

PAPER for the 17th International Conference on Arts and Cultural Management (AIMAC 2024), at the University of Lisbon, Portugal, June 24th to 26th, 2024.

Title: Stakeholder Engagement in the Arts: Practitioner Understanding of a Mutable Concept

Authors: Dr Kim Goodwin, Arts and Cultural Management, University of Melbourne, kim.goodwin@unimelb.edu.au

Dr Andreas Pekarek, Management and Marketing, University of Melbourne

Biographical notes

Dr Kim Goodwin is a Lecturer in the Faculty of Arts in the Arts and Cultural Management Program. Her teaching and research exists at the intersection of human resources, organisational behaviour and arts management. She teaches and researches in the area of work integrated learning, arts management, research skills and cultural policy subjects and runs 'Creative Community Connections' a career oriented communities of practice initiative for creative arts and arts management students, alumni and industry. Prior to academia Kim worked in human resources, graduate recruitment and talent management before building a career in the arts sector with organisations such as the National Association for the Visual Arts and Craft Victoria.

Dr Andi Pekarek is a lecturer in the Department of Management and Marketing, where he teaches HRM and Employment Relations. His research interests include comparative industrial relations, collective bargaining, worker representation and voice, HRM and ethics, social movement theory, and professional work.

Abstract

Stakeholder engagement is increasingly as both a required arts leadership skill and a cliched management trope (Caust, 2018). Senior arts leaders Fishwick and Boleyn illustrate this sentiment when, cited in Ellis (2017, 7), they describe engagement as "among the top ten most "vomit-worthy" pieces of jargon in the museum sector." While there is a growing body of research into various forms of arts engagement, there is limited understanding of stakeholder engagement as a profession within the arts. This paper explores practitioner understanding of engagement through analysis of 12 semi-structured interviews with Australian arts engagement practitioners. It demonstrates that there is a lack of shared understanding of the concept which may lead to poorer organisational outcomes and reduced employee engagement.

Key Words

Arts engagement, stakeholder engagement, human resources, arts careers, professionalisation.

Introduction

Stakeholder engagement is increasingly recognised as a critical skill for contemporary arts leaders (Keeney & Jung, 2018). While the term 'engagement' is now widely used in job titles and role descriptions of advertised arts jobs, it has also been critiqued and characterised as a management trope without clear meaning (Caust, 2018). As Kim and Benenson (2023) highlight, the term engagement is both loose in practice and underexplored within arts management literature. While research often emphasises the identification of those engaged and deemphasises engagement practices and systems developed and enacted by practitioners.

Many theorists who discuss engagement in the arts context acknowledge the loose or fluid nature of the term (Stallings & Mauldin, 2016; Walmsley, 2019). Walmsley (2021:300) argues the challenges associated with this from an audience perspective: “This epistemological lacuna is not merely holding back the progression of audience research as an emerging academic field; it is compromising the realisation of the vast potential of engagement as an area of exponential growth in the arts and cultural sector, and indeed across the wider creative industries.” If theorists are still grappling with a concise, widely shared perspective on arts engagement, then we can potentially learn from those undertaking arts engagement in the field. However, we currently know very little about how engagement is enacted within arts organizations or how practitioners make sense of the term.

This research gap has implications for audience research, as has been recognized, but also matters for arts management and human resources. How can arts organizations recruit, develop, reward and retain engagement practitioners when there is a lack of clarity around the role of an engagement professional (and, as a result, the skills, knowledge and abilities needed)? Furthermore, what are the implications of loose terminology for the careers of those undertaking engagement work?

This paper considers how Australian arts and cultural sector practitioners understand and enact stakeholder engagement. To ground these questions and their theoretical analysis, we draw on key ideas about stakeholder engagement from management (Freeman, 2010; Freeman & Reed, 1983) as well as the associated practitioner debate (International Association for Public Participation, 2015). We compare practitioners’ understandings of stakeholder engagement with literature on engagement practice. We find a lack of shared understanding of engagement as a concept and, in many cases, a narrow, one-way communicative perspective on what engagement is. We demonstrate that arts engagement practitioners do not align with theoretical approaches to stakeholder engagement process, focusing largely on the demographics of stakeholders and the desired outcomes over the mechanics of engagement activity. In doing so, we highlight the unique characteristics of arts engagement while identifying the sector’s risks and opportunities by having a mutable idea of engagement practice. Finally, the paper considers the human resources implications of this fluid concept, particularly in the recruitment and retention of engagement practitioners.

