

ROUTLEDGE RESEARCH IN CREATIVE AND CULTURAL INDUSTRIES MANAGEMENT



ARTS GOVERNANCE

People, passion, performance

RUTH RENTSCHLER



Arts Governance

Since the crisis in governance which led to a shortage of capable board members, recent years have seen the emergence of the enterprising arts organisation – a development which has led to the need for new types of board members who have a greater understanding of ‘mission, money and merit’ within a cultural construct.

This innovative book explores the world of the arts board member from the unique perspective of the cultural and creative industries. Using a wide range of research techniques including interviews with board members and stakeholders, board observations, a survey and case studies this book provides a rich and deep analysis from inside the boardroom. It provides in-depth insight into the changing pressures on arts boards after the financial crisis, and focuses uniquely on the role of passion on arts boards.

Part of the Routledge Research in Creative and Cultural Industries Management series, written specifically for people seeking to develop their careers in cultural and creative management, this book is also for people working in and with arts organisations, in government and nonprofit arts organisations. It will also be of interest to academics and researchers working in the wider corporate governance field.

Ruth Rentschler is Chair, Academic Board, Deakin University, where she is also Professor in Arts Management. She holds a ministerial appointment to the board of the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth), as well as board appointments on the Art Gallery of Ballarat, Multicultural Arts Victoria and the Duldig Gallery.

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Arts Governance

People, passion, performance

Ruth Rentschler

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To Geoffrey, Anna and James, with love

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Foreword

When I was invited by Professor Ruth Rentschler to introduce this publication, I was both delighted and momentarily apprehensive. It was a privilege to be asked to make a small contribution to an important work, but I also wondered what I could add to the fruits of her five years of scholarship, or to amplify the importance of understanding and embracing good governance principles and practice.

It then occurred to me that there are parallels between those reactions and those experienced when one is invited to join the governing body of an arts organisation as a member, office holder or chairperson. When that occurs, there is the excitement of the opportunity to use one's accumulated knowledge and skills, and passion for the art form concerned, to positively influence the organisation. This is then balanced by an awareness of the responsibility and duty of care that is involved—particularly to the artists and audiences for whom the organisation exists to serve.

Ruth has recognised the diversity of circumstances and motivations that cause board members to seek or position themselves for such appointments. Some may actively pursue positions; some have 'greatness thrust upon them.' The important thing is that regardless of the circumstances of their arrival, they are all, as Ruth puts it, 'like pilgrims on a journey of discovery. As in all pilgrimages, there has to be an aspect of sacrifice; in this context it comes in the form of the mostly voluntary nature of the journey, in a domain subsumed by passion.'

Governance and passion would at first glance seem incompatible, as the necessary strictures and conventions of one would likely exclude if not extinguish the other. But in the arts especially, though I would argue not exclusively, their co-existence is inevitable. I suspect many a scientist or sportsperson has been challenged by the same incongruity when serving on their governing bodies.

We think we understand passion but how well do we understand governance? In this book, Ruth argues that 'there is still no single way of understanding governance, (but) we have become conscious of its ubiquitousness. Engagement in cultural activities, through board governance, provides another lens on the investigation.' A useful definition of governance is that by D.O. Renz (2004) quoted by Professor Johanne Turbide in the 2011 Deakin University *Kenneth*

Myer Lecture: ‘Governance is the process of providing strategic leadership to a nonprofit organisation. It entails the functions of setting direction, making policy and strategy decisions, overseeing and monitoring organisational performance, and ensuring overall accountability. Nonprofit governance is a political and organisational process involving multiple functions and engaging multiple stakeholders.’

In contemporary Australia, the spectrum of arts organisations includes the national cultural institutions, including the Australia Council for the Arts, funded principally by the Commonwealth Government, their State, Territory, and Local Government counterparts and a myriad of supported, private and commercial arts organisations alongside community organisations. Their councils, boards and committees steer, enhance, safeguard and preserve their reputations, sustainability and futures. They must come to grips with the prosaic processes of audit and due diligence and yet maintain the ardour and enthusiasm for the art practices at the heart of the organisation. They are also engaged in the politics of arts funding and stakeholder relationships mentioned by Renz, and as Ruth has said, ‘remain loyal beyond reason, all predominantly pro bono.’

