

Artists of Color as Social Entrepreneurs:
Seeking new support in Coworking spaces

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Table of Contents

LIST OF FIGURES	3
ABSTRACT	4
INTRODUCTION	5
LITERATURE REVIEW	7
Social Entrepreneur	11
Coworking Spaces	14
POSITION OF RESEARCHER	17
METHODOLOGY	19
Phase 1. Landscape Research	20
Phase 2. Unstructured Interviews	20
Phase 3. Curation	21
Phase 4. Focus Group	22
FINDINGS	23
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	35
REFERENCES	38

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Impact Hub MSP main space with ART(IST) IMPACT gallery.	27
Figure 2. Impact Hub MSP’s Red Brick room.....	27
Figure 3. Creative Collective attendance at Impact Hub MSP coworking space.....	33
Figure 4. Creative Collective network connections.....	34

ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to explore artists of color as social entrepreneurs by investigating the synergy created in collaborative workspaces, also known as coworking spaces. They have emerged as nontraditional office spaces that provide their members professional meeting rooms, opened floor plans, and a creative environment among other things. With the influx of coworking spaces and their perceived notion of presenting serendipitous encounters, spontaneous exchanges and collaboration between the professionals that visit their space, can artists of color thrive in coworking spaces? Particularly a coworking space that values and supports social entrepreneurship such as Impact Hub Minneapolis. As social barriers continue to impede artists of color, the slow response from philanthropic supporters have not addresses new ways of providing resources. This study contributes critical discussion through empirical analysis of a project aimed at seeking new resources and support for artists of color as social entrepreneurs, by exploring what coworking spaces provide.

Keywords: artists of color, social entrepreneur, coworking spaces, synergy, structural racism

INTRODUCTION

The Twin Cities is home to many creative social entrepreneurs. In recent years, the cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul in Minnesota have seen an influx of coworking spaces-- collaborative workspaces outside the home and traditional offices (Jeffres, Bracken, Jian, & Casey, 2009). These coworking spaces have collectively added to the local economy by supporting local entrepreneurs in commercial, nonprofit, and community work (Moriset, 2013). Primarily, coworking spaces are built for professionals who have the capital to join and sustain a membership. Impact Hub Minneapolis (MSP) is one of the 15 coworking space organizations in the Twin Cities. Impact Hub MSP operate differently by emphasizing on social good, and building community by amplifying entrepreneurs who are interested in social change.

The idea of a coworking space is to bring professionals from all walks of life to an enclosed area where the synergy would create new ideas and opportunities. At Impact Hub MSP, they grounded themselves on being an inclusive space for social entrepreneurs, however, the space did not reflect the communities of color that surrounded it. A strategy to attract more communities of color to Impact Hub MSP were to engage with artists from these communities who identified as social entrepreneurs. And in 2016, Impact Hub MSP hired a volunteer to operate their arts and culture initiative that eventually blossomed into an academic research study.

The initiative brought on more questions of access and support for artists of color as social entrepreneurs-- challenging the ideas of what and who an entrepreneur is, and why. This particular focus also extended to the funding practices in the Twin Cities and its long history of

inequity. Prompting questions such as: What other entities may support artists of color as social entrepreneurs? Where can artist of color find purpose-driven individuals, and an entrepreneurial environment to support their endeavors? May these entities modify their systems to adapt to the creativity artists of color bring? And how can the synergies of these communities work together?

The questions were born out of the curiosity of identifying new ways of supporting artists of color as social entrepreneurs. With the lack of research conducted on artists of color utilizing coworking spaces, the researcher took one year and six months to work with Impact Hub MSP. Coworking spaces operate differently from one another, which will be included in the literature review. The research is specific to the coworking space, Impact Hub MSP-- how can artists of color move into key roles in social impact hubs in order to enhance creative environments, social impact, and their own careers as social entrepreneurs; Can coworking spaces support artists of color?

In no way does this study take away from arts related spaces and organizations that are already working hard at advocating for artists of color. This study does not assume that every artist of color identifies as a social entrepreneur. The intent of the study is to explore, identify, and broaden new ways of support and resources for artists of color, along with the synergy that connects communities and individuals together.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The arts play a vital role in our complex creative and cultural ecosystem. They are a “fundamental component of healthy communities, strengthening them socially, educationally, and economically-- benefits that persist even in difficult social and economic times” (Cohen, 2017). The role of the artist in cultivating and nurturing these sectors “strengthen regional and neighborhood economies in ways that magnify their contribution to equity, stability, and diversity” (Markusen, 2005, p. 1935).

Artists contribute to the quality of our daily lives and to our economic and social well-being. They can bridge the gaps to understanding our past and visualize new ways for us to see the future. In *Creativity Connects: Trends and Conditions Affecting U.S. Artists*, the research states that,

Artists play critical roles as community leaders, giving shape to community identity and voice to community concerns and aspirations. Artists are inextricably linked to the broader cultural sector and to the creative industries, and they help propel other parts of the economy as well. Everywhere they work and in their various capacities-- in cultural institutions, schools, community centers, and entrepreneurial enterprises; in public spaces, in virtual worlds, and in private studios; producing tangible objects and guiding creative processes- artists are critical to social, civic, and business innovation (2016, p. 3).