Literature Review

Theories of stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement has increasingly been recognised theoretically and practically as a valuable business activity. Freeman (2010:7) , often recognised as one of the pioneers of stakeholder engagement, claimed, “Business can be understood as a set of relationships among groups which have a stake in the activities that make up the business.” If business is a set of relationships, then effective organizations and managers successfully identify and engage with those individuals and groups - stakeholders - that influence and are influenced by organizational decisions and outcomes. While stakeholder engagement research has increased in the past four decades, this does not mean a cohesive understanding of the concept exists. Kujala et al. (2022) highlight the lack of shared understanding of definitions and related constructs and suggest it hinders research progress. In constructing a more inclusive definition of stakeholder engagement, they recognise the reasons behind the process along with the activity, arguing stakeholder engagement “refers to the aims, activities, and impacts of stakeholder relations in a moral, strategic, and/or pragmatic manner” (Kujala et al., 2022:1139)

Scholars have built on Freeman’s (1983) legacy to examine those aims, activities and impacts. Numerous studies have focused on identifying and mapping stakeholders (Frooman, 1999; Mitchell et al., 1997) and have begun to unpack specific management and engagement processes (Harrison et al., 2010; Morsing & Schultz, 2006). While there are active discourses on stakeholder engagement

within the academy, the concept has also emerged as a professional discipline with grey literature (Business for Social Responsibility, 2019), industry frameworks (AccountAbility, 2015; International Association for Public Participation, 2015) and consulting practices (McKinsey & Company, 2020). Here, like within engagement research, there is fluidity of terminology. Frameworks for engagement are often discussed in terms of both ‘public participation’ and ‘community engagement’, with public participation more often used within formal settings where groups are positively or negatively impacted by decisions and community engagement more akin to organisations attempting to proactively interact with public or communities irrespective of any format requirement (Burdett, 2024).

Stakeholder engagement processes can be generalised into five stages, including 1. Establishing the context and purpose of engagement 2. Identification and Analysis of stakeholders, 3. Development of a stakeholder management plan, 4. Execution of engagement plan, and 5. Control and evaluation (International Association for Public Participation, 2015; Jankauskaite, 2014). Engagement practices are characterised by a spectrum of participation or involvement in shared decision-making that moves from simple provision of information to shared power and collaborative practice (Table 1). The engagement spectrum, as represented in Table 1, does not suggest that every project needs to empower stakeholders but that the appropriate level of engagement is selected as part of the process. These tools, frameworks, and specialised practices have helped to professionalise stakeholder engagement, taking it from a theoretical concept or a general management practice toward a defined occupational group. For engagement to be a success, it should maintain underlying principles, including respect for participants, two-way dialogue, inclusiveness, deliberativeness and, importantly, an ongoing process that builds capacity in all involved (Burdett, 2024).

Table 1: Industry approach to stakeholder engagement, adapted from (BSR, 2019; International Association for Public Participation, 2015)

	Monitor	Inform	Advocate	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Description	Tracking or monitoring stakeholder positions	Creating targeted messages to specific stakeholders	To enlist support for issues that require effort or have encountered opposition	To work with stakeholders to ensure concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	To partner with stakeholders in each aspect of the process, including development of alternatives and identification of solutions	Shared work on common objectives of the company and the stakeholders

Engagement in the arts

Stakeholder engagement is, in practice, fundamental to arts management. A vital facet of the arts is the number and diversity of stakeholders, including board members, funders, sponsors, other artists, employees, critics, the audience, media and government (Caust, 2018). The necessity for arts organizations to maintain multiple sources of revenue, including public funds, philanthropy, and sponsorship in addition to tickets or other forms of customer income, highlights the levels of power and influence stakeholders can have.

Unlike the theoretical approaches to stakeholder engagement that have explored the specific mechanics of process to maximise competitive advantage (Harrison et al., 2010), engagement literature in the arts has focused on identifying those being engaged rather than the engagement practices and systems enacted by arts managers. With roots in marketing and communication theory, the core focus of audience engagement research pertains to audience attendance, participation, and development (Walmsley, 2021). From assisting audiences in understanding and making meaning from an artist's work to motivating, attracting, and retaining attendance numbers (Brown & Ratzkin, 2011), audience engagement encapsulates a range of activities and practices looking to demonstrate and improve economic and cultural value.

