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# Professional Career Development in the Arts Management of Supported Studios in Australia

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines ways of enabling the professional development of artists with cognitive disability who wish to build an artistic career in Australia. It investigates two case studies of the arts management of supported studios through semi-structured interviews with art staff. Thematic analysis indicates four aspects of professional development for artists with cognitive disability at individual and organizational levels: environmental setting, strategic approaches, networking, and skills and career development. The article discusses the central role of supported studios and art staff in helping artists with cognitive disability achieve their aims to pursue professional artistic careers.

## Introduction

The practice of art offers emotional, psychological, and neurological benefits for children and adults with cognitive disability (Richardson 2015). Cognitive disability is the term used to describe Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other intellectual, mental, and learning disabilities which have an impact on cognitive and emotional processes such as conceptualizing, sequencing thoughts, and interpreting subtle social cues (Olney and Kim 2001; Braddock et al. 2004). Many people with cognitive disability participate in some kind of therapeutic, recreational, or community art for its benefits to individual and social well-being (Darragh et al. 2016; Sandahl 2018; Richardson 2015). Art can also be an alternative form of expression or visual communication for people who may be limited in verbal or traditional ways of communicating with others (Australia Council for the Arts 1995; Grandin 2009; Richardson 2015).

According to the Australia Council for the Arts (1995), over the past thirty years some arts organizations have actively supported people with cognitive disability who have artistic potential and a passion for art. These organizations provide them with a range of creative services and community activities such as recreational or day option programs for building individual and social well-being (Darragh et al. 2016; Evans, Bellon, and Matthews 2017). They may also cater to the professional development needs of some people with cognitive disability, helping them to pursue further technical artistic support and building networks (Boeltzig, Sullivan, and Hasnain 2009; Arts Access

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Australia 2013). However, not all of these arts organizations are able to provide an adequate creative environment with the required multi-levels of management, business knowledge, and skills (Yoon, Ellison, and Essl 2020). In order to respond more fully to the professional development needs of visual artists with cognitive disability, some arts organizations referred to as "supported studios" provide a sustained creative environment to support their individual art practice. A number of Australian supported studios have founded a network called the Supported Studio Network (http://aarts.net.au/supportedstudios/about/).

For centuries people with cognitive disability have been confronted by barriers to higher education and employment opportunities because they are culturally perceived as being inadequate or incapable of participating in socially valued roles (Wolfensberger 2011; Solvang 2012). Research by Magiati, Tay, and Howlin (2014) shows that 55 per cent of the survey participants with ASD did not have a job; none were married or in a long-term relationship; and most had never had friends. The stigma of disability creates both attitudinal and physical barriers to social and community participation and career opportunities (Australia Council for the Arts 1995; Ludwig 2012; Yoon, Ellison, and Essl 2020). Supported studios aim to overcome the obstacles faced by artists with cognitive disability in accessing conventional pathways to education and professional development (Australian Design Centre 2020, 5 May). According to the website of the Supported Studio Network (as of 5 May 2020), the agenda of supported studios focuses on the following objectives: (1) facilitating professional development and career building; (2) providing technical artistic support; (3) promoting artists in the marketplace, in networks and to audiences outside the disability sector; and (4) demonstrating a commitment to producing and presenting work of high artistic quality.

There is a lack of information about the arts management of supported studios because studies of art in disability sectors tend to highlight therapeutic or recreational roles, and not professional careers (Yoon, Ellison, and Essl 2020; Onyx et al. 2018; Sandahl 2018). However, according to one experimental report (DADAA Inc 2014), the strategic partnership between artists with a disability and those without results in positive impacts on the professional development of the former, such as building networks, aiding planning and problem solving, developing skills and experimenting with new forms.

This qualitative study focuses on the research question of 'how supported studios facilitate the professional development of artists with cognitive disability' by examining two case studies in Australia. The study is significant for two reasons. First, the concept of supported studios is relatively new, and to date there are no specific academic studies on their arts management (Yoon, Ellison, and Essl 2020). This study shows how arts management can improve inclusivity and innovation in arts and cultural industries. Second, the study examines the potentials and challenges of arts management for artists with cognitive disability through the lived experiences of art staff who have worked with them for lengthy periods.

The nature of disability is complex, so facilitating people with cognitive disability can be challenging and requires commitment (Greco and Giovanni 2017). The findings of this study will contribute to a conceptual framework for professional development and provide guidelines for other arts organizations that could potentially provide professional development for artists with cognitive disability.

## Methods

Using case studies of two supported studios, this study investigated strategies of professional development for artists with cognitive disability through the experiences of art staff who had managed the studios for several years. It focused on collecting information about professional development in a broad context, taking into account environmental setting, additional support needs, and strategies for planning and achieving goals.

### Recruitment and participants

According to the Supported Studio Network, there are currently fourteen supported studios listed in Australia. Initially, invitations for research participation, including information about the project in PDF format, were sent out via email to five major supported arts organizations. Two studios responded to the invitation. The first respondent was supported studio A. Located in Melbourne, it provides professional development programs for more than 140 artists with cognitive disability. The second respondent, supported studio B, is located in Sydney and provides professional development programs for more than twenty artists with cognitive disability. Four art staff in total participated in semi-structured interviews: (1) one art director (Jane) and one studio manager (Tom) from supported studio A; and (2) one art director (Helen) and one studio manager (Emily) from supported studio B (Table 1).

