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Instructor's Manual: Where's My Compass?

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Abstract

The performing arts is a perennially over-subscribed market with more performers than available jobs. The COVID-19 pandemic brought a previously constrained market to a standstill. For many students graduating from musical theatre and acting programs the lack of employment opportunities in performance was discouraging. The attached case studies examine the experience of three graduates and how they used skills adjacent to their performing skills to launch small business ventures. This Instructor's Manual uses SWOT Analysis and the Ansoff Matrix as tools to assist students in analyzing the case studies (and as planning tools for their own entrepreneurial ventures). It also examines resilience and its role in navigating difficult circumstances and how the graduate performer can develop entrepreneurial ventures in non-performance spheres while still retaining their core creative identity. Through working through these case studies and the suggested exercises, arts entrepreneurship educators can help performing arts students conceive of ideas for "side hustle" businesses to support them in their pursuit of a performing career.

Learning Objectives

These case studies are primarily for performing arts students, particularly theatre, acting and/or musical theatre students. Ideally, career conversations would start from the first year of studies, but more typically these conversations happen in the final year. Through reading and discussing this case, students should be able to:

1. Understand and apply SWOT Analysis to sample case studies and students' own arts entrepreneurship ideas;
2. Understand and apply the Ansoff Matrix model in analysis of case studies and students' own entrepreneurship ideas;
3. Identify the role of resilience in navigating circumstances beyond the individual's control and how to react and respond in healthy, flexible ways while retaining core creative identity.

Case Study Analysis

Jesse, Angie and Adam, profiled in these case studies, found ways to thrive despite the state of the theatre job market. With little opportunity to pursue their preferred performance opportunities, they embraced arts entrepreneurship to develop additional income streams. Jesse landed on bookkeeping through a combination of a review of her skills, interests and market research to help her identify opportunities in finance and bookkeeping. Angie and Adam created a graduation video for their classmates and found they enjoyed the experience. Their intrinsic pleasure in producing the video, and the positive extrinsic feedback they received, helped them see how they could embrace video production as an entrepreneurial venture. In both cases, they found a sense of personal agency—despite negative external market constraints—by developing entrepreneurial business ventures. Additionally, their entrepreneurial actions fed a continuing attempt to break into performance:

- Jesse expanded her professional network in performance spheres by undertaking bookkeeping for performance companies, which helped her earn additional money to invest in her performing career.
- Angie and Adam found that the success they achieved by releasing their own music videos on social media gave them more confidence to go into audition rooms with an increased sense of their own value.

In both cases, these participants were willing to invest time and money developing skills and knowledge to launch their businesses. They invested in equipment to help scale their businesses. Both ventures went from zero customers to viable small businesses in 18 months. At the same time, the participants were also practical enough to work service-related jobs while they established and grew their businesses. Crucially, they achieved all of this without abandoning their primary identities as performers. Their small business ventures are not a replacement for their acting, but rather, are a way to diversify and create a more sustainable platform for their performance work. However, after live performance demand returns, they will be well-situated with “side hustles” that can help sustain them and balance out the variability of acting.

Sample Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe the difference between Jesse and Angie/Adam in terms of their orientation towards an arts entrepreneurship pathway? Were they both proactive or reactive in this choice?
2. Jesse, Angie and Adam had to deal with the impact of COVID-19 cancelling their graduation performances. The closure of theatres meant there were very few audition opportunities. How would you deal with a situation like this? How might you “pivot” and do something else if live performances were shut down again? What other constraints might exist to launching your dream

- performance career and how might you address these constraints?
3. COVID-19 brought a total shutdown of live performance in Canada. What impact did it have where you live? Are there still legacy impacts of the pandemic? How might that impact you and your own career plans?
 4. What strengths (or interests) could you develop further to provide you more options for ways to earn money post-graduation?
 5. What opportunities do you recognize on the horizon that might be exciting or beneficial to pursue? What strengths (skills) would you need to develop to leverage these opportunities?
 6. Are there ways you can build resilience into your creative practice if COVID-19 reappears?

