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Entrepreneurial Pathways for Emerging Creatives

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ABSTRACT



Our paper advances the understanding of entrepreneurship theory and practice from the perspective of an entrepreneurial training intervention for emerging creatives. Previous studies identify a need to provide entrepreneurial training to assist emerging creatives while highlighting the limited support available in higher education curricula which influences their career development. Based on a case study of a creative innovator program which facilitated emerging creatives in their new venture creation, we identify best practices in achieving a balance between generic to personalized entrepreneurship training and enabling access to first-hand advice from industry experts through mentorship and networking. The program enabled emerging creatives to build confidence, legitimized their new venture creation and consequently helped them to develop their professional identities.

KEYWORDS

Emerging creatives; entrepreneurship; career development; creative industries; nonprofit artist service organizations

Introduction

Despite the crucial role performed by nonprofit artist service organizations in bridging the gap between higher education and professional careers (Olshan 2017; Fillis, Lee, and Fraser 2022), there is a lack of studies examining best practice in providing entrepreneurial business skills development training for emerging creatives. The paper, therefore, uses entrepreneurship theory and practice to enrich understanding of that field. We use the term ‘emerging creatives’ to describe those who have graduated within the last five years and practice in the creative industries. This study addresses the research gap by undertaking a case study analysis of the inaugural Helpmann Academy Creative Innovator Program in 2021 which facilitated South Australian emerging creatives in their new venture creation. Over an eight-month period, the program provided workshops and masterclasses, mentoring with industry experts and networking sessions, as well as a final pitching competition for seed funding to help the graduates create their creative enterprises. The study evaluates the best practices of entrepreneurial business skills development training that the Creative Innovator Program offered and explores how it facilitated new venture creation of emerging creatives.

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We find that, most of all, emerging creatives were able to build confidence, achieve legitimization of their creative enterprises and develop professional identities through participating in the program. Our study contributes to the existing dialogues on building sustainable careers in the creative industries (Bridgstock and Cunningham 2016; Wyszomirski and Chang 2017; Petrides and Fernandes 2020). Although emerging creatives face the most employability challenges and post-university transition difficulties compared to other graduate disciplines (Lee, Fraser, and Fillis 2018), studies examining creative cohorts are scarce (Coates and Edwards 2011; Wallis 2021). While prior studies exist focusing on the career development of emerging creatives, they mainly examine the effects of artistic skills development opportunities, e.g., *via* exhibitions and residencies (Fillis, Lee, and Fraser 2015; Lee, Fillis, and Lehman 2018; Lee, Fraser, and Fillis 2018). Previously, the need of entrepreneurial business skills development training for emerging creatives has been discussed mainly in the realm of higher education curricula rather than with respect to nonprofit organizations (Beckman 2007; Bridgstock 2013; Bridgstock and Cunningham 2016). After reviewing entrepreneurial business skills development training offered by nonprofit artist service organizations for emerging creatives, we argue that nonprofit organizations supplement higher education curricula, suggesting the potential benefit of further collaboration (Olshan 2017; Fillis, Lee, and Fraser 2022; Lee, Fraser, and Fillis 2022). Discussion of broader nonprofit entrepreneurship training in the creative sector includes Wyszomirski (2004) who identifies the work in the UK since 1997 on developing an integrated approach to developing creative partnerships within national and regional governments, the arts community, arts and cultural organizations, commercial cultural industries and education. Chaston (2008) notes that tailored entrepreneurship training programs are required for the creative sector and not generic business performance approaches. Minja, Charles, and Mbura (2023) promote the need for entrepreneurship training in microenterprises more generally. Our research builds on this by addressing the gaps in embedding entrepreneurial skills in creative practice.

Literature review

Creative careers and precarity

Previous studies have identified a need to provide entrepreneurial business skills development training to assist emerging creatives in their new venture creation (Beckman 2007; Bridgstock 2013; Olshan 2017; Lee, Fraser, and Fillis 2018; Petrides and Fernandes 2020). The rising importance of such training is in response to the precarious and complex labor market within which emerging creatives operate (Comunian, Faggian, and Jewell 2015). This is characterized by relatively high levels of casual and short-term contracts, freelancing, self-employment, protean (i.e., variable) careers, and portfolio (i.e., having several jobs at the same time including unpaid activities) careers which involve both creative and noncreative work (Menger 1999; Platman 2004; Bridgstock 2005; Throsby and Zednik 2011; Wyszomirski and Chang 2017). Consequently, emerging creatives tend to accept low-income careers, low career satisfaction or take up other occupations, with relatively few continuing their creative practice in the long-term (Taylor and Littleton 2008; Elstad and Jansson 2020).