At the Australia Council, we seek to complement that important task with our own contribution. The Council’s *Essential Governance Principles for Arts Organisations* has been adapted for use by all arts organisations from the ASX Corporate Governance Principles and Recommendations. The Council believes that good governance structures encourage organisations to create value through entrepreneurship, artistic innovation, development and exploration and provide accountability and control systems commensurate with the risks involved.

Ruth has observed that ‘governance done blandly is just another form of corporate compliance, governance done well can remake the arts organisation so that it is innovative, distinctive and different.’ This book will make governance better understood and hopefully better practiced, and all of us who cherish and enjoy the arts will benefit.

Rupert Myer AM
Chair
Australia Council for the Arts

Acknowledgements

This book would not have been possible without the generosity, knowledge and cooperation of a host of board members and their stakeholders who were prepared to talk with me about their extensive experience on and with nonprofit boards. We exchanged views face to face, over coffee, in airports, on the phone or on Skype, in board meetings, chatting, debating, and developing the discourse on nonprofit boards and governance. Board members and stakeholders provided insights, formally or informally, on boards, in board workshops or in conversations outside the board room. There were dozens of them, in addition to the men and women interviewed formally. Many of the conversations provided additional depth and breadth to my understanding of how governance has developed. I owe them a debt of gratitude. I have attempted to repay them in the final text, by telling a well-rounded story. They were also offered the opportunity to have the findings presented at a board meeting or in a public forum at the conclusion of the study, as well as access to copies of the interim report of findings, which was also available on a website. In short, board members were as interested in making their views known to stakeholders, anonymously via the researcher, as I was to learn from their expertise and experience. All these means aided access. They certainly enriched the study. However, any shortcomings in the final book are mine alone.

I spoke to people in places as far afield as Australia and Canada, the UK and the USA, Asia and New Zealand. It is always hard to thank all the people who have helped to realise a project like this one. Without their willingness to share with me their thoughts, hopes and insights, nothing would have been possible. Interviews, board observations and board workshops provided the foundation, but were supplemented with additional material from surveys, case studies, archival data and the media.

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Conversations took place with government arts ministers, former arts ministers, philanthropists, arts managers, artists with arts board experience, senior bureaucrats and senior business people with significant arts board experience and access to the highest levels of government. They provided a contextual understanding of the external pressures causing arts boards to change. Demographic data provided background material for the study.

I thank the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD), and especially Larissa Vaughan, for their interest and support. I thank Susanna Yung for supporting the AICD workshop. Overall, the wise and enthusiastic reception that I gained from everyone made this book possible.

Paul Saintilan provided the opportunity to try out ideas with three masters' arts governance classes over three consecutive years at the Australian Institute of Music, Sydney. His graduate students were a ready pool of ideas, suggestions and help from their experience with and on arts boards. Jay Tzeng kindly invited me to present a key note address at his museum governance international conference at Tainan International University, Taiwan, thus allowing thoughts to develop. Thank you, Jay. I wish to thank my former arts governance doctoral candidate, Dr Marcus Morgan, for his insights and generosity of spirit. I would also like to thank my current doctoral candidate, Lyndall Metzke, who is now starting her journey into researching arts governance. Thank you, Marc and Lyndall.

I would like to acknowledge Rupert Betheras, whose art work graces the cover of this book. The people in the image on the cover seem to demonstrate the passion inherent in arts boards, making it appropriate for the book. Rupert is well known in Australian art circles not only for his art but for his elite football skills, mentoring of Aboriginal players in outback Australia and being inspired by the landscape and football for his art work. Rupert,

I can't thank you enough for your generosity in providing the work for use on the cover.