Teaching Strategy

The SWOT Analysis (outlined below) is a common planning tool in business. Once introduced, students can create and complete a SWOT as they read these case studies. Students should ask themselves: What kinds of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats do the case study participants grapple with, and how did this guide them as they made decisions? After this analysis, students can create their own SWOT. Advanced students might use the Ansoff Matrix (outlined below) to discuss how Jesse, Angie and Adam took steps, or could take further steps, towards diversification in their businesses and how that might build resilience in their entrepreneurial ventures.

Bonus strategy: Jesse used financial modelling and a clear understanding of the cost of her desired lifestyle as a useful tool to navigate choices about what she wanted and needed from her work. Students should be encouraged to consider what their own desired lifestyle would be, what it would cost and how they might budget for this desired lifestyle. A further discussion can then ensue as to what job or combination of jobs might help them to achieve this lifestyle. This may require some research regarding what they might potentially earn (e.g., looking at Equity minimum performance fees) to consider how that matches against the cost of their desired lifestyle.

SWOT Analysis

SWOT is an acronym that stands for *Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats*. Strengths and weaknesses are considered “internal” to the business while opportunities and threats are considered “external” to the business (see Figure 1 below).

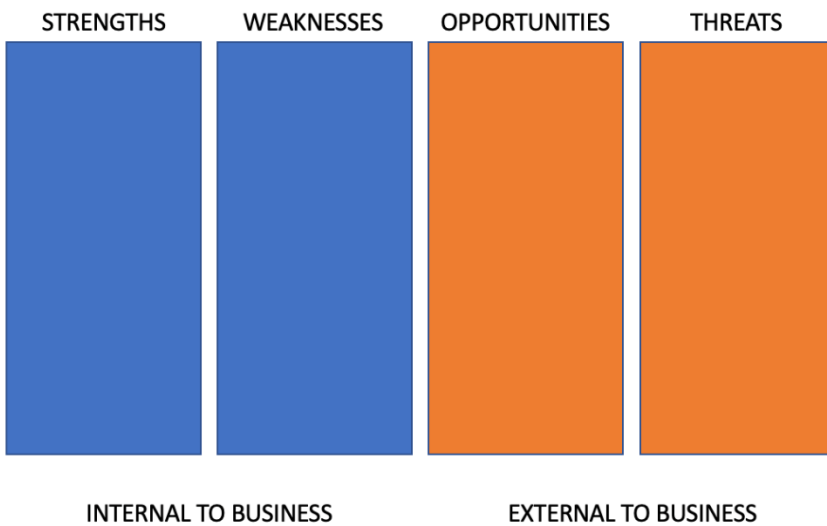


Figure 1. *SWOT Analysis.*

Looking at the academic literature, Leigh suggested SWOT was first developed by George Albert Smith Jr. and C. Roland Christensen, two Harvard business policy professors working in the 1950s, with the acronym SWOT appearing commonly within the Harvard Business School within a decade.¹ However, Helms and Nixon counter that the true origin of the SWOT is unknown.² Today, SWOT is a commonly-taught tool in business and entrepreneurship classes and can be used in a variety of planning exercises in a business or start-up; for example, to consider marketing (by looking to maximize strengths while minimizing weaknesses) or in strategy planning (utilizing strengths to capitalize on opportunities while putting in place safeguards against threats). SWOT is used strategically by a range of entities, from individual businesses to entire industries and countries.³ Helms and Nixon's survey of the academic literature discussing the SWOT indicated that it is "...a proven developmental, results-oriented strategic planning tool" while Panagiotou suggested that SWOT "...may well be used more than any other management technique in the process of decision making."⁴

Critics of SWOT hold that it does not indicate the degree to which any individual strength, weakness, opportunity or threat enhances or detracts from business performance, but rather it is a list with all entries given equal weightings. It is therefore a naming exercise rather than a ranking exercise.⁵ Panagiotou says SWOT is rooted in vagueness and is over-simplified, observing:

¹ Doug Leigh, "SWOT Analysis," in *Handbook of Improving Performance in the Workplace: Volumes 1-3*, ed. Kenneth H. Silber, Wellesley R. Foshay, Ryan Watkins, Doug Leigh, James L. Moseley and Joan C. Dessinger (San Francisco: Pfeiffer, 2009), 115-140.

