hill. Interactive, intuitive and often risky processes are a particular strength of the independent theatre sector in Australia and help developing or emerging artists create career pathways that motivate them. Unconstructive external impacts such as overly-challenging time constraints, negative audience reactions, and unproductive experimentation are also lessened. Through creative, connective processes the practitioner’s self-consciousness or ego is altered and develops the potential for oneness.

8.9 Conclusion
This chapter defines and describes the condition of oneness as it relates to independent theatre practice. It clarifies the two types of distractions to achieving oneness – concrete and perceived - that emerged from the theatre data and discusses the benefits of collaboration in developing and improving oneness.

Csikszentmihalyi developed his flow conditions based on the descriptions of people’s optimal experiences. Three of these conditions are: ‘The Merging of Action and Awareness’, ‘Avoiding Distractions’, ‘Forgetting Self, Time, and Surroundings’ which he also referred to as ‘The Loss of Self-Conscious’. These conditions all
involve a particular shift in the participant’s consciousness which this thesis terms oneness. Environmental and ego-driven considerations such as time, uncertainty, our surroundings, even happiness fade into the distance and a deep concentration takes their place. The ‘external’ elements do not disappear; in fact some case studies note ‘a feeling of union with the environment’.

The flow experience, as the other conditions in this chapter confirm, relies on this holistic interaction between mind, body and environment in order to energise and stimulate the participant.

Pathways leading to this experience vary but the experience of oneness itself does not. Some theatre practitioners have developed their own ways to overcome obstacles and distractions to oneness in certain elements of their practice. Examples of ways to develop oneness included in this chapter include allocating time at work for ‘thinking’ or ‘creative’ time and also taking up residencies or other opportunities to add to one’s learning and wellbeing. Other examples focus on collaborating with likeminded practitioners or developing working styles and structures to avoid too much distraction from the driving energies of one’s work. However the most positive and sustainable examples are those that foster a sense of oneness across all aspects of a company or practitioner’s work and throughout their networks and environment such as developing a company culture that incorporates holistic approaches to work and training. This thesis’ data indicates that practitioners who are accepting of a broader context for their work have the capability to build purpose and creativity across all elements of their practice, including management, rather than viewing such tasks as a distraction. The data also indicates that ‘oneness’ is not just a condition generated by individuals but that it can be affected, both positively and negatively, through ensemble/team work and collaboration. The focus of oneness is to develop external and internal working states that encourage sustaining energy rather than those energies that that limit or detract from it. The pathways to oneness are based on each practitioner’s or company’s individual drivers, their ability to minimise distractions, and the incorporation of the other conditions for flow - clear goals, a feeling of control, a dynamic balance between capabilities and challenges, and immediate feedback - across all their practice.
Notes

1 Joss.


3 Sawyer, Group Creativity: Music, Theater, Collaboration 12.

4 Dee.

5 Alicia Talbot. Personal interview. 28 April 2004.

6 Talbot.

7 Talbot.

8 Ryan and Deci: 714.


10 Talbot.

11 Allison and Duncan, 137.

12 Sawyer, ed., Creativity in Performance 43.

13 Allison and Duncan, 137.


15 Csikszentmihalyi, Flow 64.


17 Csikszentmihalyi, Creativity 111-12.


19 Amabile, 119.

20 Amabile, 119.

21 Dee.

22 Greder.

23 Greder.

24 Csikszentmihalyi, Creativity 120.

25 Talbot.

27 Talbot.

28 Pledger.

29 Wilson. Personal Interview.


32 Csikszentmihalyi, Flow 66.

33 Csikszentmihalyi, Flow 63.


35 Hallowell: 55.


37 Wilson. Personal interview.

38 Whitney.

39 Bartholomew.

40 Hallowell: 57.

41 Winning. Personal interview.

42 Winning. Personal interview.

43 Hallowell: 58.

44 Hallowell.

45 Bartholomew.

46 Hallowell: 60.

47 Terracini.

48 Nobbs and Carroll.

49 Nobbs and Carroll.

50 Nobbs and Carroll.

51 Nobbs and Carroll.

52 Nobbs and Carroll.

53 Nobbs and Carroll.

Csikszentmihalyi, Flow 64.

Wright.

Myers.

Wilson. Personal interview.

Gladwin.

Gladwin.

Gladwin.


Pledger.

Hill.


Hill.

Hill.

Csikszentmihalyi, Creativity 118.

Csikszentmihalyi, Creativity 120.

Csikszentmihalyi, Creativity 121.

Csikszentmihalyi, Flow 62.

Csikszentmihalyi, Flow 63.
CHAPTER 9

9  CLEAR GOALS

9.1  Introduction
Chapter 9 defines the condition of clear goals using data emerging from the research interviews. It explores how the condition of having clear goals can improve energy and sustainability for independent theatre practice. It highlights examples of practitioners and companies who have developed clear goals in relation to elements of their work practice. It also proposes ways that practitioners can implement clear goals across all aspects of their company and/or career.

‘Clear goals’, for the purposes of this thesis, is the feeling of knowing what needs to be done. This element of developing flow or optimal experience requires a clear vision of the outcome/s of all a particular theatre practitioner’s activities. This feeling of clear vision should be present throughout the entire process rather than just at the beginning or end.

Vision requires the investment of energy (that is, financial, social, and psychological capital) in order to transform the present system into a new, desirable form. … But vision alone is not enough, for it has to be translated into the operating practices of the institution.¹

Traditional business models are not necessary to effect and sustain this vision; however, the clarification of goals should be implemented throughout all a practitioner’s or a company’s purposes in order to develop flow.

9.2  Maintaining Purpose in Creative Practice
The concept of a defined structure for the creative process is a relatively modern, yet important development for many theatre practitioners. Without defined creative pathways, ‘without this direction, the collaborative process gets stuck. Many emerging
artists still work in this way unless they have been trained in process,’\(^2\) says Deakin University Lecturer Yoni Prior. Prior still practices theatre, and was a member of Barry Kosky’s Gilgul Theatre in Melbourne in the 1990s. Prior reflects that a lack of clear processes and ongoing agreement of goals were part of the reason Gilgul Theatre ‘fell apart’ when they ‘hit some real obstacles’.\(^3\) The young troupe didn’t warm up together and devised their work through the use of experimental and often impromptu processes. As a result ‘we didn't have a way of working together that had been articulated and people had very different training and very different notions of what theatre might or might not be and we tried to work the way we'd always worked and it just made it incredibly hard’.\(^4\) The development and revision of clear systems of communication that Prior believes was lacking from in her earlier days as a member of Gilgul Theatre, is fundamental for any collaborative exercise. Recent research in the fields of organisational management, learning, and leadership all indicate that communication is crucial to maintaining a shared vision in both the short and long term.\(^5\) James Kouzes and Barry Posner are Deans with the Schools of Leadership and Business at Santa Clara University. They insist that:

...as counterintuitive as it might seem, then, the best way to lead people into the future is to connect with them deeply in the present. The only visions that take hold are shared visions – and you will create them only when you listen very, very closely to others, appreciate their hopes, and attend to their needs.\(^6\)

One way to do this is through the development and implementation of indicators. These indicators can be as formal or as informal as each company chooses. The importance of developing interactive indicators in order to maintain shared, and individual, aims is recognised in many fields including sustainability studies,\(^7\) human resources,\(^8\) education,\(^9\) and business.\(^10\) In *A Guide to Community Sustainability Indicators*, Valentin and Spangenberg write that ‘indicator development is always a two-way process. Indicators are not only desired from policy aims, but they also help to concretize and mould them. So developing indicators cannot be a purely technical or scientific process; rather, it should be an open communication and policy process’.\(^11\)

Articulating and evaluating clear goals throughout management as well as creative processes helps overcome many of the obstacles associated with flow. In *Shared Vision: 212*
Why Teacher-designed Schools Experience Real, Positive and Sustained Change, Bill Martin argues that ‘consensus building’ allows an organisation to ‘find and direct its power’. Martin suggests that determining and reconfiguring goals according to the unique needs of each organisation and the individuals within it is a successful way of overcoming isolation and the obstacles of hierarchical ‘mandates’. Although this requires effort, Csikszentmihalyi research indicates that:

...the quality of experience tends to improve in proportion to the effort invested in it. ...The more activities that we do with excellence and style, the more of life becomes intrinsically rewarding. The conditions that make flow possible suggest how to transform everyday activities so that they are more enjoyable. Having clear goals and expectations for whatever we do, paying attention to the consequences of our actions, adjusting skills to the opportunities for action in the environment, concentrating on the task at hand without distractions - these are the simple rules that can make the difference between an unpleasant and an enjoyable experience.

Data from the independent theatre industry reveals that maintaining an ongoing vision and passion is often compromised by staffing constraints, funding insecurity, and project-based work, which results in multitasking and reactive work practices. The data indicates that complex tasks are juggled simultaneously with others, left to the last minute, and undertaken by somebody who does not enjoy that type of activity or necessarily have the right skills to achieve flow in that job (see Chapter 11 – Balance). Nevertheless, some practitioners have sacrificed short-term, personal goals for longer term company goals with positive results.

In order to develop and achieve sustainable company goals Lynne Bradley of Brisbane-based Zen Zen Zo Physical Theatre had to re-consider her personal career desires. In 2004 the company saw that developing a clear business focus, including its training and educational arm, was vital to its survival. In order to grow and sustain Zen Zen Zo, established by Bradley and Simon Woods in 1992, Bradley says she had to ‘step back from being the artist’ temporarily. Limited resources and staffing meant that Bradley herself took on all the business tasks and was no longer able to focus on her personal goals of directing and creating art. ‘[T]hat makes me a little bit sad sometimes but it's a
choice that I've made [because] I love this company passionately and I want to see it continue’ she adds.

The open and flexible characteristics of the independent theatre sector allow practitioners to make short-term sacrifices or re-develop goals more easily than other industries, but it is important that the practitioner’s passion and longer-term energies are not quashed. ‘There is no inherent problem in our desire to escalate our goals, as long as we enjoy the struggle along the way,’ writes Csikszentmihalyi in relation to the implementation of clear goals and conditions for optimal experience. ‘The problem arises when people are so fixated on what they want to achieve that they cease to derive pleasure from the present. When that happens, they forfeit their chance of contentment.'15 The pleasure from the present relates to other conditions of flow including oneness (Chapter 8) and reinforces this thesis’ argument for a holistic implementation of flow conditions. Because the company’s goals were closely related to her own passion and energy, Bradley was able to sacrifice her short-term artistic development for her company’s business goals while still maintaining her own personal momentum.

Other independent theatre practitioners have used their individual creativity and passion to establish clear goals that improve the sustainability of their companies, and ultimately, their own careers. Roderick Poole was interviewed in 2004 as Artistic Director of Melbourne-based performing arts company, Strange Fruit. He is now manager of Arts across Victoria, the touring program at Regional Arts Victoria. Strange Fruit produces elaborate, stilt-based, physical performances for large spaces and has a strong touring international and national profile. Poole believes that as an artist ‘you've got to know what you're doing but you've got to have room to improvise, to adapt to your circumstance, to your context, to your audience’.16 He admits however that he struggled to apply this approach to his role with Strange Fruit and the way it developed as the company grew. At the time of interview Poole, like Lynne Bradley, felt that although his managerial responsibilities overshadowed his artistic ones, he was willing in the short-term, to sacrifice some personal goals in order to sustain the company he felt so passionate about. ‘Yeah, in the old days I would just about do every tour. But we got to the point where we had different ensembles out [on tour] so obviously it was
impossible to do that. And now, it's just a stage in life. Having family, kids, and a mortgage I'm just not out on the road as much. I mean I'd like to be a bit more [on tour] than I am’. 17

Strange Fruit developed, as many companies do, from a successful collaborative project that produced one work. The group then created and performed another and then another until ‘Whoosh! It took off. Everyone wanted it’. 18 This, although hard work, provided a creative and engaging cycle that kept the company going. As the company developed however, they realised that they had not invested enough of their energies into management staffing and structures to sustain themselves financially. Establishing a sustainable management structure that suits the company's independent and artistic ideals has not been easy. However by identifying this company goal and investigating solutions, Strange Fruit has lessened the stress caused by the temporary overbalance of governance and business tasks that previously overwhelmed Poole. In stopping to assess the company’s needs, Poole temporarily created more work for himself, but ultimately achieved a clearer pathway for the company’s sustainability.

I finally got out on tour. It was only six weeks but it just made such a difference to see the work up in front of an audience, seeing their responses. That's what it’s all about. That's why we’re doing all this work. That's why it's worth hanging in there and keeping this going because it's magic you know. When it really works, it’s just brilliant. 19

9.3 Developing Creative Goals in line with Capacity

Being time and resource poor impacts significantly on independent theatre practitioners’ ability to plan and manage their goals. However, as Rebecca Scollen a former researcher in regional Australian theatre with the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and current Manager of Artworx in the Faculty of Arts, University of Southern Queensland says, although regionally located theatre practitioners are still limited in terms of staff, resources, facilities and regular industry dialogue, they often have fewer creative time constraints than their urban counterparts.
Everything has to be fast in the city. You have to catch a train on time. The notion of it being slow in the country is true to an extent and I don’t personally think that’s a bad thing. It’s not ‘slow’ as in they’re all idiots - far from it. But those deadlines aren’t needed quite as quick perhaps. You can just walk to work. There hasn’t been the need I think to embrace it [new technologies in performance] quite so quickly but as those regions grow so will that need. At the same time, because they are often isolated by distance, they will use certain technologies that will assist them to connect with people in other areas and to show their work.20

Time and accessible support are crucial factors for planning and maintaining clear and constructive goals. Macdonald, Burke and Stewart provide a useful definition for work in their chapter on The Nature of Work and Organisations21 that is particularly relevant to the condition of clear goals:

Our definition of work is “turning intention into reality”. We need to organise ourselves as individuals and in social groups so that we can turn these intentions into reality. We need to be clear about our purpose and determine a plan to achieve that purpose. This involves gathering resources, setting goals and times to completion, understanding the constraints within which we all live and work and understanding needs and markets.22

Many independent practitioners develop visions for their work that are not likely to become a reality in Australia. Yet developing and maintaining an understanding of a work ecology and the potential obstacles within it, can help practitioners cultivate realistic, yet nonetheless challenging, goals. This method of optimising professional goals is based on creating a better balance between one’s capabilities and the challenges one faces and is explored further in Chapter 11.

Developing a better understanding of what is overly challenging or unlikely within the context of their practice allows practitioners to develop goals that they feel comfortable with and allows practitioners to be creative within those parameters. Independent theatre practitioner Clare Bartholomew believes that in places such as Europe and the UK ‘…there’s no way you’d do a show unless you’d previewed it, toured it to some regional areas and then re-worked it again. I don't think rehearsal time in Australia is anywhere near what it should be. A lot of average, ordinary theatre gets done but could be
extraordinary if you had the time,'. This is a view widely shared in the independent theatre sector and was brought up time and again in the interviews undertaken as part of this thesis. For most, the lack of financial support for rehearsal and development is immensely frustrating but one that can’t be overcome simply by applying for more larger amounts of funding.

Jessica Wilson applied for and received an Australia Council professional development grant to travel to the USA and Europe in 2003 to explore artistic processes there. From this research Wilson recognised that the ‘informal extended process’ used in parts of Europe was a model that better served the research and development needs of the majority of Australian independent theatre makers. Wilson describes this process as where a company makes a limited amount of shows each year or every two years and spends the rest of the time touring and in artistic development that can feed and support new works. In Europe this model is viable because of its the developed network of self-sustainable touring provided by its critical mass. Many European-based companies can tour extensively throughout the year to boost the company’s profile and financially feed their creative gestation periods. Wilson suggests that the development of quality theatre in Australia could be better served by the informal extended process, but that Australia lacks the theatre-going population density to create a profit-making, self-sustainable touring network.

Collaboration and shared vision allows practitioners to develop a clearer picture of the resources available to them both collectively or individually. This in turn allows practitioners to better support the research and development periods that are so vital to their professional invigoration and sustainability. One of the ‘main assets of the sector’ identified in the interview data and literature is its strength in research and development (R&D). It is regularly referred to as a ‘crucible’ for innovative creative processes and performance. This research and development however, is most often carried out by individual companies or in one-off collaborative projects. The data indicates that current economic evaluations and systems placed on independent theatre, impact its ability to sustain research and development and enhance its strength as a sector. ‘I always question, and I think a lot of Artistic Directors do, am I taking enough risk?’ says Wilson. ‘I’m really interested in concept development in the early stages of
work because there's a lot of fantastic work happening [in Australia] that just doesn't get there, it's not rigorous enough in its concepts or thematics’. She herself, found it impossible to use an informal extended process with Terrapin Puppet Theatre because of the company’s relative geographic isolation, understaffing, management structure and government funding requirements. These factors overload an artistic director with administrative duties which detract from crucial artistic time. Wilson feels that the naturally organic nature of the creative process in Australia is starved of the resources and gestation time that can improve independent theatre production.

If you want money for a work and you don't want to do a whole stage unpaid first it requires you to do a lot of thinking and conceptualising about your work beforehand. Conceiving a work on paper is never quite as strong and layered as a work that's been conceived in collaboration and in physical development. I find many works that are intellectually convincing on paper result in unconvincing works on stage. I don't want to generalise. This is my opinion as a director of visual based theatre.

