

STRUT 2020 Membership Consultation Executive Summary

The STRUT Dance 2020 Membership Consultation was conducted to establish the strategic direction of program planning for 2022 and beyond.

The membership was invited to respond to a tick the box and long answer questionnaire, hosted on the Survey Monkey platform throughout October (See Appendix A for survey questions).

Proceeding analysis of this data, one on one interviews with Shona Erskine were conducted with 11 STRUT Members in December (See Appendix B for interview questions).

Theoretical Framework

In order to understand the narrative in the data and how this can be mobilised strategically, I have framed the analysis using Seelig's (2012) theory of creativity. The Innovation Engine captures the relationship between the factors that influence your creativity both **inside** your mind (attitude, imagination, and knowledge) and in the **outside** world (culture, habitat, and resources), and is briefly visualised and described below.



Based on Seelig (2012) pg. 195

The six factors of the Innovation Engine are inexorably connected and deeply influence one another. Your **attitude** sparks your curiosity to acquire related **knowledge**. Your **knowledge** fuels your **imagination**, allowing you to generate innovative ideas. Your **imagination** catalyses the creation of stimulating **habitats**, leveraging the **resources** in your environment. These **habitats**, along with your **attitude**, influence the **culture** in your community.

Not only do all the factors influence each other, each pairing of **inside** and **outside** factor is specifically linked. Each pairing is explained below with a summary of pertinent data related to each pairing.

Imagination and habitat

Imagination, the ability to create something new, essentially transforms what you know. It is an endless renewable resource. Habitats are essentially an external manifestation of our imagination. We create physical spaces that reflect the way we think, and in turn, those habitats influence our imagination. Small changes in the environment have a big influence on creative output.

STRUT does not have a branded location. STRUT has made the decision to run offices from KSAC and to utilise numerous different and changing habitats around Perth. The established artist I interviewed sat on the fence about STRUT needing its own space. They indicated that as long as STRUT kept being imaginative about the spaces it opened up to the artists, they were satisfied. If STRUT were to stop building relationships with interesting spaces, then having a dedicated multipurpose dance space would be essential.

Attitude and culture

Your attitude, or mindset, determines how you interpret and respond to situations. This is malleable and within your control. Culture captures the ways in which groups of people perceive,

interpret, and understand the world around them. We all contribute to the culture, which makes it the collective attitudes of all who live there. And when a small number of individuals change their attitude, then the ambient culture changes. The cultural stew that surrounds us profoundly influences how we think, what we believe, and how we act.

To capture the attitude of STRUT members I grouped words for each category of artist from reading all the data. The emerging artists are all about dancing, doing, performing, and are predominantly self-centered. The mid-career artists are interested in community, sharing, knowledge building, and artistic process. The established artists are focused on outcome, performance, relationship, and scale.

The STRUT culture is focused on emerging artists. This is in contrast to a thriving mid-career arts sector that is evident across other forms and their supporting organisations. A look at the written survey responses reveals the lack of cultural relevancy of the existing program to engage the mid-career and established artist. At present, the mid-career and established artists are working across sector and with alternative organisations that cater to their cultural sensibilities.

Knowledge and resources

Resources in your environment influence your knowledge, and the more knowledge you have, the more you can access and mobilise resources. Resources are all the things of value in your environment and come in all different forms. Not all resources in your environment are easy to spot; some require physical or mental mining.

I have framed knowledge and resources below in relation to all six factors in the model.

The data reveal that the most critical factor for STRUT is the **resource** of mid-career artist. The STRUT program has successfully built dance and choreographic **knowledge** in the independent dance sector in Perth over the past 10 years. The young artists that have consistently engaged with these STRUT offerings, and made their way through the existing STRUT program, are now mid-career artists. They are now **knowledgeable** about dance, their own practices, the **attitudes** that are prevalent in contemporary art making, the **culture** that is STRUT and independent dance, they work across a number of different **habitats** and spaces throughout Perth, and they are utilising their **imagination**s fully to make work.

