# *Masters of their Destiny?*

## *Identities, Learning & Development of Freelance Workers in Singapore's Technical Theatre Industry*

Nur Sahara

Helen Bound

Annie Karmel

Mahaletchumi Sivalingam

Centre for Work and Learning

Sep 2014

## About the Institute for Adult Learning, Singapore

By raising capabilities, catalysing innovation, and leading research in workforce learning, the Institute for Adult Learning (IAL) facilitates the development of an effective, innovative and responsive Continuing Education and Training (CET) sector that is able to meet the needs of industries and the workforce.

Funded by the Singapore Workforce Development Agency, IAL works closely with adult educators, business leaders, human resource developers and policy makers to transform the CET sector.

IAL thus contributes to ensure that CET is an effective strategy to sustain the competitiveness of Singapore and the employability of the workforce. Read more about us.

## About the Centre for Work and Learning, IAL



The Centre for Work and Learning focuses on Continuing Education and Training system practices, learning design, teaching, and assessment in and across different settings and the implications for practice and policy. Our research includes the study of work and work environments and learning and development within these settings.

Our research employs a range of methodologies designed to deepen understanding of the ways in which contexts enhance and challenge learning and development opportunities. Our approach is to engage practitioners in the research process and thus develop a community of practitioner researchers.

# Table of Contents

# List of Tables

# Executive Summary

This research is the third in a multi-sector study by the Institute for Adult Learning (IAL) on contingent workers in Singapore. The research is concerned with the identity, learning and developmental needs of freelance workers in Singapore's technical theatre industry.

Using data collected from interviews with 23 freelance technical theatre professionals and six organisations that engage them, the research investigated the triple challenge of a shortage of skilled manpower, concurrent stagnation and the lack of professionalism in the technical theatre industry. Vocational identity and its socio-economic context, is used as a framework to understand the challenges of learning and development in this industry.

The study found that an industry development model that privileges flagship theatre venues and the hosting of international shows is creating disproportionately more technical jobs than creative jobs in the industry. This development is skewing the profile of the workforce, from an "artistic" to a "technical disposition", and makes the local industry stand apart from similar industries in the US, UK and Australia that are anchored by local productions, with abundant opportunities for practitioners to be immersed in the creative process. Given the low barriers to entry, the industry is attracting workers with two very different profiles - the beginner with a passion for the arts who tend to have higher initial qualifications and some vision of their place in the industry, and the opportunistic worker with lower initial qualifications who enter the industry through networks but with unclear expectations. In the context of the freelance world in which contacts drive skills-formation and income-generation, passionate beginning freelancers tend to have greater difficulty securing a steady stream of jobs and run the risk of dropping out of the industry altogether to access permanent jobs in other industries. The opportunistic freelancer, on the other hand, thrives in the short-term, but lacks a vision of his or her place in the industry and thus an internal compass to evolve his or her career. The peripheral way in which freelancers fit into the production process at flagship venues, which are major sources of income, contributes to the lack of opportunities for professional development. At another level, the industry does not provide sufficient opportunities to ease freelancers' movement into new work roles in the industry, putting the onus on the individual to make highly-onerous "deliberate ruptures" to evolve his or her career. A huge limitation is the lack of regular access to experts and mentors, who play an important role not just in terms of craft deepening and inculcation of work ethics, but also in terms of coaching younger freelancers on aspects related to career, life and financial planning that are important for a viable freelance career.

The study recommends the following:

- That industry development agencies look into opportunities to balance the disproportionate lack of creative jobs that is expected to stifle the long-term professional development of the local technical theatre workforce and may prevent the achievement of the artistic vision as articulated in the national masterplan for the arts;

- That theatre venues evolve the job roles of freelancers towards a more strategic deployment of the latter's capabilities. A network of certification products, built upon formal instruction as well as the learning at and through the workplace, should be introduced to simultaneously build employers' confidence in the capabilities of freelancers, and provide important signposts for freelancers to evolve their careers;

- That provisions for continuing education and training (CET) are most meaningful if they contribute to the development of an occupational community in the context of freelance contractual arrangements that tend to give rise to isolation, as well as homophilous networking that limits opportunities for regular access to experts and mentors. Apprenticeship programmes, mentorship schemes, Masterclasses and sharing seminars are some of the preferred learning approaches as suggested by freelancers. Such programmes contribute to putting in place structures within the freelance industry that help ease practitioners' movements into more advanced work roles within the industry. The study also uncovered a loose apprenticeship practice that is embedded in the production process which should be facilitated and encouraged, because of the mutual benefits to both the beginning freelancer and the established freelancer. Any CET provision should also avoid a one-size-fits-all assumption given the starkly different worker profiles entering the industry; and

- That early <u>and</u> regular career and life coaching be offered to freelancers to help them plan their career and other aspects related to hedging income and employment risks. Such coaching may include the provision of information, but should also be offered through industry mentors who play a valuable role in contextualising the information.

# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.1 The Problem: Shortage, Stagnation & Lack of Professionalism

Singapore's technical theatre industry has undergone a profound transformation in the last fifteen years, as arts and cultural production assumes a more prominent role in the city-state's economic and nation-building strategies (Bound et. al. 2013; Kong 2011; Ministry of Culture, Community & Youth 2012).

Where previously the local theatre scene comprised a handful of arts houses and modest performance venues, it is now anchored by three large non-profit and commercial venues namely, the Esplanade, Resorts World and Marina Bay Sands, as part of a strategic plan to position the country to seize a greater portion of the cultural tourism pie, while concurrently growing its local arts industry. The government's expenditure on arts and culture grew steadily at 11% each year, increasing from S$230.2m in 2005 to S$478.9m in 2012. Correspondingly, the total nominal value-add of the arts and cultural sector scaled to S$1.3b in 2011, from S$0.8b in 2003. The number of music, dance and theatre productions has been on an upswing, growing by an average of 10% annually to hit 3,343 productions in 2012 (Ministry of Culture, Community & Youth 2013). A fourth venue, the Singapore Sports Hub, is set to add international sports to the heady mix of live entertainment options in the city-state when it opens by end 2014. A regional wing is developing, as local arts production houses begin touring their shows in the region, while superiorly-equipped local companies make inroads to supply equipment, technology and manpower to international concerts and conferences in the fast-growing emerging economies of China and ASEAN.

Like other creative industries, the technical theatre industry in Singapore relies on freelance work arrangements that appear to be the vanguard of a post-Fordist globalised economy characterised by shorter business cycles, knowledge jobs, flatter structures and outsourcing (Brown, Lauder & Ashton 2011; Evans & Gibbs 2009, Felstead & Ashton 2001; Kalleberg 2009). The core freelance jobs in the industry relate to technical, design and production jobs in the areas of lighting, sound, and stage/production. Freelance craftspeople form the backbone of the industry, and are engaged for work periods ranging from hours, days to months. The total full-time employment in the arts and cultural sub-sector stood at 24,400 workers in 2011, up from 20,900 workers in 2003. The performing arts segment specifically grew by 6% annually, from a total of 4,500 workers in 2003 to 7,100 workers in 2011 (Ministry of Culture, Community & Youth 2013). Statistics on the freelance pool, however, are not available. It has been estimated that freelancers made up 30% of

all those working in the creative industries (cited in Institute of Policy Studies, 2010). Indicative figures from the range of organisations that employ them suggest that the proportion of freelancers in technical theatre may be even higher. A flagship performing arts venue in Singapore, for instance, employs 250 permanent staff, and engages 700-750 freelancers annually, of which 250 are technical crew. A leading arts production house in Singapore has 7 permanent staff, and engages up to 50 technical and non-technical freelancers for a production, and up to 80 for a festival.

Pursuing a full-time freelance career in technical theatre is now viable where previously it was a remote possibility. There is a manpower crunch at practically all levels of job roles, and the shortage is especially pronounced at skilled levels (design/production). Yet, ironically, a sense of stagnation related to limited opportunities for progression is pervasive. This raises a profound puzzle that is bewildering because new entrants are expected to work from the ground up regardless of their initial levels of pre-service training. A level playing field ought to facilitate mobility. At another level, the professionalism of the workforce is said to be lagging considerably in comparison to mature industries like the UK and US, although standards are said to have improved substantially since the opening of the Esplanade in 2003.

There are now more pre-service offerings by educational institutions such as LASALLE College of the Arts and Republic Polytechnic, but industry players have expressed apprehension about the quality of the graduates being churned out, and their fit with the industry's needs. Provisions for Continuing Education & Training (CET) have been introduced through the Technical Theatre framework under the national Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ) system with very attractive training subsidies but they receive little take-up among freelancers. A relatively more successful scheme is the Technical Theatre Training Programme (TTTP) hosted at the Esplanade, which provides a one-year broad-based training programme for a select group of beginning freelancers. However, it is deemed to be too focused on the organisational needs of Esplanade, and limits the mobility that freelancers need. The National Arts Council (NAC) offers generous funding for practitioners who wish to pursue a degree or post-graduate studies, as well as sabbaticals. A key question to ask is the extent to which traditional skills-development and career enhancement programmes based largely on workers in stable, on-going employment with one employer as opposed to many employers, are adequate in terms of ensuring equitable standards of skills or craft development, as well as progression in freelance-dominated industries.

Understanding freelance or contingent work as distinct from permanent work has been of interest to growing groups of researchers and policy-makers. A clear division in academic research exists (Smeaton 2003). One view holds that the global growth of contingent work arrangements leads to "flexiploitation", creating a new class of precarious workers experiencing anxiety because of inconsistent income, reduced

benefits, deskilling and unclear career progression (Brophy 2006; Ross 2008; Kallerberg 2009). A contending view suggests that such arrangements are in fact emancipating as workers now have greater choice and ownership to deploy their skills and drive their careers at times and sites of their own choosing. These are the "boundaryless" or "protean" workers who are said to represent the direction in which entire workforces are heading towards in an age of flexible capitalism (Allan 2002; Arthur & Rousseau 1996; Hall 2002 & 2004; McKeown 2005).

Greater clarity in the conceptual understanding of the contingent worker appears necessary (Gold & Fraser 2002; Forrier et. al. 2009; Fenwick, T. J. 2004). Singapore's technical theatre offers itself as a valuable case study in this regard. Its value is especially because most existing research has focused on workers in Western economies with its unique set of institutional arrangements and economic conditions, which generate theories that may not easily transcend national and cultural boundaries (Allen 2011; Forrier et. al. 2009; Thomas and Inkson 2007). The focus on contingent workers in an Asian context of robust growth and full employment, alongside its set of labour market policies, structures and conditions, is timely and will plug an important gap to better inform policy-making and enhance pedagogical practice locally and elsewhere.

# 1.2 Objectives & Methodology

The focus of this study is to understand the identity, learning and developmental needs of freelancers in technical theatre, in relation to the issues of shortage of skilled manpower, stagnation and the lack of professionalism in the workforce. We want to understand what "non-traditional" work patterns mean for occupational identities that in turn shape the developmental opportunities of individuals with impact on employability, productivity and life satisfaction. Our interest is to understand how these non-standard workers experience contingent work arrangements, how they acquire their practice-based skills, and how they progress (or otherwise) over time. We put the individual at the centre of analysis as many existing tools employed in research, policy-making and pedagogical practice privilege workers in stable, permanent forms of employment. We use vocational identity as the starting point for analysis but consider the individual in relation to the wider eco-system related to industry practices, the production process, job design, and work norms, among others. By understanding what shapes their identity, we develop a more robust understanding of their learning and developmental needs. Chapter 2 elaborates on the theories and concepts that inform this study, developed from three inter-related body of literature on non-permanent work, workplace learning, and career mobility.

The main research questions addressed in this study are:

- How do freelancers in technical theatre operate in the industry? In short, what are their "ways of being"?
- How can they be supported to grow and develop?

The study adopts qualitative methods to collect data, involving semi-structured interviews with 23 current, former, and returning freelancers. The interviewees were selected based on convenience and purposive sampling (Lankshear & Knobel 2004) to obtain a range of job roles, gender and years of experience. All informants were guaranteed anonymity and the report uses pseudonyms. We deliberately sought out former and returning freelancers to capture comparative perspectives. We looked for common themes across the interviews, as well as developed vertical analysis of each narrative (Coffey & Atkinson 1996; Strauss & Corbin 1990). We also augment the data with interviews with six organisations that engage freelance practitioners to provide a wider contextual understanding. In addition, a reference group session was organised involving 23 key employers, policy-makers, educators and freelancers to discuss the preliminary set of findings and jointly identify potential recommendations. More information on the profile of interviewees and members of the reference group session are at Appendix 1 and 2 respectively.