Lee, Fraser, and Fillis (2018), and Lee, Fraser, and Fillis (2022) highlight the traits of emerging creatives which act as barriers to their career development. These include exhibiting great uncertainty toward the economic potential of their practice, lack of interest in developing business-related skills and failing to understand how to commercialize their practice. Understanding the role of entrepreneurship could enable emerging creatives to move beyond what Baines and Wheelock (2003, 107) call 'psychic income,' referring to their willingness to practice creative work for low and precarious financial rewards (Honey, Heron, and Jackson 1997; Menger 1999).

Entrepreneurial career development training for emerging creatives

Entrepreneurial career development training differs from entrepreneurial business skills development in that it offers a more focused approach to specific career goal achievement through particular pathways, rather than enabling entrepreneurial skills acquisition for the longer term.

Highlighting the importance of field-specific career development training for emerging creatives, Bridgstock (2013) and Bridgstock and Carr (2013) criticize the limited professional development support available in higher education curricula. In Australia, there is an absence of a nationally agreed framework or curriculum for higher education while the existing frameworks which result in heterogeneous program design and learning outcomes fail to acknowledge contemporary needs such as entrepreneurship and lifelong learning (Bridgstock and Cunningham 2016). Although interdisciplinary undergraduate degree programs are available, there is a limited practicality and relevance in traditional business school trainings. Emerging creatives require on-going professional skills development as their careers progress. Consequently, there is a growing emphasis on the need for nonprofit organizations to provide lifelong learning and professional development opportunities, addressing the deficiencies identified in higher education curricula (Lee, Fraser, and Fillis 2018; Petrides and Fernandes 2020).

Entrepreneurship is gaining significant popularity in professional development for emerging creatives, addressing its potential positive impact in diverse career environments in the creative industries (Beckman 2007), such as self-employment (Lee, Fraser, and Fillis 2018). Fillis and Rentschler (2010) view entrepreneurship as a process of value creation enabled through the joining together of unique combinations of public and private resources in leveraging economic, social, and cultural opportunities in a changing environment. Entrepreneurship involves the ability and willingness to embrace randomness, uncertainty, and ambiguity in the environment, rather than avoid it (Fillis and Rentschler 2010). An entrepreneur displays self-confidence, perseverance, high energy levels, calculated risk-taking and the need to achieve. Entrepreneurial activity needs a supportive business environment in order to enable creativity and subsequent innovation to develop (Lee, Florida, and Acs 2004). Other requirements include having a strong and diverse knowledge base, well developed business and social networks and an ability to identify opportunities (Harryson 2008). Through this process, emerging creatives support their creativity and autonomy, advance their capacity for adaptability, and create artistic as well as economic and social value (Chang and Wyszomirski 2015).

Approaches to entrepreneurial career progression are informed by the ongoing development of relevant network relationships (Bonus and Ronte 1997). Mentorship and networking opportunities are both viewed as entrepreneurial interventions (Scandura et al. 1996; Hanson 2021) in aiding the development of both creative and business skills through calculated risk-taking and experimentation. The role of a mentor has been described as that of a guide, teacher, developer of knowledge and skills as well as a counselor (Merriam 1983). Such interventions help support professional development and establish new career pathways for emerging creatives (Megginson 2000; Jackson 2004).

Methods

Case study: Helpmann Academy Creative Innovator Program

We conducted a single case study (Yin 2009) using qualitative research methodology (Stake 1995). Based on purposive sampling (Merriam 1998), we have chosen the Helpmann Academy Creative Innovator Program as a case for the analysis of the best practices in providing entrepreneurial business skills development training for emerging creatives. It is the only nonprofit artist service organization in Australia which focuses on emerging creatives. Since its establishment in 1994, Helpmann Academy, named in honor of South Australia's iconic actor and dancer, Sir Robert Helpmann, provides opportunities for the professional development of emerging creatives from three partnering South Australian universities for up to five years post-graduation. As a registered charity, the Helpmann Academy is funded mostly by philanthropic support, in addition to partnerships with local universities, and occasional project grants from government.

The Helpmann Academy provides a range of year-round programs for emerging creatives of all disciplines including fellowships, residencies, practical, development and investment grants of varying sizes, masterclasses, and a mentorship program. In 2021, the Helpmann Academy introduced the Creative Innovator Program and invited local emerging creatives, either individuals or small groups, with either an existing project or a new idea for venture creation in order to help them transform their rudimentary ideas into something tangible and sustainable. This program also provides financial assistance in the form of seed funding which is crucial to establish new venture.