It is worth noting those that identified as mid-career artists and established artists have a lot in common and very little differences. The main difference is years of practice as would be expected given the question of categorical grouping in the survey. Moving forward in the report when I use the term *mid-career artist* it encompasses any artist that has established a choreographic practice here in Perth, is between 27 and 36 years, and has more than 5 years of choreographic practice.

Work strategically with your resources. Your mid-career artists are your GOLD.

I am proposing to the STRUT Board that your mid-career artists are the greatest resource you have, and the group around which you need to engage in strategic planning. The mid-career artists are not only recognised as a group but are also consistently named as individuals throughout the one-on-one interviews. Analysis of the data shows the mid-career artists to be at the center of your ecosystem. Almost all groups are orientating themselves towards these individuals.

Mid-career artists are your most supportive members

Your mid-career artists are your biggest supporters. This group sees how wonderful your program is

and that you are delivering it on such a small amount of resource and staffing. The mid-career artists as a group are also incredibly supportive of each other and articulate their confidence to collectively developing the program that they would now want coming off the back of the existing STRUT program. They want a program where they learn from each other, to be in dialogue and conversation about process and practice.

Further, the established dancers want to work with and be connected to the mid-career artists, and the mid-career artists are the artists that are employing many young dancers that are currently STRUT members.

Mid-career artists are sought after by young artists who want to make the transition into choreography

The young artists who are emerging choreographers look to the mid-career group. A mid-career program would be a magnet for these artists. The mid-career artists clearly articulated that they could be of support for the emerging choreographers through curation and choreographic or dramaturgical provocation. Emerging choreographers want to be in workshops run by, and in processes led by, mid-career artists. They have some experience being held and guided through workshops by these mid-career artists and they want more.

Mid-career artists are seen as a knowledge base for non-dance artists such as physical theatre and text based practitioners to learn the craft of building choreographic and movement knowledge into existing practices

Physical theatre and dramatic artists look to the mid-career group as the artists that can guide them to understand their own choreographic language. They want to do workshops run by mid-career artists because they see these individuals as being valued teachers who understand what is involved in shaping bodies and shaping text in a singular process. In short, they see the mid-career artists as being able to teach them about this thing called dance that they think is amazing.

Recommendations

I propose four recommendations following analysis of the data. Each recommendation will be framed around the mid-career artists.

Recommendation 1 – Keep the current STRUT program and consolidate links to your mid-career artists

Employ STRUT mid-career artists as your resource to acculturate young artists into the STRUT ecology with an aim to; clarify existing access pathways, create opportunities to engage with mid-career choreographer's process, and build relationships with mid-career artists.

Maintain the existing STRUT programme as is and be clear it has a young artist focus. The existing program is highly praised by young artists whether they see themselves as emerging choreographers or not, and they are on the whole very satisfied with the STRUT program. In addition, the STRUT program has proven that it develops high quality midcareer and established independent dance artists in Perth. It is my recommendation that the existing STRUT program continue as the foundational building blocks for young artists and new graduates.

Provide a small programme in addition to the current STRUT offerings that builds bridging opportunities for emerging choreographers to connect with mid-career artists.

Call on your mid-career artists to:

1. Create labs in which young artists interested in choreographic practise are facilitated to develop their own movement language and choreographic interests. Where a mid-career artist holds the space and facilitates a thematic process in which each individual participating artist can respond in their own way, building their own work and ideas. The mid-career artist guides them through a process with prompts and encouragement where needed, to explore their own ideas in their own way, enabling a longer gestation period with no pressure on outcome. There is a capacity to share but it is done so collegially rather than as an endgame product.
2. Open up piggyback learning on a mid-career choreographer's existing process. An invitation to enter process and observe, participate, and learn by doing.
3. Imagine what an STRUT Young Artists in Residence model may look like with access to space, administrative support, and mentorship.
4. Keep a strong dance class offering with mid-career artists as teachers.
5. Be your dedicated Youth Officer - youth@strutdance.com.