# 1.3 Definition & Terminology

*Definition of the contingent worker*

For the purposes of this study, we use the definition of contingent workers as individuals employed on short-term contracts of less than 12 months with one or more organisation. This excludes permanent workers as well as those employed on contracts of one year or more. Within the local technical theatre industry, two terms are used to describe the contingent workers. The first is "casual", a term typically used by theatre venues to refer to technicians hired on a *contract of service* that is usually on a per hour basis (~ 4 hours). The second term is "freelancer" that is usually used to refer to those who take on job roles as designers or production managers. These freelancers tend to be employed on a *contract for service* basis, and paid on milestone basis based on project deliverables. The terms used are, however, not mutually exclusive, as rental/staging companies also use the term "freelancer" to refer to the technicians they hire on a per day basis. At another level, freelancers may evolve their careers by setting up companies to better organise and market the services they offer, while still identifying themselves as freelancers. Consequently, a more fluid understanding of vocational identities is necessary, in relation to aspects such as self-identification, hiring arrangements and organisational culture.

*"Technical theatre" as a terminology*

We note that the description of the industry as "technical theatre" is contested in Singapore and elsewhere (see for example the discussion in Farthing 2012). Although the industry has origins in theatre, it has since grown to include the wider music and entertainment industry (e.g. concerts, festivals, mass display events) as well as the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibition (MICE) industry that comprise a wide range of activities from major exhibitions to wedding banquets. "Live Events" has been proposed as a more apt description of the industry. In addition, the term "technical" itself is seen as a clumsy catch-all term covering technology, design, craft and management without sufficient specificity (Farthing 2012). This study does not seek to identify alternative descriptions. We retain the term "technical theatre" for expedient reasons to be consistent with the terminology used by local government agencies that oversee industry and workforce development. The key job families and the range of organisations that are captured in this study are at *Tables 1 & 2*.

**Table 1:** Key job families within the freelance technical theatre industry

| Lighting | Sound | Staging/ Rigging | Production / Stage Mgmt | Sets / Props / Wardrobe |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| • Lighting Designer<br>• Master Electrician<br>• Lighting Programmer<br>• Lighting Operator<br>• Follow-spotter | • Sound Designer<br>• Sound Operator | • Technical Director<br>• Flyman<br>• Rigger | • Production Manger<br>• Stage Manager<br>• Assistant Stage Manager<br>• Production Scheduler | • Set designer<br>• Costume designer<br>• Make-up Artists<br>• Props Master |
| Stagehand / Crew | | | | |

*Sources: Interviews & WSQ Technical Theatre Competency Map*

**Table 2:** Range of organisations in technical theatre

| Theatre Venues | Staging / Equipment | Arts Production Houses | Design Consultancies | MICE / Hotels | NGOs |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| E.g.<br><br>• Esplanade<br><br>• Marina Bay Sands<br><br>• Resorts World<br><br>• The Star<br><br>• University Cultural Centre | E.g.<br><br>• CSP Productions<br><br>• Showtec | E.g.<br><br>• Singapore Repertory Theatre<br><br>• I Theatre | E.g.<br><br>• CtrlFre@k<br><br>• Yellow Brick Produc-tions | Eg.<br><br>• Marina Bay Sands<br><br>• Shangri-la Hotels<br><br>• Four Seasons | E.g.<br><br>• Schools<br><br>• Mega-churches |

*\*Sources: Interviews, internet research*

# 1.4 Structure of report

Chapter Two discusses the relevant theories and concepts guiding the study. Chapter Three outlines the findings in relation to the "ways of being" of technical theatre practitioners. Chapter Four identifies their key "ways of knowing", and development over key stages. Chapter Five discusses the key implications to policy, research and pedagogy.

# 2.0 Literature Review

## 2.1 Academic literature

We present here an overview of three inter-related bodies of academic literature that guides the study, namely literature related to non-permanent work, workplace learning and career mobility. We highlight both the strengths and limitations of existing theories and concepts.

## 2.2 Non-permanent work – contingent vs precarious

The decoupling of the worker and his or her skill sets from ongoing or continuous relationships with any one employer or enterprise suggests the emergence of a new kind of worker. As noted in the introductory chapter, the understanding of such workers is a contested terrain. One strand of argument in academic literature suggests that non-standard work arrangements are giving rise to a *precariat* class experiencing high levels of exploitation with little dependable benefits and few opportunities for advancing oneself professionally (Brophy 2006; Ross 2008; Kalleberg 2009). Beck (2000) describes this trend of casual work arrangements as creating a "new political economy of insecurity." The creative class is believed to be especially vulnerable because of its willingness to "suffer" for arts' sake. De Peuter (2011) paints a picture of such workers as not just being victims of post-Fordist capital but "model subjects" of it – being self-driven, willing to undertake personally-financed reskilling and habituated to material insecurity.

The above argument stands in sharp contrast to another set of views in academic literature that considers such work arrangements as an inevitable trajectory in advanced knowledge economies with an overall positive benefit for the worker and for enterprise flexibility. This is the "boundaryless" worker sanctioned and desired by the new economics of global capitalism (Forrier, Sels & Stynen 2009). They are the model workers able to navigate the getting and keeping of work to their own advantage through the development of social and mobility capital networks, the management of work-life balance, and harnessing their capacity to maintain knowledge and skills. There is research that suggests the precarious worker may be found in sites that are lower paid and require less formal education, while the contingent worker may be found in sites that are higher paid and require more formal education. Other research suggests a conflation of the two (Holly & Rainnie 2012; McKeown 2005; Ross 2008; Waterhouse et. al. 1999). In a study of Australian nurses, for instance, part-time nurses demonstrated lower levels of identity

commitment and more negative career success perceptions than full-time nurses (Allen 2011).

The conceptualisation of the same non-permanent worker in two contrasting ways limits our ability to fully understand what "non-traditional" work patterns really mean, and its impact on the learning and development of such workers. One reason for this dichotomy may lie in the perennial tension in academic understanding of structure versus agency. High agentic involvement is assumed and celebrated in the conceptions of the "boundaryless" or "protean" worker (Arnold & Cohen 2008; Dany 2003; Forrier et. al. 2009). The "precarious" camp, on the other hand, tends to give emphasis to structural factors such as labour market segmentation, institutional rules and regulations and organisational structures that privilege permanent workers over non-permanent ones. The way forward to a more holistic understanding of the non-permanent worker may rest in a conceptual framework that enables a deft interplay between agency and structure. In addition, both analyses of the contingent or precarious worker do not cater for temporal aspects, in that they did not look at the experience of the non-permanent worker over time. Consequently, we may ask what conditions, from both the structural and agentic perspectives, lead non-permanent workers to enjoy productive and satisfying professional careers? Conversely, what set of conditions lead them to run risks such as deskilling, stagnation and material insecurity? In addition, we should ask if the conditions identified are stable over time. We turn to two other strands in academic literature, namely workplace learning and career mobility, to give us the tools to advance our understanding of the non-permanent worker.

## 2.3 Workplace learning – the individual and his or her context

Questions on workers' skills, progress and professionalism must be understood in the context of industry practices and the production process, because contingency or precarity is experienced in relation to the learning, development and progression taking place at and through work. While learning is often portrayed as a formalised activity through systematic instruction outside the workplace, researchers observe that most people become competent in their jobs through learning as they perform those jobs. Recent socio-cultural discourses in workplace learning thus conceptualise learning as an activity embedded in the production process, and the social interactions of the workplace (Engestrom 1999; Billet 2001; Lave & Wenger 1991; Rainbird et. al. 2004; Fuller & Unwin 2004). Agency for learning is mediated by the individual's sense-making of his or her context. Wenger (1998) argues that we produce our identities through the practices we engage in (and those we do not). Identity relates to social learning in that it combines competence and experience and develops our "ways of knowing, doing, and feeling", in short our "ways of being" (Edwards & Usher 1996). In this approach, learning and identity are relational, dynamic and provisional; always practice-based rather than acquisitional (Fenwick, T.J. 2004; Fenwick, T. 2000). "Any identity is basically relational to its conditions of existence, any change in the latter is bound to affect the former" (Du Gay 1996, p.184).

Consequently, the discourse on workplace learning puts the individual and identity-formation in the socioeconomic context of the "workplace", with a focus on its inherent tensions and unequal power relations. These aspects are to take heightened forms for freelance work where the industry really is the "workplace", as freelancers move fluidly across multiple worksites. Researchers, however, lament that the workplace learning community is generally "too attached" to researching stable and site-specific forms of working and learning (Guile & Lahiff 2012; Grugulis & Stoyanova 2011). Fundamentally, permanent workers have the opportunity to align their goals and search for personal meaning within the cultural norms and forms of the company they work for (Du Gay 1996).  Freelancers, on the other hand, move across multiple sites where they develop a number of "figured worlds" (Holland 1998) because of the dexterity required of them to adapt and contextualise services where the services are valued (T. Fenwick 2008). Success can be seen as arising from the development of capabilities to make multiple transitions and to navigate these 'figured worlds'. This fundamental distinction in the "way of being" between the permanent worker and his non-permanent counterpart has significant impact on learning and development. We assess here the theories and concepts in workplace learning, and how they may apply to freelance work arrangements.

In understanding learning at and through work, workplace learning theorists informed us that how organisations establish their production processes and regulate the employment relationship (Rainbird et. al. 2004) shape the learning and identity of their employees to a considerable extent. Extending this concept to freelancers, understanding the contractual arrangements of freelancers in terms of how they are fitted into the production process, the specific job design, and the remuneration structure, among others, become a key starting point to understanding their vocational identity. They may experience the disadvantages of marginalisation or isolation by virtue of their contractual arrangements and limited access to in-house opportunities. Conversely, because freelancers move across multiple sites, they potentially have the chance for "boundary-crossing" (Wenger 2000). This enables them to access a range of environments to capture the full benefits of expansive environments, and minimise the effects of restrictive ones not possible for in-employment workers. However, the extent to which this access to multiple environments is *real*, rather than *imagined*, remains open for further study, as research has shown that access to jobs are typically presided by tight networks (Guile & Lahiff 2012; Bound et. al. 2013).

At another level, the workplace learning discourse tends to advance workplaces as coherent communities with access to experts and peer support (Billet 2002). In the context of freelancers, this throws up unique challenges because of the isolation they tend to experience. Some argue that contingent workers are denied the opportunity to develop cohesive work-based identities because these workers are not part of workplace interaction in the same ways in which more permanent workers are. For instance, in UK's freelance-dominated TV industry, experienced workers are said to be not available for novices to consult or observe because of freelance arrangements, thus "creating a community with a missing middle" (Grugulis & Stoyanava 2011, p.342). Additionally, Standing argues that labour flexibility hinders peer-group interaction and has a negative impact on work ethics which become "constantly contestable and opportunistic" (2011, p.23). However, Perrons (2003) cautions against assuming that freelance employment inevitably creates social fragmentation given the potential for new working arrangements to be developed to foster communal and affective ties.

Workplace learning theorists also make a distinction between the different types of learning, with implications on development. Following Piaget (1968), Billet (1999) notes two types of learning. The first may be linked to the seemingly less demanding aspects of learning for "assimilation" such as following existing procedures to perform a new task. The second requires "accommodation", and is related to the process of "developing new knowledge when faced with a novel situation" (1999, p.153). Ellstrom (2006) makes a similar distinction between "adaptive or reproductive learning", versus "developmental or creative learning". Understanding the freelancers' access to different types of learning becomes critical in helping us appreciate the barriers and enablers to their learning and development.

Another facet of learning is the processes of knowledge re-contextualisation that are said to lie at the heart of workplace learning, as knowledge is put to work in different environments (Evans et. al. 2009; Evans et. al. 2010; Evans & Guile 2012). The significance of prior knowledge and skills is widely acknowledged, as moving into and between new workplaces involves much more than the simple transfer of prior skills and knowledge. Skills and knowledge have to be developed and changed, as they are operationalized in the culture of the workplaces. Furthermore, it is not the skills and knowledge that develop, but the whole person, as he/she adjusts with greater or lesser success to working in a new environment (Hager & Hodkinson 2010). For the freelancer, knowledge contextualisation is especially demanding in the context of the shifting terrains they constantly navigate. As observed by Bound et. al. (2013) of Singapore's film & TV industry, each work arrangement typically requires "rapid reading" of the visible and invisible embeddedness of dimensions of workplace environments, requiring high metacognitive and cultural skills on the part of the freelancer.

At another level, workplace learning theorists informed us that the use of workplace learning affordances depends on the individuals' prior abilities and experience, and their dispositions towards work and learning (Evans et. al 2004; Billett 2006; Hodkinson 2008). Views that assume shared social practices are experienced in the same way and shape identities uniformly are not borne out by empirical evidence (Kirpal et. al. 2004). An individual's personal history provides a platform for their coming to know and making sense of what is encountered in workplaces (Billet 2006). This process of sense-making fundamentally shapes and reflects the person's intentionality and agency in the ways in which they engage with work roles, learning opportunities and the wider social environment. This requires an understanding of a person's biography even as we note that the distribution of affordances is far from benign and is associated with occupational hierarchies and the dynamics of the contractual and wage relationship (Felstead et. al. 2009).