### Data collection

The study used two methods of data collection: field-generated data and found data (Hair et al. 2015).

Field-generated data included observation and semi-structured interviews to explore the phenomenon of professional development in its natural setting. Field notes and photographs recorded information about the studio environment and atmosphere, as well as showing artists with cognitive disability at work on their artwork. Semi-structured interviews with individual art staff were digitally recorded after consent forms had been signed by the participants. They were conducted for approximately 60 to 90 minutes and explored the participants' experiences in terms of professional development programs, strategies and challenges.

Found data included existing sources provided by both supported studios, such as annual reports, business plans, artist agreements, social media contents, publications, and marketing and promotional materials.

### Data analysis

The data obtained were analyzed using an interpretative phenomenological approach based on thematic analysis and an iterative process. The audio records of the interviews were transcribed and sent back to the four participants for their approval. Collected data were openly coded by examining and comparing them to uncover ideas, thoughts and meanings (Hair et al. 2015). In the first stage, the major categories for study emerged from data analysis following the open coding. Emerging codes were then

**Table 1.** Interview participant demographics.

| Alias | Supported art organization | Position/role |
|---|---|---|
| Jane | Supported studio A in Melbourne | Art director |
| Tom | Supported studio A in Melbourne | Studio manager |
| Helen | Supported studio B in Sydney | Art director |
| Emily | Supported studio B in Sydney | Studio manager |

examined subject to theoretical relationships, identification of conditions, actions and interactions among the actors (art staff), strategies and tactics, and consequences associated with the phenomenon (professional career development of artists with cognitive disability) (Boadu and Sorour 2015). In the second stage, the data were thematically organized, selected and minimized to focus on the main research questions regarding professional development: the effective strategies required and the challenges faced by artists with cognitive disability. From both these approaches, four major themes emerged: (1) environmental setting, (2) strategic approaches, (3) networking, and (4) skills and career development. For each major theme there were subcategories based on the details of the analyzed data, including benefits, effective strategies, and challenges.

## Results

### Description of the case studies: Supported studio A and B

Supported studio A in Melbourne has been a leader and innovator in the arts and disability sectors over the past 40 years (Stonehouse and McDonald 2014), and aims for excellence in both its exhibitions and its studio programs. Tom shared his experience as a studio manager regarding individual and systemic challenges and enablers for artists with cognitive disability to develop their art practice. Jane is an art director of supported studio A. According to Tom and Jane, art staff proactively promote artists and their artwork in the broader community, providing exhibition opportunities in a range of local, national, and international galleries. Artists are also represented in many public and private collections. Supported studio A offers studio programs for more than 140 artists as well as collaborative opportunities with mentor artists. The studio provides practical and functional artistic supports in a similar way to a tertiary art environment. Each artist develops their own art style, communicating an authentic voice through their art. Art staff are also professional artists, and they provide feedback, technical assistance, critical advice and encouragement (Stonehouse and McDonald 2014). Jane explained the current Australian systems for disability funding, NDIS, social structure, systemic impacts and societal challenges and enablers in terms of the development of art careers for artists with cognitive disability.

Supported studio B in Sydney was purportedly formed as a kind of social enterprise. Rather than being a recreational art studio, it aims to create economic benefits through the art practice of artists with cognitive disability. Helen, an art director at studio B, described the journey of establishing the studio:

> It was that kind of seeded concept that we got funding for, which was for five of the artists we were working with to get 10 days of bespoke mentorship with mainstream artists … The project was incredibly successful and we had a show at the end with our artists and mentor artists. The show was received so well. That was 2011. We still have relationships with all the mentors, and the funding body which was the state arts funding body.

The seeded concept of mentorship programs to develop art careers for artists with cognitive disability was extended to a 12-month ongoing program as the state government decided to invest in research for cultivating art and disability in 2014. This allowed artists with cognitive disability to step away from the recreational programs. Helen emphasized the need for and the importance of a professional art studio environment which works in a similar way to a mainstream art studio. She remarked that "If they didn't have a disability, they would've gone to an art school most likely, and they might've met peers. Such a critical outcome to attending art schools is the networks you get. It's not disability development, and it's like endorsement happens."

Supported studio B aims to provide opportunities to promote the value of artwork created by artists with cognitive disability by branding, marketing and commercializing their artistic strengths. Emily, a studio manager of supported studio B, provides artistic support as well as administration services for artists with cognitive disability. Helen and Emily have a vision to improve the public perception of artists with cognitive disability and the value of their artwork through branding, commercializing and exhibiting their artwork without using the word "disability." Supported studio B is an innovative art studio which aims to develop the art careers of artists with cognitive disability as professional artists. They have actively integrated mentorship programs between external artists and artists with cognitive disability, so they influence each other in developing artistic inspiration and skills. Helen and Emily described the strategies and philosophy of the organization, and they also shared their experience of the challenges of working with artists with cognitive disability.

