



THE ART OF THE POSSIBLE

A research study on the cultural
skills sector in India

March 2021 - June 2021
For NCPA Mumbai

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Supported by



Foreword

In 2021, the National Centre for the Performing Arts, Mumbai with the support of the British Council, commissioned the Art X Company to conduct a research study on the cultural skills sector in India. The aim was to gather information and discuss training methodology for Indian practitioners who work with transversal and technical skills in the live entertainment and performing arts domains — in design, programming, stage, and production management. This included a survey and a series of interviews and focus group discussions with a multitude of stakeholders. People from across the country with a wide range of backgrounds and across ages participated in this study. We believe it to be an illuminating conversation starter, which poses the question: how do we work as a national community to improve conditions and provide a greater opportunity to those currently working as creative and backstage teams in theatre?

We believe that through collaboration, we can start a pan-India movement that not only helps individuals to realise their ambitions but feeds into the larger ecosystem of arts venues to improve standards and practices. The rising tide raises all boats. The bigger picture must be considered if we are to make lasting, sustainable changes to how we make work.

That is why we need you to read this document. Consider the points of view expressed here and feel free to add your own points. Our hope is that this becomes a living document: a conversation that evolves over time, which we translate into objectives that we, as a community, can work towards together.

It is our firm belief that there is no obstacle we cannot overcome if we apply our minds to finding solutions. On every level, people who work in the performing arts must be professional problem solvers. This report doesn't solve problems. The people who embrace its ideals, and work to address these issues with ingenuity and creativity, will. And we will be standing alongside them when they do.

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About NCPA, Mumbai

The National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA), Mumbai, is India's premier cultural institution. Inaugurated in 1969, it was the first multi-venue, multi-genre cultural centre in South Asia. The NCPA is committed to preserving and promoting India's rich and vibrant artistic heritage in the fields of music, dance, theatre, film, literature and photography, as well as presenting new and innovative work by Indian and international artistes from a diverse range of genres including drama, contemporary dance, orchestral concerts, opera, jazz and chamber music.

With its emphasis on education, the NCPA is developing a reputation as a major centre for training and education, building on an already well-established programme of workshops, seminars, and special events for families and children.

www.ncpamumbai.com

About British Council

The British Council builds connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and other countries through arts and culture, education and the English language. We work in two ways – directly with individuals to transform their lives, and with governments and partners to make a bigger difference for the longer term, creating benefit for millions of people all over the world. We help young people to gain the skills, confidence and connections they are looking for to realise their potential and to participate in strong and inclusive communities. We support them to learn English, to get a high-quality education and to gain internationally recognised qualifications. Our work in arts and culture stimulates creative expression and exchange and nurtures creative enterprise. We connect the best of the UK with the world and the best of the world with the UK. These connections lead to an understanding of each other's strengths and of the challenges and values that we share. This builds trust between people in the UK and other nations which endures even when official relations may be strained. We work on the ground in more than 100 countries. In 2019-20 we connected with 80 million people directly and with 791 million overall, including online and through our broadcasts and publications.

www.britishcouncil.in

About Art X Company

The Art X Company's mission is to enable and articulate value for the arts and culture sector in India through data-driven insights, strategy-led impact, and audience outreach. A strategic consultancy operating at the intersection of arts and access, Art X Company offers consulting, research, curation, audience development and management services to the cultural sector in India.

www.art-x.co

Note from the Authors

This research report is generated by the Art X Company on behalf of the National Center for Performing Arts (NCPA), supported by the British Council, and is presented in the form of a consolidated report containing the results based on interviews, focus groups and a survey as part of the 'The Art of the Possible' research project.

Acknowledgements

We thank the team at NCPA for their feedback and guidance provided during the course of this study, particularly Bruce Guthrie, Antonia Collins, Saatvika Kantamneni, Surabhi Shrivastava and Mr. Nayan Kale. We would also like to extend our gratitude to the scores of cultural professionals from all over the country who agreed to participate in this study and share their experiences. Our research team was fortified by the thorough contributions of our project team comprising research lead Aatreyee Ghosh, data analyst Poorvaja Sivaraman, coordinator Mahima Grover, research interns Shrushti Bhosale and Zephyr Hussain Pegu, design intern Sunanda Vasudevan, and research consultant Dr. Padmini Ray Murray.