Scholarship on public engagement in arts expands the focus beyond audiences to examine the broader value of cultural exchange on the public and its individuals. In addressing the recent wave of social and cultural theories about cultural value, social empowerment, and representation (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Mccall & Gray, 2014) conversations about public engagement converge around the identification of who is or is not being reached and represented to expand notions of impact and benefit when addressing broader social issues. Community engagement literature, as distinct from audience or public engagement, often discusses the direct outreach approach used to increase or strengthen the relationship or exchange between people and the organization or their content. Informed by an understanding of public or civic engagement and audience development strategies, community engagement efforts often seek to identify, reach out, and target those less represented or entirely absent from the content and creative work contained or produced within an institution (Kim & Benenson, 2023; Morse, 2018; Mutibwa, 2019). Community engagement is often a grassroots or bottom-up approach, with practitioners beginning to publish more resources to enable effective and respectful practice (Lillie et al., 2024).

In addition to these three critical areas of arts engagement research, two other areas emerge as crucial to practical engagement activity, if not extensively researched. First, the intersection of infrastructure projects and the arts is more often explored in cultural policy literature (Stevenson & Magee, 2017), yet also impacts the roles of arts managers tasked with shepherding projects to fruition. In their analysis of cultural infrastructure projects and stakeholder engagement in Lithuania, Jankauskaite (2014) found that while project stakeholders were identified, no attention was given to stakeholder management planning or determining the specific needs of managing cultural stakeholders. The second emerging area is First Nations engagement, which overlaps with community engagement research but also features in grey literature (Wilson & Williams, 2017) and industry codes of practice (Create NSW, 2021). Infrastructure and First Nations engagement areas interconnect with arts management practice in significant ways but also require specialised knowledge and skillsets.

The importance of role clarity and job design for individual and organizational performance

How might the fluid nature of engagement impact the ability of practitioners, and therefore organizations, to achieve engagement goals? Traditional human resources approaches argue that employees are motivated intrinsically by good job design (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Herzberg, 1966). Poorly designed roles may lead to role ambiguity or the extent to which a worker understands their job requirements (Rousseau, 1978). High role ambiguity can lead to reduced performance, reduced creativity and a decrease in employee self-efficacy, where employees question their own ability to achieve in their role (Abramis, 1994; Tang & Chang, 2010). Lack of explicit instruction, performance indicators or clarity around role expectations has also been shown to decrease performance and increase the probability of staff turnover (Antón, 2009).

However, the HR implications of lack of clarity around engagement are broader than just affecting the motivation and performance of those already working in engagement roles. Clearer task and role

specificity in recruitment advertising, for example, has been shown to reduce unqualified applicants and to improve candidate perception of both the role and the company (Feldman et al., 2006). In addition, when onboarding new employees, socialisation was an important factor in supporting role clarity (Frögéli et al., 2019). A lack of consistent organizational understanding of engagement process and desired outcomes, therefore, may impact the ability of employees to succeed and increase early stressors.

In this section we have outlined three key theoretical areas used to frame our discussions on the practice of arts engagement in Australia. First, we demonstrate how stakeholder engagement has become an important area of business research and practice and outline the frameworks that have emerged professionally in recent decades. Second, we briefly overview arts engagement research and demonstrate how it centres around identified stakeholder groups. Finally, we draw on human resources literature to demonstrate the risks associated with role ambiguity. When reflecting on the data from participants, we will show how the mutable concept of engagement may impact organizational and practitioner success.

Methodology

Where Kim and Benenson’s (2023) recent research considers the not-for-profit understanding of engagement concepts from an organizational perspective, this research explores individual practitioner perspectives of arts engagement by considering the research question “How do arts engagement practitioners understand and enact their role?” Twelve interviews were conducted with Australian arts engagement specialists between March 2022 and September 2023. Participants were sourced via LinkedIn search and snowball sampling (Mason, 2002) using search terms including “arts engagement”, “arts and cultural engagement”, and other derivations. Participants worked across creative disciplines, locations, and organizational types; however, all have held roles with ‘engagement’ both in their title and at the core of their responsibilities (See Table 1 for participant summary). Each interview was 45-60 minutes long, was recorded via Zoom, transcribed and thematically coded (Chametzky, 2016). Codes were determined through the literature review process and relied on a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). While coding provided a framework for analysis, interviews were considered within the broader conversational context to ensure the lived experience of participants was considered.

