

MODULE SIX – RESEARCH

THE HIGHLIGHTS

Joining professional associations

The four principal reasons people join professional associations are:

- Necessity because of close-shop agreements.
- Professional accreditation requires membership.
- Common sense.
- And, sometimes, idealism.

Membership offers opportunities for networking, lobbying, offers of engagements, protection against unethical treatment, information services, and various administrative forms and contracts.

Associations as well as not-for-profit service organizations can be invaluable sources of non-standard contacts, information, and work. Local cultural groups may be short-lived, but can be useful networking and creative resources.

Associations lobby on behalf of their members, work with government and sister societies to improve work conditions, and offer advice, marketing and promotional opportunities, professional contacts, professional development, research and reports, and other benefits. Professional associations offer members networking and practical help, and membership may be one of the very first steps you need to take professionally.

When considering whether to join a professional association, look at the questions on p. 63 of TAMYC.

When you join, commit to making the organization work. If you think something could be improved, get elected to the governing body and change things. Being involved with the association's workings can increase your professional visibility.

Whichever organization you select, respect its rules and support the members of other professional, performer, and craft organizations. You can find out about organizations in your discipline by checking out the discipline-specific resources of TAMYC for a list of professional associations' websites.

Critical thinking

Are you aware of your process of making decisions? There are many ways to approach them, such as:

- Gut/intuition
- Research
- Procrastination
- Emotion
- Rationality
- Seeking authority
- Non-decision

Each example has a potential positive and negative side. For example, doing research is important, but not if it means you spend all of your time finding more information, but never get to making a decision.

To make informed decisions, it can be useful to ask yourself

- Will this decision move you towards one of your goals?
- Does this decision utilize all of the information available to you?
- Does this decision agree with your values and principles?

Learn to discern what is actually important from what feels urgent!

When pressed by other people, remember the adage:

Lack of planning on their part does not necessarily constitute an emergency on your part.

Find as many tools as you can to help you manage information and make informed and timely decisions.

THE HOMEWORK

Reflective Questions on Risk

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1. How have the people in your life and early experiences influenced your attitude towards risk? Can you think of a time when you were willing to take a significant risk? Can you identify any beliefs, preparatory action, or support that helped you to take that risk?
2. What's one small risk you might take now to move you closer to your goals? What's one big risk? What might you need to feel ready for a big risk?
3. Who might you reach out to for advice or inspiration?

Structuring Your Enterprise

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Setting up a business – choosing the best structure: self-employed, not-for-profit company, or commercial enterprise?

Businesses and organisations in the creative and cultural sector are set up with different legal structures; we need to be aware of the options available and the consequences of each.

A creative entrepreneur can operate as a self-employed 'sole trader', in a partnership, or set up a separate legal entity such as a company for the purposes of running a business. Self-employment, a commercial company, a partnership, a 'not-for-profit' company, a social enterprise or a charity are all possible and there are many examples of creative businesses and organisations set up in each of these ways.

Each of these structures has 'pros and cons' so it's useful to examine all the options and be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of each. Before deciding on a particular structure, it's advisable to consider the bigger picture and the long-term view. In particular, be aware of the consequences in terms of investment, ownership, control and reward.

For example, it might be easier to get a grant in the short term by choosing a 'not for profit' structure, but this same structure may prevent you from getting commercial investment in the future, and can also result in the founders losing ownership and control of their enterprise.

Business strategy

Of course you don't have to choose only one structure. Entrepreneurs and organisations often have more than one legal entity.

For example a charity might also have a subsidiary trading company, a commercial organisation can have a charitable arm, and an enterprise can be built up as a group of companies, to enable different investment options, involve different people and 'compartmentalise' business risks. But before choosing a legal format for your enterprise, think first about your overall business strategy and then select the most appropriate legal structure(s) to suit your purposes and achieve your goals.