Demonstrating that artists are important to our economic and social livelihood, they continue to be misunderstood, in major part, due to systems that were created in the 19th century by European supporters of the arts in America (Jirousek, 1995). Written history has stated that the arts in America were highly influenced by European culture (All-Art History, 2017). Sidford (2011) stated that the assumption that art was for the elite was built by “cultural patronage focused primarily on building institutions to preserve and present visual art and music based in the classical European canon” (p. 7) and historically “early cultural philanthropy did not support,... or pay attention to the arts and culture of Native American peoples, African Americans or immigrant groups from China, Europe and other parts of the world” (p. 7) resulting in “early philanthropy dedicating funding towards institutions focused primarily on Western European art forms, and their programs serve audiences that are predominantly white and upper income” (p. 1). Such social inequities are reflected in the funding practices of private philanthropy and governmental funders in the arts (Grantmakers in the Arts, 2017). This practice created a system that perpetuated structural racism in the artists’ ecosystem that is reflected in modern day America.

Structural racism, as described by Grantmakers in the Arts *Understanding and Tackling Structural Racism*, is the normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics -- historical, cultural, institutional and interpersonal-- that routinely advantage whites while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color (Villarosa, 2015). This also includes the arts with nearly four out of every five people making a living in the arts in America are white, according to an analysis of the 2012 Censuses Bureau by BFAMFaphD (Ferdman, 2014). Despite our growing diverse population, artists in America are still predominantly white--

about 80% (Data USA, 2015). The widening racial gaps among artists demonstrate where and who the support and resources are going to.

Minneapolis and Saint Paul are victims of structural racism in the arts, contributing to the disparities in arts funding. In the Twin Cities (Minneapolis and St. Paul), just over five percent of cultural nonprofits receive 77 percent of all art grants and donations, and only a fraction of that money goes to organizations by and about people of color (Combs, 2017). This is evident in the Creative MN report, where artists of color make an average income of \$30,304 compared to their white counterparts making \$38,419 (2017). As reported by the McKnight Foundation and the Center of Urban and Regional Affairs at the University of Minnesota, *Conversation About Thriving with Artists of Color in the Twin Cities* (2015), this is due to artists of color operating inside of, next to and around arts institutions and arts structures that perpetuate the same racial, social and economic inequities found elsewhere. The report goes on to indicate that artists of color have “challenges checking the box of one thing when having to describe either themselves or their artistic practice or forms, and the limitations they felt this created in people understanding and appreciating the fullness of themselves and their art” (p. 5).

As our diverse population grows and becomes more diverse, the numbers of artists of color increases. Defined by Grantmakers in the Arts’ *Racial Equity in the Arts Philanthropy Statement of Purpose* (2015) artists of color are individuals who identify as African, Latino/a, Asian, Arab, and Native American (person who identifies as non-Western European). This population is increasing and changing the norms about who is considered an artist by the arts sector and the general public; the role of an artist is changing and evolving (Creativity Connects, 2016). Artists of color are using their art in increasingly diverse ways with technology-based and

hybrid forms to “ address the root cause of persistent societal problems, including issues of economic, educational and environmental injustices as well as inequities in civic and human rights” (Sidford, 2011, p. 1). However, many of the institutions and their existing systems that train and support artists are not keeping pace.

In reaction to these persistent barriers, issues of inequities have created a wave of artists of color using their skills in multidisciplinary ways that no longer fit into the structure of institutional funding, instead they are applying social and entrepreneurial practices to sustain themselves by working across sectors (Markusen, Gilmore, Johnson, Levi, & Martinez, 2006) from addressing ways to engage and build communities such as creative placemaking, which “seeks to position the arts as a core component of community planning and development and integrate the arts into the social, physical, and economic fabric of communities” (Creativity Connects, 2016, p. 10). Another way artists of color are using their skills are through socially engaged art defined as social transformation by connecting people, community, and creating artwork with complex intentions and purpose (Yamaoka, 2014). And lastly, design thinking where artists use “design methodologies and tools in problem-solving in businesses and industry context” (Creativity Connects, 2016, p 10). This ongoing multidisciplinary practice from artists of color are creating new needs and opportunities; stretching the definition of an artist and what it means to be a social entrepreneur.

Institutional challenges and the slow responses from arts related organizations, artists of color are turning to their expertise as urban planners, activists, policy makers, cultural producers, social entrepreneurs, etc,. These artists with multidisciplinary skills are working across nonprofit, commercial, and community sectors, as reported in *Crossover: How Artists Build Careers across*

Commercial Nonprofit and Community Work (2006). Artists such as Theaster Gates, Perry Chen, and Ebony Noelle Golden are some of the pioneers in applying their artistic practices and theories into their interdisciplinary work. Because one thing is clear, however, whereas 25 years ago, when there seemed to be just two primary pathways for an artist-- the commercial arts and the nonprofit arts sector-- now we see a much broader spectrum of options that include more art-driven entrepreneurial endeavors (Creativity Connects, 2016, p.12).

In the next section, we will focus on what a social entrepreneur is and how artists of color fit or not fit into that role.