9.4 Shared Expectations, Flexibility and Values: Positive Examples
Finding the right balance between clarity of goals and the organic nature of a creative process is difficult to achieve, particularly when independent theatre practitioners are already struggling to manage their workloads. This chapter presents several independents who have developed ways of maintaining clear creative goals over time and within non-traditional frameworks. Although these companies have received funding from time to time, at the time of interview they generally eschewed funding as an income source because of the constraints it places on their work and the way they operate.

9.4.1 Defining Goals through ‘Aerated’ Processes and Profile Building
Version 1.0 was established in 1998 and has developed its creative and company goals on the basis of a shared identity and flexible working structures. Version 1.0’s Artistic Director, David Williams, believes his company keeps their creative processes experimental and meaningful while still maintaining strong goals in a fluctuating
cultural environment. ‘For starters,’ says Williams ‘the notion of a strict ensemble's kind of impossible, not that it's impossible, it's just that the group of Version 1.0 collaborators are each people with their own practice and it's very difficult to maintain’. As a survival strategy or ‘as a way of making sustainable practice’, Williams’ experience is that theatre practitioners have to be available to do a lot of different jobs at any given time including ‘casual jobs, ongoing teaching practice or both and also project based employment’.

Personally, I earn my living working as theatre technician at the Sydney Opera House and I’ve worked there for nearly eight years. So I earn much better money there than to do anything else related to the arts. …The other part of my personal survival is that I work as a PhD student at the University of New South Wales. I have an Australian Postgraduate Award so when I’m not being paid to be an artist; I am paid to be a postgraduate student. So we’re talking about survival strategies.

These strategies would not suit all theatre practitioners but they offer Version 1.0 the means it requires to keep going.

Because Version 1.0 was not able to develop creative work on a full-time basis, it developed a style of work that the members describe as ‘aerated’ or fed by the influences of space and time around the process. Rather than develop work in a block, Version 1.0 stretches the creative process out. Within this setting Version 1.0 has maintained a core group of company members who come and go depending on their other commitments. They meet as regularly as possible, usually in informal ways, and have one or two members who formalise these meetings into clear goals. Such goals, whether short term or long term, are then posted on the Version 1.0 website or communicated through email and other networks. ‘You have to think a lot about how you represent where you've been [as a company] and where you might be going to’, says Williams. Yet, in not complying with a typical, full-time, theatre company model, Version 1.0 has devised its own system making it more sustainable for its members. Subsequent to identifying its aim of profile building, Version 1.0 has built quite a ‘large body of documentation that points to the fact that we have made things’. Williams says ‘the website is partly about stamping a group identity and going, "We're here." But it’s
partly also about trying to understand for ourselves where we've been because we're very much engaged in the everyday necessities of making the work, the everyday crises'.

This in turn, opens up the company to ‘think about how we want to continue’. The company is able to have the creative time to think because it manages itself in an ‘aerated’ way, over time. Therefore it does not face the same time constraints as those working on projects in blocks. Although Version 1.0’s has since achieved Australia Council triennial funding, the company’s ability to reflect on and strengthen its artistic and business goals developed because it created a working model suited to its members’ needs and incomes. Fiona Winning, former Artistic Director with the Performance Space agrees:

> Version 1.0 does really well. The way they do that is that they commit, not all the time, but they'll go, "In these ten week or twelve weeks, we're going to commit three nights a week to improvising." So they'll actually sustain their contacts, so they develop their ensemble improvisation stuff and see where it takes them. In fact in improvisation, as an area of practice, they've done really well to sustain their practice.

9.4.2 Flexible Frameworks for Sustainability and Clear Goals

Although research indicates a link between multiskilling and productivity, further research also indicates that in order to maintain long term productivity, practitioners require a supportive and collaborative work culture. Version 1.0’s ‘aerated’ approach, as with other companies interviewed as part of this thesis, is a good example of independent theatre’s flexibility. This flexibility allows independent companies to develop sustainable collaborative structures and company goals that balance the complex, individual energy levels and commitments of their participants. Rosemary Myers was interviewed as Artistic Director with Melbourne-based Arena Theatre Company which often fuses technology and theatre to create contemporary, live performances for children and young people. Myers believes regularly re-thinking the way the company operates and the team’s flexibility and creativity has been crucial to developing and sustaining the company since its establishment as Children’s Arena
Theatre in 1968. In 2007 Rose Myers left Arena to become Artistic Director of Adelaide’s Windmill Performing Arts. Over four decades Arena has experienced many transformations and artistic directors but still remains dedicated to theatre for young people.

I think it is about how creative organisations can be and I think across this sector people are [creative], and I mean organisationally not in terms of the arts. I think it is about being flexible and being able to remodel the company and I think that we [Arena] have a good perspective on that because we’re a company with a long history. It’s rare for a company to survive for so long. I think we can easily see on the page the reason the company survived is because it has been responsive to the time and it has been prepared to rethink its organisational structure and remodel itself. In a way, it’s been creative about that.37

Structure and clarity of goals does not encourage limited thinking. In fact, rather than being forced to follow economic rationalist and outcomes-based models shaped by government or larger organisations, the arts industry could benefit from determining its own goals and processes in a way that reflects their creative and artistic strengths.

9.4.3 Proactive Approaches to Clear Goals

Lyn Wallis is currently Director of Theatre at the Australia Council. She was previously Director of Company B’s Downstairs Theatre in Sydney which focuses on new, independent productions. Wallis believes that there is a great potential for artists in the independent theatre sector to develop sustainable careers if they are able to develop proactive, ‘clear systems’38 rather than continue to multitask and work reactively which she feels contribute to burn out in the sector.39 Clarifying both artistic and business processes enables artists, who are frequently juggling both, to ‘streamline those two things so that they work in tandem and they support each other. They don't fall to pieces’.40 As part of her role with Company B, Wallis mentored many independents and found that when they learned how to clarify and support their production and administrative goals they suddenly discovered that the artistic processes become easier and vice versa. ‘They freed up’,41 she says. At first developing clearer goals may have to be conscious effort but subsequently it should become an inherent part of all of an
artist’s processes. Wallis feels that currently most small companies start with ‘a great idea but the artistic product suffers’, because of the confusion, stress and exhaustion of multitasking. Ironically, a more structured approach to practice can develop a more fluid and sustainable experience which Wallis feels is ‘very exciting’ for those who discover and maintain it.

David Pledger, Artistic Director of NYID (not yet it’s difficult), believes that ‘unpredictability is part of the mechanism of the company's history and its work’. From the outset NYID developed a strong, collective understanding and clear company goals. NYID emerged from a group of performers trained and directed through Pledger’s physical approach – an approach based in sports practices, the Suzuki method, and biomechanics. NYID was formally created in 1995 as an ‘ideas-based group of artists to collaborate on the production of cross-media projects’. The ongoing, unified vision between the collaborating artists has allowed the company to develop and maintain clear goals and systems which, paradoxically, allow them to focus on unpredictability and ‘incite narratives of enquiry’ in their creative work.

Right from the beginning I was fairly disenchanted with the kind of work I was doing as an actor [before NYID] and right from the beginning I was quite mindful I would set up something that would continue for a long period of time and get collaborators together who would work for a long period of time in all the key creative areas…. So before we started a public performance project we worked for two years as a group, as a floating ensemble, just to develop a vocabulary that we could then put into a performance. I think what often happens when people get together they make a show and that’s it.

Pledger’s personal and artistic aims were quite clear to him from the outset of his career and they become stronger as he developed a shared vocabulary with other collaborators that reinforced these aims. David Pledger has maintained clear purpose and aims for NYID while being flexible and creative enough to redevelop them when necessary. In so doing, NYID and other Australian theatre companies like Version 1.0 have successfully maintained clear goals while still managing complex creative journeys and career or company longevity in a fluctuating environment. Such examples demonstrate the flexible, resourceful, and determined nature of Australian independent theatre.
These shared characteristics allow practitioners to pursue goals through a range of means and structures which can overcome their lack of financial resources. These examples also show that by using their characteristic strengths to develop clear goals in balance with the other conditions for optimal energy and flow; independent theatre practitioners are better able to sustain themselves and their unique practices.

9.5 Conclusion

The condition of clear goals relates to the individual or company being able to develop a feeling of knowing what they want to achieve across all elements of their work. It also suggests that this feeling could primarily be maintained throughout the goal-related processes by implementing indicators that signal when changes to certain goals or processes might be more sustainable or effective. The condition of clearer goals pertains not only to company management, as with the examples of Bradley and Poole described earlier in this chapter, nor does it relate solely to single tasks. Keeping collective, and sometimes personal, aims and desired outcomes clear to all involved, working processes become more manageable and thus create better conditions for flow or optimal experience across all aspects of work.

This chapter has explored independent theatre’s concerns and loss of energy due to conflicting goals, overly reactive work processes, constant multitasking, inflexible economic systems, and limited resources. In order to develop clear goals and overcome these concerns some independent theatre companies have sacrificed individual, artistic passions and personal goals in order to sustain collective passions and energies. Others have developed a better balance between their day to day realities and their company processes and values. To function effectively has necessitated these companies to develop flexibility in working structures, recognition of individual energies and commitments, as well as a commitment to articulate shared values and desires. Ultimately clear goals can only be sustained through ongoing monitoring to ensure that these goals continue to be aligned with structures and people that can support them. The interactive processes relating to the development of clear goals enable a theatre practitioner or company to work in conjunction with their own energies and capabilities, and to redevelop their goals where necessary.
Although it is conducive to flow to have clear goals every step of the way, such goals do not need to be absolutely precise or written in stone. Very often a goal can be developed or redeveloped as action takes place. ‘For artists the goal of the activity is not so easily found. In fact, the more creative the problem, the less clear it is what needs to be done’ writes Csikszentmihalyi on creative processes.\textsuperscript{49} It is often the complexity and creativity involved in establishing clearer goals and process that can reflect an independent’s \textit{raison d’être} and the characteristic strengths that stimulate and sustain an artist. This stimulation should be developed across all elements of their practice in order to sustain them through their career. ‘One thing about creative work is that it is never done,’ writes Csikszentmihalyi.\textsuperscript{50} Theatre practitioners, like all creative professionals, need both creative stimulation as well as a feeling of knowing. Developing clear goals sounds relatively straightforward but developing them across all elements of theatre practice could be done in a variety of ways. Yoni Prior for example stressed that having a clearly understood creative development process was important. Version 1.0 relies on teamwork and good communication (online and at dedicated meetings) to make sure the company’s goals are clear and applicable to all members. Others focus on developing a better balance between reacting to issues or opportunities in their working environment and forging a more proactive stance. As with Version 1.0, NYID, Arena Theatre and other examples cited in this chapter, each individual company and practitioner should creatively and successfully develop clear goals in relation to their own unique practice and situation. Ensuring clear goals, particularly for the independent theatre sector, is about knowing what needs to be done on a macro as well as micro level and reducing any contradictory demands. It requires practitioners to clearly determine their short term and long term goals and how these are reflected in their daily working practice. It is about having clear expectations in relation to what one wants throughout the process as well as at its start and finish.
Notes

2 Prior.
3 Prior.
4 Prior.
6 Kouzes and Posner.


11 Valentin and Spangenberg: 381.


13 Martin: 6.


16 Roderick Poole. Personal interview. 6 September 2004.

17 Poole.

18 Poole.

19 Poole.

20 Scollen.


22 Macdonald, Burke and Stewart.

23 Bartholomew.

24 Wilson. Personal interview.

25 Wilson. Personal interview.


27 Wilson. Personal interview.
Jessica. Personal interview.

David Williams. Personal interview.

Williams. Personal interview.

Williams. Personal interview.

Williams. Personal interview.

Williams. Personal interview.

Williams. Personal interview.

Winning. Personal interview.


Rose Myers. Personal interview. 9 October 2004.


Wallis.

Wallis.

Wallis.

Wallis.

Wallis.

Pledger.


Pledger.

Pledger.

Odiorne, The Human Side of Management 82-83.

Csikszentmihalyi, Creativity 114.

Csikszentmihalyi, Creativity 106.
CHAPTER 10

10 CONTROL

10.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a third possible condition from which independent theatre practitioners might re-consider the sustainability of their careers and companies. Similar to the definition of clear goals as a feeling of knowing, the condition of control is not necessarily defined as being in control but as feeling in control. Establishing such a condition helps eliminate, or significantly reduce, the issue of failure and uncertainty and its negative impacts on flow. Chapter 10 explores the external and internal impacts of this feeling of control in relation to sustainability and sustainable energies across the total spectrum of work practices for independent theatre practitioners. This chapter examines the impact of hierarchical systems on an independent artist’s or company’s control of their own practice. It also discusses the relationship between control and ambiguity or uncertainty in Australian theatre practice and how improved sector interconnection can build confidence in each practitioner or company’s individual practice.

In his explanation of control, Csikszentmihalyi uses the example of dancer who has ‘the possibility, rather than the actuality, of control. …[At] least in principle, in the world of flow perfection is attainable’.\(^1\) Developing a better sense of control allows the dancer, the theatre practitioner or any other professional to ‘develop sufficient skills to reduce the margin of error to as close to zero as possible’.\(^2\) This thesis contends that the condition of control need not exclude risky or creative processes in order to experience flow. A sense of control is not contrary to the independent sector’s characteristic desire to develop innovative, often risky work. Csikszentmihalyi maintains that risky activities and processes compliment the condition of flow-conducive control.

It is not possible to experience a feeling of control unless one is willing to give up the safety of protective routines. Only when a
doubtful outcome is at stake, and one is able to influence that outcome, can a person really know whether she is in control.\(^3\)

Csikszentmihalyi’s description of control encourages independents to examine and harness their own characteristic strengths in order to develop conditions for sustainability. To maximise a feeling of confidence or control, however, practitioners also require improved, accessible connectivity and increased industry discourse on local and global levels. Improved sector connectedness also advances opportunities for dynamic balance (Chapter 11) and immediate feedback (Chapter 12).

10.2 Innovative Approaches to Developing Control

One way that theatre companies support themselves or their projects is by applying for government funding. Although successful applications for funding may provide theatre projects or organisations with a reprieve from financial stress, being reliant can reduce an independent theatre practitioner’s or company’s sense of control. ‘Conventional wisdom,’ says Queensland University of Technology researcher and writer Michael Richards, ‘[is] that as soon as you start to fund organisations and give them stability, they start to become less innovative and in a sense, they start to be more concerned with their own corporate survival than they are with servicing the mission that originally drove them’.\(^4\) Lyndon Terracini, Artistic Director of Opera Australia, argues that government agency structures tend to overshadow the independent sector’s ability to develop its own form of creative career sustainability. ‘In recent times,’ he says ‘there has been an increasing tendency towards over-regulation.... Unfortunately risk-management strategies and contractual restrictions have taken control in some instances and are choking the life out of the process of making art’.\(^5\) This thesis proposes that an emphasis on independent theatre’s characteristic strengths is one way of building or revitalising its feeling of control. An improved sense of control in turn fosters the sector’s strengths of independence, innovation, determination, and intuition and can lessen the impacts of bureaucratic management and unstable resourcing. ‘Typically,’ reports Elisabeth Pacherie, a research fellow in philosophy at the Institut Jean Nicod in Paris, ‘…the more one feels one is in control the less one feels one has to exert control and vice-versa’.\(^6\)
Independent theatre is ‘the sector where most new work is actually developed’, so developing and maintaining a sense of control over these processes is as important to individual practitioners as it is to the strength of the whole theatre sector. The data reveals that independents feel empowered by the strong creative focus their independent status allows them in contrast with the overly bureaucratic focus required of larger, more resourced, and better funded companies. Independents’ flexible and adaptable processes also enhance a feeling of control over their work. Many independents prefer to retain this sense of control over their creative and business development rather than move into a larger, more bureaucratic, company bracket. Rosemary Myers, interviewed as Artistic Director of Arena Theatre Company in 2004, admits it is unique for a company as ‘small’ as Arena to last over forty years in the Australian arts environment. With 3.5 core staff and a annual surplus under $30,000, Myers believes that much of Arena’s strength comes from the feeling of control they have developed simply by remaining independent and true to their original driving passion.

I think we like the way we're small and flexible and responsive and we can drive the work that we want to make here. We just don't want to grow into a subscriber-based company or anything like that. We enjoy the level that we work at. …we have the work that we want to produce and we have partnerships in producing that work and they’re all projects that really excite us and they’re our daily business. All of us that work here work very closely and we all work with passion on those projects.

Arena’s passion and commitment to art and to Australian and international audiences creates a motivational drive and control over their work that is viewed as a core strength rather than as a way of ‘upgrading’ to a larger theatre company or to better-salaried careers.

I think that this sector is a really interesting sector and… it can be quite art-led and it can break moulds quite easily because of the flexibility that it enjoys. It isn't locked into productions at a particular venue every year. I think we perform to, talk to, really specific audience groups that are very different to the subscription-based audiences…. I think another thing about a small to medium organisation is that the staff has a large stamp on how the company is. …the larger the company, the bigger the bureaucracy and the less you can have that stamp.
This smaller and more flexible style of working is now viewed in other fields as a valid ‘organisational design’, more ‘suited to the demands of rapidly changing … environments’ and providing ‘wider spans of control’ than conventional hierarchical or bureaucratic structures. Such working styles accept risk and diversity as well as fostering ‘less rigid boundaries, greater use of networks and alliances, and (…) smaller business units’. The practical issue for independents is whether or not hierarchical and non-hierarchical styles of practice can coexist with one another in the same sector and allow non-hierarchical models the opportunity to develop their own sense of control.