² Marilyn M. Helms and Judy Nixon, "Exploring SWOT Analysis-Where Are We Now? A Review of Academic Research From the Last Decade," *Journal Of Strategy and Management* 3, no. 3 (2010): 215-251, <https://doi.org/10.1108/17554251011064837>.

³ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 215; George Panagiotou, "Bringing SWOT Into Focus," *Business Strategy Review* 14, no. 2 (2003): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8616.00253>.

⁵ Leigh, "SWOT Analysis."

...organisations do not exist in a vacuum but rather they exist, co-exist, compete and co-operate in a multi-dimensional and interrelated environment characterised by ambiguity and complexity. Understanding this environment is fundamental to formulating strategy, decision making and strategic planning.⁶

Acknowledging these limitations, SWOT's simplicity is one of its strongest features, especially for use with student arts entrepreneurs where it can guide a deeper consideration of the internal and external factors that impact a potential business. To use the tool, students should consider themselves, or a business idea they are developing, and first look internal to the business to determine its relative strengths and weaknesses. Then, they can move on to consider the external business environment to identify potential opportunities and threats. The acronym PESTLE can be useful in guiding them to consider potential opportunities and threats in relation to the following environments:

Political
Economic
Social
Technological
Legal
Environmental

Ansoff Matrix

The Ansoff Matrix is a two-by-two matrix used to evaluate business risks and development opportunities, with an aim to guide a business towards a position of diversification (see Figure 2 below). The Matrix was developed by mathematician and business manager Igor Ansoff to look at new and existing markets and products, providing a way to consider different growth possibilities. Like SWOT, the Ansoff Matrix considers both internal and external factors of a business (products being an internal factor and markets an external factor). The four strategies presented by the Ansoff are:

1. Market penetration, which focuses on increasing the current customer base and/or increasing buying from existing customers;
2. Product development, which focuses on expanding product offerings for an existing market;
3. Market development, which focuses on finding new markets for existing products; and
4. Diversification, which focuses on new products for new markets.

⁶ Panagiotou, "Bringing SWOT Into Focus," 8.

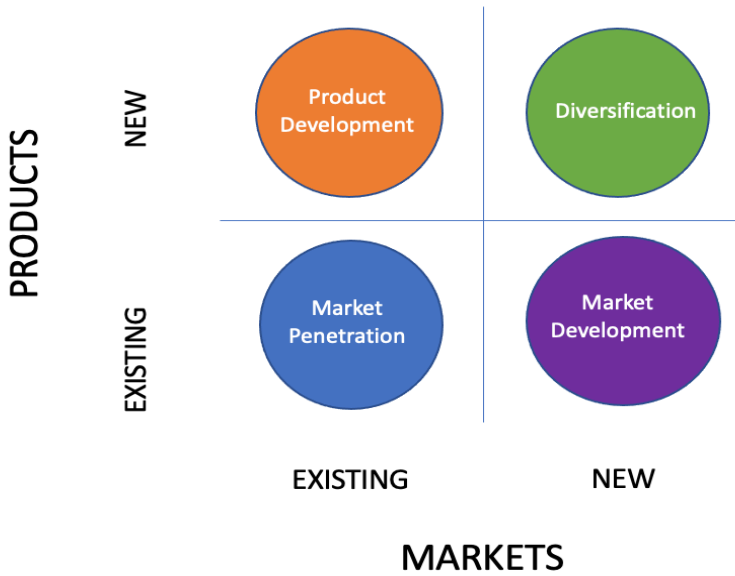


Figure 2. *Ansoff Matrix.*

To apply the tool, students should be guided to consider the possibilities presented by each of these four strategies and how they might apply to their business to help move it towards diversification. Ansoff writes:

