Creating out Loud: Coping with uncertainty

Overview

Purpose

The purpose of this meeting is to explore ways of coping with uncertainty in the arts and culture sector (e.g., precarious employment, uncertain funding) by

- reflecting on your personal coping repertoire,
- considering possibilities for mutual support, and
- learning with and from your fellow group members.

NOTE: This Discussion Guide may bring up strong emotions for you. Try to focus on what you **can** control (rather than what you can't) and think about who you can reach out to for support, if needed.

Agenda

Activity	Suggested Timing (60 minute meeting)	(75 minute meeting)
Being here	15 minutes	15 minutes
Individual exercise – Hopeful engagement • personal reflection • sharing reflection	5 minutes 15 minutes	5 minutes 25 minutes
Group discussion – Mutual support	20 minutes	25 minutes
What next?	5 minutes	5 minutes

Being here

Acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Country on which you are meeting, and pay respects to their Elders – past, present, and emerging.	
If this is your first meeting…	**If this is not your first meeting…**
Share your name and how you are currently involved in the arts and culture sector…	Share what follow-up step(s) you have taken since your last meeting… If you did not take the step(s) you planned to take, share one thing you learned or one thing you enjoyed since the last meeting…
Tell a short story about a time you felt supported by a family member, friend, employer, or someone else in your community.	

TIP: Be as personal / detailed as you feel comfortable being. Resist commenting during someone else's turn.

Individual reflection – Hopeful engagement

Hopeful engagement is often practised by people experiencing chronic illness, but it can be a powerful coping strategy in other difficult circumstances, where immediate solutions do not seem possible.

Hopeful engagement involves actively pursuing "dignity and decency," and "finding purpose and a reason to act [even] in precarious conditions."[9]

This kind of hope is less about 'resilience' or aspiring to success, and more about "what carries people through the day" and "makes life liveable while alleviating the constant pressures of daily survival."[10]

For artists, hopeful engagement might involve

- **personal therapeutic practices**, e.g., self-care, spirituality, strategic waiting, playing, finding space to rest

- **mutuality and reciprocity**, e.g., downplaying competition, fostering collegiality, favour-swapping

- **social and political activism**, e.g., producing socially-engaged art.[9-13]

"Hope" is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -

I've heard it in the chilliest land -
And on the strangest Sea -
Yet - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me.

Emily Dickinson

Reflect on what hopeful engagement means to you

- What everyday attitudes or practices help you to live "sanely" and "acceptably"[1] in the face of uncertainty and/or precarious work?

    TIP: Use the space below to write about or draw what 'hopeful engagement' looks like in your life.

Share your reflections with the group.

TIPS: Be as personal / detailed as you feel comfortable being.

Listen deeply to understand what your fellow circle members share. Ask questions for clarification.

Look for commonalities between responses, and points of common interest or concern.

If another circle member shares a coping resource, style or strategy that appeals to you, you might like to write it down and explore it later.

Focus on what you <u>can</u> do, even if it is only writing a letter or taking some steps towards self-care.

Group Discussion – Mutual support

Many artists and arts managers around the world work collectively to counteract uncertainty and precarious work in the arts and culture sector, through:

- social activism to effect policy change[6]

- creating and using co-working spaces to reduce costs and social isolation[6]

- delegitimizing offers of unpaid work that are based on a "promise of exposure,"[7] and

- developing "new social enterprises, such as arts employment charities"[8] and worker cooperatives.

Discuss any / all of the questions below, to learn with and from each other about giving and receiving mutual support:

1. What forms of mutual support have you seen amongst artists and/or arts managers?

2. What barriers do you see to building mutual support within the arts and culture sector? How might these be overcome?

3. Who needs to be initiating mutual support within the arts and culture sector? What might that look like? What cultural issues need to be considered?

4. What forms of mutual support would you find most helpful?

5. What might you do to give / receive mutual support in the coming week?

NOTE: The giving and receiving of support between artists and arts workers does not remove the need for adequate public funding of arts and culture, or community / social security services. But downplaying competitive and "us and them" mindsets can open new opportunities for building relationships, and sharing both knowledge and resources.
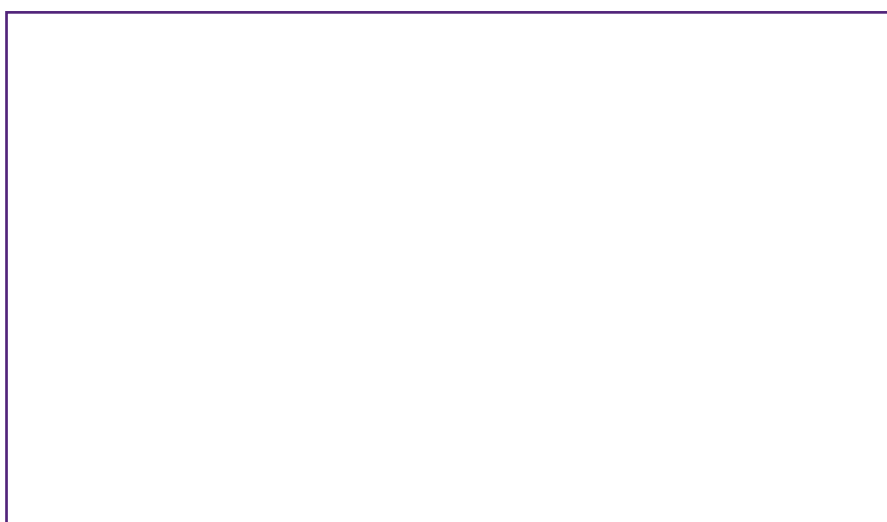
What next?