Research into the links between levels of pay, employment, education, and control has found positive relationships between higher levels of education, ‘challenging, interesting and enriching work, …higher levels of trust,’ and a sense of control. It is noted however that overly ‘demanding work has a negative effect on sense of control’. Although income is a focus of such research, findings indicate that job satisfaction and independence are more important that general income in relation to improved feelings of control. Some marketing and organisational management experts insist that flexible approaches to control development are vital for ‘enriching’ innovative practice.

The general finding from survey research has been that strict, formalized control systems stifle creativity (e.g. Arad, Hanson & Schneider 1997; Cummings & Oldham 1997; Mumford, Whetzel & Reiter-Palmon 1997). Similarly, Deming (1986) argues that performance evaluation is one of the seven deadly diseases of management that threaten employee involvement in continuous improvement programs. This is explained by cognitive evaluation theory (Deci 1972), that argues that when expected evaluation is perceived to be controlling, it decreases intrinsic motivation and, consequently, creativity.

Fresh Track Productions is an Australian-based production and touring company that has been operating for over 8 years. It focuses on the development and production of new and independent collaborative theatre and performance. Its core members are based in Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne. Torben Brookman, Fresh Track’s Co-director, says he’d love to operate Fresh Track on a full-time basis but that he can only envisage it growing project by project. Since his 2004 interview, Brookman has put his touring and production skills into a presenting company called Arts Asia Pacific but he still
juggles occasional Fresh Track productions. His sense of professional control is inherently linked to the company’s clear goals and his determination to steadily build and grow his companies without relying on government funding. He believes that the application and administrative processes required to apply for limited available funding can take too much time and energy away from other sustainability options. Brookman avoids government funding as he feels it limits his control in developing and sustaining the company’s income through touring and audience development.

I suppose it is steady growth in terms of how we get there. ...I think those same old [funding-based, economic] models clearly aren’t...working for companies like us. ...I think ultimately it’s because of our goals. ...I suppose we want to be a self sufficient company that produces work in our own right and makes a profit and pays everyone out of the company rather than be reliant on funding to survive. ...I think the companies [that do that] become more versatile and more open about what they actually do.18

Zen Zen Zo’s Lynne Bradley affirms that although government funding is a boost to any company, it cannot be relied upon. The bureaucratic systems set up by funding agencies to control their own processes, combined with funding instability in general, can have a negative impact on an independent practitioners’ sense of control of their career or company.

...It [was] a strategic decision to move into more education side of the company...because...we're not going to get infrastructural funding for another three years so [we] either quit now or we make ourselves financially independent and we can only do that through the educational arm. Sean Mee [of La Boite Theatre Company] said, "Look you'll probably be very grateful because the state of funding in Australia is just getting worse and you don't want to be reliant upon it."19

In 2008 Zen Zen Zo did not receive triennial or rolling annual funding as it had envisaged in this earlier interview. The company did receive annual Arts Queensland S2M funding in 2008 and 2009 but is continuing to sustain itself financially and build its confidence through its own educational programs and performance tours.20
10.3 Kantanka Theatre Company: Regaining control

Michael Cohen of Kantanka Theatre company admits that they have also had to ‘wake up to the reality that we're not going to grow into triennial funding’.\(^\text{21}\) Theatre Kantanka was founded by Carlos Gomes and Michael Cohen in 1995. Actor Chris Murphy also became part of the core theatre group which produces performances based in ‘classic text, strong physical skills and dynamic visual design’ and for ‘sites that do not traditionally stage theatre productions’.\(^\text{22}\) Kantanka aims to ‘lead audiences into sensorial experiences that are inspiring, meaningful and exciting’.\(^\text{23}\)

Cohen believes that because Kantanka didn’t fit the classic company structure suited to long-term funding expectations, its members have chosen to work on structures and ideas within their control rather than those that aren’t. Negative external factors common to Australian independent theatre such as low incomes, constant juggling of different jobs to make ends meet, long-distance travel, and irregular dispersal of core members influenced the company’s development and the way it chose to sustain itself into the future. Members have individual careers and come together as a company when their individual schedules allow. They have been free to develop their own systems rather than have their creative space ‘clamped and squashed’ by overly bureaucratic processes.\(^\text{24}\) Kantanka’s creativity and realistic evaluation of its situation determined its flexible company structure. This structure enables its members to develop the company and creative projects in ways that better reflect their individual and collective goals, strengths and limitations. This in turn has boosted their sense of company control.

Cohen believes that project-based funding structures for creative development can reduce the amount of quality control one has over the final work. This affects an independent’s immediate, as well as long-term, audience and income prospects. Cohen explains that earlier in Kantanka’s career they tried to adhere to funding and audience expectations but that this forced the company to develop significant shows in too short a time. This, he believes, resulted in poorer quality of both organisational and creative outcomes. With one particular production called *The Eye*, Cohen feels that funding requirements forced the company to ‘cram development around the funding’ rather than the other way around. As a result it ‘squashed us into a corner’,\(^\text{25}\) he says. Kantanka’s
energies were directly impacted by the lack of control its members felt over their work and its quality:

Unfortunately, it happened on our probably highest profile event. It was an Adelaide Festival [2000] touring event and it meant that the show [The Eye] didn't hit its mark until the end of the tour by which time everybody had gone home with their cheque books. It hurt us. ... It had huge consequences. So the next time we did a show and it was important to us, we were like, "We're not doing that again". We needed more creative development. So we did that and the final product was much better. It got really good reviews, people loved it and if there was anybody in Kantanka who had any producing energy left, that show could be touring now. That hasn't happened because of exactly that.26

Kantanka theatre continues to develop work without long term funding. It has improved the sense of control its practitioners have over their core work by developing works in timeframes that better suit its participants and that do not exhaust the company’s energies. It has also focussed on applying for funding on partnered projects with organisations such as PACT Youth Theatre (Crimesite, 2003), Cambelltown Arts Centre and Performance Space (Missing the Bus to David Jones, 2008/2009). These partnered projects allow for ‘sustained programs’ and development over ‘an extended period’27 and again, build the company’s confidence and sense of control.

Kantanka’s experience in relation to The Eye raises two points about developing a feeling of control in independent theatre practice. Firstly, control relates to the freedom to control one’s own work practices. It is the ‘possibility of making things happen’28 according to one’s own creative desires rather than having an overly controlled practice or work conditions. Secondly, in order to develop a feeling of control over work processes, the company or practitioner also needs to develop the other conditions of flow such as clear goals, improved connectedness, and a better balance between the challenges they face and their immediate capabilities. This holistic approach generates a stronger basis from which to develop a sense of control over both the internal and external aspects of contemporary, independent theatre practice.
As raised in Section 8.2, Innovative Approaches to Control, letting go of previous methods and thinking in new, creative and sometimes risky ways, can paradoxically give independent theatre practitioners a sense of improved control over their own working environment and practice. Recent psychological research into the links between a high level of tolerance to ambiguity or uncertainty and improved career satisfaction underscore how essential developing an improved sense of control can be in creative, complex or unstable working environments. The ‘uncertainty and arising opportunities’ of current working environments indicates ‘the shift towards “boundaryless organizations,” characterized as having dynamic shapes and structures and defined as organizations whose membership, job duty rules, and departmental identity are ambiguous, leads to “boundaryless' career principles’. This shift also promotes acceptance of the creative and adaptable methods for improving tolerance to ambiguity such as positive psychology theory and Csikszentmihalyi’s flow conditions. Rather than encourage independents to adhere to uniform management practices, these methods enable them to focus on their individual and collective strengths and capabilities which in turn promotes the condition of control.

Cohen explains that after expending so much energy developing *The Eye*, there was no energy left from any of Kantanka’s members to give the project longevity and fuel their company. Kantanka members were working in locations including Sydney, Newcastle, New York and New Zealand. Cohen felt that Kantanka and other independent companies had to think about ‘exhaustion’ and ‘infrastructure’ in ‘another way’. He undertook a PhD and this period of research and writing enabled him to develop new ideas that could assist in re-invigorating the company’s energy and better sustain Kantanka into the future. Kantanka ultimately developed a way of working that relied on cooperative management structures. One of the initial elements of this structure was *P-net*, a cooperative electronic marketing portal with companies including Erth and Gravity Feed. This portal, in addition to developing more suitable timeframes for their artistic development and production management, offered them a shared online profile as well as a way to develop their work when all company members weren’t physically in the same space or even in the same city. The *P-net* support system also allowed them greater control, or a feeling of greater control, and constancy over their productions. Its core members are still with the company and through the shared strategies they
implemented and the feeling of control this achieved, they are now able to pass on their experience and support to other artists. This, says Cohen, provides an ongoing cycle of knowledge and experience which sustains, rather than wastes, vital energy within the sector:

I would feel so ashamed in a lot of ways if we sucked those resources from the funding bodies and then Carlos [Gomes, Co-Artistic Director of Kantanka] or I left and the thing just fell over. It's just a whole waste of knowledge and I would much prefer to get a bunch of other artists who would like to come and take Kantanka in a different direction. This would at least create some sort of longer-term benefit from the nasty slog that you have to do in setting up a small company.34

The feeling of control which Csikszentmihalyi35 states is a condition for optimal experience is primarily the result of balancing an independent’s capabilities in accordance with internal and external challenges they face. As Chapter 11 outlines, balancing skills or capabilities with challenges improves and grows with the experience and connectedness of the practitioner or company. Each condition for flow exists and works in collaboration with the other conditions to create a sustainable balance of optimal energy.

10.4 Developing Control through Shared Experience and Flexibility

The relevance of a sharing experience and ideas as a way to improve independent theatre control of sustainability was recently highlighted in the Love Your Work paper which asks:

[H]ow can the theatre sector's connections be strengthened to support and manage risk-taking, address issues of talent development and succession, and provide benefit for both small-to-medium and large companies?36

The independent theatre data indicates that building connections and relationships with international and local practitioners creates a sense of control and confidence in an independent’s professional capabilities. This sense of control allows them to sustain innovative or ‘risky’ processes and their own independent means of operating.
Independent practitioners with limited contacts or experience indicate a loss of control due to the theatre environment’s sense of uncertainty and instability. This leads to a feeling of ‘crisis’ and a ‘very short-term theme’ about Australian independent theatre.\(^{37}\) The data also shows that all independent practitioners seek regular contact with other theatre practitioners as a way to inspire them, to reassure themselves of their place in the industry, and to give them back a sense of control over their career and a sense of belonging. Eighty-three percent of interviewees indicated a distinct lack of dialogue and opportunities for networking within the theatre sector. ‘There needs to be more opportunity for dialogue between larger companies and smaller companies and at the moment you have to do it ‘guerrilla’ style,’\(^{38}\) says founding member of Red Cabbage theatre collaborative, Louise Morris. Morris does what most independent practitioners do where opportunities allow. That is to: ‘talk to each other. They know each other, and they try to see each other’s work. It is a sector built on strong, personal relationships,’.\(^{39}\) Morris gets in touch with other Melbourne-based independents simply through word of mouth or local contacts, but she and other independents find it difficult to develop sustainable connections for regular dialogue with larger Australian companies or higher profile artists that inspire her. She believes that online communication often provides ‘easier access to overseas companies that are working in similar or interesting ways’.\(^{40}\) Such technologies have enabled her to develop potential partnerships and inspiration that give her a sense of control over her own creative energies and working methods, but from a national Australian perspective, comparing her work with similar practitioners is not so easy. ‘[We] can't often afford to attend all the major festivals, and have a presence there; talk to people when we can,’\(^{41}\) she says. Morris and other practitioners without strong financial resources or support are limited in their ability to connect with the broader theatre sector and thus compare work and develop their professional capabilities. This situation also affects their ability to determine present and future industry attitudes, conditions, and support. Chapter 12, Immediate Feedback, will provide a more detailed discussion of the importance of networks and communication in improving conditions for sustainability.

Comparison is not always a positive thing as Ellen J. Langer reminds us in her book *On Becoming an Artist*. ‘Comparing ourselves with others in order to try to succeed in exactly the same way they have is a futile task, although looking to other people can
show us possibility and opportunity’. The research data indicates that possibility and opportunity are exactly what most independent practitioners are seeking from the comparative process. Comparison can not only highlight a company or practitioner’s unique strengths and potential capabilities, it can promote a feeling of control over our environment. An international experience gives ‘you a context for what you do. It also gives you incredible confidence that you're not a complete idiot,’ says Artistic Director of Playwriting Australia, Chris Mead. Independent and core member of Frank Theatre Company, Lisa O’Neill agrees:

I don't think you grow as an artist by performing a work in front of the same audience for ten years. Brisbane has a small audience, and it's the same people and we know each other and they're our peers and our mates. How can I develop as an artist with the same audience? Frank is continuous. Every week we train. The thing about Frank is that twice a year I'll get to go overseas and it’s always fully paid. We don't make money of course, but we don't lose money. We just break even. On one hand I'm getting to see the world and on the other I'm experiencing international audiences which I think is central to progress as an artist.

Mead believes Australia’s cultural cringe combined with the physical and professional isolation Australia independent artists experience relative to international theatre markets means many artists do not get vital access to international as well as local experiences.

Mead and other independent theatre practitioners believe the current ad hoc approach to theatre networks does not support best practice. ‘I really think it’s got to do with the way the industry was created. It was such an ad hoc thing and no one’s really given thought to the bigger structural concerns. I think people are trying to address it now but it really feels like death chair management rather than deep thought’ he says. As discussed in Chapter 2, the Australia Council’s attempts to address a lack of theatre sector networks reflects ‘positive’ bureaucratic changes ‘over the last five years’. Make It New? funding aims to provide stronger presenting and production networks and the Love Your Work paper recommends improved interconnections in the sector. However, the hierarchical or bureaucratic management styles of the government agencies overseeing
such networks do not naturally complement the independent sector’s processes. This thesis argues that rather than leave each other to ‘re-invent the wheel’ in an ad hoc manner, or within the confines of overly-bureaucratic systems, each and every independent practitioner is responsible for developing and maintaining the shared experiences and ideas necessary to foster the condition of control.

10.5 Conclusion

Csikszentmihalyi’s condition of control does not infer ‘that one can always do as one wants, but rather that the possibility of making things happen as one wishes is presented.’ More precisely, this condition represents a reduced ‘sense of worry about losing control that is typical in many situations in normal life’.

This chapter has focused on how the condition of control and ultimately the sustainability of a sector characterised as flexible, innovative and independent is affected by the external expectations and influence of funding or bureaucratic management. It also explains the positive and negative impacts of uncertainty on this condition. Some companies have created self-sustainable methods for improving their sense of control such as focusing on their audiences, reducing the amount of projects they’ll accept at any given time, or developing longer-term income sources. Many more practitioners and companies build their connections and experiences with peers and colleagues to develop their capabilities and career pathways and to determine a better sense of control over their practice. Simple methods such as training, better access to useful technologies, or partnerships with like-minded organisations are just some of those suggested in this thesis.
Notes

2 Csikszentmihalyi, 60.
3 Csikszentmihalyi, 61.
9 Arena Theatre Company, 4.
10 Rose Myers.
11 Myers.
13 Palmer, Dunford, Neil and Paul, 3538.

Torben Brookman. Personal interview. 5 April 2004.


Cohen.


Theatre Kantanka.

Cohen.

Cohen.

Cohen.

Cohen.


Wynder; Reisman Sorel, "Can Control and Creativity Coexist?," IT Professional Magazine 7.2 (2005).


32 Cohen.

33 Cohen.

34 Cohen.


37 Chris Mead. Personal interview. 7 April 2004.

38 Morris.


40 Morris.

41 Morris.


43 Mead.

44 O'Neill.

45 Mead.


47 Hill.


49 Csikszentmihalyi, Flow 59.
CHAPTER 11

11 DYNAMIC BALANCE

11.1 Introduction

This chapter will define the condition of balance that is intrinsically rewarding. It will also explain how the increased complexity of this condition, in accordance with one’s capabilities, can foster optimal, sustainable working experiences for independent theatre practitioners. It will provide examples from the independent theatre data that reflect current issues affecting work balance and sustainability. This chapter will also provide examples of practitioners who have implemented dynamic balance in their theatre practice. Csikszentmihalyi refers to this condition as ‘a balance between opportunity and capacity’ and prescribes ‘the simple formula: Flow occurs when both challenges and skills are high and equal to each other’.1 However he adds that sustainable development and invigoration via the condition of balance ‘offers challenges at several levels of complexity’.