Social Entrepreneur

Social entrepreneur must start with entrepreneurship-- the word social simply modifies it (Martin & Osberg, 2007). An entrepreneur is a literal translation from the French, one who undertakes, manages, and assumes the risk of a new enterprise (Gordan, 2014). An entrepreneur has unique characteristics-- inspiration, creativity, direct action, courage, and fortitude to drive creative solutions through fruition and market adoption (Martin & Osberg, 2007). The word social implies that the entrepreneur is driven by social innovation to transform various fields to benefit society (Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, 2017). Social entrepreneurs are simply mission driven.

According to *The Entrepreneur Scan Measuring Characteristics and Traits of Entrepreneurs*, Martin P. Driessen and Peter S. Zwart, entrepreneurs possess four main components; knowledge, motivation, capabilities, and characteristics. These components require traits such as ambition, need for achievement, self-control, propensity for risk taking, autonomy,

creativity, flexibility, and knowledge that includes procedural, motivational, organisational, marketing, planning, financial, and client awareness.

Believing that artists are social entrepreneurs is Laura Callanan, the founder of Upstart Co-Lab, a nonprofit connecting artists, industry leaders, and investors to solve social challenges. Located on Upstart Co-Lab's website, it states that "Artists are engaged in social practice, using different tools and techniques to address climate change and social cohesion, but they are working like other social entrepreneurs. Artists are working in every thematic area on every social issue you can name; youth development, environmental conservation, community building, sustainable food, and criminal justice" (2017).

Many artists of color engage in social practices and entrepreneurial endeavors, such as Theaster Gates. Gates transformed a neighborhood in his native Southside Chicago with his ambitious renovations of abandoned buildings. Gates transformed his neighborhood through his African-American identity, community building, and his background in ceramics and performance art (Austen, 2013). This work escalated his career, and yielded the creation of the Stony Island Arts Bank where he paid a dollar to purchase the building after numerous attempts by developers failed negotiating with the City of Chicago (Colapinto, 2014). Gates turned the empty and deteriorating bank building into a cultural institution instilled with a library containing African-American literature, a gallery, performance and community space. He is widely regarded and celebrated as an artist and social entrepreneur.

In an interview by Artspace Editorial on Artspace website, Gates stated that "Artists need to understand that in the absence of a gallery or a museum, they have the capacity to invent the platform by which they can express their beliefs," (2017). Gates capacity to think creatively and

entrepreneurially set off a chain of reaction, to which Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter (2007) says is arguably the most influential idea about entrepreneurship (Martin & Osberg).

Creating a business on a different platform that set off a chain of reaction is artist of color Perry Chen. Chen is a Chinese American artist and co-founder of *Kickstarter*, a social enterprise serving as a crowdfunding online platform connecting with ideas and projects that would later be produced (Rafferty, 2015). Before *Kickstarter*, Chen was a struggling musician and has said in interviews that it was difficult for artists like Chen to get money to pay upfront for booking a venue or disc jockeys (Success Story, 2017). In an interview with the National Endowment for the Arts, Chen demonstrates the propensity of taking a risk by recognizing his creative failures and how to assess risk, stating that “many types of risk are overblown by cultural conservatism and social fears that should hold less power” (Gross, 2014). Chen went on to create what we now know as *Kickstarter*, a billion dollar business, and has since stepped down as chief executive officer (Smith, 2015).

Both of these artists demonstrate the tenacity for addressing social and community problems while earning the capital to sustain their endeavors, pushing what it means to be a social entrepreneur with their business interventions. Like many other non-arts entrepreneurs, significant numbers of artists are self-employed (Creativity Connects, 2016). One example is New York based artist of color, Ebony Noelle Golden, the chief executive officer of Betty’s Daughter Arts Collaborative, a cultural arts direct-action that works to inspire transformation and progressive social change through community-designed, culturally relevant creative projects (upstartco-lab, 2017). Golden is a performance artist and began her work with Betty’s Daughter Arts Collaborative when she began finding community spaces for poetry, performance and

sharing progressive ideas (Kuttner, 2014). In her interview with Paul Kuttner from culturalorganizing.org, Golden states that clients work with her because she helps them stay accountable to community (2014).

These artists of color embody the four entrepreneurial components by Driessen and Zwart, and harnesses a responsibility and commitment to the communities they serve, operating more like social entrepreneurs. The various business models, such as nonprofit structures, barter systems and cooperatives, commercial models, for-benefit corporations, and fiscal sponsorships are now all employed by artists of color (Creativity Connects, 2016).

These artists of color have paved the way for future artists as social entrepreneurs, however, the slow responses from the philanthropy community have hindered new art forms, hybrid or interdisciplinary work, for community-based artists, and for artist working in non-arts sectors. In response to search what other arts and non-arts related organizations are doing, the researcher focused on the new phenomenon of collaborative workspaces, also known as coworking spaces.

Coworking Spaces

Collaborative work spaces are also known as coworking spaces. Coworking spaces are third spaces outside of the home and office (Jeffres, Bracken, Jian, & Casey. 2009). Coworking is not a new term, and models of this concept reach as far back as the 1600s, but only in 2005 was the first official coworking space born in San Francisco by programmer Brad Neuberg as a reaction to "unsocial" business centers and the unproductive work life at a home office (Foertsch

& Cagnol, 2013). Coworking spaces provide the basic necessities of having a reserved office space and renting it out. Others are more intentional on creating a community of like-minded people.

