

Pave Program in Arts Entrepreneurship



Networking and Entrepreneurial Success

A Review of Literature

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Introduction

When conducting research for *Artist Professional Development Needs: Findings and Recommendations from a Survey of Artists and Organizations*, artists conveyed an unexpectedly strong need for “networking,” both actual networking and training in networking. This led us to question, “What is the relationship between networking and entrepreneurial success generally and for artists in particular?” The brief review of literature that follows begins to answer that question. The review also exposes a lacuna in the literature on artist professional development and career sustainability: while there is some small attention paid to networking and artist careers in the gray literature, there is very little empirical research on the relationship between networking and the career success of artists.

In most of the literature under review, there is a tacit understanding that “entrepreneurial success” is understood to be the establishment and/or growth of a business, which may vary from sole proprietorships to corporations. Analogously, the term “entrepreneur,” the unit of analysis in much of this literature, is understood to be variously: those involved in the venture creation process; founders; artisan sole proprietors; owner-managers; small business owners; or others responsible for the establishment of an enterprise. While very little of the literature explicitly engages with individual artists, some of the findings can be useful to the individual artist operating as the sole proprietor of their creative practice when viewed as analogous to sole proprietor operations in other contexts; we offer some explicit recommendations for such artists at the end of the report.

Sampling

We used the Google Scholar meta-database of peer-reviewed publications to begin our search. Forty-eight peer-reviewed journal articles published between 1993 and 2015 were identified using the search terms:

- "networking" and "entrepreneurial success"
- "networking" and "entrepreneurship"
- "network theory" and "entrepreneurial success"
- "network theory" and "entrepreneurship"

From this group of 48 articles, only two address the arts and culture sector specifically. Searches using the following artist-specific terms yielded no additional results:

- "networking" and "arts"
- "networking" and "artists"
- "network theory" and "arts"
- "network theory" and "artists"

Snowball sampling from the reference lists of the previously identified 48 surfaced five more peer-reviewed journal publications, one of which specifically focuses on an arts sector for a total of 53 articles under review.

Responses to an open call to the Cultural Research Network pointed toward the sociology literature on networking in “art worlds” and “fields,” but as this literature does not engage with entrepreneurship directly we have not included it here, while acknowledging its importance in examination of the role of network connections in understanding arts and culture as a field of social interaction.

A purposive search of literature published by foundations that commission research on the arts and culture sector generally and artist professional sustainability specifically yielded several studies that engage either directly or indirectly with networking in the arts. These are discussed in a separate section following.

We are cognizant of the limitations our sampling method presents. By examining only peer-reviewed publications and published foundation reports, we may be missing potentially significant unpublished research and trade press books. For example, we know of at least one unpublished dissertation (Loy, 2012) that is potentially relevant to the research question, but feel that limiting our sample to peer-reviewed published work leads to a more robust analysis.

Peer-reviewed Articles

In the broadest possible terms, one can summarize the findings of the body of peer-reviewed literature quite simply: networks improve business performance. Brüderl and Preisendörfer (1998) explain:

The "network approach to entrepreneurship" is a prominent theoretical perspective within the literature on entrepreneurship. This literature assumes that network resources, networking activities and network support are heavily used to establish new firms (network founding hypothesis). Further, those entrepreneurs who can refer to a broad and diverse social network and who receive much support from their network are more successful (network success hypothesis). (p. 213)

Most articles examine specific variables of interest about the networks, the business, or the entrepreneur. The majority can be classified into two types: empirical studies and literature reviews. The empirical studies themselves fall into three methodological types: quantitative or mixed-method analysis; meta-analysis of previous research; or case studies. A third type, methodological critique of previous research, is of less use except insofar as it may inform our future research. Two articles can be considered conceptual. Appendix A lists the articles sorted by type; full citations can be found in the reference list.

Many of the studies assess variables from one or more of three domains. One domain is the goal of networking or network development in relation to entrepreneurial action. This domain might include types of entrepreneurial action, such as innovation, resource acquisition, or venture launch or stages of entrepreneurial action, such as ideation, development, or growth; this is the “networking for x” domain. Another set of variables is related to characteristics of the network. Such variables are often presented as dichotomous: local/global; strong ties/weak ties. A third domain of variables is the *type* of network such as supplier networks, friends and family networks, professional associations, peer networks, and so on. In addition to these domains, there is a family of variables related to the entrepreneur her- or himself: several studies address gender, for example, or the amount of time the entrepreneur spends networking. Most of the empirical studies seek to find or confirm relationships across two of the domains. For example, is a friends and family network more or less effective at market expansion than a professional network, or does network redundancy increase or decrease a tendency toward innovation. We have highlighted that literature that seems to have implications for individual artists.