This chapter follows the energy pathways that emerged from the independent theatre data, and which interlink two of Csikszentmihalyi’s eight conditions for flow: the condition relating to balanced skills and challenges as well as the condition relating to ‘autotelic’ activities; i.e. an activity ‘having a purpose in itself’3. This thesis’ data indicates that one way independent theatre practitioners can achieve and sustain the skill/challenge balance is to develop tasks that are rewarding in and of themselves i.e. autotelic or intrinsically rewarding. ‘Something that is worth doing for its own sake is called autotelic (from the Greek auto= self and telos= goal) because it contains its goal within itself. ...Another way to term such activities is intrinsically rewarding, because their primary reward is simply in being involved with them’.4 In flow situations the challenge of the task is perfectly balanced with the person’s capacity to meet it.
11.2 Overcoming Obstacles to Balance in Independent Theatre

Independent theatre practitioners cited numerous obstacles to their development of sustainable balance between skills/capacities and challenges/opportunities across all aspects of their practice. Practitioners reported feeling bored, frustrated, or overwhelmed by administrative, marketing, economic or other non-artistic aspects of their work. Many also reported that the combination of bureaucratic hurdles, multitasking, limited resources and time often had a negative impact on their capabilities. Both these examples reduced or exhausted their creative energies and motivation. As raised in Chapter 8, Oneness, many practitioners felt that the non-artistic components of their work interfered with the artistic ones. Realistically, there will always be elements of an industry or career that are undervalued or that a particular person does not enjoy doing. In Who’s My Market?, Close and Donovan argue that ‘there is not only room for both an artistic and a business focus in an arts organisation, but that without both of these skills, the organisation is unlikely to succeed in the long term’. This thesis proposes that although both skills are relevant, to improve career and company sustainability independents need to be able to develop these skills in balance with the challenges that they face. In his essay, A Regional State of Mind: Making Art Outside Metropolitan Australia, Lyndon Terracini, explains that the current imbalance of skills and activities in the under-resourced arts industries inevitably makes work less rewarding and has a major impact on practitioners’ energies and capabilities:

Ultimately, the fundamental driver of every arts organisation is the art we make and the program we produce. If an arts organisation loses sight of that purpose and comes to believe that maintaining its own bureaucracy is its reason for being, then there is little point in it existing.6

As Chapter 2 outlines, there are a variety of management handbooks and online resources which can provide information on administrative, business and management skills. A number of these are specifically tailored to the arts industry. However these publications do not indicate how independent practitioners might overcome the negative impacts associated with improving the balance between management processes and creative development and/or production. The aim of this chapter is to provide some support and suggestions for achieving such a balance. Csikszentmihalyi’s writings on
the outcomes of developing balanced, autotelic conditions provide useful insight into the way independent practitioners may be able to reconsider aspects of their work that they find tedious or overwhelming. Csikszentmihalyi asserts that when the intrinsic rewards of an activity emerge through dynamic balance, clear goals, and other conditions of flow:

...[W]e begin to enjoy whatever it is that produces such an experience. I may be scared of using a computer and learn to do it only because my job depends on it. But as my skills increase and I recognise what the computer allows me to do, I may begin to enjoy using the computer for its own sake as well. At this point the activity becomes autotelic. ...In many ways, the secret to a happy life is to learn to get flow from as many of the things we have to do as possible. If work and family life become autotelic, then there is nothing wasted in life and everything we do is worth doing for its own sake.8

The basis of Csikszentmihalyi’s condition of balance involves ‘adjusting skills to the opportunities for action in the environment’.9 More precisely, the level of challenge in the task at hand must suit the individual’s skills and abilities i.e. not too complex as to make them stressed and anxious but not too easy as to make them bored or frustrated. This condition helps create a channel for flow or optimal experience (see Figure 11.1 Dynamic Balance).

**Figure 11.1 Dynamic Balance**10
11.3 Complex Balance Required for Sustainability

Complex balance refers to the practitioner’s activities or environment that creatively stimulate and challenge rather than stress or bore. The practitioner or company should be able to grow professionally and creatively without exceeding their energies or capabilities.

In Figure 11.2, *Growth of Complexity Through Flow*, Csikszentmihalyi explains that:

A typical activity starts at A, with low challenges and skills. If one perseveres the skills will increase and the activity becomes boring (B). At that point, one will have to increase the challenges to return to flow (C). This cycle is repeated at higher levels of complexity through D and E. In a good flow activity these cycles can continue almost indefinitely.

Csikszentmihalyi asserts that if growth of complexity is incorporated into the skills/challenge balance condition, the flow experience is capable of sustaining itself.
infinitely. Two examples of complex balance achieving sustainability in the emerging data come from Back to Back Theatre and from Erth. Bruce Gladwin, Back to Back’s Artistic Director, believes that all members require complex growth both individually and collectively so as to sustain the company long term.

A lot of the dramaturgical, artistic, and strategic decisions we make…are really determined by the fact that we have an ensemble. Part of my challenge as the Director and the person responsible for the programming is finding something that’s going to constantly challenge company members who have been with the company for 15 or 17 years.\textsuperscript{12}

An interconnected group of individual companies and practitioners provides a stronger set of capabilities, and energies to draw from in times of need. Of course there is always a tendency for creative collaborations and ideas to come to their natural end and when they finish they provide the opportunity for other concepts to begin. Erth theatre company’s move from Ballarat ‘down the road’ to Melbourne was not seen as enough of a challenge for the fledgling cooperative company, but their subsequent relocation to Sydney more than fifteen years ago ‘meant that you had to completely redefine what it was that you were doing’ says Artistic Director, Scott Wright.\textsuperscript{13} ‘We needed the challenge personally’, he adds.

Erth started with this one little thing and then from one thing it led to another, to another, to another. So everything that Erth has done has introduced someone new to what we do or it’s set a new benchmark for ourselves….\textsuperscript{14}

In this way the company has encouraged sustainable growth by informally balancing its capabilities with the next challenges.

Erth was founded in 1990 in Ballarat and still holds the same core members it did then. It performed at the 1994 Sydney Festival which prompted the company to relocate permanently there. Since then Erth has developed a repertoire of large roving works, puppetry and site-specific productions which it performs regularly at festivals and corporate engagements. The company has also developed its own production house where it produces specific creations for clients including the Sydney Opera House,
Sydney Festival, SOCOG (Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games), Department of Communications and the Arts, Centenary of Federation and Opera Australia. Growth, says Wright, is not about large scale productions but is about a balanced approach to work that supports the long term and day to day needs of the individual members:

I think another thing that is an important part of Erth now is that we are aiming for sustainability. For the core members, we’ve invested 15 years of our life and so it’s important to see a future where this company can support us as well.15

11.4 Current Capabilities in Independent Theatre
In order to develop the condition of complex, dynamic balance and improve energy flow and sustainability across the theatre industry, practitioners first need to be able to gauge their own skills and challenges. A key problem that emerged from the independent theatre data is that too often the number or types of challenges outweigh the practitioner’s capabilities. The following examples indicate that when this occurs positive energy and sustainability become an issue. Clare Bartholomew, an independent practitioner, divides her time between several performance troupes including: Clown Ensemble, The Business and an improvisation troupe called Five Square Metres. She works as a Clown Doctor at The Royal Children’s Hospital and has been a member of Melbourne Playback Theatre Company for 10 years, for whom she regularly acts, conducts and teaches. Bartholomew admits that she and her colleagues sometimes lack the skills and/or resources required to administer or manage their companies sustainably. This means that other projects suffer.

I think it’s really that conundrum of being in the fringe arts: of not just being a performer, but an administrator as well, and I actually feel really under-resourced about that. I keep thinking I’d better go and do a computer course and yet it would only be to administer the work that I do. It’s not just skills though: its knowledge, time, and equipment. It costs a lot of money too. You’ve got to have email, you’ve got to have ink in your pen, you’ve got to have paper, you know? And people in large companies don’t realise that …I don’t get paid for that for that [output]. …I sort of think if I was better at administration, I’d probably spend less time at it as well. I’m getting better at it
now than I was but …. I suppose the bottom line is: I don’t really want to do a lot of it, but I have to do it. How are you going to get around that?  

Much of the data from independent theatre reflects practitioners’ struggle to develop and maintain adequate resources and support for their professional development and growth. Gladwin believes that independent theatre’s capabilities are ‘limited in terms of the time and energy and resources that they have’. This, in turn, limits the amount of new ideas and challenges they can take on at any given time. ‘I’m the primary person working with the ensemble and I’ve got them five days a week. So, anything else that I go to, like an interstate seminar or something, means we have to find a way for someone else to work with the ensemble’. Gladwin’s comments reflect a common struggle among independent practitioners for a more sustainable balance between theatre and management tasks. If you're talking about sustainability,’ says Urban Theatre Projects’ Alicia Talbot, ‘…the only things for me that are sustainable are our artists. …I think well-practised artists lack places to go; emerging artists lack places to go. Like places to actually improve your craft and be working all the time and have a really cool environment’. Talbot refers here to both the spatial resources of venues and offices (hard infrastructure) as well as the time and developmental resources (soft infrastructure) required to improve professional skills and capabilities. These examples once more underscore the lack of support for development of new skills and new challenges because of the lack of basic infrastructure.

Bruce Naylor confirms the difficulty that even experienced artists have in developing the right balance of skills and challenges in order to sustain themselves. Naylor has been performing and directing for over 20 years. He began his work in Australian independent theatre sector when he moved to Melbourne from New Zealand to study at the Victorian College of the Arts. He subsequently studied in Japan with Tadashi Suzuki and brought this experience to his own physical theatre and street performance with a range of companies over his career. Focussing on niche areas of performance and directing, such as clown, mask, stilt and puppetry, he has sustained a Melbourne-based career by working independently and in collaboration with other established independent companies and festivals such as Stalker, Circus Dog, Missing Link, Urban Dream Capsule, Melbourne International, Sydney Festival, and Tokyo's Street
Performance Festival. He believes that career opportunities in independent theatre tend to run in cycles and that there are limited opportunities for career development for older artists.

It’s that famous doughnut affect where we got lots of activity in the middle, lots of activity on the edge but nothing in between and that effects the careers of artists like me very strongly. I worked on the fringe, I got my own company together, we found a way of working, we did two shows which I found artistically very interesting but which weren’t instant hits. …That’s what I found very disheartening. At the age of about 37 there’s nowhere to go.¹⁹

Despite diverse artistic and management styles, Gladwin, Talbot, and Naylor’s experiences relate to a desire for improved balance in Australian independent performance. They connect their concerns for the future sustainability of their careers and companies in large part to this imbalance.

11.4.1 Dedicated, Accessible Spaces

Limited access to venues, office space and equipment, or research facilities is an issue that artists felt frustrated their struggle to perform both simple and complex tasks. Independent theatre’s requirements in relation to these spaces and facilities are not necessarily enormous or high-tech. In fact many of the now-operating theatre spaces such as Carriageworks and The Stables in Sydney started as unused and unwanted buildings that were gradually taken over by theatre practitioners and later received funding and government support. Death Defying Theatre (DDT) used to rehearse in parks and since reincarnating as Urban Theatre Projects (UTP) is constantly seeking new and unusual venues for its performances.

For Frank Theatre’s John Nobbs, an important factor in enhancing a company’s capabilities is that it has a dedicated rehearsal and performance space. ‘You've got to be able to have a dump in which to make your work and show it. But really making work could be in a garage. That's all you really need,’ he says. Independent practitioner Lisa O’Neill, who is also a core member of the Frank ensemble, agrees that it was having
free access to the ‘dodgy’, ‘pastel’ spaces that allowed her to develop a repertoire and launch her independent career. Access to affordable and regular spaces gives theatre practitioners the capacity to develop and improve the performances which form their core ‘product’. It allows them to experiment and hone their creative and managerial capabilities. Csikszentmihalyi when speaking of creativity notes:

The strategies creative individuals develop are not always successful. They take risks, and what is risk without an occasional failure? When the challenges become too great for the person to cope with, a sense of frustration rather than joy creeps in – at least for a while. Both taking risks and setting limits have their merits in developing the right balance to achieve growth and sustainability in independent theatre companies and careers. Without regular access to working space a practitioner’s capacity to develop and improve their work is diminished. Independent, Lisa O’Neill comments:

It's only by making lots of work that you actually work out who you are, what you're doing and people start to connect with a certain persona. So that all happened back then with no funding but some of the best work was created and it means I had work to show when that woman from the festival turned up. She said, "Oh what can you show me?" I put on a play and did my piece in front of her.

Theatre practitioners interviewed for this thesis were disappointed that public liability constraints and re-development of previously ignored inner-city sites had significantly reduced the number of available spaces and the opportunities such spaces provided them. ‘Public liability is a huge problem, particularly for site-specific work like ours and it often means that the expense of funding something like that is impossible to overcome’ says Melbourne-based, independent Louise Morris. ‘Even if a funding body thinks that an independent company is creatively and managerially excellent they are wary of funding something that is too big in terms of space or insurance cost, because the independent sector is not seen as being able to pull it off. The issue is not just a lack of funding but a lack of trust within the sector in general’.
The SMPA was one of the earliest government reports to formally recognise the lack of accessible venues and the impact of this on long-term sustainability. It noted that although some independent practitioners were able to develop valuable relationships with venue and resource providing organisations, they faced a distinct ‘challenge’ in ‘build[ing] on these relationships to the mutual benefit of all concerned’.\textsuperscript{22} This challenge, as well as the others raised in this thesis, currently reduces the strength and sustainability of the sector.

11.5 Improving Capabilities: More Than Just Infrastructure

Since the era of the SMPA report, the Australia Council and other government agencies have developed new policies and frameworks to help overcome the lack of venue accessibility for independent theatre companies.

One example of an accessible and relatively balanced, government-supported model to assist independents is Biz Arts Makers offered by Metro! Arts in Brisbane. It offers participants the opportunity to develop their ‘practices in a community of like-minded people working to establish businesses in the same industry with similar challenges and hurdles. This collaborative environment contributes to fast-tracking the business development process’.\textsuperscript{23} This admirable program was launched in 2003 and funded through AusIndustry (the Australian Government’s business program delivery division in the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research). It is one of the rare programs that, in addition to running business skills workshops, also provides ongoing, needs-based coaching, strategic planning and administrative support through the arts centre’s own relationships with industry professionals. More importantly it offers equipment and resources such as shared office space, workstations and meeting rooms that can enable independents to put their ideas into practice while having immediate feedback and support. It also tries to balance these business concerns with regular forums on a range of topics relevant to the arts industry, business, government and community, as a way of increasing discourse about the ‘value of culture in our society and the sustainability of artists and the Arts’.\textsuperscript{24}
Biz Arts Makers is an excellent example of the move towards ‘hub-based’ styles of funding and support that emerged with the policies developed using creative industries theory in the early 2000s. The creative industries approach is still the basis for government funding of venue and touring facilities developed through *Make It New?* and the *2020 Summit* (Chapter 2). The Biz Arts Makers project aims to provide practitioners with networks and a better set of capabilities to balance the challenges they face. However only 18 participants are listed online since 2003, and Biz Arts Makers is limited by Metro! Arts’ own government funding and the small number of artists who can participate. Connection and increased participation in venue-based programs needs to grow from a shared, more cohesive attitude to sustainability. Through stronger networks and a more cohesive support-base independents might develop the capabilities to better manage the challenges that are particular to them. Capabilities, in this sense, include not just skills but resources, time, and energy. These capabilities can be enhanced through development of the other conditions required for flow: oneness, goals, control, and feedback.

Like other professions, when practitioners don’t have the skills to meet particular challenges without becoming stressed or bored to breaking point, it may be better to outsource the tasks or re-think goals and expectations in relation to the job. These alternatives however, raise the issue of resource accessibility and fragmentation. ‘Artists are just paid way too little and… [funding organisations] expect such a high level of professional approach and management’, comments Fiona Winning.25 Winning’s comments reveal how the sector’s skills, or in reality its ‘abilities’, are inappropriately matched to the challenges set them, in this case by external funding organisations. Under such conditions the sector’s current stress is inevitable. The problem for theatre practitioners is not necessarily lacking the skills or being able to develop the skills to find such tasks rewarding; it is finding the time and resources to be able to do them properly and in a manner appropriate to their company’s or career’s ideals.

Studies in resource and knowledge management indicate that developing better collaboration and shared resourcing can improve individual and company capabilities in fields such as small business, law, and information technology. These studies, *Resources, Transactions and Rents: Managing Value Through Interfirm Collaborative*


\textit{Relationships and Managing Resources: Linking Unique Resources, Management, and Wealth Creation in Family Firms}, also indicate that not all forms of collaboration are useful for improving resources and capabilities primarily because the long-term value of a potential collaboration is not always recognised or trusted.\textsuperscript{26} ‘Without strong relationship-building efforts, potential synergies from the alliance are likely to remain unrealized and the alliance is more likely to fail’\textsuperscript{27} argue Madhok and Tallman. As per this thesis’ argument that conditions for sustainability should be developed in balance with the inherent characteristics of the individual or company, Sirmon and Hitt’s study of resource management in family firms, ‘explore[s] the unique characteristics of five resources and attributes of family firms that provide potential advantages over non-family firms’.\textsuperscript{28} These resources or attributes include the ‘human capital’ and ‘survivability capital’\textsuperscript{29} that are also significant attributes in independent theatre. Clearly identifying current resources and capabilities as well as determining possibilities for future ones are important processes for any industry developing the condition of dynamic balance.