Table 2: Participant Overview

	Location	Discipline	Relevant Role/s undertaken
Participant 1 (P1)	NSW	Performing Arts/Museums and galleries	Head of Engagement/Head of Communications and Engagement
Participant 2 (P2)	VIC	Performing Arts	Head of Engagement
Participant 3 (P3)	WA	Festivals	Community Engagement Manager
Participant 4 (P4)	VIC	Visual Arts	Events & Community Engagement Coordinator

Participant 5 (P5)	QLD	Visual Arts	Senior Team Leader Engagement and Training
Participant 6 (P6)	NSW	Government/Community Arts	Community Engagement Officer
Participant 7 (P7)	VIC	Performing Arts	Owner - Arts engagement consultancy
Participant 8 (P8)	VIC	Museums and galleries	Head of Programs
Participant 9 (P9)	ACT	Screen/Museums and Galleries	Head of Public Engagement
Participant 10 (P10)	ACT	Visual Arts	First Nations Engagement Coordinator
Participant 11 (P11)	QLD	Performing Arts	Head of Public Engagement
Participant 12 (P12)	NSW	Visual Arts	Communications and Audience Engagement

In the next section, the findings of our study are grouped into three broad themes. We begin by showing how individual practitioners understand and enact arts engagement. We then explore key factors shaping these understandings and practices and finally consider the implications for practitioners and arts organizations.

Findings

Practitioners lacked a clear, common understanding of engagement

The majority of interview participants struggled to define engagement and suggested it changed depending on context, organization, department and practitioner background. For example, “*I think there’s different perceptions (of engagement). And that comes out in practice*” (P6). Similarly, another participant said, “*I struggle with a definition of engagement. In terms of how I sit in my role*” (P5).

Most participants suggested their understanding of engagement evolved over time, highlighting that socialisation within their workplaces impacted their understanding of the concept. P7 said, “*I think even when I started at <my organization>, I wasn’t quite sure what engagement meant,*” but added, “*I’m starting to understand now about what actually engagement means and how an engagement can’t be one way.*” For others, the lack of definition came from being within an organization without a clear picture of what engagement meant strategically or operationally. For example, (P5): “*I think we are still in the process, as an organization, to really define engagement. I feel like if you asked every single one of us who work here what it meant, we’d give a different answer*”, adding, “*I don’t have a definition for it.*” Developing a consistent understanding of engagement could be

complicated, however, if there was a lack of alignment between how different members of the organization, particularly leaders, understood or valued engagement. For example, P12 noted:

The way the organization sees it, is having physical attendance or digital attendance to the programs, or exhibitions on offer. For me, I see engagement more as like the communities feeling as though they have a sense of ownership over the events that we have, and genuinely know that there's a relationship between what we're doing and what they're interested in.

While many participants struggled with the definition and highlighted the fluidity of the concept, one participant took the approach that having an organization name 'engagement' as a critical function and role gave the area legitimacy, even if it was unclear. (P10): *We're saying public engagement is as important as commercial programming and utilization, venue utilization. That that is equally important. By naming it, whereas when it's not named, it's just part of a thing.*

Selective priorities: emphasizing audience attraction, attendance, and participation

The way practitioners enacted engagement focused on connection, active or passive participation and attendance. This focus on attendance, visitation, and participation of various audiences, sometimes split by demographics, largely aligns with theoretical arts management approaches in audiences, community or public engagement literature. Participants described engagement practice primarily through the lens of participation: *"I see engagement as connecting people to each other and to new ideas through art."* (P5), *"active participation through interactive workshops, and performances and sessions, and you know, talks and ideas and things like that, or if it's more passive as audience members."* (P2), *"Physical attendance, or digital attendance to the programs, or exhibitions on offer"* (P12), *"Our engagement objective is to ensure that communities who are connected to or in support of artists, and art, capital A art lowercase A arts and culture, have access to engage or participate in the arts in a way that serves their needs, as opposed to serving the needs of the lowercase capital or art or culture"* (P7).

