

<b>Institution: BRUNEL UNIVERSITY (H0113)</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 19 – Business and Management Studies</b>
<b>Title of case study: ‘Emotional Entrepreneurs’: Supporting Small-Scale Theatre Companies through the Development of Entrepreneurial Skills</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Whilst little data exists about the numbers and finances of small-scale theatre companies (SSTC’s) in the UK, they are a vital part of the theatre world whose national worth exceeds £2.5 billion annually (Theatre Futures, 2009). Yet, SSTCs attract little formal recognition (less than 2% receive Arts Council funding) and survival rates are correspondingly low (estimated at about 10%). In responding to clearly identified challenges of start-up and sustainability, Brunel research has benefited the theatre community by highlighting the need for a commercial agenda among theatre practitioners and by giving greater opportunity to develop an entrepreneurial ‘mind-set’ through access to supportive networks. With particular reference to impact on creativity and culture, it has led to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The establishment of Creative Producer’s Collective, a producer-led network managed by Camden Theatres and supported by Camden Council which supports the development of new theatre companies</li> <li>• The creation of TheatreLab, a network that shares resources and skills of producers, writers, directors and actors</li> <li>• Performing Arts training outside Brunel that incorporates professional development material i.e. commercial skills and sector specific knowledge into undergraduate and postgraduate programmes</li> </ul> <p>This has helped to promote sustained growth for a sector that has a critical impact on the theatre world more generally.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Pooling existing expertise within Brunel Business School, Brunel School of Arts and an industry partner ScenePool (a theatre production company), this ISBE/RAKE funded project investigated the challenges faced by founders of SSTC’s in terms of their ability to market and produce a dramatic product. The project, which took place 2009/2010, was managed as PI by Professor Keith Dickson, an international expert in small business management, with Professor Ruth Simpson, renowned for her work on emotions in organizations, Dr Barry Edwards, theatre director and Reader in Drama at Brunel School of Arts and Ms Kerry Irvine, co-director with Dr Edwards of Scenepool as co-investigators. At the time of the research Professor Dickson was Deputy Head of the Business School (Research), Professor Simpson was Deputy Head of the Business School (Staff Development) and Dr Edwards was Reader in Drama at Brunel School of Arts and co-director of ScenePool.</p> <p>The research was part of a stream of work from two research centres within Brunel Business School: CREWES (Centre for Research in Emotion Work and Employment Studies) which had a focus on the significance of emotions in organizations and BRESE (Brunel Research into Enterprise, Innovation, Sustainability and Ethics) which had a strong orientation towards entrepreneurship and small business management. The research responded to a need to address the low survival rate of SSTC’s and to understand their activities and practices from a small business perspective.</p> <p>Through a discourse analysis of 80 drama festival applications to Scenepool, followed by thematic analysis of 25 in-depth interviews with SSTC founders, the research uncovered an inhibiting ‘commercial blindness’ among this group i.e. a lack of sector specific knowledge that hindered the company’s development in the context of a highly competitive and complex market. Founders accordingly struggled to develop and sustain a professional identity founded on a core skill set (e.g. marketing, financial, entrepreneurial) and on role-specific knowledge within small theatre enterprise. Instead, they resisted the notion of entrepreneurialism and over-invested their personal self in their work – relying on personal feelings of passion and emotional commitment to their work</p>

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– leading to the conceptualisation of the ‘emotional entrepreneur’.

To take advantage of opportunities in an uncertain sector and to gain a more established positioning in the market, the research highlighted the need for SSTC founders to develop and manage a portfolio career and for a professional self-identification based on principles of entrepreneurialism and enterprise/production skills as well as emotional commitment to the work.

**3. References to the research** (indicative maximum of six references)

Simpson, R., Irvine, K., Balta, M. and Dickson, K. (2013) Emotions, performance and entrepreneurship in the context of fringe theatre, **Organization**. DOI: 10.1177/1350508413504020

**American Academy of Management, Montreal, March 2010:**

“Passion, Professionalism and Performance: Small Scale Theatre and Entrepreneurial Identity”, (presented by Prof R. Simpson).