There are many other people to acknowledge, including those who provided ideas, opportunities and material for the book and those who are no longer with us. The biographers, often not now with us, provided essential material for one chapter that provided an historical framework that allowed the contemporary changes to make sense. The wonderful librarians at Deakin University sourced material that enriched the final product. I thank Caitlin Savage, Helen Wood and Sharon Chau from the Deakin Library. I couldn't have done it without you! The librarians provide such strong support and advice, offering no end of suggestions on how to improve the text by providing additional references.

In writing the book, colleagues provided superb advice on the text, and/or joint work that we have prepared together that informed it. Some of the authors of biographies were by my side, not only with their books, but also their physical presence. I thank Gwen Rankin and Bronwyn Hughes whose credentials on governance and research were so helpful. Angela Osborne provided her word-smithing to the text, making valued and significant improvements. I really enjoyed our time together. I wish to thank my academic colleagues who work in the domains of leadership, arts and sport governance, women in management and diversity: Professor Jon Bilsberry, Emeritus Professor Jennifer Radbourne, Professor David Shilbury, Professor Johanne Turbide, Associate Professors Lesley Ferkins and Julia Richardson, Drs Fara Azmat, Yuka Fujimoto and Uma Jogulu. We shared our joint passion for these topics, conducting workshops, sometimes interviews, or even a survey together, or writing articles that added depth and breadth to the book by providing new perspectives on the topic as I tried to come to grips with them. Their generosity in providing me with ideas and suggestions cannot be overemphasised. I thank them all for the concepts that we shared and the ideas we developed, some of which appear in the following pages. I had research help from Emma Winston, who carefully coded all my data into a software package and prepared figures and tables for me. She was very patient with me, as one iteration of the data turned into another and then another. I thank her for her contribution.

It was a pleasure to work with Routledge UK, especially Jacqueline Curthoys and Sinead Waldron. They prompted me to continue, supported me in the process of writing and offered help along the way. They constantly checked on progress. Throughout all, they remained positive and professional. It was indeed a privilege to work with them. I thank them for their support, their belief in the book and the series of which it is a part, and their tireless work on its production process. They have a commitment to quality and sharp eyes that pick up slips needing change. They saw things I did not see. Routledge has a high-level commitment to scholarly work that is second to none in a market-driven world. Thank you, Jacqui and Sinead, for everything you have done.

In preparing the book proposal, four anonymous reviewers contributed significantly to concept development, improving it a great deal. The book also

benefited from the revision and development offered by two readers, whose generosity and professionalism were most welcome. Their thoughtful comments made an impact on the final text. They made comments on leadership on boards, board processes and the dynamic nature of boards. Their insights helped form the final version of the text.

Of course, our families provide the site of support, patience and reflection. Thank you Geoffrey, Anna and James for everything you did and for everything that you are. Geoffrey was always there, providing support, ideas, suggestions and being prepared to read numerous drafts of rather ordinary early material. I could never have done it without you. You put up with me tapping away at all hours of the day and night, interrupting meals and conversations, our bike rides and trips to the opera. I will now have more time to go bike riding and to enjoy attending the arts together.

Abbreviations

ACNC	Australian Charities and Nonprofits Commission
AICD	Australian Institute of Company Directors
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
Hilmer Report	Australian Government Publishing Service (1993) <i>National Competition Policy</i> , Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra
Nugent Inquiry	Nugent, H. (1999) <i>Securing the Future: Final Report</i> , Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra
Survey	Rentschler, R. and Radbourne, J. (2008) <i>Performance and Conformance of Victorian Arts Boards</i> , Report for Arts Victoria, Melbourne
The Met	Metropolitan Museum of Art
The Uhrig Report 2003	Uhrig, J. (2003) <i>Review of Corporate Governance of Statutory Authorities and Office Holders</i> Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra. Available at: www.finance.gov.au/governancestructures
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America

Prologue

The times they are a changin'

(Bob Dylan 1964)