A second engagement focus was on visitor experience and the removal of barriers, *"We really focus on is almost externally engagement, or externals, bringing external stakeholders in. But then there's also that other level where then I'm thinking directly about the visitor experience and what the ways that we want to engage them once they're we're on-site"* (P5) and removing barriers to access for communities, *"Finding ways looking at their barriers to access and finding ways that they can be part of the festival. And then I also worked across other departments to look at how we can do kind of tailored marketing and audience development for our particular stories that are in a program"* (P3). Other participants (P9 and P4) spoke of reaching audiences and making them comfortable in their organizations.

One area that considered engagement more holistically was the perspective of the First Nations engagement practitioner. First Nations engagement was defined in terms that included the practitioner's role. P10, a member of the First Nations community, saw engagement as the embodiment of a cultural practice, a responsibility and a lived experience. They said:

I hope to be a bridge between cultures, a bridge between our peoples, and a beacon of passion, commitment, and reconciliation for our people. And this bridge will be the next bridge for the generations of our peoples. I will bridge between cultures, and I will continue, and I and I have continued to honour and embody that practice for my cultural profession.

For P10, being an engagement practitioner was not a profession but a fundamental part of who they were, *"we are fulfilling a cultural responsibility of engaging something larger than us, that is about our culture run responsibility to hand something down, and to make sure that it is continuing in great purity."* P10 also described engagement practices that aligned more fully with other industry

approaches to engagement (as shown in Table 1.) They recognised the importance of trust and shared decision-making:

I think engagement is about trust and time developing trust. I think engagement is about humour. I think it's about stupidity. It's about messing things up and not getting the right answer to find a solution. It's about a comparative exchange of different understandings of one thing to find an outcome that has strategic agility embedded within it as a result of that amalgamation of different ideas.

This perspective is less about the outcomes of engagement, which was the common focus on other participants, but on the sometimes messy process of building trust and empowering stakeholders to participate in shared organizational decision-making.

Partial practice: one-sided engagement and untapped potential

Engagement was largely positioned in terms of outcomes or those being engaged rather than process. Participants focused on attendance, participation, or visitor outcomes (digital or physical), whether the public at large or specific community groups. From a process perspective, two key outcomes emerged. First, participants did not define engagement as a recognised procedure (e.g., identification to monitoring outcomes). Second, comparing definitions of engagement to the spectrum of engagement (Table 1) highlights that engagement practices in the participant organizations had less involvement in decision-making, collaboration or power sharing. The language used by participants rarely mentioned any form of empowerment or involvement in product or service development. Practitioners did not involve stakeholders in organizational processes, whether in programming decisions or through committees, forums, focus groups or consultation. While recognising that not all engagement activity requires this level of stakeholder involvement (Burdett, 2024), research practitioners did not acknowledge that there was potential for stakeholders to be more strategically engaged.

The exception was practitioners with experience in areas with exposure to professional engagement practices, such as IAP2. If the majority of participants aligned more towards 'community engagement' as defined by Burdett (2024), then P1 and P6 were more focused on the formal requirements of 'public participation'. P1, who was involved in large-scale arts infrastructure projects with their organization, mentioned consultation with stakeholders, "In the first instance, participation, and what we were trying to do was to leverage that participation. **To take it further into consultation.**" But it was P6, who had significant local government experience, who directly raised the industry framework:

I think, for me, more recently, going through the IAP2 has given a bit more rigour to how I think about the question of "What is engagement?" I think, for me, it's about civic participation and participatory decision-making. However, there's still an element of power in who gets to decide how much participation and how much engagement is suitable. So, at its most high level, it is about a level of civic participation in decisions that impact your life or your civic participation. But yes, it's still, for me, ultimately, a question of power. Who's willing to share it?

Given the lack of emphasis placed on engagement processes, it is unsurprising that no participant in this study discussed the identification of stakeholders when considering their definitions or processes. For those interviewed, the locus of their engagement was seemingly self-evident. For many, primary stakeholders were those identified within their role titles: public, community, audiences, or First Nations peoples. Stakeholders were sometimes segmented into key groups, such as education groups or culturally and linguistically diverse communities. For others, such as P9, who held a public engagement role with a national organization, their stakeholders were literally defined as "the Australian public."

Discussion and Conclusion

Research findings demonstrate two key opportunities for arts organizations and arts managers. First, the findings showed a lack of common understanding of what arts engagement is. At the beginning of the paper, we noted Walmsley's (2021) claim that the lack of a consistent definition of engagement was holding back both research in the area and the potential growth of the field in the arts and cultural sector. This research demonstrates that the lack of a clear definition of engagement is not only true for engagement practitioners working in the industry but also recognised by them. The fluid conceptualisation of engagement has practical implications for organizations. As Lowe (2011, as cited in Mutibwa, 2017) suggests, "(i)f we do not have a common language to describe the work, then we cannot advocate for it effectively to raise the values and perception of the practice (we cannot sell what hasn't got a name)..."