### Environmental setting

The results of the data analysis indicated the importance of the physical environmental setting and individual support in providing appropriate professional development programs for art participants with cognitive disability (Figure 1). Supported studio A in Melbourne had separate spaces for different uses, including working studios, a gallery and a cafeteria. In an open studio space, around thirty artists with cognitive disability were working on their projects in a relaxed atmosphere. Supported studio B, located on the fourth level of a community center in Sydney, was smaller but also had a calm and relaxed atmosphere with subtle background music. All artists with cognitive disability at supported studio B were independently working on their artwork. Art staff worked with some artists in a collaborative or supportive role, but did not provide direct instruction or touch the artwork. Despite their difference in size, the physical environmental settings of supported studios A and B were similar.

### Physical support

Supported studios A and B both provided high-quality materials for artists with cognitive disability to use in their art practice. All the interviewees emphasized the importance of creating an appropriate environment for artists in their studios. Tom, the studio manager of supported studio A, commented, "We are trying to promote a healthy environment when it comes to personal space, accepting differences." Depending on the time of day, the studio could be noisier or quieter than usual, and bright light or
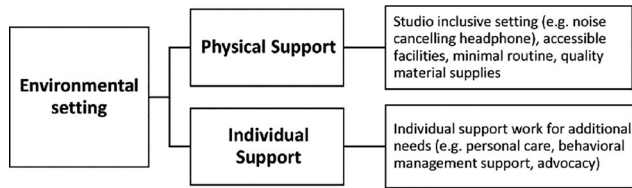
**Figure 1.** An overview of the environmental setting.

background music could be overly stimulating for some individuals with autism. Unfortunately, neither studio could offer to create quiet or low sensory spaces, but they were able to provide extra care. Tom explained that:

> We may provide the artists with noise-cancelling headphones if they need … to cut out the noise of music playing. We do little things to adjust the studio. We certainly let everybody know who's got [problems with] sensory stuff like touching.

The most critical environmental support is the engagement with individual artists. Tom noted the importance of "feeling comfortable [with] each other and realizing that everybody is here for the same reason and they don't come to this place just because it's something to do. They have to be interested in engaging in a series of ways with art practices." According to Emily, the studio manager of supported studio B, there are no fixed routines in the studios, but artists with cognitive disability are encouraged to use a signing book in the morning to see who attends for each day, and to clean up their work area before packing up.

> They have a signing book which is kind of their routine that they have to sign on. We could check if we want to, but it's like everybody likes to sign in the book. And we do have a routine with packing up and cleaning up because it's their studio, so we get these guys to get involved in washing the brushes, packing up and putting their artwork away. (Emily, studio manager)

All the art staff emphasized that a relaxed and respectful environmental setting is essential. Additionally, providing a variety of materials and equipment encourages artists with cognitive disability to explore their ideas and experiment with new forms of creativity.

### Individual support

The two main interviewees, Tom and Emily, were able to provide detailed information about individual support needs for artists with cognitive disability because as studio managers they spent the greatest amount of time with the artists on a daily basis. Individual support needs can be categorized in three aspects: (1) behavioral support, (2) personal care support, and (3) advocacy for those who cannot speak for themselves. Emily shared her perspective on respect for individual routines or preferences. For example, she says, "[Name of artist] tends to have his lunch later. He doesn't like to eat with everyone else. So, he has his lunch later. He even leaves later, after everyone leaves. It's like people have their own routine as well."

In terms of any challenging behaviors of artists with cognitive disability, supported studios A and B have both provided training sessions for any staff who require them.

> We used to do behavior training sessions. Those are available if we want them. In the last year … our admin staff did not necessarily need to go to training, but I went to the training because I had to be here every day. And it was good. (Emily, studio manager)

Additionally, some artists with severe cognitive disability might require one-on-one support for personal care such as behavioral support (i.e., meltdown, anxiety management, and sensory care) or being given medication during the studio session. Tom said that

> … we have epilepsy training and how to deliver the Midazolam and we've all done a workshop around epilepsy and we've done lots of training in workshop around autism and behavioral stuff because we do need to know this stuff.

Art staff generally do not deal with personal care because for artists with cognitive disability it is a matter of privacy and dignity. Tom emphasized that it is important to maintain equality in the relationship between art staff and artists, so most cases requiring personal care (e.g., assisting with toileting and at mealtimes) are managed by support workers who accompany individual artists in the studio. However, it sometimes happens that art staff need to manage urgent cases:

> If an artist has a personal care accident [toilet accident], we won't leave them. We will sort that out. But if there is a profile that the artist has, then we expect that somebody comes with the artist to help and manage that. It is important. (Tom, studio manager)

Tom added that treating artists with cognitive disability as adults can make a big difference. "They know that … we treat them as individuals rather than people with disability."

Lastly, supported studios A and B provide advocacy for artists with severe cognitive disability. According to Tom, "People with intellectual disabilities often can't advocate for themselves, so the agency that we offer is to take that into consideration." At supported studio A there are artists who have severe autism and are nonverbal. Those artists are capable of making great artwork, and they have been invited to many exhibitions. However, Tom explained that he did not know whether they would clearly understand what they do in the studio. Art staff can only assume the meanings of their behaviors.

> [Our] top two artists wouldn't be able to communicate what they are doing. As far as I know they are profoundly autistic, and they are nonverbal. But I would say that they have a sense of what they do here, and they have a sense of their place in the art world because they have been to so many exhibition openings featuring their work. (Tom, studio manager)

Supported studios A and B both provide artist agreements, advocacy services, and legal advice to protect the rights of individual artists with cognitive disability in selling or licensing their artwork. Jane stated that "We don't get a consistent service, but we look for pro bono [services] where we can get it. It changes over time. We go to different organizations and different legal people for advice."