The rise of coworking is attributed to several interlinked conditions namely; structural changes occurring within (urban) labour markets, including a shift to knowledge-intensive work and an acceleration in contingent forms of working (including the freelancer economy) and advances in internet and digital technologies which have fundamentally altered the spatial distribution of work (home working, remote and mobile working, etc.) (Brown, 2017). These spaces are usually opened 24/7 and supplied with wifi, printers, desks, office space, kitchen, quiet rooms, libraries, and up-to-date technology in a creative environment that is meant to enhance social interactive and innovative thinking (Bouncken & Reusch, 2016).

Coworking spaces are shared office environments that a heterogeneous group of workers (rather than employees of a single organization or industry) pay to use as their place of work, to engage in social interaction and sometimes collaborate on shared endeavors (Waters-Lynch & Potts, 2016). Physically, coworking spaces are office spaces that feature a combination of shared desks, individual desks, private offices, shared offices and conference rooms, however, the most significant space is the shared common room (Chuah, 2016). The trend of sharing also facilitates collaborative creation (co-creation) of goods and services (Bouncken & Reusch, 2016).

As stated by Spreitzer, Bacevice, and Garrett in Harvard Business Review,

Unlike a traditional office, coworking spaces consist of members who work for a range of different companies, ventures, and projects. Because there is little direct competition or internal politics, they don't feel they have to put on a work persona to fit in. Working

amidst people doing different kinds of work can also make one's own work identity stronger (2015, p. 28).

According to DeskMag.com, there are over 10,000 coworking spaces as of 2016 in the United States. By 2020, this will increase to 26,000 with 3.8 million members (Steve, 2016). These members pay a monthly fee for access to the space. Members range from tech, business, education, nonprofit, freelancers, etc. Coworking spaces encourage individuals to be authentic, supportive, and creative-- increasing productivity and engagement (Spreitzer, Bacevice, & Garrett, 2015). Individuals may work independently in the privacy of their own space or occupy the shared spaces, creating greater density and opportunities to interact and collaborate. The most important goal is the connection to local entrepreneurial ecosystems aimed at expanding the perimeter of serendipity production outside the walls of the company (Moriset, 2013).

For the purpose of this paper, the focus will be on coworking spaces in Minneapolis and Saint Paul, with more focus on Impact Hub MSP, the chosen coworking space for the study. Impact Hub MSP coworking space focuses on accelerating social entrepreneurship. As stated on their website, Impact Hub MSP provides an inclusive, inspiring, and functional space that connects members to the ideas, resources, and people they need to make tangible social impact (2015). Impact Hub MSP also serves as a gathering place for the global movement towards stronger cities and a new economy (2015).

The question is, how does an artist of color who identify as a social entrepreneur fit into third places such as Impact Hub MSP? The study below will explore this question through an empirical research and try to understand if artists of color, social entrepreneurship, and coworking spaces make a connection.

POSITION OF THE RESEARCHER

Creativity is just connecting things.

Steve Jobs, former CEO of Apple, Inc. February 1st, 1996

For the past 12 years, I have devoted my time to the arts, mainly around catalyzing arts for social justice, cultural exchange, and economic development.

Relocating to Minneapolis in 2014, I was energized by the vibrant art scene. I explored the large institutions of the Walker Art Center, Minnesota Institute of Arts, The Guthrie Theater, and The Ordway. I balanced that out with smaller organizations such as The Southern Theater, City Wide Artists, Third Space Gallery, First Avenue, etc. I attended cultural and community festivals and celebrations that gave a sense of the Twin Cities cultural and artistic diversity.

However, as a professional who worked in arts and culture, I witnessed the hardships that artists from lower-income or marginalized communities had to endure. And majority of these artists were from communities of color. They had to navigate access to transit, inaccessible language in grant applications, unfair compensation, multidisciplinary work they had to perform to make a living, and the hours they had to meet with funders and organizations why their work is essential in uplifting their communities-- I was drawn to their passion in fighting for a just world. Their artwork and art processes embodied their values and beliefs. Inadvertently, I was drawn to them as an artist, and an individual who possessed characteristics and skills as a social entrepreneur who built a chain of reaction resulting in coalitions, businesses, and communities.

The variety of skills I witnessed challenged the way I saw artists-- from the elitist and Western European perspectives taught in my earlier years of undergrad. From what I observed, artists of color were leaders who blossomed into activists that represented their communities contributing to social changes. These artists applied social practices when creating their art, and developed narratives to their work that challenged the stereotypes. However, the financial support from funders, business incubators, banks, investors, etc., were not equipped in assisting artists of color. Access to networks, professional meeting spaces, and business acumen made it hard for artists of color to acclimate to a culture built by the patronage system.

For the first year of my research, my work primarily existed in the social entrepreneur coworking space called Impact Hub MSP. A fresh new center for Twin Cities changemakers, “solo”preneurs, and start-ups. The space was created for purpose-driven individuals to connect, collaborate, and build community. The networking events were enticing and the space was open and accessible. The access to professionals knowledgeable in areas of entrepreneurship, food systems, technology, marketing, etc., was intriguing for a young graduate student curious about the serendipitous encounters and synergy this place had with all the different professional backgrounds.