If we take Kujala et al.'s (2022) definition of stakeholder engagement, which considers aims, activities, and impacts of stakeholder relations in a moral, strategic, and/or pragmatic manner, then there is clear evidence within this study to suggest that practitioners have clear aims (to increase participation and attendance of stakeholders), often within a pragmatic and moral context (to increase arts participation for either the general public or specific groups by through attraction and/or removing barriers to access). Yet stakeholder engagement is, according to foundational research (Freeman, 2010; Freeman & Reed, 1983), an activity that constructively involves stakeholders in organizational activities. If we consider engagement practices as described by our research participants through the lens of engagement literature or professionalised stakeholder engagement practice as presented by the International Association for Public Participation (2015) and Burdett (2024), then arts engagement practice exists within a narrow range of predominantly one-way engagement activities. Most interview participants focussed on marketing and communication of organizational events or activities, removing barriers to access, or enhancing visitor experience. It was only the First Nations participant (P10) who defined engagement in cultural terms underpinned by lived experience, and those involved in infrastructure (P6) who discussed ideas of collaboration, shared decision making or empowerment of stakeholders that align with models such as IAP2. These outliers were most closely aligned with the idea of project-oriented engagement proposed by Burdett (2024: 309), where the purpose is to "provide opportunities for public perspectives to inform and influence the impact assessment and planned intervention under consideration."

Why might engagement activity in the arts, aside from First Nations and infrastructure roles, centre around participation and attendance rather than collaborative or empowered practices? The answer likely relates to the background and organizational position of those undertaking engagement roles. Participants defined engagement through a lens associated with experience, practice, organizational leadership, and organizational structure. For those who had worked in multiple arts organizations, they noted that what engagement was, or what successful engagement was, shifted across entities. P11 said when asked to define engagement, "*I might answer differently if I was sitting in my previous job because we're sitting in a different context.*" Even within organizations, the definition of engagement changed, such as P2, who notes, "*I'm quite aware that engagement in different contexts, like in a marketing and comms context, it means an entirely different thing...it is being used in multiple different forms.*" Participants recognised that 'engagement' is often used to define multiple processes or tasks that don't sit comfortably in other areas. Engagement was described by one (P2) as "*a catch-all phrase*" for activity that focused on attraction of the public. Practitioners' positions on engagement often aligned with their organizational location, with the majority (67 per cent) in areas of programming or marketing and communications where associated metrics such as visitor numbers or physical and digital attendance were prominent. Depth of engagement, or the involvement of stakeholders in actual organizational processes or decision-making, was not a clear aim. We acknowledge that there are efforts within the Australian arts sector, often within

community and cultural development or community engagement, to strengthen understanding and process of community participation in arts practice. However, even within texts produced by practitioners, such as the well-regarded *The Relationship is the Project (2024)*, there is scope to enhance engagement practices in line with stakeholder engagement research and professional practice.

Second, arts engagement practitioners do not enact engagement in line with industry or theoretical models of stakeholder engagement. Participants in this research did not discuss engagement as a process that could be applied to different circumstances. There is an opportunity, therefore, for arts organisations to consider engagement from a more strategic perspective. By aligning engagement more fully with organisational goals, determining a clear purpose for engagement (beyond increasing audience participation) and investing time and space in building engagement process capacity, there is potential to use engagement as a tool to bring stakeholders (community, audiences, visitors but also other stakeholders such as funders, philanthropists or corporate partners) more fully into the organization (Freeman et al., 2018). As indicated by the responses, current engagement practice sits on the surface of what engagement can be, emphasising marketing and communications of events or organizational activities rather than more empowering stakeholder activities such as collaboration and co-design.