\subsection*{11.6 Building Shared Capabilities}

Developing and balancing capabilities can be done individually, but with limited resources available to independent theatre practitioners, a shared or in-kind approach may provide a positive method for developing optimal experience. Shared approaches to the development of individual and sector-wide capabilities in independent theatre need not be overly formal. Brisbane’s Frank theatre company is one example of a collaborative company that provides regular and accessible skills training and mentoring. As a way of enlarging their community and networks they also offer weekly, open training and free forum events that correspond with the company’s own values and goals. Their calendar of monthly forums provides ensemble members, emerging artists and interested members of the public the opportunity to view different works and to ‘discuss the 'philosophy of theatre' in a relaxed and informal setting’.\textsuperscript{30}

Shared approaches to capability-building can develop not only between independent theatre practitioners and companies but also in collaboration with other art forms, communities, events, or businesses that relate to the needs and goals of the particular
project. An important consideration in relation to the condition of balance in independent theatre is that shared approaches should improve the capabilities required for the specific challenges that each practitioner or company might face. The SMPA report stated that:

Training and professional development opportunities for those working in the Sector emphasized on-the-job training and attendance at conferences and seminars for artists and administrative staff, over specialist training courses, training with other arts organisations and other training, eg - mentorships, and for administrative staff, training with Government. Only 30% of organisations conducted training for their artists with other arts organisations, and 21% of organisations adopted training with other arts organisations for their administrative staff.31

This is certainly one area where improved industry cohesiveness and in-kind support might supplement the available funding and cost of formal conferences and training.

Each independent practitioner or company has the potential to better balance their day to day work and their long term career by building their own support networks and mutual resources. These might take the form of skills and training as exemplified by Frank, in-kind staff swapping, equipment, venues, or simply ideas and advice. As the shared characteristics described in Chapter 4 indicate, independent theatre practitioners are resourceful, but in order to overcome overwhelming challenges, shared resources and support may be needed. Currently the challenge for independently run forums or programs that encourage stimulation, training and discourse is that they are run independently of one another and primarily through an individual company’s networks. This forces many of them - such as the monthly performance events run by the Angry Mime collaborative group in Brisbane - to eventually lose momentum, lose participants and die out. Other opportunities for shared discussion and development such as the inaugural 2009 Australian Theatre Forum32 held in Melbourne only have the resources to get people together for particular events and tend to lose momentum once the event is over. The correlations between the theatre and flow theory data indicate that increased and ongoing networking amongst independent theatre practitioners would open up non-funding reliant opportunities for training, discourse and support.


11.7 Inherent Capabilities of the Sector

Capabilities, within the realms of this thesis, not only incorporate the support and skills that a practitioner or company may possess but also their specific talents and inherent characteristics. In *Systems Leadership: Creating positive organisations*, Macdonald, Burke, and Stewart argue that people’s ability to ‘carry out sustained work over time’ is affected by the capabilities they can produce in times of uncertainty. ‘Thus’, they maintain, ‘increasing social and technical skills, knowledge and having a clear sense of direction or purpose all help to sustain activity’.33

The data in this research indicates that many people working in the independent theatre sector in Australia understand the challenges that they must face in order to make a career for themselves or to sustain a company. What is surprising is their capacity to keep going in the face of overwhelming challenge and the positive attitude they maintain in regard to the theatre’s importance in Australian society and in the world at large. ‘I hope I haven't sounded too negative’, says Zen Zen Zo’s Lynne Bradley about what she has sacrificed in her personal career for the survival of the company as a whole.

I'm quite positive but it is a hard industry in Australia. I think it's hard anywhere in the world but I definitely think in Australia because a lot of friends I went to university with are now based in Europe because they haven't been able to receive the level of funding they needed to survive in Australia. But they do in Europe and it's a sad reality.34

In acknowledging the funding limitations of working in Australia, Bradley also acknowledges that she will need to identify and hone her capabilities to meet the challenges of her work without relying on government support.

11.8 Conclusion

The imbalances shown in the theatre data between an independent’s capabilities and the challenges they face can be better adjusted through education, experience and improved support networks. In order to improve energy flow, the theatre practitioner or company
needs to balance the managerial and business aspects of their work without overwhelming their principal motivators - the artistic and creative processes. The data also indicates that creative projects can be stifled or surrounded by uncertainty if practitioners are unable to fulfil the management and business elements of their practice. The formula for overcoming unmanageable highs and low, according to Csikszentmihalyi’s flow conditions, is to develop dynamic balance i.e. balance that increases in complexity in accordance with the capabilities of the individual or the company. This chapter examines this condition for balance based on the interaction between the theatre data and Csikszentmihalyi’s formula for flow.

The condition of balance, by encouraging awareness of and improved balance between the capabilities and the challenges at hand, allows individuals and companies a method for better energy flow and management of their work. This in turn also allows them to discover or rediscover their strengths, what it is they enjoy about their work, to reflect on what their next goals might hold, and what they are prepared to do, or need to have in order to achieve them. A simple way to explore the condition of dynamic balance is for a practitioner to apply Figure 11.1 to each element of their own practice to determine when they are in balance and when they are not. Once this is understood, it is easier for each practitioner to determine where they require skills development, workload reduction, more creative thinking time, shared resources etc. ‘Many people go through life never quite finding a way to match their talents to what is expected of them’ says Csikszentmihalyi. ‘Those who find a middle way weave opportunities and abilities together in an enjoyable progress toward complexity’. Finding such a middle ground is particularly useful for independent theatre practitioners who constantly have to work at the extremes of both capability and challenge. John Baylis, former Director of the Australia Council’s Theatre Board highlighted this ‘middle way’ as one of his aims with the Managing and Producing Services (MAPS) initiative to improve connectedness between independent performers and producers. His definition of a middle way for artists is, ‘a place between the freedom but terrible uncertainties of project-to-project existence, and the relative security but deadening administrative burden of funded small company life’. However he agrees with Judith Knight, Co-founder of Arts Admin in the UK, that this constantly shifting balance is ultimately determined by ‘the passions and idiosyncrasies of the individual producers and practitioners involved. As this
chapter illustrates, this middle ground is by no means static or mediocre but rather allows the practitioner to support cycles of growth and challenge through the balance and rebalance of their skills, capabilities and resources.
Notes

5 Close and Donovan, 6.
6 Terracini, 36-37.
7 Byrnes; Close and Donovan; Freakley and Sutton; Green; Rentschler, ed; Steidl and Hughes.
8 Csikszentmihalyi, Creativity 112.
9 Csikszentmihalyi, Creativity 349.
10 Adapted from Csikszentmihalyi, Flow 74.
12 Gladwin.
13 Wright.
14 Wright.
15 Wright.
16 Bartholomew.
17 Gladwin.
18 Talbot.
19 Naylor.
20 O'Neill.
21 Csikszentmihalyi, Creativity 118.
24 Metro! Arts.
25 Winning. Personal interview.

27 Madhok and Tallman: 336.
28 Sirmon and Hitt: Abstract.
29 Sirmon and Hitt: 340.
31 A Working Party of Cultural Ministers Council Standing Committee, 12.
32 Australian Theatre Forum.
33 Macdonald, Burke and Stewart, 54.
34 Bradley.
36 Travers.
37 Travers.
38 Travers.
CHAPTER 12

12 IMMEDIATE FEEDBACK

12.1 Introduction
This chapter explores the importance of developing immediate feedback in relation to independent theatre practice, both with respect to artistic and managerial output. The chapter develops the case for improved interconnection through which feedback in independent theatre can be developed. This final condition for achieving flow is vital to reinvigorating practitioner energy and improving sector cohesiveness and support. The core concerns relating to this condition emerged quite clearly from both the interview and literature data that was gathered as part of this thesis.

According to this thesis’ interview data and literature, many independent practitioners in both city and regional areas:

- feel isolated or alienated from the rest of the independent sector;
- believe that there is not enough feedback to inspire, provoke or maintain their creative strengths; or
- feel that they do not have access to vital networks, valued support and resources.

Both experienced and inexperienced theatre practitioners, commented on the deep frustration they felt in trying to develop broader networks and supportive collaborations in the Australian theatre sector. The data indicates that this situation affected their ability to seek feedback, inspiration, professional discourse, and to develop a more certain future for themselves. These issues appeared to be exacerbated by the physical distance between companies in different states or non-urban environments.

12.2 Feedback is Immediate
Theatre productions rely on an audience for their existence and value,\(^1\) which perhaps increases a theatre practitioner’s awareness of the significance of immediacy in relation to feedback. Live theatre performance is considered an immediate artform as ‘the
audience is in direct contact with the performer at the moment of his “performance”. In live performance, elements of feedback occur in real time and space as the audience reacts to, and interacts with, the presented work. The work’s ‘flow of action and energy is relayed first hand, as distinct from other [art] mediums where primary communication is often mediated through various means of recording’. This live synergy is crucial in the moment of performance but is equally relevant to the daily and longer term energies of theatre practice. In order to provide optimal energy and inspiration, feedback must reverberate through all elements of a practitioner or company’s practice. Delayed or irregular interaction between independents and between independents and their stakeholders impacts on a practitioner’s ability to develop to develop optimal working conditions. Regular and immediate feedback generated during any or all elements of theatre practice have a significant impact on a production or practitioner’s sustainability.

Concerned discussion relating to the value of arts in Australia and the limited audience that independent theatre receives in its home country was raised in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Other concerns, which are raised by theatre practitioners but less publicised in the general community, include the lack of critical discourse, accessible peer support, and networks within the sector. The reason these last concerns are less publicised in the broader community is perhaps because they are considered more intimately related to a theatre practitioner’s work processes and career development rather than their creative output. The creative outcomes of theatre practice are more likely to be discussed and promoted through the media, funding organisations, and general public. Limited discourse and networks, as this chapter will explain, have a significant impact on the availability of immediate feedback for independent theatre. However, this thesis’ research indicates that such feedback has the potential to provide inspiring and ongoing energy to independent theatre companies and practitioners. ‘In contrast to the usual state of affairs, in a flow experience we need to know how well we are doing,’ says Csikszentmihalyi of the condition of immediate feedback and its relationship to flow or optimal experience. Csikszentmihalyi’s research into the condition of immediate feedback indicates that it is the engagement in feedback or critical discourse that is effective as a catalyst for improving professional artistic careers, rather than whether such feedback is positive or negative.
12.3 Overcoming Economic Evaluations of Theatre

Jeff Khan, Next Wave festival’s Artistic Director, wrote in his submission to the Make it New? discussion paper that ‘a more networked environment, in which pathways and connections between artists and organisations are more readily supported and accessible through a more considered selection of funding initiatives, would be particularly useful in fostering a healthier and more responsive culture of theatre in Australia’.  

Bruce Gladwin believes that ‘creating a culture’ with shared venues and improved dialogue would create ‘a greater awareness of the broader performing arts culture’ and would create better working conditions for those independent practitioners and companies who lack funding, resources, and feedback.

Chapter 6 of this thesis explores the limitations of assessing an arts industry, and a sustainable career in an arts industry, through solely economic or externally created values. This chapter extends that discussion by examining how increased dialogue and feedback within independent theatre might reinforce the inherent values and strengths of the sector. Many writers and theatre practitioners have reformulated the ‘value’ of theatre through community-centric models; ecological frameworks; creative industries approaches; and cultural policy re-development. Economist and current Chair of the NSW Arts Advisory Council, David Throsby, believes that Australian culture’s over-emphasis on economic attitudes to the arts stifles our ‘creative vitality’. Yet there exist very few avenues for regular discussion or feedback about arts practices that support alternative values with respect to outcomes.

If current cultural values within Australia inhibit the easy flow of immediate feedback and discourse in independent theatre, this thesis suggests that feedback should be developed through peers and other interested parties (whether they are local, national or international). David Pledger is one among many independents who views networks and feedback as crucial to the quality and sustainability of Australian theatre. He also believes that Australian independent theatre, which develops partnered or collaborative works for specific projects, is an ideal industry from which such networks could be developed and sustained. ‘There is an advantage’, he says in not being a sustainably funded, larger theatre company, which is ‘that you get the experience of working with other groups, and people bring their experiences of working to the company. And the
networks [that are developed during those projects]…the collateral of that is enormous; it's a big plus'.

Such collaborations are usually one-off partnerships or projects and as a result, do not always provide ongoing feedback. The energy and ideas generated from such collaborations, however, are strong indicators of the potential improvements to sustainability that immediate and ongoing feedback can provide independent artists. Such ‘cross-fertilisation really fuels them’, confirms RealTime editor Keith Gallasch.

NYID’s Producer, Martin Thiele, asserts that networks are one of a theatre practitioner’s or company’s key assets. Other vital assets, he believes, are ‘your knowledge, the experience that you build, and your capacity to solve creative problems’.

In Chapter 10 this thesis discussed the relationship between improved interconnection in independent theatre and the condition of control that practitioners can foster to reduce the ‘worry of failure’. Accessible industry networks are equally important to the development of immediate feedback. In his research of creative people, Csikszentmihalyi found that:

Many artists give up because it is just too excruciating to wait until critics or galleries take notice and pass judgment … The solution seems to be that those individuals who keep doing creative work are those who succeed in internalizing the field’s criteria of judgement to the extent that they can give feedback to themselves, without having to wait to hear from experts.

The theatre data, however, indicates that it is difficult for independent theatre practitioners to invigorate and sustain their connection to their field without the external stimulus provided by accessible feedback, peer discourse and support. This finding is also reflected in knowledge management and innovation research. Research into the impact of different forms of networking on an organisation’s ability to share information found that a ‘focus on IT to create a network structure may limit its [an organisation’s] potential for encouraging knowledge sharing across social communities’ and that ‘face-to-face interaction’ was more successful in this regard.

Yoni Prior of Deakin University believes that because the ‘tribe [theatre community] is so dispersed … it’s really hard for people to locate each other. It’s really hard for people to see other’s work, which means it’s really hard to generate any sort of significant
momentum and we know that the whole sector thrives on the momentum, on a particular sort of momentum.\textsuperscript{19} Prior believes this momentum and feedback as underpins the sector’s energy and flow. ‘It’s hard for any sort of waves or ideas or energy to flow through because they just get stopped outside the borders of cities and states. And it’s incredibly expensive to move work around and to move people around’, she says. Despite this and despite the acknowledged importance of networks, support and feedback in the industry, there is no unified online system that practitioners can use to develop or maintain dialogue. As Performance News Administrator Ian McGregor wrote in an online forum:

This forum is pretty dead (tell your friends about this site and maybe the tide will change), primarily due to me pursuing more lucrative ventures. I also think people are shy…If I had more time I would nurse this forum into popularity, but it is a thankless task and doesn’t bring home the bacon… I also find that many theatre artists lack the skills or insight to fully utilise the web and its collective powers…\textsuperscript{20}

In a later forum conversation McGregor clarifies that his latter comments weren’t intended to be negative. He explains instead that if more theatre practitioners could overcome negative assumptions of online services and use them more regularly, they might better comprehend the web’s potential to improve industry networking and develop a more cohesive arts community. ‘Always remember,’ he adds ‘the greater your online presence the more chance you have of popping up in the right place at the right time’.\textsuperscript{21}

Independent theatre practitioners confirmed that technological advancements have made it easier to reach out online to fellow theatre practitioners and other contacts locally and overseas. However most practitioners felt the central motivation for their work and careers came from interacting with others in the same physical space. ‘I seem to have been trying to collaborate and get feedback from other artists throughout my career but I just can’t seem to make it happen on my own’ said Jane Naylor, an independent performance artist and panellist at the 2008 This Is Not Art Festival. Other artists on the Collectivity, Collaboration & Solitude panel agreed. ‘Online technology is useful for managing elements of my work but creatively and socially it doesn’t have the same
vibe. I say to friends and colleagues not to send me an email but to call me or come and see me,’ said performance artist Britt Guy (Davis et al.). Physical and personal interaction is a particularly important element of live performance which is a product of its own time, space and interaction between performers and audience. Even well-networked and technologically savvy companies such as NYID still prefer to discuss ‘critical management’ or project and workshop development ‘in the same room’.  

12.4 Obstacles and Opportunities for Immediate Feedback

The data indicates that Australian independent theatre’s networks are usually developed and managed in an ad hoc way that limits the immediacy, the amount, and the continuity of support they can exchange. Chance meetings in cafés and theatre foyers often result in an exchange of networks, resources and ideas. Social networks become professional ones and vice versa, allowing practitioners to take advantage of limited opportunity for time together in one space. ‘We’re having a project dinner tonight that we’ve traditionally had for the last five years or so’ explains Version 1.0’s David Williams. ‘The company pays for dinner for all the project artists and so we’re doing that tonight. Now it was a miracle for us, I proposed a date being today, the 27th and a place and this is the first time, ever, that no one has had a problem with that’. This type of event is quite common in other professions but not so common in theatre circles where funding and time frames don’t allow for pre-arranged discussion sessions. Such sessions are even more unlikely between practitioners who are not working on a joint project or between practitioners from different locales. Feedback or discussion with relevant sources outside of the independent theatre scene is even rarer. IRAA Theatre’s Co-Artistic Director Renato Cuocolo works from both Australia and Italy and believes that improving Australian networks and the sharing of information would greatly benefit the independent theatre sector.

IRAAT Theatre was established in 1978 by Renato Cuocolo. His collaborative works with Roberta Bosetti involve a series of six trilogies that have been presented at numerous festivals in Australia and overseas. The works are presented in an intimate way, often in their own home, and attempt to break down the boundaries between art and life through use of the uncanny, nostalgia and the everyday. When it is not touring,
the company divides its time between Melbourne and Italy. IRAA currently shares its administrator with other companies and as a result is able to enlarge its networks, contacts and resources. However, Cuocolo stresses that ‘inter-city networking could be improved’ within Australia.