**ISBE/RAKE Workshop, BERR, London, March 2010:**

“Emotional Entrepreneurs: An Exploratory Study of Small-Scale Theatre Company Founders” (presented by Prof K.E. Dickson and Ms K. Irvine).

**British Academy of Management Conference, Sheffield, September 2010:**

“Passion Plays: Creative and Emotional Dynamics in New Fringe Theatre Enterprises”. (presented by Prof K.E. Dickson).

**ISBE Conference, London, November 2010:**

“Emotional Entrepreneurs’: The Passion of Small-Scale Theatre Company Founders”. (presented by Prof K.E. Dickson).

The research was supported by a grant of £7,500 from the Research and Knowledge Exchange fund of the Institute of Small Businesses and Entrepreneurship (RAKE/ISBE), which itself was financially supported by Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Barclays Bank and BERR (Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform). The grant, one of five awarded from over 70 applications, was awarded to Brunel University for a period of one year (2009/10). The funded project was entitled “Emotional Entrepreneurs: An Exploratory Study of Small Scale Theatre Company Founders”.

**4. Details of the impact** (indicative maximum 750 words)

Results of the research have particular significance for existing and aspiring SSTC practitioners in their quest to survive in a highly competitive and insecure industry. Cultural benefits go beyond this specific group given that SSTC’s are seen as the ‘life-blood’ of the theatre world by feeding into established national and regional institutions more generally.

The research has had the following specific benefits to SSTC’s and drama educators. It has led to the establishment of networks, support groups and dissemination events that:

- a) have helped to break down the isolation experienced by SSTC’s in their quest to perform, improving access to support networks and training;
- b) have fostered the sharing of resources such as venues and skills, enhancing the dissemination of cultural products
- c) have enabled the dissemination of sector-specific knowledge and the acquisition of production skills leading to the development of resources to enhance professional practice. Results from the research have influenced training and programme development within drama schools in and outside Brunel.

An inaugural event to disseminate findings and to discuss key issues arising from the research (“Counting The Cost: Risks and Rewards in Today’s Theatre”) was held on 26<sup>th</sup> May 2010 in The New Diorama, London (ref 4). The panel comprised:

- Barry Edwards, Director, Performance Initiative, Brunel University;
- Nick Giles, Director, Corn Exchange and Newbury Arts;

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Kerry Irvine, Producer, ScenePool;

Chris Mellor, Senior Arts Development Officer, Camden Council;

Ria Parry, Leverhulme Director in Residence National Theatre Studio

Ninety people attended (a high figure for a local event) – indicative of the level of interest the research engendered among local theatre makers and the theatre community. These included research participants, other interested SSTC founders, members of local arts groups, local authority and higher education employees. Several outcomes followed directly from this event:-

Firstly, ScenePool was invited and became a member of the *Camden Consortium*, an industry board of 30 professionally run theatres that meets regularly to discuss issues and projects within the theatre industry. Through Scenepool's involvement, Brunel research informed policy and practice on assistance given to new SSTC's through the sharing of venues and the development of joint work.

Secondly, ScenePool joined Camden to steer a *'freelance surgery'* which meets on a quarterly basis to advise SSTC founders and related people on a 'one to one basis' on their company in terms of its future development. This initiative has now been replicated by Islington Council.

Thirdly, on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2010 in partnership with Camden Council the *Creative Producer's Collective* was launched as a support network to encourage entrepreneurship and greater commercial awareness as foundational to the creative process of making theatre. One hundred and twenty producers attended – considered an exceptionally high figure given the local focus.

