

# **A CASE STUDY OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT IN THE DANCE INDUSTRY:**

## **AUSTRALIA'S SCOPE INITIATIVE**

Professor Elizabeth More AM; Shane Carroll; Kay Foss

### **ABSTRACT**

The creative industries are recognised as playing a crucial role for our post-industrial economic well being. Dance plays a central role here, especially as a unique way of knowing and learning, with both intrinsic and instrumental value. Whilst there is diversity among dance artists, one unifying feature is short careers as performers. Having amassed an array of special attributes and competencies that are beneficial to both individuals, the arts industry and broader society, it is crucial to manage the career development and knowledge gained through dance artists' training and performing careers in order to sustain and reap the benefits of their intellectual capital for creative nations.

Unlike much of the work in the field that concentrates on organization career development and knowledge management, this paper takes an industry sector perspective. It outlines one Australian initiative to harness such knowledge, the SCOPE project (Securing Career Opportunities and Professional Employment) which has been running for the last three years in conjunction with the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS). SCOPE is especially innovative as, unlike overseas programs, it moves beyond the notion of a transition program to emphasising that of career development and sector knowledge management.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This paper presents a case study on one occupational arena – that of dance artists – in Australia's creative industries, both under researched and not well understood in the academic and broader communities. Australia's creative industries contribute enormously to our cultural, social, psychological, and economic wellbeing. Dance plays a central role in this sector, with both intrinsic and instrumental value, being worthy in and of itself and also capable of being used for an array of diverse purposes, only one of which is entertainment.

Consequently, professional dance artists through their special literacy, contribute to enhancing the cultural storehouses of states, nations, and the global community. Yet their performing careers are typically short and the human capital of the dance sector is often disposed of as age, physical demands and the competitive workplace over-ride willingness. But such intellectual capital contributions, both to micro and macro society, can continue if the special competencies dance artists have developed during their training and careers, are re-aligned and utilised both during and beyond the end of performance careers and into other employment that can benefit both individuals and society. Ensuring this transference of skill requires career development and transition support so that these talented and committed individuals can recognize and realise a certain knowledge of career longevity in diverse forms across a career history. Crucially this approach strives to sustain the intellectual capital of such performers through sector knowledge management.

The wealth of competencies, attributes, skills and experience amassed by professional dancers and choreographers during their training and performing careers must not be lost to the arts and broader community sector. This challenge is the focus of the solutions offered by the SCOPE initiative that has proved to be an exemplar of private and public benefit. It has demonstrated its value for the financial and in-kind investment government and others have contributed to its initial pilot and early funding, especially in facilitating vital sector career development and knowledge management opportunities.

### **2. CAREER DEVELOPMENT**

The root of the term 'career' lies in the Latin 'carrara', standing for a carriage travelling along a road. This seems to lend itself well to incorporation as one of the nine metaphors of career – journeys – that Inkson (2006) uses recently to survey career theory. Nicholson (2007), however, has emphasised the multiple perspectives through which the field of career studies views its focal topic and outlined that field in terms of the three D's: Destiny, incorporating genetics and social processes; Deliberation,

incorporating individual choices; and Drama, incorporating life critical events. Both works are useful in conceptualising the career issues involved for dance artists, a relatively under-studied group in the careers literature, who need to take individual action and responsibility in shaping their multiple careers path long before retirement looms, becoming more proactive in managing their career journeys. In so doing, they face issues of career development for ongoing employability, career transitions, and the challenge of multiple career paths (Clarke 2007), requiring just the sort of flexibility and adaptability that such artists possess. Whilst there is increasing individual responsibility for career management, this can be enabled by organisationally sponsored programs (Greenhaus, Callanan and Godshalk 2000) grounded in fostering career resilience, insight, and identity (Morrissey 2008). What SCOPE offers in career development for the individual is early preparation for career mobility, choice and planning, a rather different career trajectory facing dance artists now than has been the traditional reactive practice in the past. For the industry and community it offers real potential in knowledge management.

### **3. KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT**

Current research and practice in knowledge management focuses generally on the organisation and sub organisation levels. Here the emphasis is on organisations exploiting their existing knowledge by reallocating it to better known uses, creating new knowledge and innovating in a competitive environment, to maintain their markets with improved efficiency and with new services and products (Lesser 2000).