The extent to which workers on short-term contracts can personalise their workplace environments and influence workplace cultures and practices, which in turn impacts on their learning, is likely to be less than those in more permanent positions. Accessing affordances becomes a highly individualised process. Reflection becomes a 'general pedagogic stance' (Edwards 1998, p.386) that is vital to the effective navigation of shifting terrains. In the context of the continuous needs for shape-shifting to meet fluid and multiple work demands, the maintenance of internal points of reference and continuous internal life appear necessary to avoid fragmentation (Felstead et. al. 2009; Karmel et. al. 2013). Consequently, causalities of contract-based work are likely to occur where workers lose a sense of continuity and direction and are unable to access support that could help them.

A key strength to be leveraged for freelancers is that they tend to work in teams. Several types of workplace-based learning arise naturally as people work

collaboratively on tasks: seeking out and observing those who are "knowledgeable" about the task or activity; peer support; focused workplace discussion; searching out new information, ideas and solutions; mentoring and coaching (Taylor, Evans & Mohamed 2008).

At the same time, the literature on the workplace also surfaces the limits of learning at and through work. By relying entirely on learning that takes place as part of everyday work, the individual risks the danger of reproducing inefficient practices (Billet 2001; Fuller & Unwin 2008). This is a valuable cautionary note especially as we note that freelancers typically avoid access to formal learning because of the opportunity costs associated with being away from work (Jacques 2012).

In summary, the theories and concepts associated with workplace learning, while developed from the experience of permanent workers in stable working communities, remain valuable in helping us grasp the challenges and opportunities of learning and development of freelance workers. This entails a multi-faceted understanding of the identity formation of the freelance worker because such identity is fundamental to the 'how' and 'why' of workplace practice. It enables the exploration of ways in which existing and or/new programmes might be able to support an identity formation that enhances productive and satisfying workplace lives. A limitation of this body of literature is the implicit assumption that the availability of learning affordances and agency in accessing them enables the worker to be in a good position to drive his or her career. This may arise from the origins of the literature situated in stable communities based on developing vocational practice, where developmental pathways and trajectories are typically provided for. It is less apparent if this implicit assumption is applicable in the freelance world marked more by elements of navigation, risks and uncertainties with unclear and yet-to-be discovered pathways and trajectories. It is to the literature on career mobility that we now turn to for concepts that may enable us to understand the career mobility of freelancers.

## 2.4 Career mobility – the individual and movement capital

Mobility appears central to our understanding of how careers develop (Ng et. al. 2007; Sullivan 1999), and this takes heightened forms for the freelancer who typically lacks clear developmental trajectories. In conception of apprenticeship for freelance work in the media industry by Guile & Lahiff, a distinction is made between "vocational practice" - defined as "knowledge, skill and judgement" - and "social capital" – defined as "networks to secure future employment" (2012, p.2). Bound et. al. (2013) make a similar observation for Singapore's TV industry by identifying "craft" and "entrepreneurial" aspects in the freelancer's "ways of being", while emphasising that the two are not separated but integrated. Career mobility is

intricately linked to conceptions of success that may be described as objective such as higher income or better contracts, or subjective such as mastery of skills for professional satisfaction (Arthur et. al. 2005). Consistent with the literature on contingent workers, most research for new career concepts are focused on the high agentic involvement of motivated individuals. This has been criticised as overly optimistic, and applies to only "some individuals, some organizations, some industries" (Inkson et. al. 2008, p.24). Sennett (1998) additionally notes that the pursuit of flexibility may produce new structures of power and control rather than creating conditions that set people free. Consequently, Forrier et. al. (2009) argue for the interplay between structure and agency in understanding the factors that shape individuals' careers set. In this regard, they put forth "movement capital" as a concept comprising human capital, social capital, self-awareness and adaptability as key determinants, consistent with the variables identified in theories of workplace learning.  In building structure into their model, they identify "ease of movement" and "willingness to move" as two important variables. "Ease of movement" is linked to availability of work roles that are visible for a person and for which he or she is qualified. "Willingness to move" is linked to self-awareness but may also have structural components such as attractiveness of the future work-role and/or aspects related to wages. These are important concepts to help us asses the developmental trajectories of freelancers.

## 2.5 Summary

The above discussion surfaces the limitations of current academic discourse on non-permanent workers in that the sharp dichotomy between the conceptualisation of the same worker as precarious and contingent do not lead to a useful understanding of the worker. We propose here for a more nuanced appreciation of agentic and structural factors, and their interplay over time, to help understand the experience and trajectory of the non-permanent worker. The socio-cultural discourse on workplace learning offers many tools for us to understand the whole person, their context outside of work, as well as the ways in which they engage in and with work though contractual relationships, and the production process. Vocational identity is placed at the centre for analysis, but considered in relation to the larger socio-economic system the individual resides in. Tools from research on career mobility, most notably the concepts of "ease of movement" and "willingness to move", will be used to help us understand both the structural and agentic barriers to development.

# 3.0 "Ways of Being"

## 3.1 Five dimensions of "ways of being"

We present here the main findings from our data in relation to the "ways of being" of a freelancer in technical theatre across five key dimensions, with a view to capturing changes over time. These five dimensions are:

- Motivation for entry;

- Starting out;

- Building skills;

- Progress in their careers; and

- Managing income uncertainty.

## 3.2 Motivation for entry: passion for the arts vs passion for industry

The "figured world" of the freelance technical theatre practitioner must first be understood in the context of Singapore's competitive society where there is enormous pressure to secure permanent forms of employment. Entry into this industry almost always requires one to start by freelancing. In our interviews, freelancers often feel the need to justify why they opt for freelance work over permanent employment, even without prompting. Typically this is defined in terms of passion. A closer examination suggests that a distinction exists between those who articulate passion in relation to the arts, versus those who speak of a passion in relation to the industry, with profound implications on the subsequent evolution of their freelance careers.

For those expressing passion for the arts, joining the industry is always deliberate. They may have a personal interest in the arts or had prior exposure at school, and tend to have higher educational qualifications. Ashley, who holds a diploma in hospitality, was involved in Chinese drama while in school. An inspiring trip to the Sydney Opera House motivated him to try the industry out:

> "I went to Sydney Opera House. I looked at the theatre. I liked the theatre and I feel that hey, I would love to work in a theatre."

Yati, a diploma-holder in audio-visual studies and currently a lighting programmer, likewise sees herself as creating art for an audience, and is crystal clear about her long-term plan in the industry:

> "When I first stepped into this industry, I tell myself I want to be a very, very well-known lighting designer around the world...I am still fighting for that dream to come true (because) that will really satisfy me…I hope that day would come in 10-15 years' time."

The contrast is stark with those who articulate their passion in terms of interest in the industry. Their entry into this industry is almost always incidental. This group tends to have secondary education or less, and typically enter by tagging along as an extra pair of hands to friends or family already in the industry. Reza's path into the industry was not unlike many others:

> "Most of my friends are in this industry. We are the younger 'gen' that followed them...The start was doing odd jobs which involve theatre and events. Before that, I didn't know this industry at all but the interest builds up…"

In effect, we are seeing the outcome of what this study calls the "venue effect" as a consequence of Singapore's uneven arts development that prioritises infrastructure-building over arts and cultural productions. The major public and private investment in theatrical venues are linked to cultural tourism, and dependent on revenue from the more lucrative international shows. This has the effect of "crowding out" local arts production, who are now confronted by two new issues of rising rent, and an audience who prioritises international shows over local ones. The outcome is a skewing of the profile of workers in the industry to be more "technician-focused" to meet the relatively stronger demand from theatre venues and event companies. Frank, an industry veteran reminisced that previously technicians tend to be in the industry because "we enjoy the show, we enjoy the experience", but things have changed:

> "Now, a lot of them have never been involved in theatre before… it's a technician's job, they do it. There are a lot of technicians here who go out of their way to try and find solutions but there are also many who have a technician mentality. You tell me what to do or (they) take the safe way."

Ben, a director of British nationality at a local theatre venue, finds this situation perplexing and "uniquely Singapore":

> "In the UK, if somebody wanted to work in the industry, they developed a passion or an interest or an intrigue in the theatre world…and then went on to pursue a career, not necessarily the one they set out to do but to an auxiliary career …. Over here, I can't think of a single person who is doing

a technical job here because they have a passion for the arts that they're working."

The disinterest in the artistic product is reflected in the remarks below from Din, a freelance technician who joined the industry through networks:

> "We are the technicians.  When we do something, we make sure everything is good.  What happens to the show or how the story goes, we don't [sic]. To us, it's a normal thing."

This raises an important issue on the professional identity of practitioners in technical theatre that appears to be moving away from an "arts identity" towards a "technical identity" as an outcome of meeting current industry needs, yet detrimental to its long-term growth.  Whether the freelancers see themselves as "artists" or "technicians" will influence the job opportunities they seek, and how they evolve their career.  As Billet (2001) explains, developing a good understanding of the "goals for performance" is a key aspect of workplace learning, and artistic understanding and appreciation must necessarily be an integral part of workplace performance in this industry.  This should not be taken as a lack of cognitive ability on the part of this group of technicians linked to lower educational qualifications.  Examples abound in mature technical theatre industries of top designers and specialist technicians with lower pre-service qualifications. What it means instead is that the opportunities to understand the "goals of performance" in the context of the work site may be limited. A look at the production process based on interviews with both freelancers and employers reveals why this is an exceptional challenge in the local industry. Freelancers, described as "casuals" by theatre venues, are paid by the hour and typically fit at the periphery, with the core planning work with arts groups being done by full-timers. In the concert industry, equipment rental companies prize expediency and efficiency above the creative process. In the MICE industry, delivering good service is key, and artistic delivery is minimal at best. The main opportunities are in arts production houses, which we note are feeling squeezed. The lack of opportunities to understand the "goals for performance" is not experienced in equal measure by those with a passion for the arts as their interest will always prompt them to look elsewhere. It is not coincidental that both Yati and Ashley articulate their interest in relation to international experiences.

This analysis of a shift towards a "technician disposition" may provide a partial explanation to the problem of shortage of talent at the design and production management levels as freelancers entering by the network route do not naturally aspire towards design and production management jobs. This supports the approach advanced by Evans et. al. (2006) of the need to look at the personal biographies of the individual when assessing inclinations to partake in learning affordances. At another level, it signifies the lack of professionalism in the sector as technicians do not have adequate work-process knowledge nor are well-inducted into the work

ethics of the industry. Standing (2011) notes that labour market flexibility undermines work ethics that now become "constantly contestable and opportunistic", as appears to be the case with this group of freelancers who are paid by the hour.  Alex, an industry veteran and employer at a major theatre venue, laments:

> "A lot of techs do not understand that when it comes to rehearsal, it's not a time for you to laze at the side. It is time for you to look at what is actually happening and the probability of things going wrong on stage. .. When it comes to rehearsal, straight up the whole side stage is lit up because everybody has a smart phone…playing movies loudly and laughing. This is the kind of attitude that we have in the workforce…They are doing their stuff, while I am paid by the hours."

## 3.3 Starting out: the power of networks, and the threat of premature exits

The above analysis of a shift to a "technical disposition" provides only a partial explanation about the simultaneous problems of stagnation and shortage of manpower at design/production levels. Compounding the issue is the threat of premature exit of individuals most likely to aspire to those levels, namely those entering the industry because of a passion for the arts.

In technical theatre, it is networks that preside over the distribution of jobs and by extension, learning opportunities and work identities. Their enormous power can only be understood in the context of the production process in technical theatre. Collaboration sits at the heart of this process. It is a cumulative one of different parts working simultaneously and building up to a single "live show" with dire consequences if even one member of a team fails to do his or her part.  Networks in this industry are thus tight as a means of managing risks. Those who engage freelancers almost always rely on "word-of-mouth" recommendations. Someone somewhere within the network must provide informal validation of the individual as much as possible. Seasoned professionals who hire junior team members are dismissive of paper qualifications, CVs and LinkedIn profiles.  At best, these references are used as a means to check if the individual is associated with someone known to the hirer.

Consequently, the failure to get immersed into networks will put an end to a freelance career prematurely. The odds are stacked high for beginning freelancers who enter the industry not through the network route. In our interviews, these freelancers tend to express greater difficulty in getting jobs, having to build networks from scratch in contrast to the other group who are well-immersed in networks right at the onset. Getting jobs on one's own is a key aspect to being seen as a professional for this

segment of freelancers, which is never articulated with the same level of intensity by those who enter by the "network route".  Rina, a beginning freelancer who joined the industry after a three-year course in music technology, says:

> "Now I am just working in the Esplanade and my outside jobs are [through] my mentor …when I start to get my own contacts and start getting jobs from people that I don't know, then I think I am a professional."