Below is an extract from a recent press release (November 2010): -

*"The Creative Producers Collective fuses creativity, enterprise and practice, in order to create an environment where producers and theatre companies can strengthen their work, developing their entrepreneurial awareness, engaging and attracting new audiences, and fostering partnerships with venues. In the current economic climate, it is more vital than ever for Arts organisations to find new and innovative ways of working to ensure their own survival. Working closely with theatre artists and along with several industry partnerships, this new initiative aims to present opportunities and support to enhance quality and heighten the profile of theatre production."*

Fourthly, arising from the initial partnership with Camden Theatre (i.e., Camden Council), ScenePool Ltd has also secured further partnerships with the following organizations and individual: - Camden People's Theatre; The New Diorama; Upstairs at the Gatehouse; Ms Skye Crawford (Freelance Arts Consultant & London Editor of Fringe Review). The Collective held regular meetings in London and by Oct 2012 had approximately 110 members. It has presented a three-week festival in all three venues, drawing in 19 companies and 95 practitioners, that are in the partnership and funded by ScenePool, Camden Council, Camden People's Theatre, The New Diorama and Upstairs at the Gatehouse. These festivals are based on learning new skills, the sharing of expertise and costs (e.g. marketing, resourcing set and transport, print, rehearsal), exchanging marketing ideas and promotional work, swapping contacts, facilitating access to finance opportunities, engaging in methods to attract audiences and supporting each other's work – all adding to the professional knowledge of SSTC founders. While one can normally expect small audiences (average of 12) at fringe theatre events, the festival attracted a total of 750 and brought in a box office return of £4033.

Fifthly, The Creative Producers Collective initiative has led to the creation of *TheatreLab* which includes a broader spectrum of roles within the sector such as writers, directors, composers and/or anyone who collaborates towards a creative product. This expanding network currently has 60 members and has been meeting on a monthly basis since January 2012. Its key purpose is to provide training and to establish and share the necessary individual and team skills – including filling skills gaps - that are required for successful performances and for effectively managing a SSTC in a sustainable way. It offers SSTC's opportunities to show their work – such as the partnership with the Shaw Theatre in August 2011 and offers workshops and 1-2-1 surgeries. TheatreLab network has a growing membership, with 108 followers on Twitter and the professional networking site Linked In. It facilitated a weekend of new work from over 20 theatre makers on the

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11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> August 2012 with its industry partner The Shaw Theatre in London. The collective plays a key role in supporting theatre making and practitioner debate has been informed by the findings of the research.

Finally, in terms of more educative dissemination of commercial awareness, Ms Kerry's departure from Brunel University after the conclusion of this project to a new teaching post at Bath Spa University has given rise to new opportunities for teaching developments - specifically a new module in arts management on their BA in Drama Studies that incorporates professional development and entrepreneurship. She has also set up TheatreLab at Bath Spa that facilitates the knowledge exchange from the TheatreLab network working with Bath Spa students to develop new theatre product and enhance professional skills suitable for the industry.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Website of Campten council: <http://www.camdentheatres.com> and that section relating to Creative Producers' Collective's activities: [http://www.cptheatre.co.uk/event\\_details.php?sectionid=theatre&eventid=393&searchid=archived](http://www.cptheatre.co.uk/event_details.php?sectionid=theatre&eventid=393&searchid=archived) including minutes of first meeting: <http://www.camdentheatres.com/supporters-circle.php5>
2. Website of TheatreLab: <http://www.theatrelabnetwork.co.uk>
3. Website of ScenePool: <http://www.scenepool.co.uk>, and its own Twitter account <@scene\_pool>. A pdf file of ScenePool's Drama Festival in May 2010 is available.
4. Website of StageTalk, reviewing the work of ScenePool and noting ScenePool's hosting of debate on "Counting The Cost" and launch of Creative Producers Initiative: <http://www.stagetalk.co.uk/news/scenepool-playing-at-the-new-diorama-from-25th-30th-may-2010/>
5. A Senior Lecturer in Drama Studies and Performing Arts at Bath Spa University can be contacted to testify that the research influenced the development of academic courses on theatre studies at Bath Spa University.