The Creative Innovator Program is representative of entrepreneurial interventions designed for professional development of emerging creatives. The Helpmann Academy acts as a role model for other national and international nonprofit organizations. Although comparable programs exist in the UK (Fillis, Lee, and Fraser 2022) and US (Olshan 2017), they do not provide as comprehensive support to emerging creatives as the Helpmann Academy.

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected from two main sources: observations and semi-structured interviews. Observations were made following attendance at (i) 1 initial meeting, (ii) 4 workshops (business, accounting, marketing, and market research), (iii) 3 masterclasses

(idea generation, development, and pitching), (iv) pitching rehearsal, and (v) final award ceremony. Observations helped us to develop and refine interview questions. They provided insights into each participant's level of interest in the program and business approaches. Also, through observing workshops and masterclasses, we were able to appreciate the context, level of participation and quality of the program (Creswell and Poth 2018).

The 2021 Helpmann Creative Innovator Program initially selected 10 creative business projects led by 12 emerging creatives. Of the 10 creative business ideas, 5 were in the film industry, 2 in the fashion industry, with the remainder featuring the gaming, music, and jewelry industries. We undertook semi-structured interviews with 11 participants before and after the eight-month program as one participant withdrew from the program due to health reasons halfway through. Although the program was initially designed for six-month, due to the effect of COVID-19 and unforeseen delays, it lasted longer. These were 6 female, and 5 male emerging creatives in their 20s who had graduated from one of the three partnering universities in South Australia up to five years ago. Initial interviews took around 30 min on average, where participants' educational and professional backgrounds, motivations, and expectations on enrolling on the program were discussed. The follow-up interviews were intended to evaluate the program as a whole and the benefits, challenges, and potential opportunities experienced by participants in order to gain reflective insights. On average, the follow-up interviews lasted around 45 min.

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Using Nvivo12, a qualitative data analysis software, the transcripts were coded, and analyzed thematically following the approach of Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2013). Although coding was undertaken individually by two of the authors, differences in opinion were reconciled through iterative processes. We use pseudonyms (AB-MN) in order to preserve participants anonymity.

Data, collected from the interviewees and through observations, was analyzed by iteratively comparing it with existing theories, as well as the researcher's professional knowledge and experience (Timmermans and Tavory 2012). The emerging themes were labeled using a mixed approach, considering the relationship between the concepts and i) existing theories, ii) the "language of data", or iii) a combination of both (Kreiner 2016), as shown in Table 1. While acknowledging the absence of "raw data" and the importance of contextualization by the researcher (Gitelman and Jackson 2013), this study regards the informants as knowledgeable individuals whose understanding generates concepts (Magnani and Gioia 2023), bringing us closer to the essence of the study participants' experience.

In this study, data analysis does not yield a "correct" answer to a research question in a positivistic manner, but rather seeks to explain how the phenomenon occurs (Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton 2013). Specifically, it examines the entrepreneurial career development training for emerging creatives. The findings are categorized into two key dimensions: *Program design and structure*, and *Program outcomes*. Within each dimension, themes are derived from existing theory, participant feedback, and a mixed approach, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Approach to conceptualization of key dimensions and themes.*Dimension: Program design and structure*

Theme	Approach	Description
Refining business ideas	Mixed approach	While continuous refining of solutions is needed (Fillis 2004), it is important to have an initial business idea while participating in training (EF).
Balancing creative and business practices	Existing theories	Balanced tension between creative and business practices is important for the successful creative industries practice (Eikhof and Haunschild 2007; Tschang 2007).
Nurturing an entrepreneurial mindset through mentorship	Mixed approach	Mentoring is effective in developing particular entrepreneurial skills (Hanson 2021), but also in establishing the broader “mindset” (KL).
Growing social and professional networks	Existing theories	Artistic products are developed in interaction with social and professional networks (Wickham, Lehman, and Fillis 2020).

Dimension: Program outcomes

Theme	Approach	Description
Building confidence	Participants' language	Program builds confidence in creativity (KL), in how to persist in creative work (FG) and in transforming creative practice into business (AB; BC).
Legitimizing practice	Participants' language	Participation in the training legitimizes creative work (HJ), making participants accountable as business professionals (AB), responsible before the social network (EF), and validating creative practices for prospective clients (GH).
Developing professional identity	Existing theories	The program contributes to the professional identity of the participants as a holistic self-image exhibited through values, motives, and beliefs (Ibarra 1999).