The comments stand in sharp contrast to those by Reza who has similar number of years of industry experience as Rina but who entered the industry through friends:

> "Singapore always has events going on because of tourism…. You always meet people and [ask] hey, where you're working and then you ask a bit about their job, and then maybe recommendations after that."

We note that those at-risk tend to be more educated and therefore attractive options lie outside of the industry. Echoing Rina's experience, Ashley opted for a permanent job in the shipping industry after two years of trying and despite being seen as a promising practitioner recruited under the flagship Technical Theatre Training Programme:

> "I don't want to freelance anymore because it's very unstable and I was getting lesser and lesser (sic) calls (from Esplanade)…I started out with passion, but slowly the passion became money and money became a job…my passion kind of died….I definitely feel I didn't know the difficulty…of being a freelancer."

The analysis here suggests that the biographies of freelancers have a direct correlation to their skills needs. In the case of those entering the industry with a passion for the arts, many PET and CET programmes provide robust training of technical skills without sufficient exposure on aspects related to people and networking. This should not be understood simply as hard skills to be imparted, but to be accompanied with the creation of opportunities for a beginning practitioner to get himself or herself immersed into networks, and be inducted into the work norms and ethics of the industry. The "ease of movement" is low because those entering via non-network routes are structurally at a disadvantage.  Ashley lost out because the TTTP programme gave him a good grounding of skills in lighting, sound and production, but his experience was not accompanied with an induction into networks beyond Esplanade that was critical to a beginning freelancer. The case of Ron, one of Singapore's top lighting designers, suggests a similar experience of a disadvantage among those entering not via the network routes. Ron had very advanced skills when he entered the industry at the age of 21, made possible because of a rare opportunity to hone his skills on a lighting board at church. Yet he had difficulty securing jobs in the initial years. Only after he joined La Salle's diploma

programme did the job offers come in after an opportunity to work alongside professionals at school:

> "I had very advanced skills…but nobody would give me a chance because they don't know [who] I am, and they don't know what I can do.  It wasn't until the last year [before I] graduate that I started to get a bit more work… [The practitioner-lecturers] don't look at your study results. They want to know…when a prop is missing, how this person reacts? The light is flickering, what does this person do?... If you are good, [the practitioner-lecturers] will just pull you out and say, I want you to work on my show. Once you get a foot in and someone well-established says this guy can work, people will say good, come and work on my show and it is very much that way."

This lack of access to jobs is a serious impediment to the professional development of beginning freelancers at another level, as they are required to rapidly build skills that enable them to move across work sites speedily. "Shape-shifting" is a key "way of being" for freelancers as a response to fitting into diverse work environments and contributing through various job roles (Fenwick, T.J. 2004). This is consistent with the experience in technical theatre, yet this is not an easy skill-set to acquire without adequate job experiences, and accompanying self-reflection. Yati commented that the school experience is often inadequate because it is tied to a single venue which does not reflect the way practitioners operate in the industry:

> "Now if I shift you to another place, will you know how to do it? Will you use the same [techniques]? So that is where you need to switch your mind and not a lot of people can do that…Like I am somewhere else, I need to do it in a different manner, a different system,…different people,…a different way of doing things and you have to respect that…Because it is not the same everywhere."

Here, in reference to the understanding by Billet (2001), we see that the process of learning through "assimilation", while less demanding in the context of stable work opportunities, is actually onerous for beginners that require them to quickly master the "rapid reading" of environments quickly.  Beginners are often challenged because they are likely to fumble in the initial periods, with the risk of a premature end to their career. In our interviews, we hear of employers and industry veterans lamenting that students were entering the industry with unrealistic expectations of becoming designers, producers and directors, without working from the ground up. The comment below is typical:

> "Yes we are short of people but there can also be too many people especially those with no practical experience of doing things in a professional way…[P]eople take on fresh grads and that's when they realised, oops."

In the final analysis, networks in technical theatre offer a restrictive environment to the development of beginning freelancers, especially those entering the industry not through the network route. They face a disproportionate amount of challenge being initiated into the "ways of being" of freelancing without sufficient opportunities to make and learn from their mistakes, and receive constructive feedback that typically come from informal mentors in the industry. Frank notes that in the US, a fresh graduate will not design his or her own show for the first 10 years but start as an assistant or an associate. This allows him or her to build credentials and gain experience. In the UK, the process might take four years. For the segment of young freelancers with the passion for the arts, the easy entry into the industry but high barriers to learning may eventually lead to industry leakage, given the more attractive options outside of the industry that promises stable income and clearer career progression paths. The above analysis should not suggest that those who enter the industry via networks have it easy in the industry. In fact, the data suggests the risk of path dependence leading to stagnation, a point we will return to in Section 3.5.

## 3.4 Honing one's craft: opportunities and limitations of learning at and through work

As suggested in the preceding analysis, there is significant amount of learning taking place at and through work, and it appears to be the main means for honing one's craft in the industry. The collaborative nature of work in technical theatre means that there are many opportunities to learn from fellow co-workers. Ron shares with us how he picked up tips from a well-known lighting designer while supporting the latter as a lighting operator:

> "I would sit down with [him]…, not like he is teaching me but because he will tell me, I want this channel at this per cent, you start to see his working process…When you are working with someone of that calibre and experience, you would pay attention to everything he is doing, how he communicates and what he is trying to do. A lot of times you don't understand what he is trying to do. Just going through the entire process of 2-3 weeks of working with him building up the show step-by-step, you learn that this is [his] way of doing things, what works, what doesn't, why it works and how do you get that - it is a tremendous privilege."

Adi explains how he and his team of technical crew friends picked the brains of international practitioners whom they worked with on shows:

> "We read, we learn from the foreigners – the English, the Australians, the Americans. We learn from them. We copy everything that they do. We ask them questions because experience is everything to us…we know there

are something that they need to do like let's say the chandelier is going to fall down, how are they going to achieve that? We don't know but know that it's automation but then we do it with them then we learn…, then they will explain."

Sometimes the learning takes place at the sideline of work activities.  Typically, this would require the junior freelancer to deftly find a way to connect and bond with the experienced co-worker.  For instance, Sue had the chance to work with a freelancer known as the "radio guru" for one show. It was for a short period, but proved to be a transformational experience for Sue.

> "I offered to help clean the mikes…The things she taught open more ideas to things. I was only with her for that show, but the way she teach[sic], I could explore more by myself… She even put the mike into the water to let me hear and the mike costs like $800… the idea is if sweat goes in, how does it sound like…, we were shocked. If you put the mike in the water, wouldn't it short-circuit or spoil? She said that that particular mike if it's wet, you just hang it upside down for a long period of time… it's built to be like that because it's on the face, so you get sweat going in."

Helmi likewise benefitted from a highly experienced co-worker who demonstrated valuable tricks-of-the-trade during informal sessions at work:

> "[H]e is very, very good and he is not selfish… Whenever we ask him, he will show us. Like for us to get these things done, [it would be in] four or five steps but for him it is one or two steps…He can earn about $700-800 a day… because he travelled and worked overseas. That is a lot of experience."

On the surface, the above examples appear to suggest expansive learning opportunities in the industry. Consistent with the warning raised in the literature on the limitations of workplace learning, a closer examination suggests that the low barriers to entry tend to lead to haphazard development of core skills as there is a lack of opportunities for the structured development of expertise. The comments from Adi who first joined in the industry in the 1990s are telling:

> "How did I progress? …. There are no professional people because the professional people are us, which is not professional. We're not trained, we're untrained, so we're very raw but we're willing to learn."

It takes very motivated individuals to overcome the learning barriers. Zac came into the industry with Primary 6 qualifications, but took the initiative to research and understand the fundamentals of rigging including learning Additional Maths concepts from his sister and friends.

> "In rigging, you need to know your calculations. You need to know your angle, the angle of bridle, you need to know your points, the weight, the tension, this is [sic] all maths. And as a person without any education level, it is very hard to learn maths especially A Maths just to accommodate my job. So I learnt from scratch, I asked my sister, I asked my friends to help me with all of this."

Yet his experience showed the limits of learning at work in the local technical theatre industry as a freelancer. It was only after he joined Esplanade as a full-timer did he have access to a professionally-trained co-worker from whom he learnt the proper industry terms which he deems necessary to be considered an expert.

Another freelancer, Barry, recounts how he was asked to do a lighting job on the fly, because of manpower crunch:

> "They cannot find people so when I went in, I told them [I've only done] staging. So they said no worries, just follow this instruction sheet. These are the codes you just go pick whatever you want. And when I pick I [made] mistakes because some [codes] had no markings, I just pick anyhow. At the end of the day, I said I'm so sorry I am here just purely to help but if you find that my knowledge is not up to date I am so sorry because in the first place I'd already spelt out that I am a more staging crew and not so much [in] lighting and sound. But they are forgiving and they said no worries, just learnt on the spot. At least I help them to offload 50%... even though half of it I don't get it right they have to do it over again but at least I get half of it done." [sic]

This haphazard development of core skills is linked to how freelancers fit into the production process, and the general industry expectations that they learn on the job. Ben, of British nationality, is a director at a theatre venue, and feels that there is a lack of appreciation of the depth of expertise required of a technical theatre practitioner:

> "[In lighting for instance] we don't just turn up for a few lights up there and turn them off. There are various theories of physics or psychology involved in lighting design in other parts of the world. I do not see that in Singapore… They watched visiting companies and picked up all the bad habits … There's no underpinning knowledge and the quality ain't there."

Theatre venues, and Esplanade especially, are often lauded as being exceptional in offering good quality training to freelancers. However, sentiments from the ground and Zac's case suggest that the learning is still constrained compared to the opportunities open to full-timers. More importantly, because of the way they fit into the production process, freelancers do not have the chance to truly hone their craft with many suggesting that theatre jobs are easier compared to outdoor events and

concerts. Even when trained, freelancers usually have few opportunities to practise on the equipment unless they have gained the goodwill of full-timers. For outdoor opportunities, on the other hand, freelancers appear to have more expansive job roles but suffer from the lack of access to experts.

The way local arts is being developed in Singapore impedes craft development at the core. Says Carl, one of Singapore's top sound designers:

> "Our bar is sometimes so low, it's painful. Our biggest cliché term is got [sic] sound can already. Audience doesn't care... The creative process gets chopped up simply because of money. There is little time for rehearsals. Time is something that neither talent nor skills can reproduce."

He notes that a quantitative approach to arts funding "kills creativity":

> "The theatre groups…they are being forced to produce. You take my funding means that in one year, you have to produce these four shows. Then the funding gets cut [up], so [too] the number of hours, everything also gets cut, [and it] comes out - technical. [In Scandinavia], you just need to show the process. As long as I'm happy with your process, I will sign and give you the money….One simple idea can take one year to develop, so the government funds them for that one year."

This contrasts with the experience of Flora who took on a scholarship with the National Arts Council (NAC) to study technical theatre in the UK. She recalls vividly being involved as a small-time crew in an elaborate play where an artist used his entire hometown as a stage.

> "There was never a point where he breaks character. So even at night when he goes to one of the hills to stay, it was filmed and recorded so that people could watch it online. There's so much technicalities to it that you just learn. If you ask me what I learned, I really don't know…but it's just taking it to the next level."

In the context of the quality of local productions, it did not take long before she feels that she is not challenged sufficiently.

> "When I worked [in the UK], there's so much to learn because you have skilled people who are achieving a higher standard of art."

The net effect we see is that the element of professionalism in the work identity of freelancers is in short supply. Flora lacks the language to elaborate on the learning she experienced being part of a crew of an elaborate play in the UK. This explains the seeming lack of professionalism in the workforce, which should not be seen as a lack of capability or capacity of workers but rather the limitations they face as a result

of industry practices, the production process and their job roles. Unless "demand-side" issues from the employers are tackled especially in their recruitment practices and design of freelance jobs, as well as the opportunities for creative roles, skills development may remain difficult. This is not to imply that there is little to be done in providing opportunities for skills development through supply-side provisions either through PET or CET institutions. However, as the experience of Flora demonstrates, any skills-supply programmes must be accompanied by a parallel engagement of employers and the industry as a whole to aid utilisation. Unsurprisingly, at our reference group session, representatives of educational institutions lament their students were not valuing the educational experience, as jobs were being offered to them even before graduating.

## 3.5 Progress: stability vs craft, niches and "deliberate ruptures"

What does progression mean for freelancers in technical theatre? As noted in Section 3.2, the figured world of freelancers is often contrasted with the world of permanent employment, and perspectives change over time as a result of family, health and other personal and professional circumstances.