Whilst management of knowledge has emerged from a number of established academic disciplines, knowledge management within the dance and arts sector probably aligns best with an organisational behaviour perspective that posits that knowledge cannot be managed, only enabled through human relationships and effective communication. This is because it involves human processes that are difficult to quantify and control – creativity, conversation, judgement, teaching, and learning (De Castro and Muina 2002).

Replacing the emphasis on organisations to that of sector, we can characterise sector knowledge as that which is shared by members through relevant information, ideas, suggestions, and expertise (tacit and explicit) (Bartol and Srivastava 2002), with knowledge sharing activities becoming an indispensable element in the sector's knowledge management processes (Lee and Ahn 2005). Moving from knowledge acquired at individual, group, organisational and sector levels, it is not surprising, then, that communication and communicated knowledge are cornerstones for success, not only for exploiting existing knowledge but also for facilitating development of new knowledge and innovation across these levels.

### **4. DANCE ARTISTS TRANSFERABLE COMPETENCIES/ATTRIBUTES**

Dancers have an enormous range of transferable skills, competencies and attributes. Moreover, in keeping with recent developments in cognitive theory, dancers traverse numerous intelligences that may include but can go beyond the traditional ones of linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligence, in keeping with Gardner's (2000) 'multiple intelligences': spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalist. These are complemented by Goleman's (1995) emotional, and Zohar and Marshall's (2000) spiritual intelligences.

In addition, recent thinking in management research and education highlights the crucial value for business and management of using principles of artistic performance, especially dance, to improve individual and organisational leadership. In *The Dance of Leadership*, Denhardt and Denhardt (2006) emphasise learning from dancers.

And in a knowledge economy that lauds creativity, innovation, and creative problem solving, the creative value of dance artists' capabilities can contribute significantly to economic outcomes. These include competencies and attributes of enormous breadth, ranging from intelligence and emotional rigor, self reliance, collaboration and communication skills, to organising and presentation skills. They also fit with Gardner's (2006) 'five minds' crucial for thriving in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: 'the disciplined mind' mastering a distinctive mode of thinking related to a craft/discipline/profession; 'the synthesising mind' drawing together information from disparate sources and synthesising it; 'the creating mind' breaking

new ground; 'the respectful mind' working effectively across differences among individuals and groups; and 'the ethical mind' working beyond pure self-interest and on improving the lot of all.

## 5. THE SCOPE INITIATIVE

### 5.1 Rationale

The Australian dance sector is currently thriving, representing a high worth creative capital, and it was deemed essential that a program be developed that strategically invested in its most valuable resource – its people. A number of national and international studies from the 1980s onwards showed clear evidence of foreseeable benefits in a career development program (e.g. Beall 1989; and L'Opera National de Paris 2002). For the sector and the wider community, furthermore, recognition has grown of the value of dancers' knowledge, in accord with the global acceptance of knowledge being the only source of lasting competitive advantage in our century (Guadamillas, Donate, and Sanchez de Pablo 2008). Action has followed in America and Europe, although only recently in Australia.

Mirroring the brief outline of knowledge management within organisations in Section 2 above, like many modern enterprises, the value of the dance sector consists primarily of knowledge capital – what dance artists as employees know, create, and can do. The value the individuals bring to the enterprise/art form arises from:

- Their connections – which they know, the relationships between them, their clients (audiences), their collaborators (dramaturges, writers, musicians, composers, designers, film makers).
- Their experience – planning projects, problem solving, sustaining excellence, etc
- The actual content of their knowledge – *how work* is created, developed, and performed
- An enormous passion and commitment to the enterprise.
- Dance has a special knowledge capital management challenge:
- Experienced practitioners leave the profession at an early age (actually at their most economically potent age) and the knowledge capital exits with them. In most knowledge-based enterprises, this would be seen as a devastating dilution of value.
- It's poorly paid (and time and energy consuming), so artists have little capacity to develop the skills to allow them to transfer their knowledge, making the value of their knowledge unable to be captured *before* they exit.
- The art form is largely intangible and ephemeral, making it difficult for future practitioners to examine and use that past experience.

Therefore, in economic terms, *not* having a process for developing and recycling the knowledge capital of dancers diminishes the value of the art form. SCOPE reduces this major opportunity cost for the knowledge economy.