## Strategic approaches

The results of data analysis demonstrate three strategies for developing art practice for artists with cognitive disability: (1) planning individual goals, (2) achieving individual goals, and (3) decision-making. All artists with cognitive disability are encouraged to follow these three strategies to develop their art practice to professional standard.
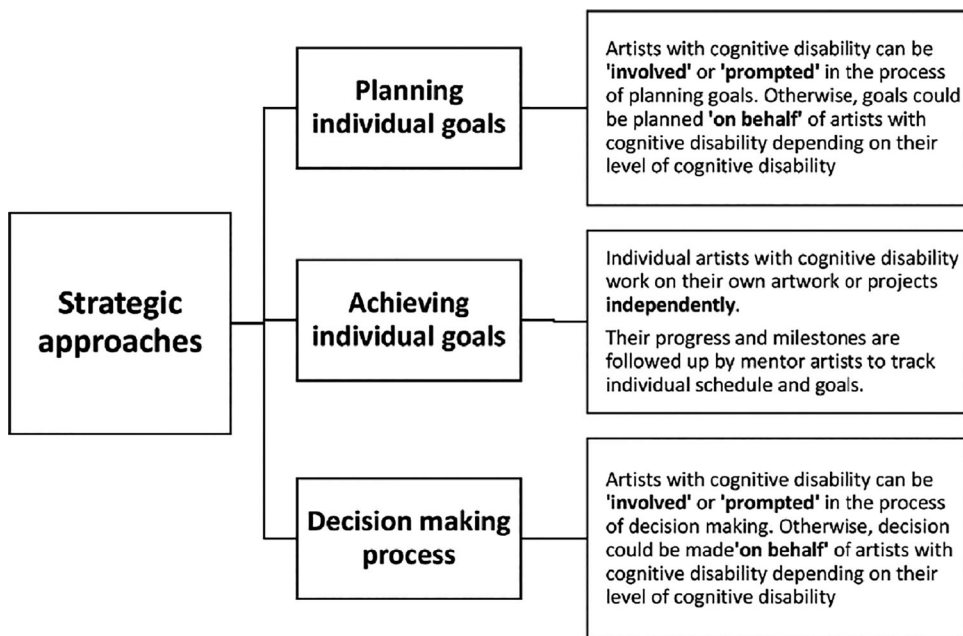
**Figure 2.** An overview of strategic approaches.

However, not all can follow the strategies independently. Therefore, depending on the artist's level of cognitive capacity, art staff adopt one of three different approaches to achieve the best outcome for individual goals: involvement, prompting, or agency. Using the first approach, artists who have the capacity to articulate their own thoughts and ideas are involved in the process of setting goals and decision-making. In the second approach, artists who can share their thoughts and ideas but need some support are given prompts to help them take part in the process. Thirdly, for those artists who cannot share their thoughts and ideas, planning goals and decision-making processes are set by art staff, internal mentors acting as agents on their behalf (Figure 2).

### Planning individual goals

Supported studios A and B both pursue non-directive approaches for professional development in order to empower artists with cognitive disability to form their own styles. Jane, the art director of supported studio A, said, "We don't teach people how to paint and how to draw. It's very much about eliciting a person's personal style. In our studio, you will see 140 different styles. Not everyone does the same sort of work." Tom, the studio manager, added that "It's all about the artists being encouraged with mentorship and feedback to find their own thumbprints, their own artistic creative voice." The fundamental philosophy of professional development is respect for the voice of individuals with cognitive disability through their artistic expression.

In order to set up goals, the process of reviewing the personal style of each artist is critical. Depending on individual cognitive capacity, some artists are involved in planning their own artistic goals, but for others art staff need to intervene to set up goals on their behalf.

> We have a lot of goals that we set on behalf of the artists [art participants with cognitive disability] about their aspiration, what they would like to achieve with their art practice … Those goals are often set by the staff during the review period which happens at the end of each school term. (Tom, studio manager)

Art staff discuss individual goals with artists who have the capacity to share their thoughts, and the artists can then agree or disagree with those suggestions or opinions.

> We talk to the artists about that, and they also set some goals for themselves as well. They may reject some of the goals that we set because they don't agree with us. And we kind of work towards helping and developing their practice further. (Tom, studio manager)

According to all the interview participants, some artists with cognitive disability who have taken part in studio programs for a long time have become more independent in planning their goals. However, those who have severe cognitive disability and are non-verbal still require ongoing support for goal-planning and decision-making. Art staff build a depth of understanding of their artistic profiles through multiple reviews of their artwork before setting up goals on their behalf.

### Achieving individual goals

Interestingly, once goals are set up, the entire process of artwork by individual artists is achieved 100 per cent independently, regardless of their level of cognitive capacity. Jane, the art director at studio A, emphasized that "No one touches artists' work except the artists. That's the most important thing." According to all interview participants, the artistic quality and performance of artists with cognitive disability at supported studios are as good as those of contemporary artists without disability. Artists with cognitive disability are also expected to meet the deadlines required by their set goals, such as commissioned work, public exhibitions or collaborative projects. The role of art staff is to follow up the schedule of each artist. Emily described how she helps artists to achieve their goals on time:

> [Name of artist] has been working on the painting for the National, and he had the deadline four months. So, every week, we have to make sure that [he] is staying on track with his painting. He has to do sixteen paintings over several months.