For the first few months at Impact Hub MSP, I noticed the lack of artists in the coworking space. I especially noticed the lack of diversity of the people accessing the coworking space. Impact Hub MSP had cohorts of professionals who met to solve issues around racial equity, food systems, climate change, women empowerment, etc., and to my knowledge, none had involved an artist of color. The artists I’ve been working with in Minneapolis and Saint Paul were involved in social change, and were what I saw as changemakers.

The first steps of my involvement with Impact Hub MSP were to engage with artists of color. I met and interviewed; then I curated and assembled a collective of artists of color to drive a program initiative and utilize the Impact Hub MSP coworking space. This study is the result of my work.

METHODOLOGY

This research project was built out of curiosity and a genuine need to connect artists of color to the resources and individuals who may contribute to their artistic practices and endeavors, to provide them with spaces, and new opportunities.

The research was conducted inside Impact Hub MSP, located in Downtown Minneapolis. Impact Hub MSP was chosen because of their initial efforts to connect with artists of color and their focus on entrepreneurs involved with social change.

The researcher hopes that this project simulates conversations among the artistic communities, funders, and arts related and non-arts related organizations that contribute to the social, cultural, and creative economic fabric of the Twin Cities Metropolitan area.

The chosen methodology is based on conversations with artists of color in the Twin Cities who inspired the study with the researcher.

This consisted of four major phases:

1. Landscape Research
2. Unstructured Interviews
3. Curation

4. Focus Group

Phase 1. Landscape Research

Phase 1 consisted of gathering information on coworking spaces in the Minneapolis and St. Paul areas. I visited, corresponded, and researched online on their history and what they currently offer in programs, events and if they supported artists. I created a document that included information on membership pricing and if they devote time, space, and resources for artists.

List of coworking spaces in the Twin Cities:

Assemble, COCO, Everyday Office, Flock, Impact Hub MSP, Industrious, Intermedia Arts, Joule, New Rules, Northside Economic Opportunity Network, Officenter, Regus, Restore Collaborative, The Reserve, Work Around

Phase 2. Unstructured Interviews

During my time from January 2016 to December 2016, I was an observer of Impact Hub MSP and had multiple conversations with artists of color, and arts related organizations. The conversations were conducted in the coworking space of Impact Hub MSP. I spent one day out of the week at Impact Hub MSP, sometimes more depending on the event and my personal and professional meetings. My time there was to observe the interaction of the members and staff and be engrossed into Impact Hub MSP community.

The conversation with artists and arts related organizations started off with these three questions:

- What is your artistic practice?
- What else are you doing beyond your artistic practice (i.e. consulting, freelancing, performing) and how would you like to build more of an infrastructure for it?
- Can you see yourself in Impact Hub MSP coworking space, and how would you take advantage of the programs, events, and space?
- How can we partner and create allyship?

Phase 3. Curation

Curating is the process of selecting and organizing a collection of art. Phase 3 occurred with advice from artists of color that I interviewed. The strategy to engage artists of color with Impact Hub MSP space were to curate exhibition shows, calling the initiative ART(IST) IMPACT. This process required reaching out to the networks of artists of color that I already had a concrete relationship with prior to joining Impact Hub MSP. Having had previous experience curating exhibition shows for galleries, I had the skills to on-board and handle documents required when loaning visual pieces.

The work of the artist were displayed on an empty wall in the main shared room inside Impact Hub MSP. The wall was now a dedicated rotating gallery space. Exhibition openings at Impact Hub MSP were in conjunction with their ongoing event, Wine Down, where members and guests gathered to network over wine. The focus of the exhibition

openings were to offer an opportunity for artists to engage with Impact Hub MSP community and the public.

Each artist had the opportunity to speak on their work, artistic process, and answer questions from community members inside Impact Hub MSP. In return for the willingness to exhibit, the artist received membership, which included access to the open-floor office space, the kitchen with free coffee, networking events and programming, printing, and most importantly purpose-driven individuals.

Phase 4. Focus Group

The purpose of a focus group is to:

- Understand the functionality of Impact Hub MSP space.
- Guide the development of the ART(IST) IMPACT program.
- Observe the the use, synergy and new opportunities at Impact Hub MSP space for artists of color.

The focus group, known as the Creative Collective, consisted of five artists from the Twin Cities metro area.

*All members are quoted by their first name and how they artistically identify themselves.

I do not consider these artists as emerging. All of them have been practicing their art for years and understand the structural barriers for artists of color. The artists I worked with are below:

1. Sara, Painter, early 40s, Associate Degree
2. Brittany, Digital Storyteller and Social Entrepreneur, mid 20s, Bachelor Degree
3. Audrey, Actress and Activist, mid 20s, Bachelor Degree
4. Christina, Graphic Designer, early 30s, Bachelor Degree
5. DeCarlo, Performer, early 20s, Student*

*inactive: participated in one meeting

The Creative Collective met for six months starting February 2017 to July 2017. The group met for two hours from 2pm-4pm to discuss their experience in Impact Hub MSP. Four of the meetings were conducted inside Impact Hub MSP and the other two were at off-site locations. All members of Creative Collective had access to the space, networking events, and purpose-driven individuals.

FINDINGS

During **Phase 1. The Landscape Research**, I found 15 different organizations that own coworking spaces in Minneapolis and Saint Paul, with some owning more than one space. Out of the 15, only 19% support or work directly with artists and 14.3% have gallery space dedicated to the visual arts. All coworking spaces are open-space offices, with some having limited programs, and events.