Disclaimer

The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of NCPA or of any organisation mentioned. Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this paper, however the research is subject to uncertainties that are beyond the authors' ability to control or estimate precisely. Neither the authors nor NCPA assume any warranty for the accuracy, completeness or use of the findings. Readers are responsible for assessing the relevance and accuracy of the content of this research.

Acronyms and Key Terminology

Acronyms

ATSA : ARThink South Asia

B.Voc : Bachelor of Vocation

DSM : Drama School Mumbai

FGD : Focus Group Discussion

FTII : Film and Television Institute of India

ICHR : Indian Council for Historic Research

ICSSR : Indian Council of Social Science Research

IFA : Indian Foundation for the Arts

ITIs : Industrial Training Institutes

LE & PA : Live Entertainment and Performing Arts

MESC : Media & Entertainment Skills Council

NAEMD : National Academy of Event Management and Development

NCERT : National Council for Educational Research and Training

NCO : National Classification of Occupations

NIEM : National Institute of Event Management

NIFT : National Institute of Fashion Technology

NSD : National School of Drama

NSDC : National Skill Development Corporation

NOS : National Occupational Standards

NSIM : National Skills India Mission

NID : National Institute of Design

NSO : National Statistical Office

NSQF : National Skills Qualifications Framework

NVEQF : National Vocational Education Qualification Framework

SMART : Strategic Management in the Art of Theatre

TIC : Theatre Infrastructure Cell

UGC : University Grants Commission

Terminology

1. **AUTO-CAD drawings:** AUTO-CAD (Computer-aided Design) is a type of software developed by the company Autodesk that is often used by theatre professionals as a drafting tool for set design and production.
2. **EQing - Equalizing:** This refers to a form of audio-processing in music production. This allows audio-cleaning and therefore, is used to edit out imperfections in sound.

3. **Gig economy ecosystem:** A free market system wherein independent workers are hired for short-term contracts or positions. It includes freelance jobs that are flexible and adaptable to work demands.
4. **High quality work:** This refers to what experts in the field would consider as work that is of a certain quality or standard, based on attributes that they deem non-negotiable for that particular sector.
5. **Infrastructure:** This includes the venues, facilities, rehearsal spaces, auditoriums, and technical equipment that professionals need and use particularly in the LE & PA sector.
6. **Live Entertainment and Performing Arts:** Live entertainment and performing arts (LE & PA) include the following 12 sub-domains — circus, dance, illusion / magic, mime, music, musical theatre, performance arts, puppetry, spoken word, stand-up comedy, storytelling, and theatre.
7. **Management professionals:** In the context of this report, management professionals are those who usually handle the business dimensions of arts organisations, including operations, fundraising, financial management, marketing, PR, staff management and evaluation.
8. **MESC Qualification packs:** A Qualification Pack certifies a person for a specific job role. Each Qualification Pack also contains a NVEQF (National Vocational Education Qualification Framework) Level, which will theoretically make it possible to drive competency-based training for every Entry Level job role in the Media & Entertainment industry. These packs are marked with a NVEQF level, such as level 1 to 10. The Qualification Packs help in both the creation of curriculum and assessments.
9. **NCO:** NCO is a classification of occupations which describes and assigns codes to the various occupations in the country and is used in the network of employment exchanges, job postings and job search. It plays an important role in maintaining standards of occupation.
10. **NSDC:** The NSDC is a Public Private Partnership (PPP) in India that is set up to facilitate the development and upgrading of skills in the unorganised sector in India.
11. **Peer learning:** This refers to the process of workers in the transversal skills sector learning from each other on-the-job and through collaborations. It talks about cooperative learning and fostering meaningful connections between the workers in the sector/performing arts industry.
12. **Proscenium:** This refers to a type of theatre with a stage that is surrounded on the top and sides by a physical proscenium arch. The front of the stage usually opens into the auditorium and gives a good view of the stage and performers to the audience.
13. **Skilled labour:** This refers to the kind of labour that is equipped to develop, and execute work that is of 'high quality' (see definition above) in the respective sectors.
14. **Skills gap:** This refers to the skills, tools and expertise that is lacking at a macro-level among professionals in a particular sector.