Findings

The study engages with entrepreneurship theory in helping to understand how entrepreneurial pathways can be utilized in shaping career development training within the creative sector. The need for the acquisition and development of entrepreneurial competencies is clear. Appropriate skills, for example, in value creation, the ability to deal with uncertainty through creative practices, willingness to develop and exploit networks all help to counter any unsureness in the external environment, and the sector more specifically.

This study identifies two major dimensions for entrepreneurial career training for emerging creatives: *Program design and structure*, and *Program outcomes*. The first dimension includes four themes: *Refining business ideas*, *Balancing creative and business practices*, *Nurturing an entrepreneurial mindset through mentorship*, and *Growing social and professional networks*. The second dimension comprises three themes: *Building confidence*, *Legitimizing practice*, and *Developing professional identity*. The findings are illustrated in Figure 1, which shows the relationships between central phenomena, aggregated dimensions, and related themes. These dimensions and themes are further discussed in subsequent sections of the study.

Program design and structure

We first evaluate the design and structure of the Creative Innovator Program to investigate how it bridges the gap between higher education and the professional careers of emerging creatives. Design of the program is inspired by other existing incubators,

Table 2. Timeline of creative innovator program.

Date	Type	Topic
February	Announcement of awardees Initial meeting	12 emerging creatives representing diverse disciplines had been awarded. First meeting took place at a co-working workspace sponsored by the partner of the program. Mentors were matched to each participant and fortnightly-meeting were scheduled.
April	Workshop 1 + Networking Workshop 2 + Networking	Explored business model innovation for creatives sector and challenges. With accounting and wealth advisers, focused on business planning, strategy, budgeting, financial management and tax.
May	Masterclass 1 + Networking	"Idea to Iteration" focused on applied creating thinking, problem solving and design thinking with experts from the creative industries.
June	Workshop 3 + Networking	With a marketing agency, discussed branding and audience development strategies with practical tips on how to manage social media platforms.
July	Workshop 4 + Networking	With a market research agency, focused on understanding the market through different types of research by introducing various examples of data collection methods and analysis.
August	Masterclass 2	'Pitching' masterclass was led by a coach, and the importance of clear identification of a problem, and development of a focused business model, were discussed.
September	Masterclass 3 Pitching Rehearsal Final Pitch	The second 'pitching' masterclass focused on story development and one-on-one public speaking training. Participants were invited to a pitching rehearsal by the Helpmann Academy staff. Feedback was given to participants. The final pitch took place with a panel composed of three representatives from three different incubators and programs in South Australian universities.
October	Announcement of the winner	\$2,000 was given to each creative enterprise with the winner of the 'pitching' contest receiving seed funding of \$20,000. Two winners received \$20,000 each with a runner-up receiving \$5,000. Opportunities for a placement at three different incubators and programs in South Australian universities were also offered to the winners.

labs, and accelerator programs for new venture creation within the technology and innovation research centers at three collaborating universities and other industry partners. There is potential here for researchers and practitioners in other sectors to glean insights from the creative sector's proficiency in harnessing inherent creativity to develop cost-effective solutions through entrepreneurial endeavors. The program, however, has been curated specifically to address emerging creatives' particular needs and the context of the creative industries. Over a 8-month period in 2021, the Creative Innovator Program by Helpmann Academy provided 1) a series of one-on-one mentorship; 2) workshops and masterclasses delivered by leading professionals; 3) networking opportunities with other program participants and industry experts; 4) a co-working space; 5) seed funding of AU\$2,000 on completion of the program and an opportunity to pitch their creative business ideas for further funding of AU\$20,000.

Table 2 shows the timeline of the Creative Innovator Program including the content of meetings, workshops, and masterclasses. This tailored program intended to help emerging creatives to develop their business planning, strategy, budgeting, audience development, branding, marketing, goal setting and evaluation, presentation, and pitching. We discuss how the emerging creatives perceived the structure of the program, namely, refining business ideas, balancing creative and business practices, nurturing an entrepreneurial mindset through mentorship, and growing social and professional networks.

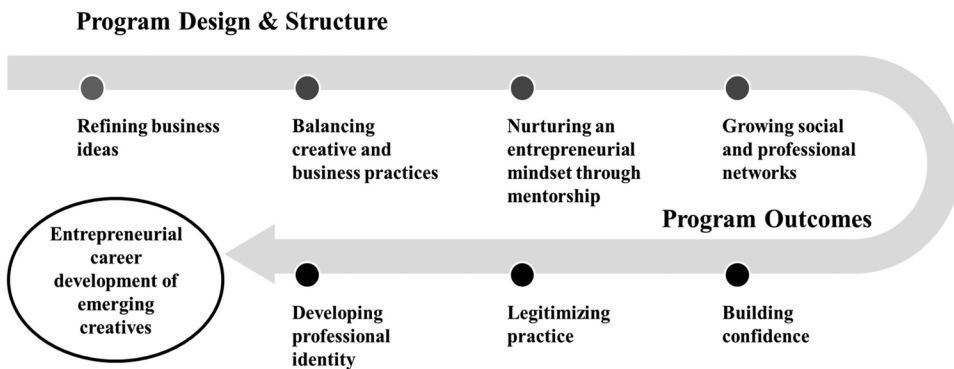


Figure 1. Empirical framework of findings.