Generally, staffing consisted of 2-3 people:

1. Membership Manager

2. Marketing Associate
3. Community Outreach Coordinator (This position is least likely hired)

The average cost the organizations charge for full access to their coworking spaces is around \$433 per month for membership. This includes amenities such as a dedicated desk, conference room rental, printing, wifi, kitchen space, a locker, mailing address, events and programming.

The chosen coworking space for this study is Impact Hub MSP. Impact Hub MSP is part of a larger network of Global Impact Hubs that started in London, England. The Minneapolis location was created in 2015 by Minnesota Social Impact Center, a group of people who came together in response to a growing call for support and place for social entrepreneurs to thrive.

The mission of Impact Hub MSP is to accelerate social impact by building an ecosystem for innovators in Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Impact Hub MSP provides a coworking space for members to collaborate and incubate ideas for the betterment of the community. The coworking space thrives to be a community of change that supports professional and personal growth by engaging in transformative ideas, business expertise, supportive relationships and serendipitous encounters, surrounded by an inspiring community of innovators and creative space.

Many of the coworking spaces that operate under Global Impact Hubs are located in former industrial buildings with an open floor plan, equipped with monitors, printers, quiet rooms, libraries, private conference rooms, an open kitchen, galleries, meditation rooms, some may even lease out office spaces for organizations who want to be surrounded by innovative thinkers in a coworking collaborative space.

By joining Global Impact Hubs, members can access endless amounts of programs, trainings, workshops, networking events, spaces and conference rooms. They'll also be surrounded by like-minded people who want to make the world a better place through innovation and collaboration for social impact. Global Impact Hubs offers programs, trainings, workshops, and networking events, including:

- Tech Week
- Financial Literacy
- Idea Box
- Sexy Salad
- Creative Fundraising
- Brand Messaging
- Communities of Practice
- Women Empowerment
- Consulting
- Social Media

These are a few of the services Global Impact Hubs offers, dependant upon location.

According to its website, Global Impact Hubs community stands at more than 15,000 members with an annual growth of 35%. Almost 1,200 new start-ups have developed within Global Impact Hubs, which has created over 4,600 new full time jobs (Impact Hub, 2015). Altogether, Global Impact Hubs have brought more than 50 million people through its doors from its various programming, and events, indicating the strength of this community and its collective efforts for social impact.

Currently, at Impact Hub MSP, they have more than 111 members, 19% being people of color. At least 3200 attendees came through Impact Hub MSP doors, creating up to 500 future connections and collaborations (Impact Hub MSP, 2016). Impact Hub MSP is home to a few start-ups such as MindShift, they recruit and train people with autism to fill IT and data management roles; Fair Anita, creates opportunities for women in developing countries; Bim Bam Boo, creating paper from bamboo that is free of chemicals and BPA.

Majority of coworking spaces are for-profits that operate with angel investors, however, the founders of Impact Hub MSP decided on a nonprofit status. They are currently working on a plan to be more than 80% earned revenue and 20% on philanthropic support. Just like many other nonprofit organizations, Impact Hub MSP struggles with its finances-- this attributed to the staff capacity, programming, and events.

In 2016, Impact Hub MSP was looking for an arts and culture coordinator, someone with a background in arts and culture and racial equity. The coworking space wanted to be more intentional on working with women and artists of color. The arts and culture coordinator would volunteer their time in exchange for the use of the coworking space, the networks, and events. This is when the researcher was hired to lead the initiative called ART(IST) IMPACT, and eventually growing the program with this study. This initiative was also a strategy to create more diversity not just in race, but gender, class, professional sectors, and age.

The Figures below are images of Impact Hub MSP coworking space. The images belong to Impact Hub MSP.



Figure 1. Impact Hub MSP main space with ART(IST) IMPACT gallery.



Figure 2. Impact Hub MSP's Red Brick room.

During **Phase 2. Unstructured Interviews**, a total of nine artists were interviewed. These informal conversations guided the research. The artists interviewed were musicians, spoken-word performers, and visual artists. Each artist were interviewed inside Impact Hub MSP to explore and connect with the staff members and the coworking space.

Majority of the artists interviewed considered themselves artists of color. All of them were interested in the coworking space with over 50% of them never having heard of the coworking concept. One artist mentioned:

“You’d have to convince artists on this concept. I don’t think it’d be hard since artists need to increase their networks. They would see this as an opportunity.”

The interviews would lead to questions about the research methodology. How should the research be conducted and what steps should the research take to bring more artists of color into the coworking space that will build a foundation for future programming? Speaking with a predominantly known spoken-word artist based in the Twin Cities, he stated:

“I see this project as a three step process. First you outreach to artists, you curate, then you form a group.”

This has since been incorporated into the methodology process and has helped guide the research.

As for **Phase 3. Curation**, Impact Hub MSP had two exhibitions showcasing the work of two artists of color. The artists were not paid, instead they were offered full access to Impact Hub MSP coworking space. The artists were each selected for a 3-6 month exhibition show. The artists were Pa Na and Sara, both visual artists; one as a digital media and the other as a painter.