Research That Engages Specifically with the Arts and Culture Sector

Three articles specifically engage with the arts and culture sector. Konrad (2013) conducted a study of 121 private cultural event enterprises in Germany. His study looks at the effects or prerequisites for networking and their relationship to the success in these enterprises, where success is defined as the establishment, attainment, and consolidation of market position, rather than sales figures, jobs created, or capital attracted. Networking specialists in these organizations, who may be the founders or other lead personnel, are “characterized by a portfolio of good connections and relations with key figures such as informants, experts, decision makers, opinion leaders and reference people” (p. 309). He finds that engaging a network specialist, either the founder or someone else, positively influences the establishment of cultural businesses (p. 313). Contacts in cultural politics and media, and with opinion makers, are deemed more important than the supplier or resource networks that are the focus of many of the other studies. Whether or not contacts in “cultural politics” have the same importance in the US is unknown. Konrad tests a hypothesis related to the assertion, “The most important influence for the development of a cultural business comes from the official department for the promotion of cultural affairs.” Because the impact of departments of cultural affairs in the US differs significantly from those in Germany, Konrad’s findings in this regard are not transferrable. However, another hypothesis, about the level of competition in a market environment, may be. “The positive effect of the networking specialist on the establishment of the cultural business increases” where there is an environment of low competition (p. 316). One can infer from this work that competition does not have a positive

effect on networking success and that networking does not mitigate the challenges posed to cultural entrepreneurs by increased competition.

Klerk and Saayman (2012) studied 137 “festival entrepreneurs” (i.e., stall owners conducting direct sales) at the Grahamstown National Arts Festival in South Africa. This research is both very narrowly focused and lacks the robust methodology that would make it transferable or reliable. The study’s findings, that becoming a festival entrepreneur is a career choice and that trust is an important factor in networking, are basic assumptions. The latter seems to tangentially support the findings of Kuhn and Galloway (2015).

Kuhn and Galloway (2015) surveyed 343 artisan entrepreneurs who sell their creations on Etsy about their peer-to-peer networking behavior. They argue that peers (owner-managers of similar businesses) have context-specific knowledge and thus are best positioned to provide useful advice and support. Unlike advice that may come from advisors with whom there is a perceived power differential, “peer assistance may often be reciprocal, and can include collaborative activities and socio-emotional support in addition to advice” (p. 573). On Etsy and other sales sites, artisans self-organize as “teams” or “guilds.” Interesting findings from the study include:

- artisan motivations affect the type of peer advice that is most valued such that artisans who are personally motivated value emotional support and friendship while more pecuniarily motivated artisans value joint promotion activities. (see p. 581)
- both friendship with other artisan sellers and receiving constructive critique on shop design were “significantly predictive” of better sales performance. (see p. 585)
- the number of peer groups an artisan belongs to is positively associated with performance while receiving a lot of business advice from peers is negatively correlated with business performance. (see p. 586)

The findings about numbers of connections are echoed by some of the network redundancy literature discussed in the following section. Kuhn and Galloway’s study interestingly used as a modifying variable the motivations of the artisan seller as favoring either creative expression or business success. Not surprisingly, the former tend to offer and receive emotional support while the latter tend to offer and receive marketing or other business advice, with the most value placed on mutually beneficial joint promotions in which all parties stand to benefit.

In reviewing this study, we could not help but connect the underlying ideas behind this research with the motivation and design of the AZ ArtsWorker program, which relies significantly on peer-to-peer knowledge sharing. We also found that the context for the research, artisan sales sites that “enable sellers to easily communicate with one another,” may have relevance for the artist resources site that was mapped in *Artist Professional Development Needs* (Flanagan and Essig, 2016).

Findings of Interest from the Remaining Business Networking Literature

Several studies investigate aspects of networking and their relationship to aspects of entrepreneurial behavior that we believe may be applicable to individual artist behavior or the actions of cultural entrepreneurs (i.e., founders of arts organizations). Ramachandran and Ramnarayan's (1993) meta-analysis indicates that entrepreneurs that are pioneering and innovative (i.e., entrepreneurs with highly novel and impactful ideas) use networking to obtain critical resources more than humdrum entrepreneurs do. They further find that such entrepreneurs do not merely *adopt* network-acquired knowledge, but *synthesize* it. Such entrepreneurs also proactively extend beyond the close ties of friends and family networks to better understand their environment. The first of these findings is supported by George, Wood, and Kahn (2001), who find that external linkages are effective at securing scarce resources.