For one group, going into full-time employment becomes the desired progression path to overcome the problems of inconsistent income, punishing hours and declining stamina. There appears to be no link between the level of educational qualifications and the desire for full-time employment, except that those with a diploma or a degree have more options to climb into management roles within the industry, or pursue full-time opportunities elsewhere. Those with lower level educational qualifications, however, appear to be stuck in that the opportunities for full-time employment at theatre venues are finite, while options outside of the industry will leave them worse-off. Din exemplifies the typical profile of such freelance workers. A veteran who hones his skills at outdoor events, Din now shuns such jobs because of the long-hours and hard work in favour of jobs at a particular theatre venue even though he finds the latter less satisfying professionally and akin to "babysitting". He moved quickly to the highest level possible for freelancers because of prior skills accumulated at outdoor events, but that progression has since been "flat". Full-time options outside of the industry, however, will leave him worse off:

> "I've been looking for a job but you see, I'm used to work in this line. I would say that the average of my pay is $3000, …$2500. So other jobs with my knowledge and qualification, other jobs that I apply I cannot really get this kind of pay. So it's been hard for me. I have to come back here. I don't have any opportunity to even upgrade myself. The only thing that I can hope and pray for is to become a full timer here which is hard."

For another group, however, staying on as freelancer is vital. This is the committed freelancer who deliberately opts for a "boundary-less" career fraught with a high level of uncertainty because it is key to craft development. The opportunity to work across sites, genres, national borders and with different teams of people enable them to acquire diverse sets of experiences and access to different experts, not available if they were to remain with one employer. This is true at all levels of the production process, from the specialist technician to the lighting designer and production manager. Indeed, diversity and international work opportunities seem to be strong markers of the work identity of the committed freelancers. In the context of the strong growth of full-time employment opportunities, staying on as a freelancer is a conscious choice. Yati, a beginning freelancer, found herself in a dilemma when she received job offers from two flagship theatre venues. She was guided by her career goal:

> "If you know about our industry, the most successful are actually freelancers...because they can move around anywhere you see. One day you can be in Singapore, the next day you can be in Macau. You can be in Europe doing a set-up, doing a show, then you can tour around…it broadens your views, your perspectives....when you stay in one place, you'll be so contained in it."

Ted, who is now in a full-time managerial position, explains that as a technician, he was committed to looking for challenges beyond the shores:

> "When I was a technician, I dreamed to tour. I dreamed to work on a Broadway show as a technician….the events in Singapore would seem boring and mundane to me. I want to look for a bigger challenge to do bigger events and where is the opportunity going to come from? Overseas…, even Malaysia has bigger events than Singapore."

Not all made it to stay on as freelancers. Adi, a specialist technician who was operating internationally, is now a full-timer at a theatre venue. He is nostalgic about his work experiences as a freelancer and wishes to return to it, but sees full-time work as a practical choice to be with his children who are growing up.

Regardless of the desired progression, the "way of being" of freelancers necessarily requires one to develop niches amidst diverse experiences. This is not an easy task as it entails navigating networks that exhibit path dependence effects. Alex informs us that how one entered the industry has important ramifications on subsequent development:

> "If you come in and work with a contractor that does events, it might be event is the only thing and that is the circle that you are keeping to."

Without a strong sense of core, it is not easy to progress well in freelancing. Says Jay, one of the region's top freelance lighting designers:

> "If you start in a freelance world, you [must] have a direction - you say I want to do theatre, I want to become a concert specialist, I want to be a console specialist. If you want to become a console specialist, you won't simply take up a sound job or a cable job. You will just focus on doing the console job and wait for the next console job and plan for the console job. If concerts are coming, I am going to initiate and call up - do you need a console operator?. Obviously there are people who are not very sure what they want and doing everything, and end up not being focused on certain skill that can actually help them to advance. Dance jobs, advantage in dance market. You sharpen it into a point and make it your advantage. Otherwise you just become general lighting design, and don't have the extra demand power. You have to find the niche market."

An important aspect of progression in the freelance world of technical theatre is what this study calls "deliberate ruptures". For those aspiring to higher levels, while being a technician is deemed as necessary to start a freelance career in the industry, it may constrain the long-term growth of freelancers subsequently. Carl, now a top sound designer says, "Somebody along the line, he has to say I don't want to do, I don't want to become technician."

Jed, a technician turned lighting designer, explains the dilemma:

> "(Being a) technician pays you a lot of money. To go into design, you need to sacrifice some of that money. A specialised technician could be earning $6,000 compared to new lighting designers who may be undercutting at $1,500/month. In the past, while I was building up my name as a designer, I was doing tech to supplement my income. I'm still doing that now. "

Carl took the hard option of quitting a full-time job at a theatre venue to establish himself as a sound designer. Jed and Ron took up LASALLE programmes as a means to establish themselves as lighting designers after limited success in the market. Carl continues to make deliberate ruptures. He has set up two companies. This is a major shift in his work identity:

> "For three-quarters of my life I… don't care, don't want to know about the whole business. I just do my thing. I'm a craftsman, whether I'm an artist or not, I let other people judge. I don't care but I'm a craftsman. I do this and *da, da, da*. But now I need to run company. Now CPF sends me email, I actually read it."

The negotiating and re-negotiating of work identities are not unique to freelance employment, but have to be undertaken in a more deliberate manner for freelancers.

Indeed, borrowing from the literature on career mobility, we see that progression is onerous because of the relative difficulty in movement linked to sharp ruptures in one's "ways of being", and the general unwillingness to move linked to the risks in taking on a new work-role. Self-awareness is critical. This entails, amongst other factors, knowing what jobs to take, what to turn down, and what to seek out. This "industry process knowledge" is potentially emancipatory for the freelancer. The challenge is enormous for those who come into the industry without a clear direction, specifically those entering the industry through network routes as outlined in Section 3.2. Their path in the industry need not be deterministic, if they can be helped by good industry mentors. Jed had the opportunity to be taught by Carl who was a part-time educator at LASALLE. He still remembers Carl's advice:

> "[Carl told us] don't get too comfortable being a tech. He said sure go out and be a tech, do it for four, do it for five years, do it for 10 years. Don't stay there because at the end of the day, it really stifles you."

The above quote should not be taken as being dismissive of technician jobs but rather to suggest that being a technician has a certain path dependence that would require a deliberate shift from it if one seeks alternative pathways. The challenge is to communicate this information to freelancers early enough and in an effective manner so that they can make informed choices about their career. At another level, the freelance technician job-role requires redesign and the creation of specialised pathways, beyond progression into permanent jobs. That "deliberate ruptures" are required to facilitate progression suggest the presence of structural impediments blocking the ease of movement into new work roles, making it onerous on individual agency. The introduction of programmes and initiatives to ease the movement into new work roles seems necessary.

# 3.6 Managing precarity: simple coping vs taking the bull by its horns

Income and employment uncertainty are top concerns among all the freelancers interviewed, regardless of their career stage. Despite being widely seen as a top lighting designer, Ron still has fears:

> "No matter how established you are, you always have this little fear inside you when is my next job going to come."

What the data suggests is that there are short-term and long-term ways to mitigate the risks of income uncertainty and inconsistency. Zaki provides the bare minimum approach.

"When I work four days a month..(or) only one or two shows, OK, time to start calling people."

Rizal sets up a range of safety nets that may last him for three months.

"[One] would be my savings, [then]…those people who owe me money, [then]… outside jobs….It may be a delivery job, it may be an IT job, whatever it is we just have to find. .. it really works and I'm like smiling even though I'm not working for three months but I still have money."

Others have more long-term approaches. Ron shares how he plans his savings:

"The first thing I did once I graduated was to sit down with a financial planner and said I am a freelancer, I don't have CPF, I don't have all this, what should I be buying? What should I be planning for? And I did that and I contribute a good 20-30 per cent of my pay to long-term savings and you need to because if you don't, nobody will save you."

Teaching is often cited as a valuable fall-back plan. Ron is entertaining such thoughts:

"I have been looking at getting a degree or Master's so that I can perhaps move into teaching. As I hit my 30s, you get more and more tired. I would like to stay in Singapore more consistently."

Jed, for instance, does part-time lecturing at educational institutions to get a steady source of income, which he then pumps into a company. Having a company is also a means to get legal protection compared to operating as a freelancer. However, there may be trade-offs. Says Jed:

"Last month I was asked to go to China for two months but I can't go because … I still have to protect my teaching market. I mean, sure I get paid very well for two months but what do I do after that when I come back? Somebody here would have taken over my job here because they will probably need to find a replacement for me…I look at the long-term."

The way one manages one's craft as a business is an integral part of mitigating employment risks. Jay set up a theatre consultancy early in his career for the benefit of his children:

"I set up a company that is supposed to help me stabilize the issue because I have a family of children of three, so I cannot afford to have uncertainty when the children start growing up. It is very difficult to see that."

Carl actively recruited assistants to help him on shows, and that prepares him for the next level of jobs:

> "..I make sure I have assistants [on my shows]…I use my pay, I cut my pay… I can call upon a team readily because of all these things that I have done. It wasn't an accident. I was teaching, and I was very clear that apart from sharing knowledge, I'm finding potential people who can help me. So now I can take on multiple jobs and kind of like spread it out, make sure that all of them run well under my name but I don't need to cut myself into four pieces."

At another level, consistent with the observation of Kong (2011), the current set of social institutions in Singapore is not equipped to deal with systemic precarity of freelancers, as regulations tend to benefit those engaged in permanent employment. This is typically in relation to medical benefits and the loss of income that might follow. These are concerns among both freelancers and employers. As Adi notes of the freelancers working with him,

> "These boys or girls, when they work as a freelancer, sometimes to tell you the truth, they work harder than a full-timer in that company but if anything happens to them, there's no black and white [sic]. If they get injured, if they hurt themselves during a process of working, there is nothing that actually shield them or protect them, that's it. There's no obligation for the company to pay for them."

In the final analysis, there are short-term and long-term solutions to managing the precarity aspects of self-employment. The challenge is that many freelancers appear unaware of the need to develop long-term plans for themselves that are appropriate to their future needs, both in terms of family life and state of health. Both Jed and Ron emphasise the need for more support to be given to freelancers to shift them towards adopting long-term strategies. Jed, for instance, shares that he advises young freelancers to always file their income tax returns as there would be proof of income in the future when they want to get a bank loan to purchase a house. Because precarity is typically experienced over time, early advice by mentors appears to be a valuable resource to freelancers. In addition, there appears to be a need for core social institutions in Singapore to evolve to deal with systemic precarity of these workers.

# 4.0 "Ways of Knowing"

## 4.1 Knowledge for a satisfying career

This chapter discusses the key types of knowledge important to the technical theatre practitioner to develop a long-term satisfying, professional career in the industry. In addition, it surfaces the kind of challenges experienced by freelancers at the different career stages and the learning they expressed as desirable.

## 4.2 Types of knowledge

Table 3 describes the types of knowledge desirable for the holistic development of the technical theatre practitioner.

**Table 3:** Types of knowledge

| Types of knowledge | Description |
|---|---|
| Theoretical knowledge | This refers to underpinning theories related to physics, electricity and psychology, for example. While they are not necessary at entry into the industry, they offer important foundational concepts for a deeper appreciation of current jobs, and as pre-positioning capital for more specialised work roles in the future. Those on PET programmes may have access to such knowledge, but may not have the opportunity to apply them at the workplace at the point when they are taught the knowledge. For those entering via the network route, they are limited in their access to this knowledge to a considerable extent because of the opportunity costs associated with formal training. This limits their ability to access more specialised job roles. |
| Technical knowledge & skills | This refers to immediate technical or craft skills relevant to the job roles e.g. operating the light board for the lighting operator, rigging lights. Most of these skills are acquired "just-in-time" at the workplace or through ad-hoc training typically available at venues. The skills are generally well-developed in the industry, but suffer from the lack of strong theoretical grounding. |

| Entrepreneurial knowledge (people skills, networking) | This refers to aspects of networking and niche-building related to working in teams for current jobs, and building social capital to secure future jobs. This is very much shaped by the individual biographies, as well as through access to peers and experts. Freelancers entering the industry not via the network route require more development of this set of skills. |
|---|---|
| Knowledge and appreciation of artistic genres and forms | This refers to understanding the final product in technical theatre i.e. the 'show'. The cultivation of knowledge and appreciation of artistic genres and forms will allow a worker to anticipate and propose new solutions, enhancing his or her productive capacity. This quality is said to be missing among technicians in general as well as graduates of PET technical theatre programmes. |
| Aesthetic skills | Involves judgements of taste and development of a style(s) appealing to the senses and emotions, and building upon the philosophy of art and beauty. It requires the ability to execute technical jobs with flair, and requires significant practice and support from peers and experts. |
| Industry process knowledge | This refers to an understanding of the immediate and long-term developmental opportunities in the industry. For instance, it requires an understanding of the process of getting jobs, the limitations of certain jobs over others, the opportunities to access support, and long term career options. Although the provision of information is important, peers and experts are valuable in helping to contextualise the information. |
| Income and financial planning | This refers to awareness of strategies to minimise income and employment risks related to financial and medical planning. Like industry process knowledge, the provision of basic information is important but augmented by advice from peers. |
| Business knowledge | This refers to corporate skills related to project management, running a business or securing bigger projects through government tenders. Although applicable generally to more established freelancers, such skills should be picked up early as pre-positioning capital to access bigger jobs. |

| Metacognitive, reflexive skills | This refers to reflexivity as a general pedagogic stance which is important in the context of the constant shape-shifting required of freelancers across diverse environments, and the need for high agentic involvement in driving his or her own career over the long-term. |

It is worthwhile noting that freelancers need the types of knowledge at different levels depending on their individual biographies, as well as the career stage they are at.