It would be great to have an annual general meeting where you can visit other companies and discuss different issues. This could then develop the creation of communal things like an independent email network based on a spontaneous network rather than a formal one. And each year one company takes the role of organising an annual get-together. Otherwise, yes, there is a tendency to feel a bit isolated. We tour a lot and then it can be two or three years before we hear or are in touch with other companies again. Here we see companies less and less and less because we are to-ing and fro-ing a lot.\textsuperscript{24}

The \textit{Love Your Work}\textsuperscript{25} paper recommends a similar annual meeting for theatre directors but these recommendations do not indicate how access to this event would occur or how theatre practitioners in roles other than artistic direction might improve their feelings of isolation. Cuocolo also suggests that improving critical debate and increasing the chance for work to be viewed by media and presenters would improve the value of the sector as well as its audience or touring potential. He suggests that rather than have one large market like APAM (Australian Performing Arts Market) that not all independents can get to, it might be better to maximise presentation and resource sharing and have shared, local viewings and forums. That way, ‘if we are advised in advance that people are coming, we can get them to see us. This is very good for small companies because small companies can't afford to get those people here’.\textsuperscript{26}

\subsection*{12.5 Obstacles and Opportunities for Dialogue}

The data indicates that developing individual theatre networks, whether in regional or urban environments, is hindered by division and fragmentation. It takes a lot of time, resources, and vital energy for an individual to track down the right people they need to undertake and complete their professional objectives and develop appropriate feedback. For emerging artists or artists who cannot work or live in one community throughout their careers, developing contacts, feedback, and sustainable resources is an ongoing
and often overwhelming challenge. This thesis argues that collaborative efforts to share contacts and ideas might be more productive.

Rebecca Scollen is a Lecturer and Researcher in Theatre Studies at Queensland University of Technology. Scollen supports the correlation between better theatre networks and improved Australian touring circuits. Scollen notes that scant and irregular feedback between presenting venues and artists limits the potential of Australian touring circuits and regional venues for independent practitioners. She cites the example of one group of emerging artists who applied to regional venues to tour. The venues wanted a business plan in order to present the application to their stakeholders. The artists immediately presented them with ‘who they were, what they were going to do, how much it was going to cost them, and what the show was going to be like’ says Scollen.27 Because the artists had provided an easily understandable business plan, the venues’ feedback was both immediate and positive. Despite being inexperienced artists, the venue and their networks all bought the show because:

They were very professional in their approach and gave them very clear information. The venues said, “if we had young people coming in every year like that, they’d get the gig”. I believe that there’s something falling down here because on the one hand the venues are complaining that they keep getting tired, old stuff and yet they are not developing networks with artists or providing clear enough feedback in order to encourage them to apply or to reapply.28

Scollen believes that such feedback and the networks needed to convey such feedback are easily available to most practitioners.

Urban Theatre Projects (UTP) has successfully negotiated more than 25 years of existence and sustained relocation and massive re-structuring. One of the ways it survived was to its focus on feedback and dialogue with its stakeholders and extended communities. In recent years UTP has developed a support program that includes an annual artist residency, artistic and management consultancies, grant auspicing, and its project ‘Critical Dialogue’29 which presents a series of essays promoting dialogue between artists and theorists. Originally a collaborative, community-based theatre, UTP
was obliged to revise its management structure in the early nineties in order to meet its funding requirements. Established in 1981 as Death Defying Theatre or DDT, the company was almost forced into closure in 1990. As Paul Brown writes in his essay on the company:

It’s the middle of 1990. DDT has been put ‘on notice’ by its key funding body, The Australia Council for the Arts. It is a period when the Council’s Performing Arts Board is obsessed with so-called ‘excellence’. The quality and innovation of DDT’s repertoire are in question, the energy of its people is running low. The vote is almost unanimous, to wind up the company.\(^{30}\)

At the eleventh hour however, a report outlining a new life for the company proposed a move from Bondi, in central eastern Sydney, to the city’s outer West. At the same time it proposed a dramatic shift away from the company’s collective structure to one run by a permanent artistic director and associated staff. Since that time the company has established itself in its new base of Bankstown and, due to the commitment, skill and sheer drive of its various artistic and administrative staff, has created a strong sense of sustainability for itself, for the community in which it is based, and for a new generation of independent artists. As Ian Maxwell wrote of the company in his essay *The Middle Years: Death Defying Theatre Transformed*, it went from ‘struggling to sustain cohesion and artistic focus’ to:

...inventing a new model for making performance work, drawing upon both the legacy of ‘community theatre’ and—herein lies perhaps the most remarkable (and most frequently remarked upon) aspect of this experiment—upon what might be broadly (and unsatisfactorily) labelled as the ‘avant-garde’, or perhaps ‘post-modern’ traditions developed in inner city venues including the Performance Space.\(^{31}\)

UTP creative re-modelling of itself allowed it to improve dialogue between its collaborative partners. However, UTP’s current Artistic Director, Alicia Talbot, believes that Australian theatre practice is weakened by a lack of sector-wide dialogue and professional development opportunities:
In the arts people are desperate to work but it's often only once an artist begins to get a bit successful that they become networked into all these other things they need and encouraged to do. It helps to get some good feedback and having an exciting, stimulating creative life.

The issue for Talbot is that although she recognises the vital need for improved networks for Australian artists, developing and sustaining these networks independently of other theatre organisations is exhausting.

12.5.1 Mentoring: A Promising Start

UTP is not the only theatre company that aims to develop vital support and mentoring programs for artists. Other independent companies and organisations with dedicated spaces, staff and resources offer in-house programs to which other artists can apply. Mentoring is seen as a vital yet under-utilised process to create longer term connections and feedback. The difficulty for independent companies and their mentoring programs are that they are often operate informally or are developed internally and thus lack the energy and support of sector-wide interaction and shared capabilities. Although important, such programs are a massive energy drain for the independents trying to develop and maintain them in conjunction with their own projects. ‘So what happens then is your life begins to erode because you're trying to keep a company and the people [involved] sustainable’. Without a more cohesive approach to sector feedback and networks, individual practice is very difficult to sustain.

Despite the value independents place on immediate feedback and improved professional pathways, attempts to improve this condition are often short-term or managed by one or two already over-worked devotees. Lyn Wallis believes a large part of her role with Company B was to provide mentoring and feedback that could bolster independent artists but, like Talbot, she feels that there are too few of these roles supported in Australia to give the overall industry the boost it needs:

A big part of my job is mentoring, as a mentoring producer. I have a very clear system where they [the participating artists] don't just do their work and get on with it; they’re part of the
season. I meet with them regularly. There's a structure of things they must do. They get advice and we work with them to help them learn from their mistakes and do it. We're just starting to spit out some really good companies. Mostly this is where I wish I had more people to help me. I'm doing it all and it's just stupid. … But I'm basically a producing mentor because I feel if I pick the projects right, if I get the programming right, they've got a great plan, a great team I go they should be able to do that without any interference from me.\textsuperscript{34}

Chris Mead became Artistic Director of Playwriting Australia in 2008 and aims to provide ‘an advocacy service where you’re linking up playwrights. I describe myself as the host of The Bachelor. I’m trying to get writers to meet companies and that’s the kind of relationship you have to create’ to get a show produced.\textsuperscript{35} Previous attempts to do this through the National Playwrights Conference were not as successful, he believes, because it was an annual, one-off event rather than an ongoing meeting point for feedback and development. A study from the Journal of Vocational Behavior\textsuperscript{36} confirms that ‘multiple mentoring relationships’ developed across a career rather than relying on limited mentoring opportunities is more effective in improving professional networks and competencies. In Mentoring in Action: a Practical Guide for Managers\textsuperscript{37} the authors claim a common theme from their case studies is that networks improve the mentoring process and that shared and integrated experiences provide rich learning and networking opportunities.

12.6 Building A Cohesive Approach through Sharing and Flexibility

In order to create conditions for immediate feedback on a more cohesive level, more theatre practitioners require regular access to updated and informative networks, affordable communication, shared useable spaces (both physical and online), and to be able to build dialogue and feedback processes into their routines. As Independent, Bruce Naylor has indicated:

To me the most important thing is that you see good stuff happening. The thing that actually keeps you going is that you see stuff happening. The term ‘dialogue’ can be misleading. It needn’t be people talking to one another it might be people watching what other people are doing. Watching other work – inspires me to take my work [to new places] – it’s like a
dialogue of influences; you’re influencing each other, that’s creating a culture of performance making.  

The independent theatre sector thrives on the energy developed through immediate feedback and inspiration. These are not necessarily located within the programs and structures associated with funding or economic rationalist models. Chris Bendall, previously Artistic Director of Melbourne-based, independent company Theatre@Risk (now Artistic Director of Deckchair Theatre in Western Australia), noted that increased funding and resourcing of venues or producers did not necessarily trickle down to independent theatre. ‘Opening up more funds for venues won’t turn venue managers into creative producers who will be able to suddenly transform their venues into new creative hubs. Would presenters, even with this additional funding support, really be in a position to not worry about box-office but be creative risk-takers?’ The drive to value creativity and to improve conditions that support it should come from those who understand it firsthand. Independent theatre makers have the intuitive, collaborative and creative strengths required to improve the limited dialogue that exists within the sector and to share space, ideas and information.

Scott Wright, Artistic Director with Sydney-based, physical and visual theatre company Erth, believes building a range of feedback producing networks into a theatre company can help develop a level of sustainability for the future. The development of emerging artists and mentoring processes are important to Erth because original members see this as the origins for their own careers, and indeed those of all artists. The core artist team also works collaboratively with other independent artists and provides development opportunities for both established and emerging artists wherever possible. Through these non-hierarchical relationships, Erth members are able to pass on their own skills and experience and, in return, receive feedback about their own processes and professional goals. These mutual relationships develop better communication, and a more vibrant company with stronger networks and an ongoing professional lifecycle.

Erth needs to be a flexible entity that supports its members, that gives people a freedom to experiment and to try new things and to be a vehicle for core members to express or convey things that they want to do. The way that we treat people, I consider it as being a lot more personal. You’re not just on an assembly
line. You're in an environment where every artist in that environment is encouraged to share information. You don't have hierarchies of senior mould-makers who are making certain skills a secret because they're the only ones who know how to do it and if they teach anyone else they could be out of a job. There's none of that. It's conducive. It supports people.

Access to inspiration via mutual and immediate networks feeds and reinforces creative practice. Having a dedicated, shared space with other companies from which to base their operations would, for many artists, provide the immediate feedback and supportive culture they require. In 2004, David Pledger commented on NYID’s office set up in the front room of his Melbourne home where his children’s prams shared the entry way with staff’s briefcases:

I'd like not to work at home. …We actually almost set it up last year where there'd be people from other art forms that'd work in a similar office environment. So you'd have other people to bounce things off. I don't want to work in DreamWorks or anything like that. I want to make work that I think is important and significant and have a workplace that represents that.  

The need for feedback has been expressed by the sector but expressing this need ‘alone is not enough, for it has to be translated into the operating practices of the institution' or the practitioner. Improved industry dialogue is already part of organisational models in many industries outside of the arts. In The Manager's Desk Reference feedback is described as a collaborative exercise between employees and employers that develops trust, strengthens relationships, improves work quality, promotes better problem solving, and reduces uncertainty. In applying this model to the Australian independent theatre industry; the role of ‘employees’ would be played by the individual practitioners while the role of ‘employers’ is largely that of the more established companies, venues, funding organisations or private corporations, educational bodies and arts media. Feedback, particularly non-controlling feedback, is cited as a motivational tool for creativity and performance improvement. In order to develop and sustain such motivation, organisations are encouraged to include feedback from its members into all of its processes and projects.
12.7 Conclusion

Without an increase in accessible, sector-wide networks and immediate feedback, practitioners are too often left to their own depleted energies and ad-hoc networks. Immediate feedback is both a stimulant for, and a result of, a more cohesive and better networked industry. Although most Australian artists generally admit that city locations such as Melbourne and Sydney provide much better access to ‘developments, conferences, networks and understandings of what is going on,’ many practitioners are more likely to have a discussion with peers ‘informally in the foyer of a theatre’ or during short periods of project development. More isolated practitioners still only have the opportunity to communicate with one another and with international contacts via email and telephone. These makeshift approaches to communication do not foster cohesive approaches to immediate feedback. However, if formalised networks are not immediately available to a practitioner, a good way to instigate such networks is to set one up. The focus for achieving this condition is that feedback is available and that it is as immediate as possible. Practitioners could achieve this by developing their own network of potential providers of feedback by setting up regular emails, meetings or phone catch-ups with collaborators, mentors, business partners etc. Such interactions need not be lengthy but simply provide the practitioner with immediate feedback to a particular question, concern or idea they are facing.

This chapter establishes immediate feedback as a condition for sustainability that might be developed formally or informally by independent theatre practitioners in accordance with their working style and networks but that ultimately requires improved avenues for timely, relevant, and regular communication. Immediate feedback works holistically with the other flow conditions outlined in this thesis to create and sustain optimal experience and to improve sustainability for independent artists.
Notes

1 Auslander.

2 Hunter in Auslander, 18.


4 Csikszentmihalyi, Creativity 111.

5 Csikszentmihalyi, Creativity; Csikszentmihalyi, Flow; Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi, eds., Optimal Experience: Psychological Studies of Flow in Consciousness.


7 Gladwin.

8 Terracini; Archer.

9 Gallasch, Art in a Cold Climate - Rethinking the Australia Council.

10 Cunningham, What Price a Creative Economy; Negus and Pickering.


12 Throsby, Does Australia Need a Cultural Policy? 36.

13 Pledger.

14 Gallasch.

15 Thiele in Pledger.

16 Csikszentmihalyi, Creativity 112.

17 Csikszentmihalyi, Creativity 115-16.

18 Swan, Newell, Scarbrough and Hislop.

19 Prior.

20 McGregor.

21 McGregor.

22 Pledger.

23 Williams. Personal interview.


26 Cuocolo.

27 Scollen.

28 Scollen.


32 Talbot.

33 Talbot.

34 Wallis.

35 Mead.


38 Naylor.


40 Pledger.


44 Wilson. Personal interview.
CHAPTER 13

13 CONCLUSION: AN INDEPENDENT FUTURE

13.1 Revisiting the Research Aims

The primary purpose of this research is to investigate the issues relating to sustainability of Australian independent theatre careers and companies. In particular the thesis asks how independents might develop more sustainable companies or careers while still remaining true to their core values and characteristics?

In Chapter 3 Grounded theory methodology develops a data-led process of enquiry and conceptual development that in turn, generates an understanding of sustainability based firmly in positive psychology’s conditions for flow as well as the ideas and examples from the independent theatre sector itself.

A work environment that emphasizes positive work relationships is a central source of positive states and experiences such as satisfaction, enrichment, development, and growth (Dutton, 2003; Dutton & Heaphy, 2003, Quinn & Dutton, 2005). Quinn (2007) contends that ‘‘the higher quality of the connection between two people, . . .the more energy those people will feel’’ (p. 74). As such, work environments can be energizing and enriching and foster human thriving, development, and growth in the workplace (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005).\(^1\)

This thesis aims to show that such theories are particularly useful for smaller, flexible, independent organisations and individuals who can apply them in accordance with their particular processes and objectives. This approach shifts the research question focus from ‘studying conditions that account for deficiencies to better characterizing the conditions that account for positive experiences and states’.\(^2\)
13.1 The Unique Nature of the Findings

This thesis’ data finds a gap in the existing literature in determining shared characteristics of independent theatre. The literature and interview data that emerges through this thesis’ grounded theory methodology, presents a diverse sector that nonetheless shares core characteristics. These characteristics are:

- passion for and dedication to the independent performing arts and their value in our society;
- strong emphasis on creativity and innovation;
- flexible, organic and intuitive development;
- short-term, reactive development despite wanting to achieve longer-term sustainability;
- niche markets;
- values co-operative, collaborative relationships and creative discourse which are developed and maintained mainly through informal and personalized connections;
- resourcefulness in the face of constant adversity which in turn results in multiskilling and multitasking.

This thesis also identifies gaps in the existing literature in addressing the issue of sustainability through non-economic means. The 2002 SMPA report explains that independent organisations ‘have highly flexible structures that support creative processes and multi-skilled management. There is a range of working models in this sector, including examples of organisations successfully discarding one model and re-inventing themselves in response to a changing external environment’. However none of the literature reviewed for this thesis incorporates these successful examples into an accessible and practical alternative for sustainability that all independent practitioners may adopt.

This thesis examines the issue of sustainability through the collective voice of practitioners who question the restrictive economic structures which are often imposed on their practice. This thesis puts forward a system for improved sustainability that builds on the shared characteristics and values of the sector while allowing each
independent to maintain their particular focus and working structure. This non-economic system better overlays the sector’s natural processes, values and energy. ‘The impact of economics on industry is witnessed around the world. And only we can challenge ourselves to unearth the resources that the art itself requires, beginning with what we have in abundance, and calling into being that which we need’ writes Megan Monaghan, Literary Director of Atlanta’s Alliance Theatre Company. This call to the practitioners within the theatre sector is reflective of this thesis’ own research processes and findings. This research analyses the impact of continual internal and external pressures on the inherent energy and strengths of Australian independent theatre practice. The pressures on this sector, the sector’s strength, and the issue of sustainability have been examined in recent arts literature but have never, until now, been drawn together into a positive, accessible set of conditions from which independents can develop their own kind of sustainability. This set of conditions is based on the individual and collective ideas of Australian independent theatre makers as well as theories surrounding creativity, energy, optimal experience and sustainability.