Refining business ideas

Over the course of the eight-month period, some participants changed their creative business ideas, influenced by the program features which they were able to use to refine their original ideas. JK suggested that the opportunity to challenge his own ideas has been beneficial.

So, it changed about three times and the start last time I changed, it was about two weeks before I actually pitched, but I'm really glad it did because it'll probably keep evolving. That's the nature of business, but what I've ended up with I'm extremely passionate about. (JK)

This illustrates the preparedness of entrepreneurs to alter their mindsets and derive multiple solutions when needed (Fillis 2004). On the other hand, EF suggested that encountering industry experts and engaging with mentors, while having a 'firm business idea', had maximized the benefit of the program to her.

I guess the firmer you are on your idea before you start, the more you'll get out of it, because you're able to directly apply everything that you're learning to your product or service as you go on. (EF)

Participants have gone through very different individual journeys interacting with the program while either developing, delivering, or challenging their own business ideas.

Balancing creative and business practices

Some emerging creatives expressed how balancing creative and business practice was 'a must'. This aligns to the importance of creative and cultural entrepreneurship where hard and soft skills are required to drive the business forward (Wise, Özdemir, and Fillis 2023). They recognize a need to embrace an entrepreneurial mindset and acquire relevant skills in order to transform their creative practices into viable businesses.

Being an artist, you have to be a businessperson as well. I would love to have someone else do all of that for me, but there is no one, so it's me that has to figure out how to go and do those things as I'm going along. So those are skills I do need, it's not just about the art, it's also about the business side of things. (EF)

EF explained that with experience comes a realization that it is necessary to embrace sound business practices in order to both generate a realistic income and sustain a creative practice.

I want to run a business. Over time that I realized that in order to live off of [my creative practice], I needed to do something as a business. I can't just [create] in my room every day. [...] It took a few years and just life experience to come to terms with the options that my career had and what I was actually passionate about, and how I could make money off of it. (EF)

For some participants, the Creative Innovator Program enabled them to realize that they could balance creative and business practice successfully. AB and BC thought that business and creative practice were two disparate concepts and initially approached them separately within their company. Creativity enables the entrepreneur to identify and follow up on opportunities so that competitive advantage can be secured. This provides the foundations for innovation and growth (Bilton 2007). During the program, they changed their views and started to look at their creative practice as a business in itself.

It was having an expectation to think like, 'Oh, there's two worlds that I want to work in. I want to work in the corporate and I want to work in the creative.' I realized like, 'Oh, these two worlds can be intertwined, and it can be combined, and I can be doing one while I'm still doing the other, and they work really well.' They almost work actually better together rather than before the program I was thinking it was two separate entities. [...] And the mentors were like, 'That all intertwined and you can just combine them both, and one strengthens the other.' (AB)

We always thought that having one company would be fine, but it was this outside idea that you need to be professional and professional means you run one company that's corporate and one company that's creative, but that's not true at all. (BC)

This aligns with the findings of Valentine, Fillis, and Follett (2013) who develop a mentoring program for craft practitioners, focusing in part on the development of marketing and entrepreneurship skills in order to sustain their business practice. For FG, whose creative practice focuses on a niche market, the Creative Innovator Program has helped them to find ways of broadening target audiences through engaging with industry experts.

I do a very niche market. My target audience is a very specific, so I was looking at me as a businessperson doing my creative practice. The industry experts' feedback was that I could make it a bit more commercial which I could consider as ways of making it approachable to the public. (FG)

Most participants welcomed the opportunity to embed business practices into their creative practices and were able to balance them more effectively as a result of their participation in the program.

Nurturing an entrepreneurial mindset through mentorship

Within the program, mentors enabled first-hand connections between the participants and industry experts. Mentoring as an entrepreneurial intervention assists in the

development of both artistic and marketplace skills (Hanson 2021). The mentor enabled KL to acquire the ‘mindset of an entrepreneur’.