## 4.3 The beginning freelancer – getting in

For the beginning freelancer, getting access to multiple work sites is an immediate priority so as to become a viable freelancer who has a steady stream of income. Strong entrepreneurial skills to get jobs are required in this regard, consistent with the observation by Bound et. al. (2013) of practitioners in Singapore's film and television industry. He or she needs to be seen as effective at work and needs to quickly master the routine processes at different worksites. This process of re-contextualisation goes beyond technical skills to also include aspects related to the rapid reading of different work environments and cultural norms, among others. Reflective practice becomes an important strategy. Established freelancers often share with us how they tend to observe and take notes conscientiously early in their careers.

Being seen as effective at work not only ensures repeat jobs, but opens up opportunities for new learning as experts at the worksites are willing to share more with those they view as competent. This is critical as it marks the start of the deepening of the freelancers' craft. Based on our interviews, we note that it is almost always incidental that they get tips or advice from those more experienced than them. At the same time, the beginning freelancer needs to start developing a mid to long-term plan for him or herself in the industry, which includes aspects related to life and financial planning. A strong theoretical foundation is also important to pre-position him or herself for jobs. Its acquisition outside of school, however, is a challenge. This points to the need of considering merging the best of school and working world.

We note here that the analysis in the preceding chapter suggests that the individual biographies of freelancers co-relate with the challenges they face. For those with a passion for the industry, they have an edge in that their passion for the arts provides a strong internal compass. This is a strength that the industry should leverage. Their challenge, however, is the difficulty in penetrating networks to get jobs at the start of their career. Structurally, this is impeding the "ease of movement" for this set of beginning freelancers that leave them at risk of dropping out of the industry, and

moving into permanent jobs in other industries. At another level, the pre-service education system is biased towards preparing them for permanent jobs, without sufficient attention to the development of entrepreneurial skills, and the "ways of being" of a freelancer. As Yati notes in the preceding chapter, diploma courses prepare students based on a single venue. In addition, internships are usually arranged with venues because of the policy that students can only be released for internships with companies. Students, as such, are typically attached to permanent staff that may not open doors for them in the same way that a freelancer would.

Those entering using the network routes have an advantage at the start because they are already immersed in networks that enable easier access to jobs. However, they tend to suffer the effects of homophilous networks that limit their access to and awareness of experts. They appear to lack the same internal compass that leads us to observe a lack of "willingness to move" to new work roles to take craft development to the next level.

Regardless of their entry point, the overriding challenge of beginning freelancers is the lack of opportunities to develop meaningful relationships with experts necessary for a community of practice. Socialisation into an occupational community is important for craft deepening and development of work ethics. In the context of the freelance world, this also entails the sharing of advice and tips on navigating the freelance world, such as financial planning and strategies to hedge income and employment risks. From the data, we observed that there is a natural way of apprenticing with experts in the industry embedded within the production process, which should be developed and encouraged.

Yati gets called up for jobs by a freelance lighting designer as and when he needs help to cover him for jobs. She calls him a 'mentor', and she represents him at work and gets paid by him. He always prepares her for the assignments, disciplines her to get her to develop the right work ethics, and guides her through a reflection session at the end of each assignment. He trains her up such that she was able to represent him for a highly challenging job in Bali. The mentoring relationship extends to include her personal life and she looks up to him as an exemplar of someone who could manage a successful freelance career while still managing a family.

Carl similarly develops a system of grooming young talent in a mutually beneficial manner. He brings them on-board with him on shows, not as designers, but as operators. They slowly pick up skills from him, to a point where many of them become designers in their own right. For busier periods, he will make an agreement with companies that he will co-design with his young apprentice. He will do the initial concepts, and be the resource person when the other person is stuck.

> "That's the best way…Start off with observing, then slowly [the mentor] will share some of the workload which he deems is appropriate. His reputation is on the line."

Frank notes that such assistants cannot be fresh. Mac talks about his expectations of his assistant, who also freelances elsewhere:

> "He knows exactly what I want. He can prepare things. When I get there, I just grab and start working. In that way, you stick to certain people out of convenience…during the process, if he's interested to learn, I will answer. He might not see me doing it the way he would but he doesn't mind listening to another alternative. So in that case, [there's] one more knowledge that you can spare with in case you need to."

Such loose apprenticeship arrangements in the industry are valuable for giving the beginning freelancers simultaneous opportunities to master routine processes under guidance, as well as knowledge that is potentially developmental. At this point, it is worthwhile noting that Fuller & Unwin (2008) warn that apprenticeships that are located entirely in the workplace are "problematic" for both pedagogical and social reasons. According to them, formal instruction provides spaces for reflection, to transcend workplace concerns. Apprenticeships are also potentially exploitative, but the risks are much reduced in the context of the freelance world with opportunities for boundary-crossing. Regardless, any programme that introduces an apprenticeship element must be accompanied by opportunities to access learning situated in real work environments and in educational institutions. Designers of apprenticeship programs also need to develop clear goals and outcomes of what they want the apprentice to 'be'. This guides the developmental nature of the program, the movement between work and school and the graduate attributes (Bound & Lin 2013). Being an apprentice is valuable not only in the short-term when one begins freelancing. It offers opportunities to build long-term relationships to avoid the risks of 'middling' typical of the seasoned freelancer, which we examine in the next section.

# 4.4 The seasoned freelancer – risks of "middling"

The seasoned freelancer would typically have been in the industry for more than three years and would have acquired a steady stream of jobs. His or her challenge at this point is to develop a niche to stand out in the market. He or she needs to start acquiring business acumen to ascertain the market space he wants to play in. He or she now has to be strategic about the jobs to take up. Reflective practice takes a different dimension and focuses on the wider industry. The challenge for this group is the lack of access to experts necessary to help in maturing their craft. Because they tend to be hired for a specific service, they are seen as the expert for that project. Mike, an artistic director at a local production house, comments on freelance stage managers in the market:

> "Maybe their management skills are great for small productions or school productions. When trying to manage a production of 25, it's a different game

[such as] making sure everybody respects them enough. If actors don't turn up on time for a show, we've got a big problem. And it's a stage manager's job to make sure actors are there, ready to start on time."

The above comments points to the importance of exposure to deepen one's craft, and mature as a professional. Ellstrom (2006) highlights the need for opportunities for developmental learning, yet for seasoned freelancers, such opportunities are scarce. Our interviewees who are seasoned freelancers speak wistfully of the value a mentor can bring to their skills. In the context of their contractual arrangement where they tend to be the only one in their field of expertise, opportunities to be mentored are limited. Seasoned freelancers in our study tend to suggest Masterclasses as a valuable learning opportunity. At another level, the creation of developmental networks where seasoned freelancers have regular access to established freelancers would enable learning conversations to take place, and open up new opportunities to help them access more challenging jobs. At times, the seasoned freelancer may also take up a different job role to get access to experts. Jay explains the importance of growing one's repertoire of knowledge:

"You react to what you know. You cannot react to something that you don't know. It is experience. You take the most similar case to deal with this case. But if this case is something totally new, you get ready to stumble. Experience need not necessarily be your experience. It could be somebody else's experience that they share with you or you actually travel enough or know enough people and go into different networks that allow you to see some other people's experience. [I was once] working as a technical director….I saw an Australian lighting designer create a sepia effect…It is a nice effect, a learning curve [for me] and I say oh, that is how they do it. So [the next case].. I know how it can be done. It doesn't mean that I know exactly how it works, so there is a learning process for me as well to trial and error. This is where the so called human relationship is very important. If you are a nasty technical director, then people don't…want to share with you. You lose all the opportunities to learn."

In the context of niche-building necessary to progress in freelance life, the technicians face significant challenges because they are primarily fitted at the periphery in venues and hired on a contract of service. Those who are good tend to be able to progress only by taking on permanent jobs or to play in the international field. Staying on as a freelancer locally to hone one's craft as a technician appears difficult.

# 4.5 The established freelancer

The established freelancer has cornered his niche in the market and is hunted for his or her skills. There appears to be no co-relation between years of industry experience and the ability to establish oneself as a freelancer. Learning for this group becomes tied to securing access to high quality projects of a certain scale. The frustrations at the quality of the jobs in Singapore are expressed vehemently by this group comprising both designers and technicians. Consequently, they seek out international opportunities as a means of honing their craft. Carl, for instance, tries to take on a touring show each year.

Because of the type of jobs they access, learning typically takes place in teams. Frank shares how his team tried to create an effect for the National Day Parade. They eventually succeeded but the organisers decided not to proceed with it.  He comments:

> "In a way it's a failure because it never found its way into the show, but we took something from it. So if that scenario comes up again or something similar [is required], we can apply that. I don't need to start from zero again."

In terms of opportunities to learn, like the seasoned freelancer, the established freelancer seeks opportunities to learn as part of an occupational community. Carl notes that practitioners typically don't watch one another's shows. He suggested seminars where practitioners can share their design challenges, work challenges, and venue challenges.

Finally, the acquisition of business or corporate skills becomes even more critical as the established freelancer eventually sees starting companies as the next stage of his or her career development. This requires a shift to a new "way of being" - as an entrepreneur.

# 4.6 Summary

In summary, we have identified three key stages in a freelancer's career in technical theatre. The first stage requires initiation into the "ways of being" of a freelancer that requires rapid adaptation to various worksites, and the development of a long-term plan of his or her place in the industry. The opportunity to be an apprentice to one or a few experts is valuable with regards to the inculcation of work ethics, access to jobs and developmental learning, and lessons on life and career planning.  The second stage requires the freelancer to move into niche-building to establish his or her space in the market. This inevitably gives rise to isolation and the risks of middling that can be mediated by opportunities to access and observe mentors either outside (e.g.

learning conversations or Masterclasses) or within the production process such as by taking on jobs beyond one's specialisation (e.g. a lighting designer taking on the job as a technical director). The third stage is the established freelancer who is hunted for his or her skills. He or she is constrained by his solo "way of being", and may gravitate towards forming teams to access more sophisticated jobs. In this regard, there is a natural impetus to take younger freelancers under his or her wings, as part of building long-term capacity. These three career stages are broadly defined, and do not co-relate with the years of industry experience, as a talented and committed freelancer may be able to establish him or herself quickly. It also does not take into account "deliberate ruptures" that some freelancers go through when they switch job roles (e.g. from technician or management to designer).

# 5.0 Implications & Recommendations

## 5.1 Key observations

Our study points out that neither the precarious nor contingent worker concepts are adequate in understanding the experience of freelance work in Singapore's technical theatre experience. While instances of stagnation were apparent, a good number of freelancers appear to thrive on freelance arrangements. Our interviews include practitioners who turned down or resigned from full-time employment because they see access to diverse experiences as vital to craft development that would not be possible by sticking with one employer. Some also indicate that they enjoy higher income as a freelancer than if they had taken up a permanent job in the industry. For some practitioners, the world is their oyster, with one practitioner observing that top-tier freelancers in Singapore have strong international value and may spend some 40 per cent of their time abroad. The experience of this group of workers thus reflects more the contingent worker discourse in academic literature. Yet this perspective cannot explain the simultaneous experience of stagnation experienced by many others in the industry. Given the extremely low barriers of entry, workers with elementary and post-graduate qualifications work alongside one another as equals, yet how they evolve their careers appear to be different. This study has shown that the individual biography of the freelancer is one important variable in explaining the difference in how freelancers evolve their careers. It also shows the disproportionate challenge that beginning freelancers encounter, especially those who enter the industry not via the network route. Their passion for the arts makes them an asset, but the industry is set up to lose them especially given their ability to secure permanent jobs outside the industry. Too much is also expected of the individual to evolve his or her career, such that "deliberate ruptures" are required. The industry can do more to ease the movement into more advanced or alternative work roles, and improving access to experts and mentors is one key strategy. Lastly, many freelancers lack awareness and the skills to mitigate their employment and income risks. Support in this regard appears necessary to help them build a long-term satisfying career in the industry.