13.2 Overview of the Research Findings
Interviews with practitioners and experts in the field, combined with an extensive literature review, show that many issues relating to sustainability in independent theatre revolve around revitalisation and conditions for improving optimal experiences in the workplace. Despite an initial clamour for more money and better resources, most independents believe that there is simply not enough government arts funding available in Australia to sustain the independent sector’s diverse companies and practitioners. As a result most practitioners in this sector develop their own, multi-sourced modes of raising income. The data indicates that this way of working leads to fluctuating energy levels, lack of long-term career prospects, cycles of burn out, and a lack of professional pathways and networks.

Correlations between these findings and the references to energy in Csikszentmihalyi’s flow or optimal experience theory suggest that a holistic and practical set of conditions could be drawn on to improve sustainability in independent theatre.
Research into the applications of non-hierarchical and ecological theories to organisational sustainability further develops firmer links between energy flow and sustainability. As per the refining capacity of grounded theory, correlations between Csikszentmihalyi’s optimal experience or flow theory and the independent theatre data tightens the focus of this thesis. Csikszentmihalyi, along with other experts in creativity theory such as Theresa Amabile and Keith Sawyer, as well as theatre practitioners and cultural experts such as Julian Meyrick, Keith Gallasch and David Throsby all argue for holistic approaches to motivation, sustainability, creativity and the arts. These arguments understand the working environment as a holistic one where an individual, their actions and their environment are interrelated. The conditions for the sustainability of Australian independent theatre and companies, as outlined in this thesis, are based on this same ecological understanding.

This thesis suggests or describes five main flow conditions which Australian independent theatre practitioners may consider in relation to sustaining their work energies. These five conditions are: a sense of oneness; clear goals; a feeling of control; a dynamic balance of skills or capacities with challenges; and immediate feedback. Each of the five interconnected conditions are flexible, yet practical means of enhancing the flow of energies in independent theatre companies. Each of these five conditions allow individual, unique choices of specific action for independent practitioners to consider in relation to career and company sustainability in their own environments.

‘When we consider that vitality and energy have been associated with greater performance and persistence, as well as psychological and physical wellness, it is clear that vitality represents an important resource whose promotion has multiple benefits,’ assert Deci and Ryan in *From Ego Depletion to Vitality: Theory and findings concerning the facilitation of energy available to the self.* They conclude that ‘[a]s this research develops further, we may continue to find new paths to enhanced feelings of aliveness, which after all, is perhaps the most basic satisfaction of all’. The benefit of this thesis’ findings is the development of a non-economic and non-funding reliant alternative for improved energy and sustainability. The proposed framework for improved energy flow requires only a certain level of dedication from each practitioner or company to explore and develop flow conditions rather than to consider formal economic or management structures.
Examples of how these conditions could be developed are included throughout Chapters 8 to 12 and in the conclusion to each of those chapters. A starting point for practitioners is to develop their own sense of flow and to analyse when the conditions have aligned for it to be active in their daily working life. Examples such as regular meetings, professional development, collaborations or partnerships with likeminded practitioners, identifying goals, understanding capacities, limiting distractions, sharing skills or resources, and better access to suitable work spaces are just some of the examples noted in this thesis. But rather than follow examples of flow within particular settings, this thesis proposes that practitioners develop their own methods for implementing conditions for flow within the context of their own practice. The framework developed as part of this thesis should begin with a sense of flow, the conditions for flow and the correlations between this state and the sustainability of Australian independent theatre careers and companies.

13.3 Recommendations for Future Research
Developed using a constructivist grounded theory methodology, this research acknowledges the hermeneutic processes involved at all stages of the research process from initial exploration to conceptual development. Grounded theory is a methodology that focuses on generation of concepts rather than the testing of concepts. As a result the findings that emerge from the thesis data are, as yet, untested. The strength of Csikszentmihalyi’s own research into flow theory and optimal experience (Chapter 6), particularly in relation to creativity and improved sustainability, cannot necessarily be applied to this thesis’ findings. Future research is advised in order to test and strengthen the findings of this research. Such research would require monitoring and evaluation of the application and outcomes of this thesis’ conditions for sustainability on trial groups of independent theatre companies and practitioners. Further research of the framework’s applicability across different cultures and art forms is also recommended.

13.4 Encouraging a Sustainable Future
The conditions for sustainability of Australian independent theatre, as proposed in this thesis, streamline practitioners’ energies by moving away from restrictive economic
modelling and by focussing instead on positive examples and the strengths of each individual as well as their collaborative impact. As Csikszentmihalyi states:

> It is difficult to approach the world creatively when one is hungry or shivering from the cold, because then all of one’s mental energy is focused on securing the necessities one lacks…. To free up creative energy we need to let go and divert some attention from the pursuit of the predictable goals that genes and memes have programmed in our minds and use it instead to explore the world….  

This thesis encourages independent practitioners to learn from one another and proposes conditions for sustainability that can be developed irrespective of the sector’s diverse working structures and styles. ‘Our jobs’, writes Csikszentmihalyi ‘determine to a large extent what our lives are like. …Work can be one of the most joyful, most fulfilling aspects of life. Whether it will be or not depends on the actions we collectively take’.  

283
Notes

1 Ronit and Abraham: 786.
2 Ronit and Abraham: 286.
5 Ryan and Deci: 714.
6 Ryan and Deci: 714.
7 Csikszentmihalyi, Creativity 346.
Researcher  
Jane Kreis

Project Name  
Together Alone: Creating and Sustaining Contemporary Live Performance Across Australia and Beyond

I have been given information about the study Together Alone: Creating and Sustaining Contemporary Live Performance Across Australia and Beyond and discussed the research project with Jane Kreis who is conducting this research as part of a Doctor of Philosophy supervised by Dr Ian McGrath and Ms Janys Hayes in the Faculty of Creative Arts at the University of Wollongong.

I understand that, if I consent to participate in this project, I may be quoted in the research document.

I have had an opportunity to ask Jane Kreis any questions I may have about the research and my participation.

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary, I am free to refuse to participate and I am free to withdraw from the research at any time. My refusal to participate or withdrawal of my consent will not affect my treatment in any way.

If I have any enquiries about the research, I can contact Jane Kreis (jeod@uow.edu.au) or Dr Ian McGrath (Ph 02 4221 3581) or Ms Janys Hayes (janys_hayes@uow.edu.au). If I have any concerns or complaints regarding the way the research is or has been conducted, I can contact either the Ethics Officer, University of Wollongong (k.mcrae@uow.edu.au) or the Complaints Officer, Human Research Ethics Committee, University of Wollongong (Ph 02 4221 4457).

By signing below I am indicating my consent to participate in the research entitled Together Alone: Creating and Sustaining Contemporary Live Performance Across Australia and Beyond, conducted by Jane Kreis as it has been described to me in the information sheet and in discussion with Jane Kreis. I understand the data collected from my participation will be used for the purpose of the Doctoral Thesis and Guide for Small to Medium Theatre Companies and I consent for it to be used in this manner.

Signed: ..........................................................................................................................Date: ...................................................................................................................

Name (please print): .............................................................................................................
APPENDIX 2 PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM

Title of Project
Together Alone: Devising and Sustaining Contemporary Live Performance Across Australia and Beyond

Description of Project
How can small to medium Australian theatre companies collaboratively devise, produce and sustain ‘successful’, live performance in the ever-increasing globalised climate?

This key question specifically focuses on small to medium organisations that collaboratively devise their own product/s with an aim to create live performance that reflects the socio-political and cultural influences of its time and place and that is aesthetically and meaningfully stimulating as it is financially viable.

With subsidy culture on the wane and entrepreneurial, often globalised culture becoming a necessity for survival, how can the small players continue to create vital yet viable work?

The Researcher
This research is being undertaken by Jane Kreis for a Doctor of Philosophy (Theatre) at the University of Wollongong. The supervisors of the research are Dr Ian McGrath and Ms Janys Hayes at the Faculty of Creative Arts.

Summary of Project Aims
At present there are limited resources or guidelines for small theatre companies. Although DCITA’s report on the small to medium performing arts sector raised some issues, it did little to assist companies (particularly those on the fringe of that sector) to find some useful solutions. Many theatre companies are using their own nouse and networks to devise processes and strategies to achieve their aims.

The proposed outcome of my thesis research is the development of a map of contemporary and future guidelines. This industry map would provide strategies for small to medium theatre companies as they collectively plan and create new work with content that operates across multiple and viable platforms and applications. It will offer such organisations practical ideas and methods for developing and growing unique, live performance in the increasingly globalised, festival and spectacle-based markets.

Target Participants
Small to medium theatre companies and independent artists who collaboratively devise their own work and who have participated or will be participating in an international festival or overseas venture.

Primary research includes interviews with theatre practitioners (artistic directors, performers, managers). Interviews will also be held with Australian leaders in theatre policy, funding, education and practice in relation to the current and future outlook for
small theatre company development. In some cases observation of the theatre company’s creative and business processes may also take place.

Contact Information
If I have any enquiries about the research, I can contact Jane Kreis (jeod@uow.edu.au) or Dr Ian McGrath (Ph 02 4221 3581) or Ms Janys Hayes (janys_hayes@uow.edu.au). If I have any concerns or complaints regarding the way the research is or has been conducted, I can contact either the Ethics Officer, University of Wollongong (k.mcrae@uow.edu.au) or the Complaints Officer, Human Research Ethics Committee, University of Wollongong (Ph 02 4221 4457).
APPENDIX 3 INFORMATION & QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWEES

Research Purpose
These preliminary interviews are designed to cover a range of topics relating to the small to medium theatre sector. In order to clarify the purpose of such an interview I have outlined my central research questions below:

Key Question
How can small to medium Australian theatre companies collaboratively devise, produce and sustain ‘successful’, live performance in the ever-increasing globalised climate?

General Sub-questions:
• With subsidy culture on the wane and entrepreneurial, often globalised, culture becoming a necessity for survival, how can the smaller players continue to create vital yet viable work?

• Another of the key questions the proposed research aims to examine then is: how can collaborative work be devised and promoted across the physical distance imposed by the Australian landscape and the transitory employment market of the globalised economy?

• How can small to medium theatre organisations develop a balance between the lack of physical proximity and stability and the advantages that new technologies can offer?

• What effect does the current ‘festival culture’ have on the localised cultural references that are inherent to devised performance?

• Can small to medium theatre companies develop work that is culturally rich and relevant as well as being financially and aesthetically viable in both local and international markets? What processes do they use? Where do these processes take place (in the space, office, bar/café, telephone, www, at home)? Why are they successful? Are they sustainable or transferable?

Interview Layout & Tips
• Each question has been grouped into categories focussing on: Practice and Process; Sector Value; Funding; Work Situations; Globalisation and Solutions.

• This is a generic interview questionnaire and some of the questions may not be relevant to you or your company. If a question is not applicable to you simply insert ‘n/a’ and move on to the next question.

• In addition some of these questions may not be relevant to your current work but you may have had prior experience with these topics – please respond accordingly.
Interview for Practitioners

Practice & Process: An Australian Approach for the small to medium theatre sector (SMTS)

1. a) How would you define the type of work you create?
   b) What are its advantages/disadvantages in the theatre market?
   c) What processes do you most use to create work?
   d) Does this process vary – if so why?

2. a) Do you see a permanent ensemble as a positive or negative and why?
   b) What is the average length of your rehearsal and development periods and why?

3. a) What do you feel are the key issues affecting Australian small to medium theatre companies today?
   b) Have these issues changed very much in the last 10 to 20 years? If so, why?

4. What effect/s does Australia’s geography, population and culture have on your:
   a) collaborative processes;
   b) management and administration (including longer-term sustainability)?

5. a) How do you view your company’s own specific, location and its affect on your ability to create and produce work?
   b) Where do most of your performance collaborators and performers come from?
   c) Is this important to your organisation?
   d) Do you or the people you work with have to move around a lot?
   e) What is it that you seek (skills, qualities, background) in your performers and collaborators?
   f) How do you communicate with most of your collaborative colleagues?

6. Is your company currently sustaining itself? Why or why not? If Yes, how?

7. Can you think of any other country’s theatre policy or attitude to small theatre which could be applied, or have elements of it applied to Australia to improve the impact of Australia’s small to medium sector?

8. Has the impact of new technologies affected the way that you work creatively and/or administratively?
   If yes, creatively: why and how?
If yes, administratively: why and how?
If no, why and can you envisage ways you would or could use new technologies?

9. a) What are your key marketing strategies?
   b) Do they vary for each show?
   c) Do these marketing strategies affect the nature of the creative work you develop?

Sector (SMTS) Value
1. a) How would you define a small to medium theatre company sector in Australia?
   b) Does your company fit into this definition?
   c) Why and why not?

2. Do you believe there is enough diversity in the Australian theatre scene?
   b) And why?

3. a) Given that the small to medium theatre sector is often identified with work that is high in ‘risk and innovation’, how does this affect the nature of your work?
   b) How do you see ‘risk and innovation’ is valued in Australia and more globally?
   c) How do you believe your work and your sector’s value are compared with that of the Australian Major Organisations?

4. ‘All Australians should be proud of the arts in Australia as a realistic expression of who Australians are and the things that they value’ (Australians and the Arts: 21). a) Do you believe the arts are valued enough to adequately support the small to medium arts sector?
   b) Why or Why not?
   c) Is this a factor when looking at what works you will create and how you will produce them?

5. a) Do you think that in order to become financially viable, the small to medium sector may have to choose between ‘innovation, experimentation and creative risk-taking’ (SMPA: 22) and self-sustainability?
   b) Why or why not?
   c) If you answered yes, what would be the outcomes of that?
6. a) Do you believe that the concepts of creative research and development are valuable to your sector?
   b) Why or why not?
   c) Do you believe that these concepts are properly valued and adequately resourced (either through grant funding or through other means)?
   d) Why or why not?
   e) If you answered no, how do you envisage this could be improved?

7. a) Do you create works that are, at least in part, ‘ambassadorial’ in nature i.e. work that is designed to showcase your company and perhaps boost your chances at larger audiences, festival or market inclusion, touring and funding opportunities?
   b) Why or why not?
   c) If you answered yes, how do you create such work and what have been the outcomes for you/your company?

**Funding: The Reality**

1. a) Could you break down an estimate in percentages of where your company’s income comes from? *E.g. Commonwealth funding 50%, Own state funding 25%, Other state funding 10%, Local Council funding 15%, Ticket sales 10%, Sponsorship 10%, Donations 5% = 100%*
   b) Does this vary considerably from year to year?
   c) And if so, what effect does it have on the company and its creative work?

2. Given that the government agencies have only a limited amount of funding to give, how best do you see it could be organised to provide the small to medium sector with stability or the means to better plan and create?

3. ‘… [T]he ability of the Sector to earn sponsorship income [is] an issue raised by one in three of the organisations surveyed as a “great challenge”’ (SMPA: 17).
   a) Why is it such a challenge?
   b) Can the interviewee see any solutions or have they experienced any solutions to these problems or is there a solution other than sponsorship?

4. a) To what extent (if any) does the ‘type’ of funding you receive, e.g. project-to-project, triennial or other, have on your creative and planning processes and in particular your ability to participate in the international or global market?
   b) Have you developed ways to either counter or encourage any of these effects?
Work Situations – the nature of work in the small to medium theatre sector (SMTS)
1. a) How would you describe your current management ‘working model’?
   b) What are the advantages and disadvantages of this model in practice?
   c) Can you see this model changing or developing in the near future?
   c) How and why?
2. a) How would you describe your role in the company?
   b) How sustainable is this role?
3. What would be your ideal work situation?
4. a) Do you or your colleagues need to supplement your income with other work?
5. b) If yes, what is the effect of this on your role with the company?

Globalisation (Glocalisation)
1. What effect/s, if any, does the current trend in global markets (including international touring and festivals) have on your:
   a) collaborative processes;
   b) management and administration (including longer-term sustainability)?
2. How do you or your organisation meet the challenge of building relationships with festivals, venues and the Major Performing Arts Sector?
3. a) Have you toured internationally?
   b) If yes, do you find international touring more rewarding (both financially and in other ways) than national touring?
   c) Why or why not?
   d) If you haven’t toured internationally, why?

Solutions
1. Please respond to some of the solutions (listed below) to boost the small to medium theatre sector in Australia (this responses may be negative, positive or both). You may have your own solutions and if so, please note these.
   a) Development of a small to medium theatre companies council or lobby group;
   b) Sharing or networking of resources (these include office and rehearsal spaces, staff, audiences (eg. A joint ‘Friends Of’ or ‘Subscription’ system) equipment and ideas);
   c) A Business/Arts networking organisation that not only liaises between potential business and theatre partnerships but also helps to raise income sources for and awareness of the small to medium theatre sector in Australia;
d) Better networks (both through technology and face-to-face communication) between individual theatre companies and independent practitioners across each State and across Australia. Some of these networks do exist but do not seem to be regular or to provide useful links across vast distances.