I always wanted a mentor and because of these eight months that Helpmann Academy provided, it just made the journey a lot quicker in a way, just establishing myself and getting into the mindset of an entrepreneur. (KL)

For EF, her mentor allowed her to explore new ideas while also realizing that her original idea was what she was still interested in and what she now needed to refine. EF described how her mentor was able to put her business experience into perspective, explaining how businesses worked ‘on the general level’ and what she could do with her business.

It was really valuable having a contact that just explained it all to me..., explaining general timelines and what’s usually expected. So, just having that information was super valuable and enabled me to make more clear plans and have a clearer understanding of what is expected. (EF)

Participant BC valued an opportunity to choose his mentor, as he knew industry experts and wanted to have someone whom he had not work with previously.

[I] didn’t think it would be beneficial to talk to people that we already knew because we’ve already had those relationships. We thought it was more important to have more of a fresh perspective. (BC)

AB appreciated the honest advice and criticism which mentors were able to give participants. They explained how they themselves had developed their own businesses and discussed the mistakes which they had made. They suggested ways by which participants could avoid doing the same.

[I] like mentors that can be brutally honest, but they can be critical, and they can be like, ‘This is the current state of trying to make stuff here in Adelaide. Here’s what you’re going to do to stand out.’ And they were pretty honest with the information that they were giving. ‘Here’s how we made the mistakes when we were your age, and here’s what we did. And you could do it a different way and you’re going to run into these problems.’ And so, they were really good in mentoring us. (AB)

Identifying new income streams through mentorship was one of the program’s outcomes which FG thought was important.

I sat down with [the mentor] and was looking at things like different income streams. Part of it is sales. [We were] talking about pricing and how to price work and how to go through sales, and how to keep track of that. And part of it was also looking at grants and how [the mentor] go through that process of applying for grants and getting and funding that way, knowing that there are different ways of making money as an artist. And I’ve been doing here teaching, so that’s like another income stream. (FG)

Our findings indicate that having mentors acting as guides for emerging creatives is extremely valuable, particularly in having access to a variety of opinions. Mentors helped the participants to explore innovative ideas, align skills and work experience with the current industrial context and plan their own businesses.

Growing social and professional networks

The findings we uncover in this study contribute to both further theorizing and practical insight into networking from a creative industries perspective. We build upon the understanding generated by Wickham, Lehman, and Fillis (2020) regarding how artistic products are developed using a network perspective *via* conceptual, production and distribution networks. Program participants appreciated the benefits of both informal and formal networking. Being part of a close network of local emerging creatives who are like-minded and ‘in the same boat’ during the program has been a source of creative ideas for both DE and CD and has made them more enthusiastic about the program.

It was the biggest benefit. I really wanted to broaden my network of people, my creative network. So, I think that aspect was really great just seeing like-minded creatives, pursuing their own creative businesses, and feeding off them and their ideas and enthusiasm. (DE)

I think that the creative innovator Program has placed me in environments where I have been able to connect with people around me who are in a similar boat. And also, in the different fields that I didn’t know very much and [I was] able to learn from them. (CD)

The Helpmann Academy Creative Innovator Program provided a chance to engage with participants from other disciplines and through engaging and interacting with each other, they identified new ways of working for their own businesses and also created collaboration opportunities. For GH, the program facilitated both networking and collaboration opportunities with other participants in the program.

Because some of the other creatives were into videography and filming, I approached one of them to partner and I was able to expand my practice. And one of the other participants also approached me and said, if I needed help in the future, they’d be more than happy to help out. So that was really good, making connections from a completely different creative practice, but in ways that could be beneficial to both of us. (FG)

Nevertheless, a few did not appreciate informal networking opportunities and believed that networking should be considered as a formal activity with industry experts and potential clients.

More of like a pitch, it’s networking. Because of the eclectic collection of people in the program, networking randomly was never going to really help us. If each of us is searching for clients, then that’s not really a space that we’re going to find our networks. We’re going to need to go to experts from the same creative sector. We’re going to need to go into industry-related institutions. Whereas that’ll be completely different for someone that is doing other creative projects. (GH)

For HJ, who treats networking events as small job interviews, the concept of networking is pretentious and one which he finds difficult to appreciate. Nevertheless, he would prefer more opportunities to talk directly to potential investors and clients at networking events.

For me personally I’ve never found networking simple or even particularly interesting. It just seems to be just these little mixing events where people wear nice clothes and pretend, they know what they’re doing and try to talk themselves up so much, almost like a small job interview, whereas I haven’t found them particularly useful. [...] We’re just sitting here talking about how great our businesses are. But how does that benefit both of us to do that? Or how do we help each other out? (HJ)

The program attempted to create links between the participants and industry experts, creative and business mentors while promoting social engagement among themselves 'on the same journey'. While most participants enjoyed the opportunity to create both informal and social networks, a few valued formal professional networking opportunities more and had hoped that these would have been more effective in introducing them to potential investors and industry partners.