At the crux of our findings, we note that freelancers in the local technical theatre industry sit - not at the periphery, not as a parallel workforce, - but at the core of the industry. The best in this industry are freelancers. They also form the pipeline into the permanent workforce at both the technical and management levels. They provide flexibility to enterprises and are central to the internationalisation efforts by local arts production houses, as well as rental and staging companies. Consequently, any industry or manpower development initiatives would do well to incorporate the developmental needs of freelancers at the core. Yet policy-makers have always fitted them in from the periphery, usually because of the freelancers' inability to organise

themselves. This is unfortunate as it is this very segment that are unable to access support, given that most learning and development initiatives are typically provided for through an employer.

The sections that follow discuss the implications of the findings to policy. We draw on our findings, our interpretation of the data and issues, and suggestions made by stakeholders at our reference group session in their discussion of the implications of the findings (See Appendix 2).

## 5.2 Implication: whither the profile of workers?

This study found a shift in the profile of the technical theatre workforce from an "artistic disposition" to a "technician disposition" as a consequence of an industry development model that privileges the establishment of flagship theatre venues. As a member in our reference group notes, there is disproportionately more technical jobs than creative jobs given venues are essentially presenting houses and bring in international shows that typically do not require manpower for the creative process. This makes the local technical theatre industry different from other mature economies like the UK, US and Australia in which the skills of the technical theatre workforce are built upon local productions. The extent to which this shift is of adverse impact to the industry became a topic of debate among members at the reference group session. While some felt that the shift reflects the current needs of the industry and leads to growth of jobs in new areas such as the sales of technical equipment, the general consensus was that a technical theatre workforce must be anchored by the core values of the arts. The latter view is supported by the national vision that the industry growth is primed towards enabling Singapore to "join the league of arts and cultural capitals" through a "proliferation of artistic talent and free exchange of ideas" (Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth 2012, p.7). The finding of the shift to a "technical disposition" is a sobering reminder of the limits of the industry development model as it exists now, and the importance for more sustained efforts to evolve the professionalism of the workforce towards one that can support the national vision in arts. Members at the reference group session called for higher support for small experimental companies, particularly in terms of access to venues and equipment. Some note that the funding discrepancy between venues and production houses, such that freelancers were gravitating towards venues for better income security. Established freelancers also lament the quantitative approach to arts funding that leads to budgets being stretched at the expense of the creative process. There was also a discussion of how commercial venues could be incentivised to produce local shows. Interestingly, theatre venues themselves are seeing the effects of a "technical disposition" on their permanent staff. Says the head of learning & development at one theatre venue:

"We are trying to create opportunities for [our permanent staff] to be seconded out to industry for their own exposure. [They tend to have] a mindset of bottom-line and compliance. [Secondments give them] opportunities to interact with other practitioners who have another type of mindset."

| Recommendation | Agencies |
|---|---|
| To strike a better balance between the objectives of investing in cultural tourism and support for local arts production<br><br>To provide more support for local arts production<br><br>To incentivise flagship venues to have a greater stake in supporting local arts production | Ministry of Community, Culture and Youth (MCCY) & the National Arts Council (NAC) |

# 5.3 Implication: low barriers of entry and job design

The study found that low barriers of entry to the industry offer tremendous opportunities for learning for beginning freelancers, but leads to subsequent stagnation for many technicians. This is particularly acute for those entering via the network route, who tend to have lower levels of initial qualifications. The recommendation is for the industry to move towards a strategic deployment of freelance technicians based on higher responsibilities with quality checks linked to a network of certification products agreed upon by the industry and aligned with worldwide standards. We hear often that employers were mainly looking at warm bodies to overcome the manpower crunch. Says one venue head:

"We just need hands. We almost prefer [individuals who are] well-rounded, then we get more people to do multiple things…But when we get really busy, we say: ok ok, you know what, this freelancer can do it by himself. Give him two people. And they kind of get tested on the job."

In part, this reluctance to accord higher responsibility to freelancers stems from a lack of trust on their capacity to be accountable to clients, in the way permanent workers would. A network of certification products[1] in the industry, which also taps on

---

[1] This may take the form of basic and specialist certification products for technicians.

learning at and through work, would provide a quality check on the capabilities of the individuals. The challenge is significant in this sector because of the diverse range of organisations that utilise the services of freelancers. However, feedback from members of the reference group suggests that the challenge is not insurmountable. The WSQ framework provides a good starting point to develop a range of certification products for the industry. We note that there is another policy impetus for the professionalising of the industry in the context of government efforts to create good jobs to ameliorate the conditions of low-wage work. The technical theatre industry is one with the potential of enabling those with lower initial qualifications to acquire a high level of skill sets for a long-term professional career, and deserving of more sustained attention.

| Recommendation | Agencies |
| --- | --- |
| To move towards a more strategic deployment of freelance technicians based on higher responsibilities with quality checks linked to a network of certification products agreed upon by the industry, and aligned with worldwide standards. The certification products should tap on learning at and through work but also offer access to opportunities to acquire the full range of different types of knowledge required in technical theatre (see Table 3) | Companies in technical theatre & the Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA) |

## 5.4 Implication: individual biographies and CET and PET interventions that facilitate participation in an occupational community

The study found that CET interventions should avoid a one-size-fits-all assumption as workers come into the technical theatre industry with very different individual biographies in the context of low barriers to entry. In addition, they require different types of assistance at different career stages.

In the context of the isolation faced by freelancers as a consequence of contractual arrangements, CET interventions that are most meaningful in the industry are those that enable the building of an occupational community. This is consistent with the recommendations made in the "Report of the Arts and Culture Strategic Review" that called for the introduction of mentoring and apprenticeship in the industry (Ministry of

Community, 2012: 78). This study takes the recommendations further by suggesting that an apprenticeship scheme is most suitable for beginning freelancers, while mentoring programmes should be introduced for seasoned freelancers. This study has also identified a loose form of apprenticeship system embedded in the production process, whereby established freelancers recruit young talent as assistants. This is mutually beneficial to both beginning freelancers as well as established ones whose ability to form teams will allow them to stretch their development. Carl, a sound designer, shares how such government interventions may work:

> "If I'm paid x amount [by a company], the government will match that amount by half or about one-third [which will] go to the assistant, and can only be used by him. Everybody will have an assistant [because] everybody is stretched. A lot of times, a lot of shows have bad design because the designer is trying to do cheaper, better, faster [sic]…70 per cent of the time in industry, the designers are already underpaid."

The above proposal differs from the existing Creative Industries Apprenticeship Scheme which focuses on new hires, and trains them up for a period of six months. In contrast, the apprenticeship system proposed here is tied to projects, and may be accessed by freelancers for instance, say within the first three years of their freelance life. The introduction of any apprenticeship and mentoring programme must be accompanied by the simultaneous identification and skilling-up of practitioners to become industry mentors. There is value to consider hosting established freelancers at theatre venues or other companies to act as industry mentors to younger freelancers. In this regard, government agencies may co-share the cost of hosting such freelancers jointly with venues and other companies.

At another level, the WSQ system is seen as "venue-based" by many freelancers in that it identifies mainly competencies that would allow for development and progression in venues, but not necessarily the wider industry. It is also said to be short on cultivation of work ethics. Freelancers acknowledge that policy-makers have attempted to engage them, but it is hard for them to participate as "everytime we are not doing work, we are not getting paid." Undoubtedly, the value of any intervention programme is to reach out to segments that most need it. More sustained efforts are required to capture the needs of freelancers and this study is an attempt to plug this gap. In addition, freelancers note the limits of training, and point to the need to develop alternative pathways of learning and assessment:

> "Most of the people in the industry now would run rings around any training provider. I have witnessed in CET classes where we have technicians who have been in the industry 10-15-20 years ago, and signed on a job with [a theatre venue] sitting there falling asleep because he knows more about the subject matter than the instructor."

The study also found that most PET programmes are robust in equipping graduates with theoretical and technical skills, but fall short in terms of initiating them into the ways of being a freelancer that require entrepreneurial skills to secure jobs, dexterity to work across multiple sites and job roles, and sound life and financial planning. The organisation power of venues means that interns are channelled mainly to them. However, in the context of the industry norm that beginners start out as freelancers, a PET programme must necessarily be found wanting if it does not cater adequately to preparing its graduates for the "ways of being" of freelancers, lending a higher risk of subsequent attrition. This points again to the need for any CET and PET programmes to be integrated within the occupational community.

| Recommendation | Agencies |
| --- | --- |
| To introduce CET programmes and schemes that can build an occupational community. This should include apprenticeship and mentoring programmes that tap on freelance practitioners directly. There is opportunity to introduce an apprenticeship embedded within the production process that benefits both beginning and established freelancers. Established freelancers may also be stationed at venues to be mentors. Masterclasses and sharing seminars are also valuable platforms to facilitate the building of an occupational community.<br><br>To customise CET programmes based on individual biographies of freelancers<br><br>To strengthen PET programmes such that they better prepare graduates for the "ways of being" of freelancers | WDA, educational institution, companies in technical theatre |

# 5.5 Implication: ownership by and protection of freelancers

Enterprises, by and large, find that they are structurally unable to cater to the learning and development needs of freelancers. We were told the following:

> "We will train [our full-timer] because we are responsible for this person's career development whereas as a freelancer, unfortunately anything

outside that contract… how [can we as a] company …be responsible for that person."

Consequently, freelancers need to adopt long-range planning for themselves if they are to sustain a professionally satisfying career as a freelancer. This entails aspects related to managing their vocational practice, as well as life and financial planning. This study found that it is not natural to many to adopt such long-term planning. Members of the reference group session emphasized the need to educate freelancers early <u>and</u> regularly. As noted earlier, former technician turned lighting designer Jed shares how he advised a younger freelancer to always file income tax, because there would be evidence necessary when one needs to apply for a housing loan in future, for instance. This anecdote shows that industry mentors have the potential to play an important role in coaching the beginner on long-term life skills, in addition to vocational skills. Another aspect of concern to freelancers and employers alike are medical plans for freelancers, including protection from loss of income.

| Recommendation | Agencies |
| --- | --- |
| To provide career guidance support early and regularly to freelancers. The provision of information is important, but equally valuable is the access to industry mentors to help contextualise the information. | WDA, established freelancers, National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) |
| To look into industry-wide medical protection for freelancers, including protection from loss of income. | |

## 5.6 Implication: pressing need for a guild or industry association

In the context of the range of challenges confronting the industry, members at our reference group session discussed extensively the need for an industry association to bring together different interests, and coordinate efforts to boost the professionalism of the workforce. Among others, the industry association would be able to run a freelance jobs portal, organise Masterclasses and related development, identify industry mentors, educate or coach freelancers on life and financial planning, and generally be the front for any industry coordination work. The National Arts Council (NAC) has a scheme to fund the starting up of such an organisation, but many in the reference group session felt that the scheme did not cater for sufficient

resources to hire full-time administrative personnel, which was the situation that led to the current defunct status of the Technical Theatre Association of Singapore. More dialogue on the setting up or reviving of such an institution appears necessary.

| Recommendation | Agencies |
|---|---|
| For stakeholders to come together to discuss the setting up of an association or guild. More government support appears necessary given the unique needs of freelancers that are not met by current institutional infrastructures that tend to privilege permanent workers and established organisations. | Freelancers, NAC, companies in technical theatre |

# Appendix 1: Profile of interviewees

A total of 23 on-going, former and returning freelancers were interviewed for this study. Purposive sampling was employed to obtain a range of profiles in terms of age and job family. We then collected more information from the interviewees in relation to their number of years of industry experience, educational qualifications and income, among others.