The first artist spoke on her struggles of being categorized as a Hmong artist instead of an artist. She spoke of grant applications that centered her work on being Hmong, and to combat this, she decided to sit on grant panels. The artist vocalized that hopefully her work spoke for itself, instead of her identity. This artist worked full-time as a marketing associate, with an academic background in the arts.

Sara, a painter and sculptor from Ethiopia, went to art school in her native land but left to the US for a better life. She voiced that finding work in MN as a black artist has been hard because her paintings and drawings emanate from her lived experiences from her native land. Her struggles of assimilation to western society made it hard for her to find an audience that truly appreciated her paintings of African diaspora. As a new immigrant, she seem conflicted with her identity and eventually stopped being a full-time artist.

During Sara's curation process, the artist struggled with writing her artist statement, a document that indicates the story behind her paintings. From my observation, the artist shied away from writing on her experience as an African artist in Minnesota because she was apprehensive of the judgment that may occur during her exhibition opening. The exhibition opening was in conjunction with Wine Down- a two hour social event for members and other potential members at Impact Hub MSP.

Both artists of color spoke on the challenges of finding their voices in the Twin Cities art scene, as they felt that their identity hindered opportunities.

And finally, **Phase 4. Focus Group**, consisted of five participants: Sara, Brittany, Audrey, Christina, and DeCarlo. All participants are full-time artists that practice painting, acting, design, poetry, and music. Three of the participants own their own limited liability corporation. One of the participants was born outside of the United States and is considered a new American. Three of the participants are in their 20s, one in their 30s, and one in their 40s. Four of the participants actively participated while one came to the initial meetings but left due to unforeseen circumstances. All of the participants consider themselves artists of color, and all create art with the intentions of amplifying their communities, and creating social change.

Majority of meetings were held at Impact Hub MSP coworking space, while one was held at a large corporate building and another at a local business. Artists of color were encouraged to use the coworking space as much as possible for formal meetings, creative thinking and collaborating, and entrepreneurial support.

In order to understand the artists of color interpretations of artist, social entrepreneurship and coworking space, it was necessary to determine exactly how the participants understand the terms. Majority of them defined an artist as:

“A person who creates art with intent to share it with an audience.” (Brittany)

All of the participants were more hesitant in defining a social entrepreneur. There was not a concise definition and one artist had ask,

“What is social entrepreneurship? What is an entrepreneur? What does being that even mean?” (Christina)

Although Christina has her own LLC, she questioned the traditional meaning of this term, acknowledging that expansion of who is and what social entrepreneur is needed to be re-evaluated.

Most participants were new to the term coworking space, however, they understood the concept. Only one of the participants had joined a coworking space. This artist mentioned that her time there was well-received but they did not have programs and events targeted at supporting artists.

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the shifting paradigm of artists and to find new ways of support, collaborations and economic opportunities, while redefining what it means to be a social entrepreneur working in nontraditional spaces such as coworking spaces. The study revealed the following barriers; 1) external and internal barriers of the coworking space, 2) expanding connections and future opportunities, 3) the mindset of the participant.

1) External and Internal Barriers of the Coworking Space

The artists of color participated for a six month study. During this time, the participants were to evaluate the internal coworking space and the external environment. The contributing factors they found were transportation, hours, and access to networks.

Impact Hub MSP is located in Downtown Minneapolis. The busy area includes meter parking and a train station. Participants mentioned that the access to parking made it difficult for artists because of the different freelance work they acquire that requires them to use their cars to attend meetings throughout the city.

The hours at Impact Hub MSP are from 9am-5pm, the standard work day time. Artists are creating different artworks, conducting meetings, working on collaborations, etc., and found it difficult that the coworking space did not open past five.

“We are artists that work at various times. Sometimes I like to come in at night to get work done because that’s when I can concentrate most.” (Christina)

The figure below indicates that half of the participants used the space once every week for six months while the other half used it only during the formal meetings. When asked why, one of the participants answered with,

“After using the space for a few times, I found that creatives cannot be in a space that isn’t intentionally designed for artists. Although I’m a designer and only need my computer, the coworking space was not functional and did not create an inspiring environment for my work.” (Christina)

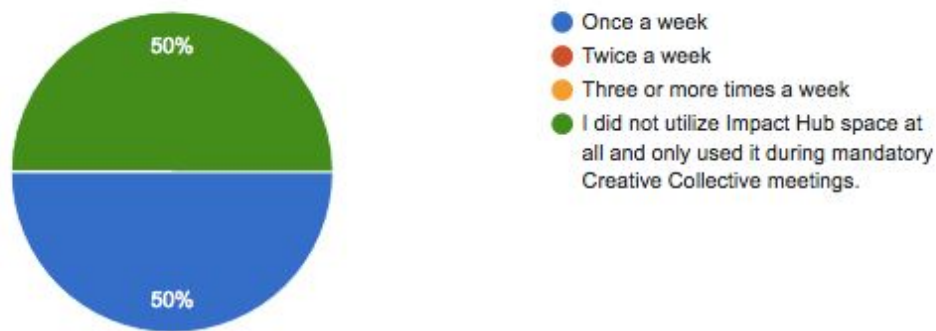


Figure 3. Creative Collective attendance at Impact Hub MSP coworking space.