Recommendation 2 - Establish a STRUT mid-career artist program of events

Celebrate STRUT mid-career artists and their existing interconnectedness as your resource when developing structures and programs for new dance knowledge and the exploration of new habitats.

Engage with mid-career artists to develop a STRUT mid-career program of events that runs parallel, and in connection to, the existing program. The mid-career artists want to learn from each other, have agency in creating the structures in which they operate, and build strong relationships within the dance sector and between other arts sectors and organisations.

There already exists in Perth a vibrant dance ecology build in part by the existing STRUT program. It is my recommendation that STRUT mobilise the mid-career artists to explicitly demonstrate the magnificence of the dance community. Anecdotally, every organisation I speak with that first encounters dancers and choreographers is astounded by their commitment, professionalism, and talent. The dance community is held in high regard by other artform artists and their associated organisations.

Call on your mid-career artists to:

1. Design forums for sharing of process and exchange of critical dialogue that calls on and builds a supported peer-to-peer dance ecology that in turn encourages diversity of creative process.
2. Define the bidirectional support that could be resourced between STRUT as an organisation and mid-career artists as individuals.

Recommendation 3- Embed mentorship in the mid-career program and across the existing STRUT program

Explicitly embed mentorship in your mid-career program allowing for access to mentorship experiences across young, emerging, and mid-career artists. Mentorship is thus not an isolated program but the thread that connects opportunities into the cultural web of STRUT.

Mentorship was the most endorsed item on the Wish list. However, even with STRUT members advocating for mentorship, it is my suggestion that STRUT does NOT invest in a stand alone

mentorship program. Mentorship programs need to be long term, are often costly, and benefit the few people selected. There is little return to the organisation or the general membership. Further, the question of what specifically a mentorship program should look like was one that people struggled to answer. Instead, I would encourage STRUT to look at mentorship through the lens of the Innovation Engine and embed mentorship across the **culture** of STRUT programs.

Mentorship is spoken about by your members in terms of **Inside** factors. The **attitude** towards mentorship is one of support and connection. Your mid-career artists already express this attitude and I would encourage STRUT to embed this in your culture through your mid-career programming. Artists are also seeking **knowledge** about the roles and responsibilities of mentorship, and have already started to **imagine** how connections may be established.

Call on your mid-career artists to:

1. Articulate mentorship experiences across sector
2. Define more clearly the different mentorship models.

Recommendation 4 – Formulate a STRUT Choreographer in Residence

Select a STRUT mid-career artist as your Choreographer in Residence through an application process to showcase the in-depth imaginative capacity of a single and interconnected dance artist local to Perth.

Create a home base for a mid-career choreographer for a year.

Call on your mid-career artists to:

1. Design a Choreographer in Residence at STRUT opportunity that is one year in duration.
2. Consider the habitat for the residency.

Recommendations for the process moving forward into 2021

I strongly endorse engaging mid-career artists in a consultation process to build the STRUT mid-career artist program.

I suggest employing a complex systems model for the consultation, such as Richard Knowles Process Enneagram. The invitation to participate is extended to up to 30 mid-career and established artists to ask a broad ecological question. An example is below including subset questions.

What would a STRUT mid-career artist program of events look like that supported peer to peer dialogue of process, cross disciplinary learning, choreographer in residency opportunities, encompassing mentorship, to be piloted in 2022 with a budget of \$30K?

With sub set questions:

1. *What is the Identity of the mid-career dance artist in Perth?*
2. *What portfolio of opportunities does STRUT need to provide a mid-career artist?*
3. *What are the guiding principles that bind these opportunities together as a program?*
4. *What are the issues you will face while building the program?*
5. *What types of relationships do you want to sustain you?*
6. *What information do you need to be accessible to all?*
7. *Who will do what, and when?*
8. *What structures are needed to support your endeavours, and what context do you operate in?*
9. *How will you sustain what you learn?*