Program outcome

The Helpmann Academy Creative Innovator Program participants believed that the program helped them through building confidence, legitimizing practice, and developing professional identity. This then contributes to the building of professionalism (Jeffri and Throsby 1994) where entrepreneurial skills and other creative attributes shape the professional status of the creative individual. This is influenced by marketplace forces, the qualifications achieved through relevant training and mentoring and recognition within the profession.

Building confidence

The major outcome of participation in the program for AB was enhancement of his confidence in transforming his creative practice into business.

The program has made us feel probably more confident. I think maybe before we thought that after five years of doing this, maybe at older age, we should start to think about doing this corporate business. The program has been like, no, we can do it now, and we can start and build now. I think that confidence has probably been the most beneficial part of the program. (AB)

As BC clarifies, incorporating various business elements into creative practice was not what he planned to do before participating in the program. Initially, AB and BC looked at implementing business elements in their creative practice much later after obtaining more experience and yet, the program made them enhance their business competencies much earlier than expected.

We cold-called and cold-messed a bunch of clients because of this, and I don't think we would have done that nearly as early as we did without it. (BC)

The experience of participating in the program was particularly positive for KL, whose parents were not in favor of her working in the creative sector.

They provided a space for me where I feel confident in my creativity because especially coming from [my] background, the creative industry is not something that my parents usually accept. And also, being creative, it's about being vulnerable and learning how to express that side of you. (KL)

Again, FG confirmed that the program and support that the Helpmann Academy staff provided enabled her to build confidence in her creativity and motivation to continue creative practice.

I'm always questioning my own ability, and so having an organization like the Helpmann Academy, which is there to support and to encourage. That has just been amazing for me and given me the confidence to keep doing what I'm doing. (FG)

Legitimizing practice

The program has helped participants to legitimize their creative practices based on the advised business structure which helped them to formalize goals and milestones.

Drive, purpose, goals, like milestones, things to aim for, definitely it was about having goals to aim towards. Otherwise, if we didn't have the program, we probably wouldn't be anywhere near as structured as we are now. I think it's legitimized the actual work that we're doing. We've had to purposely build ourselves up for it. (HJ)

AB mentions a sense of accountability as one of the outcomes of participation in the program. This highlighted the importance of running their creative practice as a professional business.

Accountability has been really beneficial because artists are bad at setting deadlines and goals and sticking to something because another random project comes on and you get really passionate about that project and then you forget about all these other little projects. You're always chasing the new thing, but the program has made it really accountable to set up a strong foundation to grow the business and to do this full-time in the future. (AB)

As AB explains, to develop a successful creative business, the participants need to pay attention to details which are perhaps unfamiliar to freelance artists working from project to project. From AB's perspective, those 'deadlines and goals' are essential as they shape the foundation of the creative business. For EF, accountability is also based on framing details, e.g., timing and scheduling. Becoming accountable is also connected with a sense of responsibility to her social networks created by the program.

The program pushed me to focus on my creative business more, but my own creative business was never a priority because it was not making me money at the time. Doing this mentorship allowed me to prioritize this idea and made me accountable. I'm not letting down the people that have chosen to support me. (EF)

For GH, participation in the program enabled her to obtain business knowledge and skills and validated her business to her clients and industry.

Being involved in the program has also given us validity to our clients to say, 'We've done this program. We've put in the investment to ourselves to make this a viable business.' We've worked with professionals to develop business. It's something that we've been willing to put in the time, that they can see evidence of that. (GH)

Participants were able to legitimize their practices and develop their businesses through responsible and accountable business approaches rather than by firefighting.

Developing professional identity

Most participants were interested in developing sustainable practices. For example, DE suggested that, for him, it was more important to deliver a project ethically and morally rather than for the sake of obtaining grants or accessing funds.

We need money for things that would be applicable. I don't want to be the type of person that goes for every grant for the sake of going for every grant. I would only do it if we ethically and morally had use for it or had need for it. (DE)

For many participants, the purpose of turning their creative practices into businesses was to create positive social changes or contribute to communities which were important to them or reflected their identified core values. JK, for example, is interested in improving gender representation in the creative sector through advocating women's empowerment and challenging the status quo. Meaningful work and contributing to communities through doing 'the right thing', legitimized their entrepreneurial approaches. Also, the participants are prepared to 'give back' to local communities after transforming their creative practices into businesses. DE is committed to contributing to the local creative ecosystem and that gives him a sense of purpose.