Art staff also share suggestions for using different materials, or present examples of artwork to encourage new ways of being creative. However, it is entirely up to the artists whether or not to adopt the suggestions, and their decisions are always respected.

> We generally have [art staff] who are working artists themselves or some sort of creators … so they've got skills. The idea is to support the artists for what they are doing, not changing their style. It's their work, so we are meant to be supporting and [giving] guidance. (Emily, studio manager)

### The decision-making process

All interview participants agreed that it is a challenge for most artists with cognitive disability to make the decision to participate in public exhibitions or art projects in mainstream art. Accordingly, carers or others who are close to the artists need to be involved in the decision-making. Tom shared his experience that "A couple of the most successful artists wouldn't be able to read and acknowledge the artist agreement. We
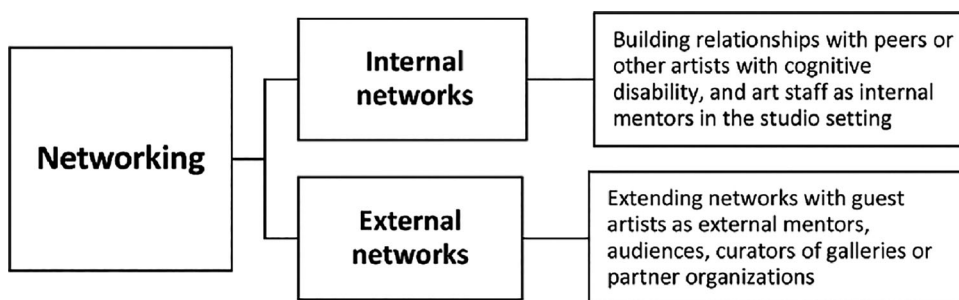
**Figure 3.** An overview of networking.

make sure their parents who advocate for them are reading [the agreements] and saying 'yes' on behalf of their child." The most challenging part is to understand those artists who are nonverbal because even the people closest to them, such as parents, can sometimes experience difficulty interpreting what they want. Tom described one occasion during preparation for an exhibition:

> There is no way we can particularly know whether they don't want us to [do something] … but they probably know … Once if [name of artist] didn't want his artwork on the wall with a fan, he would've shown this somehow by physically ripping the work off the wall or acting out.

Some artists who have a mild level of cognitive disability can be involved in the process of decision-making with support from art staff or their close people. Jane, the art director at studio A, added that

> We are working with people with disabilities. We have some people who are high-functioning and people who don't speak and people who don't hear, people who have a high level of autism. We don't just have one line of communications. We have lines of communication with the artists, with parents, with guardians, caregivers, whoever that is.

Without a holistic understanding of individual artists, decisions made on their behalf could be misleading or misconducted. Jane emphasized the importance of keeping multiple lines of communication open to allow for changing situations.

## Networking

Artists with cognitive disability can build internal and external networks through professional development programs such as mentorship under the management of supported studios A and B (Figure 3). Networking is one of the most significant benefits for professional development because people who are living with cognitive disability tend to have limited social contacts due to their communication and behavioral challenges. According to all art staff, being involved in the community and staying connected with other community members can create positive impacts for artists with cognitive disability and their families.

## Internal networks

Internal networks comprise peer artists, studio members, volunteers and art staff who spend the most time with artists with cognitive disability on a regular basis within the studio setting. Art staff of supported studios A and B are referred to as "internal mentors."

> Everyone who works with them is artists themselves. We don't employ disability workers but artists. We work with artists [art staff]. (Jane, art director)

Unlike other disability-related service providers, all art staff working at supported studios A and B have a qualification in the arts area. Art staff pursue an equal relationship with artists with cognitive disability, and they exchange artistic skills and knowledge rather than teaching them.

> The studio staff have an influence on the artists, and the artists are [also] influenced by their peers. The great thing about having a studio dedicated to artists is that you can work as an artist yourself while also supporting others. The conversation's generated about art too. (Tom, studio manager)

According to all interview participants, the studio environment has positive impacts on artists with cognitive disability in terms of developing friendships with other members of the studio. And it's not only the artists who benefit from having social interaction with others; art staff too have developed close bonds with the artists.

### External networks

According to all interview participants, external networks comprise guest artists, audiences, curators, collaborators from other arts organizations, or industrial partners. Supported studios A and B have both invited guest artists from mainstream art to work as external mentors, either for skills development or for involvement in collaborative projects. Emily shared her experience of involving guest artists with artists with cognitive disability: "Guest artists will either meet someone or see someone or find someone involved in work aligned closely with that of one of our artists. Some of these relationships can go on for years." According to Helen, the art director of supported studio B, most guest artists have never previously worked with someone with cognitive disability, and initially they may be nervous. However, the guest artists quickly learn to get along with artists with cognitive disability. In many cases, after external mentors and artists have worked on collaborative projects, the mentorship becomes a friendship:

> One of our artists does graphic novels, and years ago we invited a guest artist to come and work with this artist. They really did projects together and now they are friends. They kind of have a professional and close friendship with each other. (Emily, studio manager)

Artists with cognitive disability are also offered opportunities to go on field trips and to collaborate with many different mainstream artists. External networks can be established through involvement in public or private exhibitions. At exhibition openings, artists with cognitive disability are encouraged to meet curators or people connected with galleries as well as audiences. Helen explained that through multiple experiences of attending exhibitions and interactive art shows, artists with cognitive disability tend to broaden their social network by engaging with audiences and members of the public.