Dancers must utilise their numerous skills and experience if they are not to be compelled to completely retrain, usually in their 30s, having accumulated little financial reserves during a short artistic life, and many experience lengthy periods of time supported by social welfare payments. In Australia, a disproportionate number are subsequently unable to branch beyond dance teaching and related disciplines. SCOPE's philosophy of career development works here in assisting artists to understand their 'skills worth' and by encouraging development in a number of areas, not just completely 'retraining' and abandoning prior learning and experience.

As the international research program, the *aDvANCE* project, noted: 'the inadequacy of transition support not only creates significant challenges for individual dancers, but also imposes a social cost in the form of wasted human capital' (Baumol, Jeffri, and Throsby 2004:7). The research, which outlined international dancer transition programs, also demonstrates that, in those countries where transition programs have been implemented, a majority of former dancers are able to take their skills to the full spectrum of employment possibilities from which society benefits.

### 5.2 Australia's SCOPE Initiative

By harnessing the AIS initiated NCACE program, Australia's SCOPE program for dancers and choreographers was officially launched on 13 March 2007. SCOPE's mission is to provide career and education support to professional dance artists and, as such, it moves beyond the common notion of a linear transition program to becoming a world leader in career development.

The initiative is a successful collaboration between the Australia Council for the Arts and the Australian Sports Commission with support from Ausdance. It enables a specific number of dancers/choreographers access to the NCACE program in delivering a set of professional development and career management services to dancers and dance organisations. It focuses on key strategies of:

- Ensuring recognition of dance-specific opportunities, funding tertiary scholarships, providing professional development courses (PD) and access to the career referral networks of the AIS.
- Developing and clarifying sustainable career paths during and beyond performing careers within the arts and other sectors: capturing Recognised Prior Learning value and using existing bridging programs to greater effect in benefiting and strengthening the dance economy.
- Evaluating, identifying and funding other PD and skills development options available through government or private sources and maintaining an ongoing resource base. The emphasis of the PD programs will include the development of basic business skills to generate income, as well as skills focused on allowing effective capture of intellectual capital.
- Promoting the program with dancers, companies, industry groups, training institutions and potential employers (SCOPE Website 2008).

The program constituents are all professional dancers and choreographers, whether independent, community or (major or small) company based and with cultural and artistic practice diversity. Any dancer meeting the professional definition is eligible, regardless of the nature of their employment or practice. It involves education and advocacy organisations as partners in promoting awareness of the program. Moreover, it promotes artists who are taking part in the program to assist in the education process of SCOPE as a career development program not solely focused on transition.

A pilot program was run in 2005 utilising the National ACE program with 17 dancers. While dancers and athletes share challenges of elite performance, dancers have distinctly specific career pressures. Nevertheless, whilst the dance and sport industry models are different, the rationale for career development and maintaining knowledge/human capital is similar.

There is a full time national manager of the program, responsible for the day-to-day workings of the relationship with NCACE, providing considerable research and information gathering services, and acting as liaison with individual dancers, service providers, and with the various related training organisations. There is a Steering Committee providing direction to the manager, offering advice on scholarship applications, supervising financials and periodically evaluating the program. The committee consists of the NCACE manager, the Director of the Dance Board, Ausdance's National Director, and an independent dance consultant. The Australian Sports Commission reports to the Dance Board of the Australia Council for the Arts.

The committee meets regularly at the ASC in Canberra. The Steering Committee and manager are closely involved with a number of partners for collaboration and education at various stages of planning and implementation, for example:

- Other arts boards such as ATSIAB and MPAB for areas of shared interest
- Ausdance National
- Dance companies and artists
- Tertiary Dance Council of Australia
- Artsupport and AbaF for initiatives involving business partners
- Various state and federal government departments and their relevant development programs.

The current program offers a range of services, including:

- Individual assessment and career counselling
- The development of a career and education action plan
- Funding for personal and professional development courses
- Employment preparation
- Access to a tertiary scholarship fund
- Mentoring
- Business and industry networking and referrals
- Access to ACE online, an interactive career development website designed exclusively for elite performers
- Access to a national network of career professionals, and transition planning and support.