Network redundancy is the subject of at least two studies. While one might assume, based on George, Wood, and Kahn (2001), that network redundancy, which implies fewer unique external linkages, would negatively impact knowledge acquisition through networks, Jensen and Greve (2002) find that low redundancy networks do not improve knowledge acquisition; rather, it is the number and strength of ties that is important. They find that many strong and weak ties with more redundancy yield better information and support. Soh's (2003) research seems to confirm that redundancy in networks is an asset.

Miller, Besser, and Malshe's (2007) study of small businesses in small communities has potential implications for arts-based small businesses and individual artists. Social capital theory and strategic network theory undergird their analysis of small business owners in formal business networks. They find that people join such networks in order to share resources and information. "Combining resources to affect legislation has also been an important aspect for many of these networks" (p. 637). These activities were found to significantly benefit the network members' businesses, thus providing them with incentive for staying in the professional network. Although most obvious in this study, several others (MacGregor 2004; Pittaway, Robertson, Munir, Denyer & Neely 2004) suggest that formal networks are particularly useful for small business success, especially outside of urban centers where density naturally leads to informal networking (see Nijkamp, 2003). Watson (2012) finds, like others, that having multiple formal and informal networks is associated with business sustainability, but only formal networks are associated with growth. Taken together, this group of studies seems to support the idea that artists, as small business owners, could benefit from membership in formal networks, especially in smaller or rural communities.

A related area of research is on innovation networks (e.g., Karlsson and Warda, 2014; Hayter, 2013). Many researchers emphasize institutional arrangements (formal and informal) and the structure and efficiency of innovation networks as major explanations of why the frequency as well as the quality of entrepreneurship varies between different places, regions,

and countries. An innovation network may be conceived of as “a set of economic agents involved in innovative production with established contacts between agents, such as producers, customers, suppliers, universities and research institutes” (Karlsson and Warda, 2014, p. 394). We do not see this specialized focus on innovation networks to be of particular use to artists at this time, except insofar as we can conceive of new art as new knowledge creation.

Jack, Dodd, and Anderson (2008) present a longitudinal analysis of three professional networks in a single market sector. In doing so, they are able to examine how the networks change over time and, more importantly, how the networks themselves effect the environment for entrepreneurship. Their research proposes, “that networks actually create the environment, as it is understood and operated by the entrepreneur, and that consequently the networking process is the enactment of the environment” (p. 125). Bollingtoft’s (2012) study of “bottom-up incubators” likewise supports the idea that networks can create an environment for entrepreneurship rather than being created by it. Jack, Dodd, and Anderson (2008) explain, “For the entrepreneur it is networking processes that allow them to perceive, navigate, enact and even co-create the environment. Our findings show that collaboration and co-operation are far more prevalent than conflict, probably because network relationships are so strongly founded on affection, friendship and a shared mindset” (p. 151). Kuhn and Galloway’s (2013) study of the Etsy artisans likewise supports this contention that cooperation and friendship, rather than competition, are typical in peer-to-peer networks and support an environment for business success.

Finally, culture matters. Klyver, Hindle, and Meyer (2008), Foley (2008), and Klyver and Foley (2012) study the effect of cultural differences on networking and entrepreneurship by either looking across cultures globally, at indigenous cultural entrepreneurs in three countries, or at minority entrepreneurs. In general, these studies show that cultural differences exist in networking behavior and its role in entrepreneurship. Such differences are currently coming to the fore in the US around issues of funding for cultural artist entrepreneurs and, most recently, leadership training in the arts (see Turner, 2016). Leaders of formal networks that may develop to support arts entrepreneurs should be mindful of the cultural differences that may exist between dominant and minority cultures as well as among different indigenous cultures.

Gray Literature

We identified two reports that specifically intersect wholly or in part with networking by artists and/or networking in the arts and culture sector. The influential 2003 *Investing in Creativity* report from the Urban Institute addresses networking specifically in relation to individual artists (Jackson et al, 2003). The report includes “communities and networks” as one of six key domains of artist infrastructure (the others being validation, demand, material supports, training, and information). The report points out that networks both within the arts

and culture sector and networks that reach beyond it are important to artists. The report provides a useful taxonomy of network types:

- National networks
- Regional networks
- Networks based in local artist-focused and community-based organizations
- Networks based in institutional affiliations
- Funder driven communities and networks
- Networks outside the cultural sector
- Personal networks

The categories in this listed are included in the business literature on networking and entrepreneurship, although every type is not uniformly addressed. Instead, the business literature tends to approach network types dichotomously: formal/informal; global/local; professional/friends and family; and so on.

This report is the most directly applicable to the question of interest in our pool of literature. While it does not address the applicability of networking to “entrepreneurial success,” it does point out the importance of networks of diverse types and sizes to artist support generally. Its findings about networks provide guideposts for the development and sustainability of networks that have launched since.