The participants also indicated that a potential barrier could be the membership fee. Because the participants were selected for the study, none paid for the fees for the following six months in agreement to share their experiences. Impact Hub MSP full access fee is \$245 per month.

2) Expanding Connections and Future Opportunities

Artists found it hard that Impact Hub MSP did not have the tools to connect members together. Impact Hub MSP community is dependant on the Manager of the space to facilitate connections. Networking events were during operating hours, and because artists hours were unpredictable, many of them were not able to attend.

The figure below indicates the connections the participants made during the six month study.

None of the participants made over six connections, indicating that half of the participants made one connection every month while the other half made one or less.

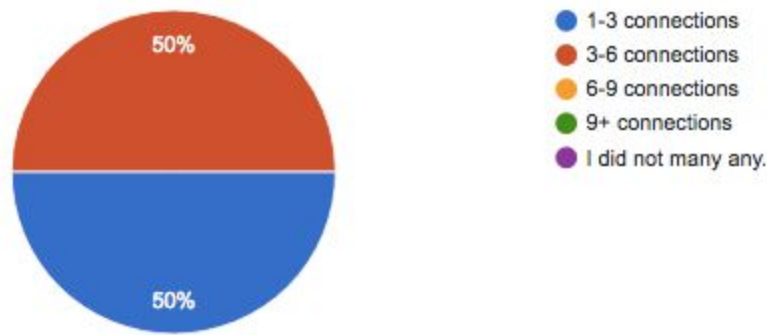


Figure 4. Creative Collective network connections.

3) The Mindset of the Participant

A major finding from the survey that was distributed on paper to the participants, was that only one artist of color included being an entrepreneur in the many professional titles that she wears. Two of the participants, when they spoke, consider themselves entrepreneurs however, they would question the title and what it means.

“The thing I’m trying to sell is myself. Selling myself for commercial and film. My business is myself. My product is my face. Being an entrepreneur is shaped differently, than a typical entrepreneur.” (Audrey)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Over the past 17 months, the researcher had the privilege of conducting the study at Impact Hub MSP. The researcher worked with amazing artists, and staff that dedicated their time and energy to a study that was grown out of genuine belief in inclusivity for artists of color. The study was to push the boundaries of artists of color, and find new ways of support and resources by accessing coworking spaces that push for social entrepreneurialism, connection, and collaboration. This research concluded multiple limitations with coworking spaces resulting in: social entrepreneurship needing to be redefined; philanthropic support needs to be re-evaluated; and the need for continual research on this topic of artists as social entrepreneurs.

Phase 1 of the research included looking more deeply into coworking spaces in Minneapolis and Saint Paul to gather data from each coworking space such as member demographics and field of work. The researcher dived deeply into their programming, events, and membership fees. Unfortunately, due to most of the coworking spaces being owned by private investors, when asked to share the information above, many of the coworking spaces refused or allegedly do not collect data of their members.

During the time spent at Impact Hub MSP, limited staff capacity hindered the interaction with the participants during Phase 4 of the research. The researcher found that the participants needed a sense of validation. Staff and Impact Hub MSP community members were not engaged with the artists of color, thus, this lack of awareness did not make the coworking space feel inclusive.

Another issue with the limited staff capacity is that it created a dependency among Impact Hub MSP community members and the manager. Impact Hub MSP community members sought the manager to facilitate connections. The manager had a limited amount of time to interact with participants. The participants understood that the manager had time constraints and recommended a virtual portal for easier connections. The researcher observed that coworking spaces encourages spontaneous connections, however, enhanced interaction will not happen without formal exchanges. The researcher recommends that Impact Hub MSP has a dedicated staff member to build the creative programming in engaging artists of color.

In Phase 4, during our interviews and meetings, the researcher found that using the term social entrepreneur did not resonate with the participants. Particularly, when using the word entrepreneur to describe who they are. Artists of color on many levels embody the spirit and practice of an entrepreneur, however, many of their skills and leadership goes unrecognizable as many artists of color discount their labor and market value when bringing their work to the public (Bonin-Rodriguez, 2012). The word itself has had a long history of feeding into capitalism, which is perceived by many artists as privileging material gains instead of progressive messages. Instead of imposing what an entrepreneur is, Impact Hub MSP and the larger community need to re-think, reconsider and expand the definition of a social entrepreneur for the artistic community.

Overall, the research indicates that critical discourse should address the changing roles, and encourage new and strengthen existing support systems for artists of color. For years, artists of color had to endure the patronage system that has contributed to the philanthropic community, arts related organizations, and their artistic practices and work. There has yet to be funding

dedicated for a set of tools and resources catered specifically for artists of color as social entrepreneurs, and until the systems that care about the arts can come together to better coordinate more equitable ways to address underlying issues of patronage, the slow response will continue to create more disparities among the artistic communities.

This study was conducted to seek new ways of support for artists of color and was exploratory and confined to Impact Hub MSP. In general, there were several issues that raised questions for further research on coworking spaces even if artists of color were not participating. In particular, since many coworking spaces function differently, is value creation taking place among members of that space, and what infrastructure are each coworking space using to develop value creation? Although this empirical study was focused on artists of color, the research indicates that there is a gap in the way we support and connect purpose-driven individuals, no matter their professional titles, the common core are the intentions to contribute to a just world.

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