The implications of these two engagement opportunities are broad and far-reaching from a HR perspective. Meta-analysis of the impact of job ambiguity shows it is negatively related to satisfaction and performance (Abramis, 1994). Arts organizations recruit people with disparate backgrounds into roles that are 'catch-all' or have an unclear purpose. When advertising roles, a lack of consistent understanding of what an 'engagement practitioner' is will impact candidates' ability to discern their suitability and potentially cause a misalignment in understanding role requirements (Feldman et al., 2006). Once on board, a lack of alignment between leaders and other organizational members regarding the value and best practice engagement processes will mean misallocating resources, wasted effort, staff disillusionment and decreased retention. For people to achieve in their roles and for roles to contribute to the achievement of organizational goals, there should be a consistent understanding of what engagement is, how it is done, and what the measures of success are (while out of scope for this paper, participants uniformly noted there were no clear measures of success, other than attendance metrics, for most).

There is ample opportunity to further develop and deepen the understanding of stakeholder engagement as an arts management skillset. While participants are spread across geography and creative disciplines, the total number interviewed in this study totals a relatively small number of experts in each area. This is particularly relevant when considering First Nations and Infrastructure-oriented engagement, and there is an opportunity to build an understanding of these two distinct engagement areas. In addition, there is potential to consider the written job descriptions and key performance metrics of engagement to look at the alignment of human resource processes with the lived experience of engagement professionals.

What this paper has shown, however, is that arts organizations have additional opportunities to benefit from enhanced stakeholder engagement practices. Currently, there is a lack of shared understanding of engagement and a focus on engagement outcomes rather than process. Developing an understanding of engagement, including mapping and a deeper understanding of actions, would bring value to the arts, given the alignment between engagement principles and the multi-stakeholder nature of arts management. This would mean that all staff and stakeholders would be united for a common purpose. Currently, arts organizations are not maximising the opportunities that engagement practices bring; beyond providing a social license to operate,

engagement can deepen the connection with the community, create more effective information sharing, and lead to greater democracy in decision-making.

References

- Abramis, D. J. (1994). Work role ambiguity, job satisfaction, and job performance: Meta-analyses and review. *Psychological reports*, 75(3), 1411-1433.
- AccountAbility. (2015). *AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard*. AccountAbility.
<https://www.accountability.org/standards/aa1000-stakeholder-engagement-standard>
- Antón, C. (2009). The impact of role stress on workers' behaviour through job satisfaction and organizational commitment. *International Journal of Psychology*, 44(3), 187-194.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/00207590701700511>
- Brown, A., & Ratzkin, R. (2011). Making sense of audience engagement: A critical assessment of efforts by nonprofit arts organizations to engage audiences and visitors in deeper and more impactful arts experiences. *The San Francisco Foundation*, 1, 78.
- Burdett, T. (2024). Community engagement, public participation and social impact assessment. In *Handbook of Social Impact Assessment and Management* (pp. 308-324). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Business for Social Responsibility. (2019). *Five-Step Approach to Stakeholder Engagement*. BSR.
<https://www.bsr.org/en/our-insights/report-view/stakeholder-engagement-five-step-approach-toolkit>
- Caust, J. (2018). *Arts Leadership in Contemporary Contexts*. Routledge.
- Chametzky, B. (2016). Coding in Classic Grounded Theory: I've Done an Interview; Now What? *Sociology Mind*, 06(04), 163-172. <https://doi.org/10.4236/sm.2016.64014>
- Create NSW. (2021). *Aboriginal Arts and Culture Protocols*. NSW Government.
<https://www.nsw.gov.au/arts-and-culture/engage-nsw-arts-and-culture/resource-hub/aboriginal-arts-and-culture-protocols>
- Feldman, D. C., Bearden, W. O., & Hardesty, D. M. (2006). Varying the content of job advertisements: The effects of message specificity. *Journal of Advertising*, 35(1), 123-141.
- Freeman, R. E. (2010). *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Freeman, R. E., Harrison, J. S., & Zyglidopoulos, S. (2018). *Stakeholder Theory: Concepts and strategies*. Cambridge University Press.
- Freeman, R. E., & Reed, D. L. (1983). Stockholders and Stakeholders: A New Perspective on Corporate Governance. *California management review*, 25(3), 88-106.
- Frögéli, E., Rudman, A., & Gustavsson, P. (2019). The relationship between task mastery, role clarity, social acceptance, and stress: An intensive longitudinal study with a sample of newly registered nurses. *International journal of nursing studies*, 91, 60-69.
- Frooman, J. (1999). Stakeholder influence strategies. *Academy of Management Review*, 24(2), 191-205.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery grounded theory: strategies for qualitative inquiry*. Aldin, Chicago.
- Hackman, J. R., & Oldham, G. R. (1976). Motivation through the design of work: test of a theory. *Organizational behavior and human performance*, 16(2), 250-279.
[https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/0030-5073\(76\)90016-7](https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/0030-5073(76)90016-7)
- Harrison, J. S., Bosse, D. A., & Phillips, R. A. (2010). Managing for stakeholders, stakeholder utility functions, and competitive advantage. *Strategic Management Journal*, 31(1), 58-74.
- Herzberg, F. I. (1966). *Work and the Nature of Man*.
- Hooper-Greenhill, E. (2000). Changing Values in the Art Museum: Rethinking Communication and Learning. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, Vol.6(No. 1), pp.9-31.