A recent report on the program highlights some of the SCOPE funds being used to attend personal and professional development training in areas such as 'Running a Successful Creative Business', Certificate III in Fitness, various computer skills training packages, and a number of university programs. As well as accessing ACE online resources, artists and program staff are communicating and sharing information worldwide via the SCOPE Secure Web Community, developed in collaboration with the ASC Web services (Annual National CACE Report 2008:4).

### 5.3 Evaluation

GOAL	ACTIONS	KPIS	ACHIEVEMENTS
Retain intellectual capital in the Arts	Education/training scholarships, career counselling	Impact on Arts sector	7 participants' careers related to the dance sector
Create human capital for Australia's economy	Education/training scholarships, career counselling	Impact on other sectors	4 participants careers outside dance
Improve earning capacity of dance artists	Education/training scholarships, career counselling	Skills acquired	8 participants studying at TAFE or University (includes medicine, business, fitness)
Improve the position of dance artists in the community	Lobbying Funded research studies  Ongoing communication	Development of resources  Dissemination of information	Media coverage  ACE and SCOPE research and program provide examples of why it is crucial to continue investing in harnessing dancers' skills and providing career transition support.
Deliver professional development and career services to dancers during and post performing	Financial support  Training, counselling and career support	Participation rates – numbers, calibre  Tangible outcomes – qualifications, jobs  Knowledge of program	Currently 38 dance artists in the program: 12 full time & 2 part time company dancers; 13 independent artists; 7 independent choreographers; 4 in transition from performing; (10 of independents relying solely on grant applications)  41 dance artists have accessed the program in total  Program cost efficiencies in using the AIS NCACE infrastructure.  Media coverage of SCOPE launch = 4 print media (920w)

**Table 1: Evaluating the initiative**

From 2005- 2009 funding has consisted of in-kind support from AIS and Ausdance National and the time of the Steering Committee members. Government has funded through the Australia Council approximately half a million dollars over the period to cover the costs of manager and administration, the tailoring of the NCACE program to suit dance specific needs, service delivery, tertiary scholarships, PD and educational courses.

### 5.4 Benefits

SCOPE provides career development support to professional dancers, allowing them to identify ways to utilise and further develop their hard won skills to create sustainable futures. Importantly, it allows them to take up their career journey with dignity and a healthy self esteem. Moreover, as international

research has demonstrated, those who engage in career planning are consequently well prepared for transition, especially through retraining, and attain more career satisfaction and an income advantage (Annual National CACE Report 2008). The capacity for choice is crucial – adequate preparation, support, and training/education make such choice possible.

<b>Individual</b>	<b>Dance Sector</b>	<b>Community</b>
Support for career development – future preparedness	Provides more security so aids attraction and retention of dancers to the profession	Retains knowledge capital
Assists psychological wellbeing	Uses intellectual/knowledge capital of professional dance artists	Uses intellectual/knowledge capital of professional dance artists in new ways
Less unemployment	May encourage sector innovations	Supports societal and economic need for innovation and creativity
More career satisfaction	Establishes skilled and confident dance mentors	Can enhance community health and wellbeing
Increases opportunities for using hard earned skills	Ensures the supply of suitably qualified and experienced dance teachers for professional training as a dance career, for recreation, health and fitness, community	Dance aids school performance
Builds on current transferable competencies/attributes/skills	Provides a new type of arts administrator, experienced professionally in the sector with management education	Can contribute to society's obesity problem
Potential to increase salary		Dance can educate for the creative collaborative employees needed in business
Enhances range of career choices through training/education opportunities		Can contribute content for burgeoning creative industries

**Table 2: SCOPE benefits**

Given the breadth of dance related careers, SCOPE can provide a model for successful career management for the rest of the arts sector, thus providing a platform for sector wide knowledge management success. Beyond this, dance artists possess a rich toolkit for entering sectors affiliated with the dance sector but also beyond this as both local and international research demonstrates. Cases include those going into finance, accounting, medical, legal, and academic careers for example.

Furthermore, with the 21<sup>st</sup> century call for increasing creativity and innovation in business, it is no surprise that business schools and organisations are forging stronger ties with the arts for cross fertilization (Adler 2006). Indeed, a recent edition of *HBR* (April, 2008) includes an interview with Twyla Tharp, internationally renowned dance choreographer.