Oehler and Sheppard (2010) look at networking in the arts and culture sector at an organizational level of analysis in a report for the Center for Creative Community Development. They suggest that network theory can be a useful means for research on arts organizations and can be deployed to answer a variety of questions. They conduct network analysis on three different organizations seeking answers to different questions for each organization as evidence of the applicability of network analysis to research about the sector.

Future Research and Conclusion

There seems little doubt that networks can support entrepreneurship. Diverse networks characterized by many strong and weak ties with some redundancy can support innovation. Networks can provide both emotional and business support. Taken together, the group of studies under review supports the idea that artists, as small business owners, could benefit from membership in formal networks. This may be especially true for artists outside of urban centers. A future study can test this hypothesis.

Artists are motivated by both intrinsic expressive ends and practical business ends. The study of online networks by Kuhn and Galloway (2013) can be extended to formal artist networks to see if the same results can be found in formal face-to-face networks regarding the differences seen in network usefulness when modified by motivation. Related to their results as

well as Konrad (2013) and Jack, Dodd, and Anderson (2008), it would be interesting to examine the ways in which networks that are founded on affection, friendship, and a shared mindset rather than competition for scarce resources could foster better arts entrepreneurial outcomes for artists. Such a study might compare affinity networks with funder-initiated networks.

A third potential area of study is to expand and update the “Communities and Networking” section of *Investing in Creativity*. Such work may be part of the research currently underway by the Center for Cultural Innovation in partnership with Helicon and the NEA.

As the artists we surveyed for *Artists Professional Development Needs* noted, networking is important to their success. The business literature on networking and entrepreneurship suggest that networks aid in resource and knowledge acquisition, innovation, and growth. Artists can be encouraged to join professional networks and peer affinity groups, while also building personal networks to sustain them. Network builders should be mindful of cultural differences both within and across national borders that may affect how networks evolve and function.

Specific Recommendations for Artist-entrepreneurs

Several ideas and recommendations are worth reiterating for the benefit of readers who are themselves artist/entrepreneurs. This list is not all-inclusive, nor is it in priority order, but we hope it is useful:

- Build a network of peers that operates collaboratively and cooperatively rather than viewing peers competitively
- Recognize that networking is supportive of an entrepreneurial approach to creative practice
- Join as many networks of different types as possible, even if there is overlap between them
- Acknowledge that friends and family are as much of a network as professional associations
- Build networks that provide emotional support as these are as valuable as those providing professional knowledge or resources
- Join professional networks in your arts community, local, regional, and national
- Join professional networks that are outside the art and culture sector (these can be especially useful in resource acquisition).

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Appendix A: Articles Sorted by Type

Empirical Studies

Quantitative Analysis

Greve	1995
Ostgaard & Birley	1996
Brüderl and Preisendörfer	1998
Chell & Baines	2000
George, Wood Jr. & Khan	2001
Jenssen & Greve	2002
Dodd & Patra	2002
Dodd, Jack & Anderson	2002
Greve & Salaff	2003
Soh	2003
MacGregor	2004
Mackinnon, Chapman & Cumbers	2004
Cruickshank & Rolland	2006
Atterton	2007
Manolova, Carter, Manev & Gyoshev	2007
Miller, Besser & Riibe	2007
Miller, Besser & Malshe	2007
Hallen	2008
Jack, Dodd, Anderson	2008
Klyver, Hindle & Meyer	2008
Thorgren, Wincet & Örtqvist	2009
Klyver & Grant	2010
Matirz	2010
Lans, Verstegen, Mulder	2011
Watson	2011
Wang, Wang, Huang, & Deng	2011
Miller, Besser & Vigna	2011
Semrau & Werner	2012
Acquaah	2012
Konrad	2013
Hoyos-Ruperto, Romaguera, Carlsson & Lyytinen	2013
Klerk & Saymann	2013

Kuhn & Galloway	2013
Redd	2014

Meta-analysis

Ramachandran & Ramnarayan	1993
Martinez & Aldrich	2011

Case Studies

Elfring & Hulsink	2003
Mort & Weerawardena	2006
Gilmore, Carson, Grant, O'Donnell, Laney & Pickett	2006
Shaw	2006
Foley	2008
Egbert	2009
Moensted	2010
Klyver & Foley	2012

Literature Reviews

Johannisson & Monsted	1997
O'Donnell, Gilmore, Cummins & Carson	2001
Hoang & Antonicic	2003
Nijkamp	2003
Pittaway, Robertson, Munir, Denyer & Neely	2004
Hayter	2013

Methodological Critiques

Witt	2004
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Conceptual Articles

Dubini and Aldrich	1991
Karlsson and Warda	2014