This book is about people on nonprofit arts boards who share a particular passionate experience. Drawing on observations from the field, I argue that harnessing passion requires competencies and behavioural characteristics for board members to ensure they meet the strategic and performance needs of the board and the organisation. The view taken is from inside the boardroom. Hence, it is also about the board itself, how it functions and how it is led in the context of constant change; Bob Dylan's famous song is as relevant today as it was when it was penned back in the 1960s, in speaking of the changin' times. The book is written for the people it is about. These people are contributors and witnesses, documenting their times as narrators. Many arts board members are prominent people in business, government or the arts; they can be difficult to access and hard to encourage to open up to a researcher. Some arts board members are seeking to improve their careers in arts management, of which arts governance is an integral part. Others are socially minded individuals such as philanthropists who wish to give back to the community. The book is about these people, their passion, and their performance in a volunteer role that leads to strategies, structure, culture, leadership, change and conformance undertaken through their paid staff. The principles are relevant to different types of arts organisations and their boards, including: peak bodies; regional, state or national arts organisations; international organisations with boards; and associated organisations that present events, manage venues or facilities or deliver services through networks to arts participants and their audiences.

The book has been constructed from the narratives with which I was provided. I see it as a scholarly discipline as well as a novelist's art, where I am both in control of the plot while also letting it tell me what is happening in the story. I have spent much of my professional life on boards of one kind or another, mostly nonprofit or voluntary in focus. The book has been written from that perspective: of someone engaged with the arts, as arts board member, teacher, researcher and mentor. My journey towards the creation of this book began when I had completed studies on arts leaders and creativity,

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followed by numerous studies on arts boards, arts board members and governance. These studies had been conducted for government agencies and enabled me to develop additional knowledge that would assist me as a board member. I asked myself what the experiences were like for men and women on arts boards. I also asked why arts boards achieved a balance between men and women on the board, embracing people from different backgrounds – something that business and some nonprofit boards in other sectors had failed to do. I also asked myself what learnings could be gleaned from studying arts board members that would help them, as well as people in other domains. The vexed questions about change and challenge in stringent times arose as a result of the first two questions. From these simple avenues of enquiry, I have undertaken several studies on arts boards, arts board members and governance, the results of which culminate in this book.

The amorphous term ‘governance’ can encompass society, organisations, boards or individuals, and is used in distinct and different ways to include all these forms. The term was formerly descriptive in nature – even though used distinctively by different authors or in a billowing sense of being all-encompassing – with little differentiation between governance and management evident in the early days. Now it is quite different. Government enquiries have been set up to investigate governance. Universities teach governance. While there is still no single way of understanding governance, we have become conscious of its ubiquitousness. Engagement in cultural activities, through board governance, provides another lens on the investigation.

So, while this book is based on conventional research – conducted over five years and including interviews with board members and stakeholders, a survey, case studies, board workshops and board meeting participation, observation and document analysis – it is underpinned by personal experience. The book is structured around the concepts of board people, passion and performance, what that means for high performing boards and for sound governance. Notes identify matters from the survey that provide supporting points of view to interview or historical data. I also use my knowledge of board member interests and activities through my advisory work with nonprofit arts organisations in and around Australia and beyond to enrich the story.

This book has been written for a range of people. It is for people who are working in arts organisations, on arts boards, aspiring to join an arts board, or developing policy for arts boards. Such people include those working in government, nonprofit arts organisations, local government, other levels of government and those studying to develop their careers in arts management. It is for people studying in arts management, of which arts governance is a vital part. It may even be of use to people on other types of boards – whether nonprofit or corporate – as it provides valuable lessons for boards as far as diversity is concerned.

The book reminds us that if we are going to analyse governance in a way that will resonate with readers, we must engage with its components rather than treat it as a lofty abstraction. It makes its argument through an historical

understanding of governance in the arts, embedded in contextual insights, whose evolution in meaning concludes in contemporary times.