15. **Standardisation:** In the particular context of this study, standardisation refers to the process of developing and implementing certain norms and technical standards with respect to quality of work, work conditions, pay scales and venue facilities in the LE & PA sector in India, based on the consensus of relevant stakeholders.
16. **Tech riders:** A technical rider is a document that reflects the technical requirements of a show. The document may include the stage plan, channel list, and equipment list along with a description of the plan in terms of light, sound, decor, and video, etc.
17. **Technical and transversal skills:** These refer to skills that are typically transferable to other sectors and that can be used in a wide variety of situations and work settings. For instance, a production manager or sound designer can work in diverse industries such as theatre, film and advertising. For the purposes of this study, we are focusing mainly on production-related skills and not on other areas such as acting, writing, and direction.
18. **Technical equipment:** This refers to the varied instruments, devices and tools that are utilised in the production of live performances. For example, technical equipment used in a theatrical play would include Lighting instruments and Sound Amplifiers.
19. **Technical staff:** This refers to workers who assist in the configuration and utilisation of technical instruments used in the production of live performances. They are accountable for maintaining these instruments and provide general technical contributions to the venue and/or production(s).
20. **Upskilling:** This refers to the act (process) of either gaining new skills or improving existing skill sets in order to perform better in a particular field of work.
21. **Vendors:** These refer to professional individuals or companies that rent sound /light/video equipment to theatre companies, technical artists etc. for use in productions.
22. **Venue technical leads:** This refers to professionals who are responsible for leading technical teams at a specific venue where they are employed full-time. The technical workers they supervise assist sound teams, light teams, etc.

1. Executive Summary

Introduction

'The Art of the Possible' is a first-of-its-kind, primary-research led study in India that looks at the transversal and technical skills landscape in the live entertainment and performing arts domains from the perspective of working professionals and sector stakeholders. The study identifies specific upskilling challenges and training requirements within the cultural sector, while mapping existing gaps, skilling needs and barriers to the entry of professionals into the sector.

Commissioned by the NCPA, the study is aimed to provide insights and recommendations to the NCPA to enable it to develop its new training programme for cultural professionals with technical and transversal skills.

Methodology

The methodology employed in this research study includes a review of secondary data, interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and an online survey. The final analysis and write-up is also informed by an FGD with internal stakeholders from the NCPA aimed at getting feedback and insights from an in-house perspective.

In depth interactions 54 respondents (in the form of both personal interviews and focus group discussions) were undertaken with representatives from theatre and dance companies, technical equipment vendors, freelance consultants, educators, technical heads of India's biggest arts venues, cultural workers in sound, light, stage and costume design and stage and production management. Further, the online survey was taken by 150 respondents with 97 complete responses and 53 partial responses. This aided the comparison and contrast of responses received during fieldwork. All the respondents were given information sheets and written consent was taken prior to gathering and recording their responses.

Key insights

Sector composition and career pathways

- The cultural sector in India can be described as an informal sector without an overarching policy framing its evolution and growth. Culture, as a mandate, is mainly under the remit of the Ministry of Culture and 11 different central government ministries. resulting in little recognition of theatre as a legitimate and secure career with defined pathways.

- Pathways to entry into the transversal skills space for the majority of the respondents has been through exposure to theatre at the school or college level. Therefore, possession of social and cultural capital determines an entrant's pathway to the sector. While most training occurs on-the-job, some who can afford it and are determined to upskill, may undertake intensive training programs abroad.
- Acting is usually the first port of entry into the transversal skills space, where aspirants play a small role 'and help out on lights or sound', as a couple of respondents stated.
- The sector is also characterised by a lack of adequate information and knowledge on career pathways and progression.
- Career portfolios of most transversal skills professionals are extremely diverse and these skills are employed across allied sectors. Of the 106 responses received for this question, education (57%), events (48%), and film (45%)¹ were the three most recurrent allied sectors these professionals worked in. The reasons for such a diverse career portfolio range from the need for financial sustainability to the desire to learn more.
- The interpersonal and professional relations within this space are characterised by deep camaraderie, friendship and a sense of community, often leading to career progression in the sector through referrals.
- The informal nature of the sector and the lack of affordable and adequate educational options present significant barriers to professional growth in the sector.
- Respondents raised concerns about gender bias in the sector, specifically in the area of transversal skills, which is dominated by men. The class and social differences between professionals greatly determine who can pursue a relatively stable career in theatre, and if they have the skills and networks to apply for formal funding and grants.