The harsh reality of [local creative business is], that you see people that have done that, and they break into that success, and they don't want to give back to the community because why should they? That's a cycle that should be broken. (DE)

As AB states, the artistic ecosystem in South Australia is also more supportive than other states. JK describes the Adelaide art community as readily approachable.

It's really different compared to what I've heard from other arts communities. Everyone is really extremely giving with their time and very passionate. (AB)

We've got such a tight-knit creative community that I am really grateful for, and I don't want to give up. (JK)

While other states in Australia may provide better career opportunities in creative business, GH wants to stay in South Australia, in order to develop the local art scene.

Personally, I would love to stay in South Australia and be contributing towards developing the [creative] industry in South Australia. I personally can't see me leaving South Australia. I mean, it might happen [...] but I would probably come back. (GH)

Our analysis of these quotes illustrates how being part of a responsive and supportive community inspires emerging creatives to develop their professional identities, with the potential for their businesses to help change society for the better.

Discussion

The Creative Innovator Program involved multifaceted entrepreneurial business skills development training encompassing a diversity of learning contexts, from generic to personalized, with open and closed sessions activating both 'hard' and 'soft' skills of participants as identified by Wise, Özdemir, and Fillis (2023) in developing creative entrepreneurship impact. However, we observe that every participant's experience was distinctive, with varying perceptions as to how effectiveness each feature of the program was in developing their creative enterprises. Hence, it is important to note here that, although there are areas of commonality, recognizing subjective differences in entrepreneurial and creative priorities is also crucial (Ardley 2011). Mentorship was found to be the most effective feature which is also known as a core practice of entrepreneurship education (Hanson 2021). More broadly, the mentorship itself needs to contain a degree of flexibility in recognizing the different needs of emerging creatives, given their specific priorities. Some participants enjoyed informal networking

especially with other participants of the program as they were able to receive more relevant source of information and advice than formal business networking (Shaw 2006).

The program enabled emerging creatives to build confidence and legitimize their practices with greater awareness of accountability and responsibility to their clients and to different stakeholders. Legitimacy is “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions” (Suchman 1995, 574). Legitimacy is a process relying on collective actions and support by multiple stakeholders (Rentschler, Lee, and Subramaniam 2021, 2023; Rentschler, Fillis, and Lee 2022). Thus, as an entrepreneurial mindset develops further across each creative business, this then acts to legitimize the need for, and use of, both formal and informal ways of taking risks in order to secure future success.

Development of professional identity has been nurtured by the program based on internalized ‘attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences’ (Ibarra 1999, 765). The participants were able to build a credible image of themselves over time throughout the program and valued being part of the South Australian creative community and this also helped shape their professional identity.

Conclusion

Our study examined best practices of nonprofit artist service organizations in providing entrepreneurial business skills development training for emerging creatives using the case study of the Helpmann Academy Creative Innovator Program in South Australia. The program helped pave sustainable and entrepreneurial career paths for the emerging creatives. Based on its holistic approach to developing broad entrepreneurial attributes, the program has helped participants adapt and thrive in a dynamic world. Through participating in the program, they were able to identify their niche markets while developing their authentic and professional identities in a particularly challenging COVID-19 environment. Consequently, we argue that embedding skills in entrepreneurship alongside creative practice helps to enhance career sustainability. Nonprofit organizations, such as the Helpmann Academy, provide important infrastructures for the state, facilitating creative entrepreneurship, new venture creation and a productive ecosystem for the creative industries.

We recognize the limitations of a single case study. Future research could focus on a number of different nonprofit organizations which provide similar programs for emerging creatives and/or undertake a cross-disciplinary comparison study. Further, a longitudinal study could be employed to explore changes over time. Finally, although we have described emerging creatives as one group, we acknowledge that they could all experience their career-related journey differently and their needs of skills development may vary depending on their education and cultural backgrounds. Nevertheless, our study begins the conversation, which can stimulate further exploration of the career sustainability in the creative industries.

Recovery from the impacts of COVID-19 has made it imperative that creative practitioners are prepared to embrace environmental uncertainty and turbulence through appropriate entrepreneurial pathway interventions. Willingness to develop a broad

competency spectrum containing appropriate hard and soft skills will help address future challenges in the sector. These dimensions should be embedded in any subsequent training programs. An effective approach, for example, would be to instill understanding of how entrepreneurial marketing can address the needs of the creative practitioner in embracing unsureness and ambiguity while, at the same time, developing a more focused and appropriate form of entrepreneurship for the sector (Lehman, Fillis, and Miles 2014).

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