Other ideas?
APPENDIX 4 INFORMATION & QUESTIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS & COMMENTATORS

Research Purpose
These preliminary interviews are designed to cover a range of topics relating to the small to medium theatre sector. In order to clarify the purpose of such an interview I have outlined my central research questions below:

Key Question
How can small to medium Australian theatre companies collaboratively devise, produce and sustain ‘successful’, live performance in the ever-increasing globalised climate?

General Sub-questions
- With subsidy culture on the wane and entrepreneurial, often globalised, culture becoming a necessity for survival, how can the smaller players continue to create vital yet viable work?
- Another of the key questions the proposed research aims to examine then is: how can collaborative work be devised and promoted across the physical distance imposed by the Australian landscape and the transitory employment market of the globalised economy?
- How can small to medium theatre organisations develop a balance between the lack of physical proximity and stability and the advantages that new technologies can offer?
- What effect does the current ‘festival culture’ have on the localised cultural references that are inherent to devised performance?
- Can small to medium theatre companies develop work that is culturally rich and relevant as well as being financially and aesthetically viable in both local and international markets? What processes do they use? Where do these processes take place (in the space, office, bar/café, telephone, www, at home)? Why are they successful? Are they sustainable or transferable?

Interview Layout & Tips
- Each question has been grouped into categories focussing on: Practice and Process; Sector Value; Funding; Work Situations; Globalisation and Solutions.
- This is a generic interview questionnaire and some of the questions may not be relevant to you or your company. If a question is not applicable to you simply insert ‘n/a’ and move on to the next question.
- In addition some of these questions may not be relevant to your current work but you may have had prior experience with these topics – please respond accordingly.
Interview for Policy Makers & Commentators

Practice & Process: An Australian Approach for the small to medium theatre sector (SMTS)

10. a) What do you feel are the key issues affecting Australian small to medium theatre companies today?
   b) Have these issues changed very much in the last 10 to 20 years? If so, why?

11. What effect/s do you believe Australia’s geography, population and culture have on the small to medium theatre sector’s:
   a) collaborative processes;
   b) management and administration (including longer-term sustainability)?

12. ‘… national flagship institutions … means further consolidation of cultural industries in one or two spatial hotspots in the country – Sydney or Melbourne…. ’ (Cunningham, S., 2002: 11).

   1. How can small to medium theatre companies or independent practitioners not living in centralised cities continue to develop work that is sought after by funding bodies and national markets?

   2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of being ‘de-centralised’?

13. Key recognised areas of Australian export performance are as follows: spectacle, physical theatre, new media performance, dance and indigenous work or are production houses that operate on behalf of other performers. In addition many have: a high profile with the Australia Council or funding agencies; are key organisations in their particular field; or are among the 16 major funded arts organisations.

   How would you envisage theatre companies and practitioners that do not fit into these categories or who are not in collaboration with high profile organisations can aim for the international market while still maintaining their own style and creative influences?

Sector (SMTS) Value

How would you define a small to medium theatre company sector in Australia?

8. a) Do you believe there is enough diversity in the Australian theatre scene?
   b) And why?

9. If you are aware of it, what is your reaction to the Small to Medium Performing Arts Sector Report published by DCITA in 2002?

10. How do you believe the small to medium theatre company sector is valued by:
   a) the Australian population as a whole;
b) the government (Local, State and Commonwealth);

c) the global market.

11. ‘Large proportions of the population would feel more positive about the arts if there were changes to cost (85%), information (80%), location (74%), timing (69%), and transport related to the arts’ (Australians and the Arts: 386)’. What advantages does the small to medium theatre sector have that might increase audience access through:

b) Cost of the show compared to competitors (including other forms of ‘entertainment’);

c) Information about the work/company;

d) Location of the work/company;

e) Timing of the work;

f) Significance and style of the work presented?

12. a) How could the creativity, flexibility and other advantages that the small to medium sector might have be improved?

b) Who should do this and how?

13. a) In your opinion, how do flagship funding and policy organisations identify key issues, policy and programs that affect the theatre sector?

14. What do you see would be the right balance of arts advocacy and funding bodies in Australia (what sort of organisations are needed and would it be on a tri-level basis of national, state, local)?

15. How would you implement such a system?

16. What would the direct benefits or changes be for the small to medium theatre sector?

17. How would such a system fit in with funding and advocacy systems on a global scale?

18. ‘Cultural policy … was divorced from industry policy …’ (Cunningham, S., 2002:8). Cunningham is of the opinion that this has resulted in policy and funding divisions between ‘culture’ which is ‘institution’ or ‘subsidy’ based and entertainment which is ‘industry’ based and more ‘commercially viable’.

b) Do you believe such a division exists?

c) If yes, what do you believe are the effects of such a division on the small to medium theatre sector in particular?

d) If such a division exists, how should Australia attempt to overcome it?

e) If yes, how?

19. In revaluing the arts and the policies that affect them, many commentators believe that we must be able to develop and use ‘…strategies that grasp the nature of intangibles, the weightless economy, of “living on thin air” – what Barry Jones in Knowledge Nation calls the “dematerialisation” of the economy’
This comment seems to indicate a revaluing of the arts in Creative Industries-based economy.

How do you envisage such a revaluing could eventuate and what would be required of both policy makers and the art sector itself?

**Funding: The Reality**

1. a) What do you feel is the current government policy on subsidisation of the arts?
   b) Do you believe arts subsidisation is a declining phenomenon and why or why not?
   c) How could the small to medium theatre sector continue to survive with limited or no subsidy?

2. a) Do those companies that are triennially funded seem to do better financially and in terms of productivity?
   b) Given that it is not possible to give triennial funding to every organisation, what solutions could be made to ensure better funding and a more stable financial situation across the diverse small to medium theatre sector?

3. How do you see that the relationship between Government agencies and the small to medium theatre sector could be improved on a
   a) local;
   b) national;
   c) international level?

**Globalisation (Glocalisation)**

1. a) In your opinion is there a large focus by government and arts agencies on international and global markets?
   b) Why or why not?
   c) If Yes, what impact do you believe such agendas have on the small to medium arts sector? Both on their:
      i) collaborative processes;
      ii) management and administration (including longer-term sustainability)?

2. a) What, in your opinion, does a ‘global’ arts market entail?
b) If a company’s show or presentation needs to be tailored to each country or area market – how can a truly global arts market operate?

c) Some experts in the area of globalisation prefer to use the term ‘glocalisation’ which signifies a meeting of the global and the local. One of the ways of considering the idea of global culture is in terms of it being constituted by the increasing interconnectedness of many local cultures both large and small …’ (Robertson, 1995: 30-31).

Do you find the term ‘glocalisation’ more useful than ‘globalisation’ in a discussion of the small to medium theatre sector and why or why not?

**Solutions**

1. Please respond to some of the solutions (listed below) to boost the small to medium theatre sector in Australia (this responses may be negative, positive or both). You may have your own solutions and if so, please note these.

   a) Development of a small to medium theatre companies council or lobby group;

   b) Sharing or networking of resources (these include office and rehearsal spaces, staff, audiences (eg. A joint ‘Friends Of’ or ‘Subscription’ system) equipment and ideas);

   c) A Business/Arts networking organisation that not only liaises between potential business and theatre partnerships but also helps to raise income sources for and awareness of the small to medium theatre sector in Australia;

   d) Better networks (both through technology and face-to-face communication) between individual theatre companies and independent practitioners across each State and across Australia. Some of these networks do exist but do not seem to be regular or to provide useful links across vast distances.

   e) Other ideas?
## APPENDIX 5

### INTERVIEWEES FOR TOGETHER ALONE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Name</th>
<th>Last Name</th>
<th>Position in 2004</th>
<th>Year Of Interview</th>
<th>Company Name in 2004</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>2009 Position</th>
<th>Genre/ Creative Niche</th>
<th>Funding/ Income/ Management Structure</th>
<th>Funding/ Organisational Change Post-2004</th>
<th>Career Movement Since 2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clare</td>
<td>Bartholomew</td>
<td>Independent Practitioner</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Primary Companies: The Business, Five Square Metres, Melbourne’s Playback Theatre.</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Physical/ Comedy</td>
<td>Independent artist who also collaborates on other projects. Also works as Clown Doctor.</td>
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<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Baylis</td>
<td>Director of Theatre</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Australia Council for the Arts</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>New Position</td>
<td>Government Funding Organisation</td>
<td>Federal government arts agency - salaried</td>
<td>Director of Theatre is now Lyn Wallis</td>
<td>Left the Australia Council in 2009 and is currently Producer, Performing Lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynne</td>
<td>Bradley</td>
<td>Co-Artistic Director</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Zen Zen Zo Physical Theatre</td>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Non-funded company with small staff reporting to Artistic Directors</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Torben</td>
<td>Brookman</td>
<td>Managing Director</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Fresh Track Productions Pty Ltd</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>Same but additional external company</td>
<td>Text-based theatre</td>
<td>Non-funded production company staffed by small team of founding members</td>
<td></td>
<td>Major focus now a new company: Arts Asia Pacific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Cohen</td>
<td>Co-Artistic Director</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Theatre Kantanka</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Non-Funded company with founders as central staff and performers</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Renato Cuocolo</strong></td>
<td>Artistic Director</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>IRAA Theatre</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Contempor ary/ Intimate</td>
<td>Non-funded company with founders as key staff and performers. Administrative support is outsourced.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Susie Dee</strong></td>
<td>Artistic Director &amp; Independent Practitioner</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Union Theatre, Melbourne University Student Union</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Text-based/ spectacle</td>
<td>Salaried Artistic Director within a university and independent artist who also collaborates on other projects</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Peter Eckersall</strong></td>
<td>Senior Lecturer, Theatre Studies</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>School of Creative Arts, University of Melbourne</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Physical/ Contempor ary</td>
<td>University lecturer - salaried. Dramaturge with NYID</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Keith Gallasch</strong></td>
<td>Managing Editor</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Real Time Magazine</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Free contempor ary Media/ Arts Magazine</td>
<td>Salaried position. Federally funded arts magazine (currently no state funding). Also generates own advertising income.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bruce Gladwin</strong></td>
<td>Artistic Director</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Back to Back Theatre Company</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Contempor ary</td>
<td>Triennially funded company with small staff and board</td>
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**RealTime Staffing:** 2 x Co-managing editors: full-time, assoc. editor [inc sales, web management]: 7/10 time, admin assistant: 2/10, online producer: 1/3 time
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>New Position</th>
<th>Current Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stefan Greder</td>
<td>Theatre Fund Manager</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>Arts Queensland</td>
<td>State government arts funding agency</td>
<td>Salaried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon Hill</td>
<td>Independent Practitioner</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Physical/Online</td>
<td>Independent artist who also collaborates on other projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laz Kastanis</td>
<td>Developer, Virtual Reality Project</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Virtual Theatre</td>
<td>University Lecturer - salaried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Mead</td>
<td>Independent Director and Theatre Writer</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>New Position</td>
<td>Text-based theatre/ Theatre writing/ Contemporary</td>
<td>Independent artists who also collaborates on other projects</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Since November 2008, has worked in the position of Senior Producer at the Brisbane Festival. In March 2006 left Arts QLD to become Acting Director of the Judith Wright Centre for Contemporary Arts. In 2009 left JWC for Brisbane Festival.
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sean</strong></td>
<td>Mee</td>
<td>Artistic Director</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>La Boite Theatre</td>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>New Position</td>
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<td>Text-based theatre</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Triennially funded venue-</td>
<td>based company with mid-size</td>
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<td>funded venue-based company</td>
<td>staff and board</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>David</strong></td>
<td>Meggarity</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>Same</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Practitioner</td>
<td></td>
<td>Practitioner</td>
<td></td>
<td>Children’s/ Physical/ Music</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Louise</strong></td>
<td>Morris</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Primary Company:</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>Same but additional</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Practitioner</td>
<td></td>
<td>Red Cabbage,</td>
<td></td>
<td>external salary position</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Melbourne-based.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Contempor ary Theatre/</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Performance Art</td>
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La Boite's A.D. now David Berthold. OzCo multi-year funding cut ($156,000) in 2008. The cut represents only 7% of total income but 30% of funding, with the rest coming from Arts Queensland. It cut one play, *The Peach Season*, from its 2009 Season.

Resigned in late 2008. Currently Lecturer in Drama QUT’s Creative Industries Faculty.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Previous Company</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>New Position</th>
<th>Hybrid/Young People</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>Myers</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Arena Theatre Company</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>New Position</td>
<td>Hybrid/Young People</td>
<td>Triennially funded company with small staff and board. Arena's funding category has changed (now multi-year funding 2009-2011) but structure inherently the same. Under KO Funding (which replaced Triennial Funding). Has Multi Year Funding which can be reapplied for in 2011. Late 2007 Myers resigned as Director with Arena after 13 years to become Artistic Director of Windmill Performing Arts in Adelaide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruce</td>
<td>Naylor</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Independent Practitioner</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Physical/Street Theatre</td>
<td>Independent artist who also collaborates on other projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Nobbs</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Frank Theatre Company</td>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Physical Suzuki method/Contemporary</td>
<td>Non-funded company with founders as staff and any casual staff or performers reporting to Artistic Directors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>O'Neill</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Primary Companies: Frank Theatre and Brides of Frank</td>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Physical/Dance/Contemporary</td>
<td>Independent artist who also collaborates on other projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Company</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Funding and Funding Status</td>
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<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Artistic Director</td>
<td>NYID</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>NYID (not yet it's difficult)</td>
<td>Same but now position is salaried</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td></td>
<td>Physical/ Hybrid</td>
<td>Non-funded company with small staff reporting to Artistic Director</td>
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<td>2006-07 OzCo Program Grant: receive 12 mths funding and encouraged to progress to Emerging KO fund</td>
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<td>funding which then opens the door for potential multiyear KO funding. Granted multiyear funding KO in 'artistic explorer' category 2009 – 11, $600,000</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Position and company now financially assisted via three years Australia Council funding</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roderick</td>
<td>Artistic Director</td>
<td>Strange Fruit</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Left Company</td>
<td>Non-funded company with small staff and board</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td></td>
<td>Physical/ Spectacle</td>
<td>Recipient of 2006-07 OzCo Program Grant. Recipients receive 12 months funding and encouraged to progress to Emerging KO funding which then opens the door for potential multiyear KO funding</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Resigned from Strange Fruit at the end of 2005 and now Manager of Arts Across Victoria, the touring program at Regional Arts Victoria</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoni</td>
<td>Senior Lecturer, Theatre Studies</td>
<td>School of Communication &amp; Creative Arts, Deakin University</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Physical/ Cultural</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td></td>
<td>University Lecturer - salaried</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Michael</strong> Richards</td>
<td>Writer &amp; Researcher</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>ARC Research Project with CIRAC, QUT and Arts Queensland QLD</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Theatre in Education</td>
<td>Independent Researcher and Consultant</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Karen</strong> Rodgers</td>
<td>Production Manager</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Performing Lines NSW</td>
<td>Left Company</td>
<td>Contemporary Performance</td>
<td>Government Funded National Touring Agency</td>
<td>Australia Council multi-year funding received 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rebecca</strong> Scollen</td>
<td>Lecturer and Researcher, Theatre Studies</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Theatre Studies, CIRAC, QUT QLD</td>
<td>Left Company</td>
<td>Regional Theatre</td>
<td>University Staff - Salaried</td>
<td>Manager, Artworx, Faculty of Arts, University of Southern Queensland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alicia</strong> Talbot</td>
<td>Artistic Director</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Urban Theatre Projects NSW</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Communit y/ Contemporary</td>
<td>Triennially funded company with small staff and board</td>
<td>Funding category has changed (now Multi-year funding 2009-2001) but structure inherently the same. Under KO Funding (which replaced Triennial Funding). Has Multi Year Funding which can be reapplied for in 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Joanne</strong> Tompkins</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>English, Media and Art History Department, University of Queensland QLD</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Text-based Theatre/ Virtual Theatre</td>
<td>University Lecturer - salaried</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Venue</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lyn</td>
<td>Artistic Director</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>B Sharp, Company Belvoir</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>Left Company</td>
<td>Venue-based organisation for contemporary</td>
<td>Funded company with small staff and board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Whitney</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Canberra Theatre Centre</td>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>Left Company</td>
<td>Venue based, state company</td>
<td>Funded national arts venue with large staff that mainly imports performances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Williams</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Version 1.0</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>Left Company</td>
<td>Contemporay</td>
<td>Collective working as a part-time ensemble. Project and self-funded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Wilson</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Terrapin Theatre</td>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>Left Company</td>
<td>Puppetry/Theatre/Children</td>
<td>Funded company with small staff and board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona Winning Director 2004 Performance Space, Sydney NSW Left Company Venue &amp; Development</td>
<td>Funded Sydney-based contemporary arts producing, presenting, and research development venue with small staff and board Performance Space received Program Presenters grant of $150,000 for the presentation of a selected group of works across multiple performance languages within the Performance Space program for 2009-2011 Returned to Independent Practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scott Wright Artistic Director 2004 Erth Visual and Physical Inc. NSW Same Physical/Spectacle</td>
<td>Non-funded company with core members as staff and performers.</td>
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</table>
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316


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320


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