Learning behaviour and work mechanisms

- Quality formal methods of learning and training are scarce in India such that most learning happens 'on-the-job'. In the survey, out of 147 respondents, 63% and 67% highlighted 'learning via observation' and 'learning from peers' as major contributors to respondents' growth and development in the sector respectively.

¹ The survey participants could choose multiple sectors, therefore the sectors are not mutually exclusive.

Learning is also facilitated via one-off residencies organised by cultural organisations, consulates and embassies.

- Knowledge exchange with technical equipment companies and vendors was seen as a crucial avenue for training, especially to get up-to-date with the latest equipment and technology.
- The motivations to learn have been wide-ranging, with 'passion for the craft' (79%) and 'curiosity or a desire to learn new skills' (76%) being the two prime reasons as indicated in the survey by 147 respondents.
- Most productions are not able to afford specialists and hence many professionals are tasked with handling various aspects of a production. For example, the same person manages light and sound or one person looks after both costume design and production management. This calls for versatile skill development which leads to a wider breadth of learning rather than depth.
- As per the survey data, respondents on an average valued a low-budget production at INR 2.55 lakh, a medium budget production at INR 6 lakh, and a high-budget production at INR 10.66 lakh. However, the production budgets ranged as low as under INR 10,000 for a low-budget production to as high as INR 5 crore for a high budget production covering commercial, musical and experimental theatre. This significant variance points to more robust data collection needs to correctly estimate the size and scale of productions and the related pay scales of professionals. This sort of informality of the sector and lack of standardisation across work conditions, work hours, pay, career progression, and entry mechanisms, makes the sector particularly vulnerable, unsustainable and difficult to navigate.
- In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, online workshops are becoming a prime source of knowledge exchange. For example, 40% of 105 survey respondents mentioned that they have adapted their work to the online medium for performances, conducting or attending workshops, learning from tutorials etc.

Skills assessment: gaps and needs

- The existing notions of 'skilled labour' and 'high-quality work' varied according to the context the professionals operated in. Some of the key skills that respondents highlighted are adaptability, resourcefulness, problem-solving, knowledge of the basics or the fundamentals, creativity and specialisation.
- The work environment is often characterised by limited infrastructure and budget constraints which requires skilled professionals to multi-task, maximise output

with limited resources and be flexible with regards to adapting to the demands of the particular workspace.

- Another dimension of a skilled professional that respondents stressed on is the importance of 'knowing the material' and understanding all aspects of the production process.
- With respect to skill gaps, a majority of the respondents felt that new entrants into the sector are under-qualified and required a lot of on-the-job training. Knowledge gaps were cited as the major precursor to skill gaps. The lack of formal pedagogical learning causes professionals to have a limited knowledge of fundamentals which results in them not being able to utilise those principles in problem-solving or delivering high-quality work.
- Another factor that leads to limited upskilling is the lack of pedagogical peer learning platforms with regards to journals and articles on the craft, conferences and seminars specifically dedicated to transversal skills.
- Another important gap is the lack of health and safety protocols of all production personnel, including, and particularly, women.
- Additionally, as most one-off courses for these areas are often conducted in English, a major skill gap is communication skills because a majority of professionals do not communicate in English and this results in limited opportunities to upskill.
- Further, especially in the current context since 2020, digital skills have been flagged as a major skill gap.
- There is also ambiguity around the benefits of upskilling with respect to quality and holistic nature of training programmes on offer, affordability of training and post-training work opportunities or the 'return' on investment made in training.
- Of the 98 respondents who identified barriers to upskilling, high course fees (70%), unfavourable location (49%) and lack of time (45%) were some of the most significant barriers to upskilling that were identified.