### Skills and career development

Supported studios A and B both provide technical artistic support and career-building opportunities for artists with cognitive disability. There are three aspects to the
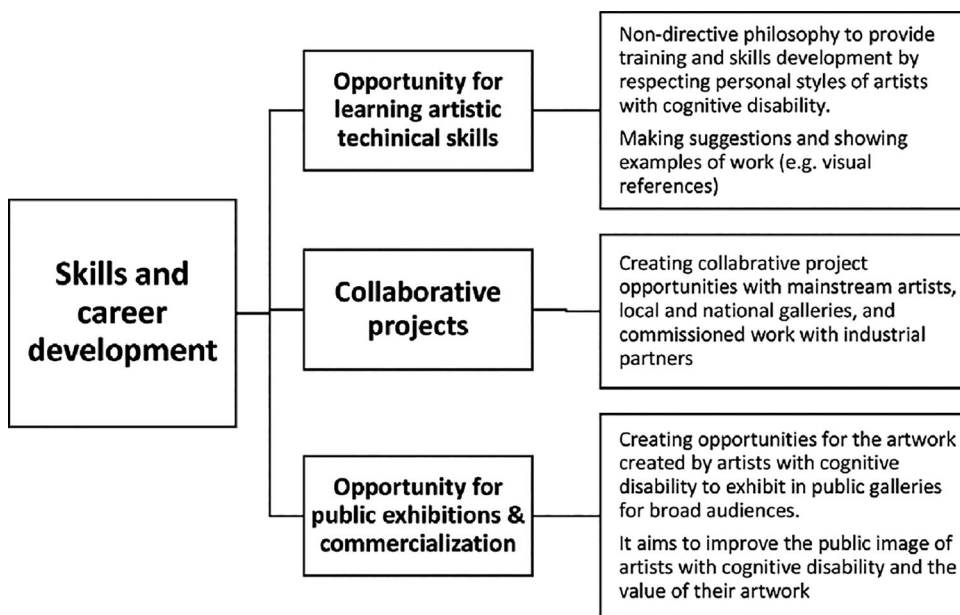
**Figure 4.** An overview of skills and career development.

promotion of artists' professional skills and careers: (1) opportunity for learning new artistic skills, (2) involvement in collaborative projects, and (3) opportunity for public exhibitions and commercialization (Figure 4).

### Opportunity for learning new artistic skills

People who do not have a disability have conventional pathways to becoming professional artists, such as going to art college or enrolling in tertiary education to gain knowledge and learn artistic skills. However, according to Helen and Jane, there are few alternative pathways to this kind of education for people with cognitive disability, even if they have an interest in and passion for art.

Supported studios A and B provide educational and vocational pathways for artists with cognitive disability through various disciplines. Jane commented that "We do help to guide people if they need or want to learn technical things like printmaking or ceramics. We will assist them by teaching technical skills." Individual artists with cognitive disability have a different pace of learning or practicing new skills or finding their own styles. All interview participants agreed that it is important to respect the individual styles of artists with cognitive disability. They also emphasized that the way of introducing new skills and knowledge should not be coercive but suggestive, by (for example) giving guidance to good examples of work or supplying visual references.

### Involvement in collaborative projects

Collaborative projects with external parties such as guest artists, industrial partners or public galleries can enhance the professional development of artists with cognitive disability, helping them to extend networks and audiences outside the disability sector.

According to all media publications about supported studios A and B, their artists with cognitive disability are involved in multiple collaborative art projects with mainstream artists. These include participation in national art shows, mural design, and commissioned works for fashion brands. Helen, the art director of supported studio B, commented that "[A collaborative project with external mentor artists and artists with cognitive disability] was incredibly successful, and we had a show at the end with our artists and mentor artists. The show was received so well." Tom, the studio manager of supported studio A, added that "We try ourselves to connect the guys [artists with cognitive disability] to a lot of the mainstream art going on, whether it's a collaboration, or going out to an artist's studio, or to mainstream galleries."

Collaborative projects also develop inter-organizational relationships between supported studios and industrial partners. These inter-organizational relationships can potentially create broad career opportunities and income streams. For example, one fashion company has produced a series of fashion products using the work of different artists with cognitive disability from supported studio B. Their ongoing collaboration for productive outcomes has generated economic benefits for both the studio and the artists. Art directors Helen and Jane see diverse collaborative projects as essential to the artists' professional development and the creation of economic value for their work.

### Opportunity for public exhibitions and commercialization

According to all interview participants, involvement in public exhibitions and commercialization improves both the public perception of artists with cognitive disability and the value of their artwork. Helen and Jane added that public audiences tend to have the perception that people with cognitive disability cannot make good art, or that the artwork they create does not qualify as professional art. However, Helen argued that the quality of artwork created by artists with cognitive disability is as good as that of contemporary artwork in public galleries. She also said that those artists were simply not given an opportunity to exhibit. Helen believed that exhibiting the artwork of artists with cognitive disability in public galleries would improve public perception:

> I've been inspired by other studios internationally which have been able to really increase the value of their artists' work. Like in New York, the Museum of Modern Art has in its collection work by artists with intellectual disabilities.