## **6. THE FUTURE**

'The dance world shares many characteristics with other sectors of the creative industries. ... [it] exists in a state of uncertainty and complexity and therefore constant evolution and adaptation is required of its workforce, which needs to be multi-skilled with transferable skills, capable of managing portfolio working as well as able to carry out more than one role. This means that individuals who wish to pursue careers in these labour markets must be entrepreneurial and innovative. They have to create new styles of work, explore new ways of working that give them access to future employment opportunities or resources, diversify by finding new employment areas. This has been called "career resilience"' (Burns 2007: 9).

## 6.1 Some challenges

For progress in sector knowledge management, the culture of the dance sector as a whole needs to incorporate enhanced recognition of the career development and career mobility that SCOPE has initiated and that characterise the broader national and global communities. The major challenge for the SCOPE initiative, the key to retaining and building sector knowledge management content and practice, aside from the industry culture change one, is that of ongoing financial support following the government's grant ending early in 2009.

## 6.2 Some options

Certainly we need a culture of support and encouragement in the dance sector, in companies and the dance community more broadly. The industry needs to be proactive and supportive, including dance teachers and tertiary educators who should ensure that career development and transition are part of dancers' education, and directors who can assist the process in numerous ways. For example, providing opportunities for dancers to work in areas other than performing during their performing careers including teaching, choreography and administrative roles. Companies could develop policies and strategies that enable artists to plan study regimes, or take part in professional development courses.

More specifically, and drawing to some extent on international experience, there are a number of solutions:

- Providing online programs for career development and transition.
- Providing free places at universities and other educational institutions
- Facilitating parallel training – professional dancer and professional teacher
- Ensuring dance schools provide career management skills – work in education policy to ground professional dance education with the breadth required, providing the diverse skills and preparation for the portfolio nature of a professional dancer's career.
- Funding career development and financial advice for retirement and retraining for all professional dancers
- Offering scholarships/grants for career training – financial and business skills
- Creating special companies for older dancers (e.g. Sadlers Wells Company of Elders; Nederlands Dans Theatre).

For future program sustainability, new sources of funding need to be found that build on the Australia Council's initial catalyst funding. Options to complement and provide alternatives to government funding centre on the following international examples:

- Employer/employee contributions
- Government contributions to companies
- Fundraising and philanthropy – corporate and individual
- A special Dance/Arts lottery (e.g. UK's National Lottery)
- A 'Future Fund for the Arts' (partly to fund dancer career development and transitions) (Hunt and Shaw 2008).

Consideration could also be given in Australia to a specific tax on all dance tickets and entertainment (live and mass media) using dance artists, to go into a fund for *A Dancer Career Development Program*. Given the current popularity of dance arts, this may more than provide the adequate funding source for the continuation of SCOPE into the future.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Studies since the 1980s on the issue provide us with the requisite international data and it appears that 'transition has begun to be viewed by some as an integral part of a dancer's career process rather than its annihilation. So, it seems the career transition message is getting out there' (Baumol, Jeffri and Throsby 2004: 3). But we need something broader than this, more proactive, such as SCOPE offers. Moreover, the new Australian Labor government, at least in a pre-election discussion paper, vowed to review artists' income, may require major companies to increase skills training and career development support for their artists, and enhance opportunities for employment (Garrett 2007). Greater fundraising and philanthropy opportunities also need to be explored and relationships established.

At a government and societal level, we must recognise the major benefits for individuals, organizations, and the dance/arts sector of well-managed dancer career development. Moreover, career management should begin much earlier and organizations need to be involved in career development throughout an artist's employment. A continuing climate of neglect of career trajectories would be personally and socially costly. Instead, we need to take up the opportunity to reap the real benefits of their past, current and future knowledge capital through better managing and supporting the form, experience and outcomes of such dancer careers.

Currently, knowledge existing in the arts, culture and entertainment sectors may not generally be regarded as central knowledge policy concerns. Yet, given that knowledge-based economies are grounded in the social and cultural (Rooney, Hearn and Ninan 2005), the SCOPE initiative clearly demonstrates why they should, in offering Australia's knowledge society, appropriate opportunities for retaining and using the knowledge capital of dance artists in the sector and beyond.

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