Recommendations

A. General (For the NCPA/for the programme)

1. **Initiate a consortium of 10 arts venues in India:** NCPA can form a consortium of arts venues to develop a range of best practice documents and resources. These

include architectural drawings of stages, contact lists of major vendors the organisations work with (to make it easy for touring).

2. **Training manuals and programmes for NCPA's technical equipment:** Mini workshops and short introduction sessions along with printed training material can be devised. This would allow for on-going and in-direct training of visiting freelance professionals.

B. For the sector

1. Formal training programmes and visibility for transversal skills

- a. Formal, long-term programmes should be introduced for technical and transversal skills, with essential financial support for the first few batches of graduates.
- b. It is imperative to have a **platform or forum for sharing / publishing works** dedicated to cultural professionals with technical skills.
- c. A platform or network to provide mentoring and formal apprenticeship in the cultural sector would be beneficial to new entrants in the sector.
- d. Inclusion of transversal skills in theatre seminars and conferences is imperative.

2. Active leadership of venues

- a. NCPA (or the sector) should put a **production credit template** in place for every theatre and dance production team to give to the NCPA. This would include the names of all operators, technicians and designers in the transversal skills space and hence, work towards legitimising their work.
- b. Venues can create a **post-show feedback form** to be filled by the transversal skills professionals from a visiting production which can help venues compile a robust set of equipment, process and system needs. At the same time, venues can take the feedback from the transversal skills community while upgrading their systems.
- c. Venues need to have **stronger technical teams** that are employed full-time in order to effect regular maintenance of technical equipment and relevant and resourceful upgrades within venues.

3. Adoption of best practices and repositories

- a. It is suggested that **templates are developed** for various processes in order to ensure effective, efficient and safe work in the sector.

- b. There is a **need for a database/repository** that could facilitate the work of all stakeholders in the sector, including vendors, cultural professionals with technical and transversal skills and venue personnel.
- c. It is proposed that a **practice-oriented and participatory research project** be done collaboratively between cultural sector practitioners and researchers to create a set of materials that record best practices for processes as well as guidelines that the sector can use.

2. Introduction

India boasts of a rich and diverse cultural sector with a mixed economic sustenance model for creative professionals. India also has no formal culture policy regulating the sector and its growth. Aside from the design and film sectors which have been formally recognised as 'industries', with design also backed by a formal policy, most sub-sectors are best seen as informal. Aligned to this is the training of cultural professionals, who have few formal courses to choose from and rely on on-the-job training to develop skills required to develop cultural productions. In India, theatre and live entertainment share several commonalities. However, structurally both sectors differ in their ability to scale and become profitable.

Arts management professionals can be categorised into two types: the technical professionals and managerial professionals. Technical professionals, who work mainly in transversal areas such as lighting, production, make-up, sound etc., can be trained either at one of the several Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) or on the job (through informal apprenticeships, because there is a lack of alternatives to acquiring formal training and induction of new entrants). Many technical professionals work their way up the ranks after gaining experience. As they gain success and grow in their roles, the junior staff and entry-level technicians learn from them, which creates a cycle of an informal system of in-house training. This leads to a highly precarious environment for technical creative professionals that underscores the challenges of the gig economy ecosystem, including employment relationships, rights of workers and job insecurity. These professionals often work on the basis of passion. This leads them to have to contend with low and variable pay, lack of opportunities and incentives to upskill, and an inability to propagate for standardisation, minimum wage and even health and safety modalities.

Despite this being a known and familiar context, there is little by way evidence and nuanced research reports into understanding the skill gaps and needs of technical creative professionals, their barriers to accessing and partaking in upskilling opportunities, and their motivation to do so. At the same time, an ecosystem scan that underlines the unique nature of how cultural work is undertaken and executed in India, the market potential for technical skills and the sector's preparedness for formalising, including accepting aspects of minimum wage, would be crucial to determine how to also engage with policymakers and industry influencers to potentially shape the market dynamics for standardisation of production and pay parity. It is against this background that the NCPA commissioned this study.