The public image of artists with cognitive disability can be improved through commercialization as well. Emily proudly explained that

> [Name of artist] … had one of his images, a painting he did, selected for some lining. They printed [his artwork] on a lining like silk and it was actually [on] luggage tags, a wallet and other stuff, which are very beautiful. That was really good for him and his promotion. And that was through partnering with Corban and Blair [a fashion company].

Supported studios A and B pursue innovative, inclusive and sustainable arts management strategies to promote the artistic contribution and achievement of artists with cognitive disability to contemporary art culture. They also advocate for public recognition of the artistic value of supported studios within broader arts and cultural industries.

## Discussion

From a conceptual perspective, the professional development of artists with cognitive disability needs to be established on trustworthiness and mutual respect. It is important that art staff develop a good understanding of artists' strengths and abilities. Art staff and artists have artistic interests in common, and are open to the exchange of ideas and artistic styles in a respectful manner. However, from a practical perspective, the professional development of artists with cognitive disability can be complicated if they require additional support for individual needs (Hadley and Goggin 2019). The results of this study indicate that professional development comprises two different levels of management: the individual level and the organizational level (Figure 5).

This multilevel management system is described in the Multilevel Models of organizational system theory (Klein and Kozlowski 2000; Ghayour et al. 2013). Organizations are multilevel systems, and multilevel models are designed to bridge micro and macro perspectives to illustrate relationships between phenomena at higher and lower levels of analysis, such as individuals and organizations (Klein and Kozlowski 2000). A multilevel theoretical model focuses on how phenomena at different levels are linked between top-down or/and bottom-up processes (Klein and Kozlowski 2000).

In multilevel theoretical perspective, supported studios include both top-down and bottom-up processes to achieve the best outcomes between individual artists with cognitive disability and organizations. The individual level of professional development management focuses on discovering and developing the individual artistic strengths and capabilities of artists with cognitive disability. In other words, art staff tend to use a "bottom-up" (micro) approach that embraces individuals' capabilities and functional variations (Stein 2007; Klein and Kozlowski 2000; Ghayour et al. 2013). In this way art staff develop a holistic understanding of individual artists, including their artistic profiles, their conditions of disability, strengths, functional variations, challenges, and even family circumstances. To support individual planning for goals, or decision-making to achieve those goals, art staff adopt one of three approaches depending on artists' individual artistic profiles and capacity, either involving them, prompting their responses, or advocating on their behalf. This level of professional management centers on the development of individual skills, the management of individual needs, facilitating artistic progress, and establishing social relationships with internal networks such as art staff, other studio members or volunteer artists.

Art staff have a central role in providing multiple supports for the professional development of artists with cognitive disability at the individual level. These include artistic support (e.g., technical skills training, buying materials, preparing exhibitions), personal care support (e.g., assisting with toilet time, mealtime and medicine), and behavior management (e.g., dealing with meltdown, managing anxiety, and sensory care). However, sometimes these multiple responsibilities and duties mean that art staff could be overloaded with more duties than they can handle, and they risk physical and emotional burn-out. In order to create a sustainable and healthy environment at the individual level, the mental and physical health of staff, as well as artists with cognitive disability, should be well managed and protected.

The organizational level of professional development management for artists with cognitive disability entails infrastructural support, professional arts management, and
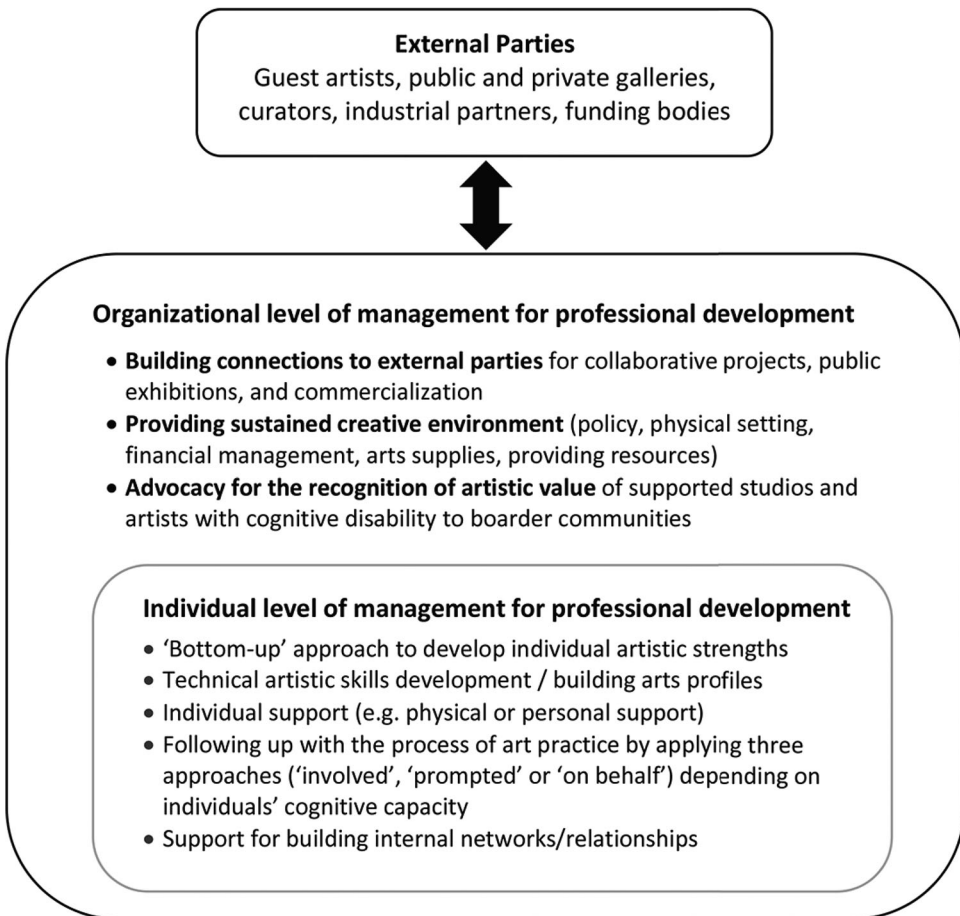
**External Parties**
Guest artists, public and private galleries,
curators, industrial partners, funding bodies