Types of arts organisations

The men and women interviewed for the book serve on arts boards of varying types: elite boards; small to medium boards; peak body boards; statutory authorities; and national and international boards. No attempt was made to select a random sample; however, the web scan showed that the data provided from the interviews was representative of Australian arts boards. People served on boards in the performing arts, galleries and museums, peak bodies, venues, festivals, film, and publishing. Board members are in their middle years on average, as would be expected. The men and women interviewed served on arts boards, such as at Opera Australia, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Arts Access, Virginia Symphony, Virginia Opera, International Chamber Music Competition, International Trumpet Guild, Big West Festival, Art Gallery of Ballarat, Geelong Performing Arts Centre Trust and Metropolitan Opera. These men and women work in arts organisations which are becoming increasingly enterprising, of necessity. Funding models are changing; governments are more and more constrained in what they can provide to arts organisations, leaving gaps that must be filled through entrepreneurial activity.

Types of board members

I spoke to people who served on 60 arts boards, in metropolitan and regional Australian cities and internationally. Against this background, I was provided with an opportunity to hold rich conversations with 85 men and women on arts boards and their stakeholders. Many of the interviewees have followed the transition of arts boards from amateur to professional status over many years. The collective experience of these people and the historical and contemporary approaches to governance provide a unique opportunity to study the topic in a way that has not previously been undertaken. By comparing shared meanings and change over time, I explore how individual board members behave in a particular context. I show how meaning making is influenced by the ways individuals describe themselves as board members, as well as being influenced by the changing social context within which they are embedded. Collectively, interviewees provide a 'historical horizon' (Gadamer 1982) on which to make judgements and interpretations about arts governance. I recognise that one small part connects to a much larger whole of experience, in the literature and in research. The book then, is a reflective piece that allows others to rethink their experiences with governance, and to ponder new meanings and complexities.

Arts board members were appointed by government ministers, elected by members of the arts organisation, found after a search, or, in some cases, tapped on the shoulder. Stakeholder interviews took place with influential

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men and women who had served in government, business, philanthropic organisations, as sponsors and in the arts in a variety of other capacities.

The story told is grounded in these interviews, as well as web searches, document analysis, a survey, board meeting participation and observation, case studies, content analysis and board workshops. The result may seem to be unruly rather than the tidy approach of statistics, but it is an interpretive study providing insights and deep analysis, with an eye on the global literature of governance studies, including biographies and autobiographies that clarify the changes that have occurred in arts governance over time. The emphasis is not so much on individual arts organisations or their boards, but rather on themes and patterns that emerge from the data collected from individual board members and their stakeholders.

Writing this book

By listening to the individual voices of men and women on arts boards, my approach is inductive, interpretive and descriptive. These voices are present throughout the book, in quotations as well as interpretations. The words of the board members are an important part of the story as it is told from their point of view, from inside the board room. However, the story is underpinned by an historical analysis, a survey (Rentschler and Radbourne 2008), web scan, board observations and workshops, and case studies, which enabled me to ascertain that the purposive sample used for the interviews was representative of boards in the cultural context. Relevant results from the earlier survey are provided in the notes. Collectively, this data showed that arts boards: are functioning well, but express uncertainty as to their role and accountability; are hindered by scarce resources; demonstrate a high level of commitment to their positions but need to be more strategic; and need to work with their CEOs as change agents. The data further revealed that there are also similar numbers of men and women on arts boards and that there is 25 per cent ethnic diversity on arts boards in Australia, making these boards somewhat different from other boards.

Overall, the project took five years. The survey was conducted first, then case studies, followed by the web search, interviews, board observations and board workshops. Interviews took place throughout 2011, 2012, 2013 and into 2014.

What's in the book

This book comprises five parts and eight chapters. Part I focuses on the historical changes in arts governance. Chapter 1 sets the scene of the changing processes and the dynamic environment in which arts governance takes place. Chapters 2 and 3 discuss the roots of governance from historical and theoretical perspectives. Part II is about the men and women on arts boards, who they are, where they come from and what they do. Chapter 4 profiles these people. Chapter 5 focuses on board leadership. Part III investigates governance by