- International Association for Public Participation. (2015). *Quality Assurance Standard For Community and Stakeholder Engagement*. <https://www.iap2.org.au/news/quality-assurance-standard-for-community-and-stakeholder-engagement/>
- Jankauskaite, D. (2014). Analysis of Stakeholder Management within Cultural Projects. In R. Oczkowska & G. Śmigieliska (Eds.), *Knowledge Economy Society* (pp. 97-108). Foundation of the Cracow University of Economics.
- Keeney, K. P., & Jung, Y. (2018). Global Arts Leadership: An Exploration of Professional Standards and Demands in Arts Management. *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society*, 48(4), 227-242.
- Kim, M., & Benenson, J. (2023). Arts and Culture Nonprofits as Civic Actors: Mapping Audience, Community, and Civic Engagement in Nonprofit Organizations. *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society*, 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10632921.2023.2240132>
- Kujala, J., Sachs, S., Leinonen, H., Heikkinen, A., & Laude, D. (2022). Stakeholder engagement: Past, present, and future. *Business & Society*, 61(5), 1136-1196.
- Lillie, J., Brown, J. J., Larsen, K., & Kirkwood, C. (2024). *The Relationship is the Project: Working with Communities*. NewSouth Publishing.
- Mason, J. (2002). *Qualitative researching*. Sage.
- Mccall, V., & Gray, C. (2014). Museums and the 'new museology': theory, practice and organisational change. *Museum management and curatorship*, 29(1), 19-35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2013.869852>
- McKinsey & Company. (2020). *The pivotal factors for effective external engagement*.
- Mitchell, R. K., Agle, B. R., & Wood, D. J. (1997). Toward a theory of stakeholder identification and salience: Defining the principle of who and what really counts. *Academy of Management Review*, 22(4), 853-886.
- Morse, N. (2018). Patterns of accountability: an organizational approach to community engagement in museums [community engagement, accountability, participation, organizational studies, local authority museum]. *2018*, 16(2), 16. <https://doi.org/10.29311/mas.v16i2.2805>
- Morsing, M., & Schultz, M. (2006). Corporate social responsibility communication: stakeholder information, response and involvement strategies. *Business Ethics: A European Review*, 15(4), 323-338.
- Mutibwa, D. H. (2019). 'Sell[ing] what hasn't got a name': An exploration of the different understandings and definitions of 'community engagement' work in the performing arts. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 22(3), 345-361. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549417722107>
- Onciul, B. (2018). Community engagement, curatorial practice, and museum ethos in Alberta, Canada. In *A Museum Studies Approach to Heritage* (pp. 714-730). Routledge.
- Rousseau, D. M. (1978). Characteristics of departments, positions, and individuals: Contexts for attitudes and behavior. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 521-540.
- Stallings, S. N., & Mauldin, B. (2016). Public engagement in the arts: A review of recent literature. *Ford Theatre Foundation, and Los Angeles County Arts Commission*.
- Stevenson, D., & Magee, L. (2017). Art and space: Creative infrastructure and cultural capital in Sydney, Australia. *Journal of Sociology*, 53(4), 839-861. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783317744105>
- Tang, Y.-T., & Chang, C.-H. (2010). Impact of role ambiguity and role conflict on employee creativity. *African Journal of Business Management*, 4(6), 869.
- Walmsley, B. (2019). *Audience engagement in the performing arts: A critical analysis*. Springer.
- Walmsley, B. (2021). Engagement: The new paradigm for audience research. *Participations*, 18(1), 299-316.
- Wilson, D., & Williams, T. (2017). *Evaluating the Indigenous Community Engagement Coordinator pilot for Performing Lines*. Patternmakers.