**Organizational level of management for professional development**

- **Building connections to external parties** for collaborative projects, public exhibitions, and commercialization
- **Providing sustained creative environment** (policy, physical setting, financial management, arts supplies, providing resources)
- **Advocacy for the recognition of artistic value** of supported studios and artists with cognitive disability to boarder communities

**Individual level of management for professional development**

- 'Bottom-up' approach to develop individual artistic strengths
- Technical artistic skills development / building arts profiles
- Individual support (e.g. physical or personal support)
- Following up with the process of art practice by applying three approaches ('involved', 'prompted' or 'on behalf') depending on individuals' cognitive capacity
- Support for building internal networks/relationships

**Figure 5.** An overview of arts management for artists with cognitive disability at the individual and organizational level.

governance. At the organizational level, the management approach becomes "top-down" (macro) to encompass an organizational vision and mission statement, short- and long-term goals, and road maps toward achieving these goals (Martinkenaite and Breunig 2016). Top-down processes describe "the influence of higher-levels of the system" (Klein and Kozlowski 2000, 7), including financial support, the provision of spaces and facilities, the recruitment of appropriate art staff, connection with external networks, and creating opportunities for learning skills and career development. Supported studios A and B also act as agencies to advocate on behalf of artists with cognitive disability in order to protect their legal rights. If an art studio is a supported studio, that suggests it can provide professional knowledge of policy, finance, arts and cultural management as well as a depth of understanding for individual artists with cognitive disability. At the organizational level of professional development management, the studio also takes responsibility for managing any potential risk for both art staff and artists with cognitive disability, such as conflicts and occupational and safety issues.

The management of professional development for artists with cognitive disability consists of micro- and macro-level interactions, which include systemic and social support;

disability-related knowledge, such as an understanding of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS); strategic arts management; and the facilitation of inter-organizational relationships by engaging with external parties (Figure 5). At another higher level, social factors and outcomes are critical external contexts influencing the management of artists' professional development. Supported studios must deal with social and perceptual barriers toward artists with cognitive disability, because the stigma of such people being seen as "incapable" is still deeply embedded in public perception (Yoon, Ellison, and Essl 2020; Ludwig 2012). In 2009 the Australian Government introduced the first cultural strategy for disability art, the National Arts and Disability Strategy (NADS), to guide Australian arts and cultural industries and communities to greater diversification of contemporary arts culture and audiences. The development of strategies to allow artists with cognitive disability access to and participation in mainstream arts and culture has become a critical agenda in arts and cultural management.

This study identifies some limitations for professional development and career-building for artists with cognitive disability at the societal and systemic levels, such as a lack of recognition of the organizational role of supported studios in creating disability employment. Supported studios provide an alternative economic space for artists with cognitive disability by encouraging full social participation in commercialization, public exhibitions, and commissioning of artwork. However, such opportunities are not yet recognized as disability employment. According to McMahon, Arthur, and Collins (2008), Australian career development practitioners state the importance of "political awareness of the value of career development to society and its position as an interface between individual needs and political and social needs" (16). It is worth investigating further the potential for creating disability employment opportunities through supported studios in order to advance the careers of artists with cognitive disability.

## Conclusion

Over centuries people with cognitive disability have been perceived as being incapable of professional achievement in any areas of society. Accordingly, they have never had equal opportunities or support to pursue their career as professional artists. However, a number of artists with cognitive disability demonstrate artistic strengths, and they are able to achieve their goals for artistic career-building through the professional development opportunities provided by supported studios. These case studies show that it is a matter of empowering them to achieve their goals by bridging the gap between what they are capable of and what they need. There should be more studies on exploring diverse sustainable models of arts management to strengthen marginalized artists. This in turn will lead to further inclusivity and innovation of arts and culture in society.

## Notes

1. The Supported Studio Network (SSN) is a national body that pursues building capacity and strengthening connections to sustain diverse supported studio models for artists with cognitive disability in Australia: https://www.artsproject.org.au/supported-studios-network-forum-2017/
2. The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is the national disability policy in Australia introduced in 2013 (Commonwealth of Australia 2013).

3. The National Arts and Disability Strategy is the first national cultural strategy for people with disability introduced in 2009 (Commonwealth of Australia 2009).

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