Making the most of your peer coaching experience involves taking at least one step after each meeting, to consolidate and build on what you have learned, and/or to pursue your specific goals.

After today's session, you might like to

- **reflect on your own coping repertoire –** make a record of your personal coping resources, style, and strategies using the material provided on pages 7 and 8. You might also like to write down ideas shared by other circle members, and look back at this page for ideas and inspiration in future.

- **explore ways of increasing your sense of control –** see page 9 of this Discussion Guide.

- **read about hopeful engagement and coping in the arts and culture sector,** e.g.,

    o references 9 –13, on page 11 of this Discussion Guide

    o The Apparent Paradox of Creativity

- **consider other ways of dealing with uncertainty and stressful situations**, e.g.,

    o How to deal with uncertainty

    o The routines, rituals and boundaries we need in stressful times

- **explore The Arts Wellbeing Collective's resources dealing with precarious work:** Navigate well - Explore ways to sustain healthy career pathways

- **read *Preparing Musicians for Precarious Work*,** by Dr Nicole Canham

- **read about embracing uncertainty in art**

- **take a step towards accomplishing a personal or professional goal.**

If today's session has raised issues for you, you might also like to explore the Additional Resources listed on page 10.

What one step will you take before the next meeting?

Coping repertoires

Coping resources
- personal qualities
- social support

Coping style
- habitual ways of approaching problems

Coping strategies
- thoughts / actions you use to deal with problems / emotions

Active engagement strategies – such as confronting (rather than avoiding) problems, asking for help, focusing on reassuring thoughts, and expressing emotions – can support coping by increasing our sense of control.[9] By contrast, disengagement often works against us.[10] Uncertainty has always been a feature of the arts and culture sector. This includes, but is not limited to, precarious employment. Many (if not most) artists and arts managers "pull together portfolio careers… work as freelancers on a series of unpredictable short-term projects… and compete against one another for funding and other opportunities."[11]

At a personal level, people cope with this kind of uncertainty by drawing on a range of coping **resources, styles and strategies**:

Coping resources are personal, social, and structural factors[12] that directly affect your wellbeing, but also influence your coping **styles** and **strategies**.[13]

Personal resources	Social support	Structural support
•Sense of control •Self-esteem •Meaning •Trust	•Family & friends •Employers •Co-workers •Customers	•Equity

- **Personal coping resources** include having a sense of control over your situation and meaning in life [14]; positive self-esteem; and the ability to trust and build cooperative relationships with others.[13, 15]

- **Social coping resources** involve having a sense of being valued as a person, and being part of "a network of communication and obligation."[15] Social support may come from family or friends, but can also be found among employers, co-workers, even customers[13] – as well as groups of people with shared values and/or experiences (e.g., neighbourhood or religious groups).[12]

- **Structural coping resources** rely on equity – equal rights, fairness, justice, reciprocity. Therefore, some people have greater access to these resources than others.[13]

Coping styles are "habitual preferences" for dealing with problems, such as being active and approaching or confronting problems, or remaining passive and withdrawing from or denying problems.[12]

Coping strategies are the thoughts / actions you use to manage difficult situations.
These might involve focusing on the problem itself and/or your emotional response to the problem.[12]

My Coping Repertoire

Coping resources	Coping style	Coping strategies

Increasing your sense of control

Even when many things are outside of our control, having a general belief that we can and do shape our own life can help us find new ways of coping.[16]

To develop your own sense of control, you might like to:

- read about the connection between mental health and feeling in control

- keep track of everyday events, distinguishing between things you can and cannot control – try to notice even very small things that you are able to control.

- explore these resources about feeling more in control of your situation:

    o How to cope when things feel out of your control

    o Seven Ways to Feel More in Control of Your Life

    o How to restore your sense of control when you feel powerless

    o 6 Ways You Can Feel More In Control During The Coronavirus Pandemic

For extra support…

This Discussion Guide was created to support your wellbeing through peer coaching, but peer coaching is not a substitute for professional medical advice.

- Always seek the guidance of your doctor or other qualified health professional with any questions you may have about your health or a medical condition.

- Never disregard the advice of a medical professional, or delay in seeking it because of something you have read in this Discussion Guide or heard in your Creating Out Loud peer coaching circle.

If you are in an emergency, or at immediate risk of harm to yourself or others, please contact emergency services on 000.

Lifeline 131114	Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467
Contact	
Support Act supportact.org.au	Crew Care crewcare.org.au

More information about other support services can be found here:

- **New Access Mental Health Coaching Program**

- **The Arts Wellbeing Collective**

- **Department of Health and Aged Care**
  This **government website** lists the contact details for several organisations that support mental health and suicide prevention

- **ReachOut Australia**
  This **community website** offers information about getting professional help for your mental health, if you don't have much money

- **Mental Health Resources for the Arts Community**
  This **professional website** collates a range of mental health resources for people working in the arts and culture sector

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16. Ross, C.E. and J. Sastry, *The sense of personal control*, in *Handbook of the Sociology of Mental Health*, C.S. Aneshensel and J.C. Phelan, Editors. 1999, Springer US: Boston, MA. p. 369-394.Additional Discussion Guides

Discussion Guides on other topics related to arts and culture can be found at [University of Queensland's Creating Out Loud](#) webpage

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The opinions in this Discussion Guide do not necessarily represent the views of The University of Queensland, funding / industry partners, or the individual members involved in the reference groups.

About Creating Out Loud

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Creating Out Loud was developed to support Queensland's artists and arts managers as they recover from and rebuild business, artistic, and cultural practices following the COVID-19 pandemic.

For further information visit
University of Queensland's Creating Out Loud

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