In terms of the number of years in the industry, a period of 15 or more years is not uncommon in the industry, primarily because the industry has no minimal entry or age requirements. One of our interviewees traced his involvement in the industry from a young age of 15 when he was hired as a stagecrew for a school production. We observe that of those who indicated their annual income, a sizeable number put their income as ranging from S$20-30k annually. We are hesitant to make further analysis because more established freelancers expressed reluctance to indicate their annual income. However, from the small data pool, we note that there was no correlation between initial educational qualifications and levels of annual income. Those with lower educational qualifications have reported higher annual income than those with higher educational qualifications. There was also no co-relation between years of industry experience and annual income. Charts 1 – 6 provide a breakdown of the demographics.
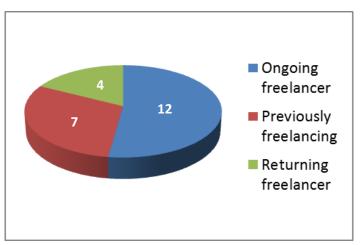
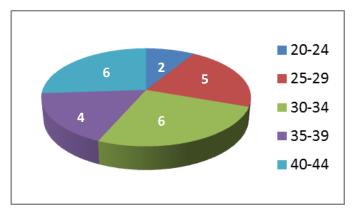**Chart 1:** Breakdown by current employment status

**Chart 2:** Breakdown by age in years
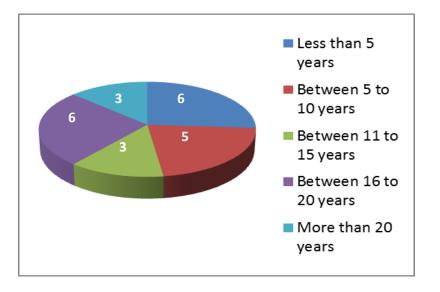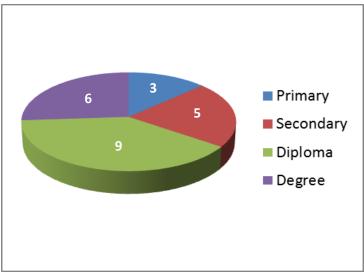


**Chart 3:** Breakdown by number of years in industry



**Chart 4:** Breakdown by initial educational qualifications
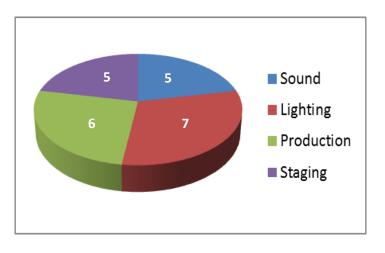
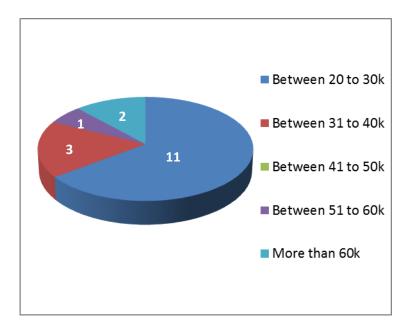**Chart 5:** Breakdown by job family



**Chart 6:** Breakdown by annual income (in S$)

# Appendix 2: Reference Group

A reference group session with stakeholders was organised on Tuesday, 3 June 2014, to discuss the preliminary findings and implications, as well as brainstorm recommendations. Twenty-two representatives from fourteen organisations, and two freelancers participate in the session. The list of participating organisations (in alphabetical order) is as follows:

- Institute of Technical Education

- LASALLE College of the Arts

- Marina Bay Sands

- Ministry for Culture, Community and Youth

- National Arts Council

- Republic Polytechnic

- Resorts World

- Singapore Repertory Theatre

- Singapore Workforce Development Agency

- The Esplanade Co.

- The Star Vista

- University Cultural Centre, National University of Singapore

- Yellow Brick Productions

# References

Allan, P. (2002). The contingent workforce: challenges and new directions. *American Business Review*, 20(2), 103-110.

Allen, B.C. (2011). The role of professional identity commitment in understanding the relationship between casual employment and perceptions of career success. *Career Development International*, 16(2), 195-216.

Arnold, J., & Cohen, L. (2008). The psychology of careers in industrial and organizational settings: A critical but appreciative analysis. In G. Hodgkinson & J. Ford (Eds.), *International review of industrial and organizational psychology* (Vol.23, pp.1-44). Chichester: Wiley Interscience.

Arthur, M. B., & Rousseau, D. M. (1996). *The boundaryless career: A new employment principle for a new organizational era*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Arthur, M. B., Khapova, S. N., & Wilderom, C. P. M. (2005). Career success in a boundaryless world. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 26(2), 177-202, doi: 10.1002/job.290.

Billett, S. (1999). 'Guided learning at work'. In D. Boud and J. Garrick (Eds.), *Understanding Learning at Work* (pp. 151-164). London: Routledge.

Billett, S. (2001). Learning through working life, interdependencies at work. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 23(1), 19-35, doi: 10.1080/01580370120043222.

Billett, S. (2006). Relational interdependence between social and individual agency in work and working life. *Mind, Culture and Activity,* 13 (1), 53-69

Bound, H., et. al. (2013). *The entrepreneurial self: becoming a freelancer in Singapore's film & television industry.* Singapore: Institute for Adult Learning.

Bound, H., & Lin, M. (2013). Developing competence at work. *Vocations and Learning*, 6, (3) pp. 403-420.

Beck, U. (2000). *The Brave New World of Work*, trans. Patrick Camiller. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Brophy, E. (2006). System error: labour precarity and collective organizing at Microsoft. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 31(3), 619-638.

Brown, P., Lauder, H., & Ashton, D. (2011). *The global auction: the broken promises of education, jobs and incomes*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Coffey, A., & Atkinson, P. (1996). *Making Sense of Qualitative Data: Complementary Strategies.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dany, F. (2003). Free actors' and organizations: Critical remarks about the new career literature, based on French insights. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 14(5), 821-838.

De Peuter, G. 2011. Creative economy and labor precarity: a contested convergence, in special issue, "Towards an Autonomist Communication Studies: Assessing Hardt and Negri's Trilogy, ed. Jack Z. Bratich. *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 35.4: 417-425.

Du Gay, P. (1996). *Consumption and Identity at Work*. Britain: Sage Publications.

Edwards, R., & Usher, R. (1996). What stories do I tell now? New times and new narratives for the adult educator, *International Journal of Lifelong Education* (May 2013), 37–41.

Edwards, R. (1998). Flexibility, reflexivity and reflection in the contemporary workplace. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 17(6), 377-388, doi: 10.1080/0260137980170604.

Ellstrom, P. (2006). 'The meaning and role of reflection in informal learning at work'. In D. Boud, P. Cressey, and P. Docherty (Eds.), *Productive Reflection at Work*. London: Routledge.

Evans, K., Hodkinson, P., Rainbird, H., Unwin, L., Fuller, A., Hodkinson, H., Kersh, N., Munro, N. & Senker, P. (2006). *Improving workplace learning*. London: Routledge.

Evans, K., Guile, D., & Harris, J. (2009). *Putting knowledge to work: the Exemplars.* London: WLE Centre for Excellence, Institute of Education, University of London.

Evans, K., Guile, D., Harris, J., & Allan, H. (2010). Putting knowledge to work: A new approach. *Nurse Education Today*, 30(3), 245-251, doi: 10.1016/j.nedt.2009.10.014.

Evans, K., & Guile, D. (2012). Putting different forms of knowledge to work in practice. In J. Higgs, R. Barnett, S. Billett, M. Hutchings & F. Trede (Eds.)*, Practice-based education: Perspectives and strategies* (pp.113-130). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Evans, J., & Gibb, E. (2009). *Moving from precarious employment to decent work.* International Labour Office; Global Union Research Network (GURN). GURN discussion paper; no.13.

Engestrom, Y. (1999). Innovative learning in work teams: Analysing cycles of knowledge creation in practice. In Y. Engestrom, R. Miettinen and R.L. Punamaki (Eds.), *Perspectives on Activity Theory* (pp.377-404). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Felstead, A., Fuller, A., Jewson, N. & Unwin, L. (2009). *Improving Working as Learning.* London: Routledge.

Felstead, A., & Ashton, D. (2001). Paying the price for flexibility? Training, skills and non standard jobs in Britain. *International Journal of Employment Studies*, 9(1), 25-60.

Fenwick, T. (2000). Adventure Guides, Outfitters, Firestarters, and Caregivers: Continuing Educators' Images of Identity. *Canadian Journal of University Continuing Education*, *26*(1), 53–77.

Fenwick, T. J. (2004). Learning in portfolio work: anchored innovation and mobile identity. *Studies in Continuing Education*, *26*(2), 229–245, doi: 10.1080/158037042000225236.

Fenwick, T. (2008). Women's Learning in Contract Work: Practicing Contradictions in Boundaryless Conditions. *Vocations and Learning*, *1*(1), 11–26, doi: 10.1007/s12186-007-9003-9.

Forrier, A., Sels, L., & Stynen, D. (2009). Career mobility at the intersection between agent and structure: a conceptual model. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology,* 82(4), 739-759, doi: 10.1348/096317909X470933.

Fuller, A., & Unwin, L. (2008). Towards expansive apprenticeships. London: Teaching and Learning Research Programme.

Gold, M & Fraser, J. (2002). Managing self-management: successful transitions to portfolio careers. *Work, Employment and Society*, 16 (4), 579-598.

Guile, D., & Lahiff, A. (2012). *Apprenticeship and Freelance Work: a de-centred and distributed model of learning to develop Media Production apprentices' vocational practice and social capital.* London: Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies at: http://www.llakes.org

Grugulis, I., & Stoyanova, D. (2011). The Missing Middle: Communities of practice in a freelance labour market. *Work, Employment and Society*, 25(2), 342-351, doi: 10.1177/0950017011398891.

Hall, D. T. (2002). *Careers in and out of organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hall, D. T. (2004). The protean career: A quarter-century journey. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 65(1), 1-13, doi: 10.1016/j.jvb.2003.10.006.

Hager, P. & Hodkinson, P. (2009). Moving beyond the metaphor of transfer of learning. *British Educational Research Journal*, 35: 619–638.

Hodkinson, H. (2008). *The significance of emotions in 'formal' learning throughout the lifecourse.* Paper presented at ESREA Life History & Biographical Research Network Conference**.**

Hollie, S., & Rainnie, A. (2012). Who cleans up? The declining earnings of cleaners in Australia. *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, 23(1), 143-160.

Holland, D., Lachicotte, W., Skinner, D., & Cain, C. (1998). *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Inkson, K., Roper, J., & Ganesh, S. (2008). The new careers as discourse. Paper presented at the 24th EGOS Annual Colloquium, Amsterdam, July 2008.

Institute of Policy Studies (2010). *Towards a media industry freelancers' grouping.* Retrieved at http://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/ips/event/towards-a-media-industry-freelancers-grouping.

Jacques, N. (2012). *Improving workforce planning and development: perspectives of sessional VET practitioners.* Adelaide: NCVER

Kalleberg, A. L. (2009). Precarious work, insecure workers: employment relations in transition. *American Sociological Review*, 74(1), 1-22, doi: 10.1177/000312240907400101.

Karmel, A., Bound, H., & Rushbrook, P. (2013). *Identity and learning for freelance adult educators in Singapore.* Singapore: Institute for Adult Learning

Kirpal, S. & Brown, A., & Dif, M. (2007). The individualisation of identification with work in a European perspective. In Brown, A., Kirpal, S. & Rauner, F. (eds.), *Identities at work.* Dordrecht: Springer, 285-313.

Kong, L. (2011). From precarious labor to precarious economy? Planning precarity in Singapore's creative economy. *City, Culture and Society*, 2(2), 55-64.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lankshear, C., & Knobel, M. (2004). *Teacher research: from design to implementation.* England: Open University Press.

McKeown, T. (2005). Non-standard employment: when even the elite are precarious. *The Journal of Industrial Relations*, 47(3), 276-293, doi: 10.1111/j.1472-9296.2005.00174.x.

Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (2012). *The report of the arts and culture strategic review.* Singapore: Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth. Retrieved from http://www.mccy.gov.sg/~/media/MCCY-corp/Topics/Arts/Files/ACSR_FinalReport.ashx.

Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (2013). *Singapore cultural statistics 2013.* Singapore: Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth.

Ng, T., Sorensen, K., Eby, L., & Feldman, D. (2007). Determinants of job mobility: A theoretical integration and extension. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 80(3), 363-386.

Perrons, D. (2003). The new economy and the work–life balance: Conceptual explorations and a case study of new media. *Gender, Work & Organization*, *10*(1), 65-93, doi: 10.1111/1468-0432.00004.

Piaget, J. (1968). *Structuralism*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. (Translated and Edited by C. Maschler).

Rainbird, H., Munro, A., & Holly, L. (2004). 'The Employment Relationship and Workplace Learning'. In H. Rainbird, A. Fuller and A. Munro (Eds.), *Workplace Learning in Context* (pp. 38-53). London: Routledge.

Ross, A. (2008). The new geography of work. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 25(7-8), 31-49, doi:10.1177/0263276408097795.

Sennett, R. (1998). The corrosion of character: personal consequences of work in the new capitalism. New York: W.W. Norton.

Smeaton, D. (2003). Self-employed workers: Calling the shots or hesitant independents? A consideration of the trends. *Work, Employment, and Society,* 17(2), 379–391, doi: 10.1177/0950017003017002008.

Standing, G. (2011). *The precariat; the new dangerous class*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. (1990). Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques. London: Sage.

Sullivan, S. (1999). The changing nature of careers: A review and research agenda. *Journal of Management*, 25(3), 457-484, doi: 10.1177/014920639902500308.

Taylor, M., Evans, K., & Mohamed, A. (2008). *The Value of Formal and Informal Training for Workers with Low Literacy: Exploring experiences in Canada and the United Kingdom.* Ottawa: Partnerships in Learning.

Thomas, D., & Inkson, K. (2007). Careers across cultures. In H. Gunz & M. Peiperl (Eds.), *Handbook of career studies* (pp.451-470). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Waterhouse, P., Wilson, B., & Ewer, P. (1999). *The changing nature and pattern of work and implications for VET*. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of Practice: learning, meaning and identity.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.