A company which accepts diversification as a part of its planned approach to growth undertakes the task of continually weighing and comparing the advantages of these four alternatives, selecting first one combination and then another, depending on the particular circumstances in long-range development planning.⁷

In the context of the teaching cases presented here, Ansoff's focus on "circumstances" is relevant not only for COVID-19 pandemic circumstances, but also for non-pandemic periods when highly-competitive performing arts markets may require adaptation to external circumstances (or what is deemed "opportunities and threats" in SWOT). Ansoff says that diversification "...requires a break with past patterns and traditions of a company and an entry on to new and uncharted paths..." which rings true for the case studies presented here.⁸ New and uncharted paths can become necessary when creative dreams meet constrained realities.

Further Development

An additional useful tool for students to use to analyze these case studies and develop

⁷ Igor H. Ansoff, "Strategies for Diversification," *Harvard Business Review* 35, no. 5 (1957): 113.

⁸ Ibid.

their own business ideas is the Business Model Canvas of Osterwalder and Pigneur.⁹ A plethora of information is widely available on the internet regarding how to use the Business Model Canvas, including downloadable templates.¹⁰ One of the Business Model Canvas's strengths is directing the student to view a business from the customer's viewpoint considering the value proposition offered. While value proposition is key for any commercial business, it can be a difficult concept to contextualize for arts and social enterprise businesses where the notion of "value" needs to be reframed. The Creative Business Model Canvas of Michelle and Chris Carter may be more applicable and easily understood for performing arts students as it centers "artistic identity" instead of "value proposition."¹¹ Either or both of these tools would be excellent follow-ups to the lessons outlined above.

Conclusion

While these case studies are specifically about the pandemic period, this is not just a discussion about COVID-19. It is widely understood that crises happen in all careers (creative and non-creative) and can come from multiple sources. While a global pandemic can shut down entire industries at the macro level, there are also meso-level crises such as local recessions that can see entrepreneurial opportunities ebb and flow, and micro-level crises such as personal illness that can impact careers. *How* the entrepreneur reacts to these crises is key.

These case studies illustrate how three musical theatre graduates launched "side hustles" during a period of market contraction. By testing ideas, responding to feedback, developing entrepreneurial skills and seeking out further education and training, the subjects of these case studies demonstrated how developing "side hustles" provided financial stability and a sense of agency and purpose during a period when there was very little performance work. They also discovered that their business ventures informed their work in performance and gave them increased confidence. The tools discussed in this instructor's manual can help performing arts entrepreneurs develop similar skills.

Three learning outcomes framed this teaching case study, and for the benefit of performing artists working in crowded and constrained markets, the most important is the third one: "Identify the role of resilience in navigating circumstances beyond the individual's control and how to react and respond in healthy, flexible ways while retaining core creative identity." Planning tools, of which SWOT, Ansoff Matrix and Business Model Canvas are just a few examples, are meant to teach a process of thinking through a business problem and seeking solutions based on available strengths and opportunities. Likewise, learning to work through internal weaknesses and external threats, combined with an orientation based on internal strengths and external opportunities, helps develop a healthy resilience in young performing artists facing

⁹ Alexander Osterwalder and Yves Pigneur, *Business Model Generation: A Handbook for Visionaries, Game Changers, and Challengers* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2010).

¹⁰ A good starting place is <https://www.designabetterbusiness.tools/tools/business-model-ideation>.

¹¹ Michelle Carter and Chris Carter, "The Creative Business Model Canvas," *Social Enterprise Journal* 16, no. 2 (2020): 141-158, <https://doi.org/10.21125/iceri.2019.0911>.

many unknowns and a precarious employment market. In this way, the case studies of Jesse, Angie and Adam can illustrate a pathway for students to navigate through the unknown with increased confidence and agency.

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