The term 'transversal and technical skills' has been adopted to include a wide variety of skills that are considered to be 'transferable' across various domains and sectors. The UNESCO International Bureau of Education has defined Transversal skills as 'those typically considered as not specifically related to a particular job, task, academic

discipline or area of knowledge but as skills that can be used in a wide variety of situations and work settings (IBE 2013).²

The Art X Company undertook the study on behalf of the National Centre for the Performing Arts, Mumbai, India's premier cultural institution. NCPA's overarching mission is to preserve, promote and propagate India's rich and diverse cultural heritage besides providing a platform for the finest of international performing arts.³ In line with its objectives, the 'Art of the Possible' is one such ambitious initiative that the NCPA wished to undertake to train, support and develop Indian talent across both managerial and transversal skills domains in the cultural sector. With an emphasis on the latter, the NCPA aims to embark upon a three-year professional development course centred on transversal skills in design and technical production of performing arts.

In order to inform the development of the programme and refine its learner targeting, the NCPA commissioned this study of technicians and designers in India who work in the performing arts ecosystem. The focused categories of investigation included light, sound, set, costume and video design; light, sound and video technology; and stage management, production management.

The research objectives were:

- To provide a contextual overview of India's transversal cultural skills landscape
- To underline pathways of entry into the sector, the socio-professional relationships and workflows of cultural workers, and identify pockets of talent
- To outline the professional development needs of cultural professionals in the transversal skills sector
- To identify learning behaviours and preferences, work mechanisms and explore questions of sustainability in the sector
- To identify skill gaps and labour shortages

Furthermore, the study also considered the logistical aspects of implementing such a programme and thus provides recommendations both in terms of the course content and execution as well as broader ideas that can help bolster the sector for the future.

² UNESCO International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training, 'TVETipedia Glossary', UNESCO-UNEVOC. Available [here](#).

³ NCPA, *Corporate Social Responsibility*. Available [here](#).

3. Research Methodology

A mixed-methods approach has been taken for this study, comprising a review of secondary data, focus group discussions, interviews and an online survey. The research was divided into three phases: preparation and desk research; fieldwork (comprising one-on-one interviews, focus group discussions and an online survey); and finally, analysis and write-up, including a final focus group for feedback from key stakeholders.

i. Desk research

Secondary research has been informed by newspaper articles, interviews with sector stakeholders, and articles from other journals and magazines. Many of these articles are primarily qualitative and investigative in nature and have helped understand how the sector works, current challenges and trends, and innovations. Guidelines from various government regulatory standards such as the NCO (National Classification of Occupations) 2015⁴, NSQF frameworks⁵ and MESQ Qualification packs⁶ have also been considered. Other existing data from reports of governmental and non-governmental organisations, research agencies and international bodies have also been included.

ii. Interviews

The interviews were planned in two blocks. The first set of preliminary interviews with **11 shortlisted individuals** from across the technical and transversal skills sector was undertaken to gain a broad overview and better understand key areas to probe and focus on. The second set of deeper sector interviews, respondents were selected based on desk research and insights from the preliminary interviews. In addition, there was a certain amount of snowball sampling above and beyond our initial list. In total, **30 respondents** from across diverse sectors such as freelancers, theatre and dance companies, educational institutes, event management companies, service companies or vendors, researchers and live entertainment and performing arts (referred to as LE & PA henceforth) venues were interviewed.

iii. Focus group discussions

Four Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were organised with **24 participants** spanning light and sound designers, stage and production managers, set and costume designers and venue technical leads. The focus group discussions were undertaken to target specific groups of stakeholders to get a deeper understanding and multiple perspectives on a particular aspect of relevance to the study.

⁴ National Classification of Occupations- 2015. Available [here](#).

⁵ Guidelines for providing Skill Based Education under National Skill Qualification Framework. Available [here](#).

⁶ Media & Entertainment Skills Council, *Qualification Packs & National Occupational Standards*. Available [here](#).

A fifth and final session was held with internal stakeholders from the NCPA on 20 July 2021. This session presented the key insights that emerged from the fieldwork to garner comments, feedback and further suggestions from the experts.

An information sheet covering all aspects of the study and the rights of respondents was provided while inviting the respondents to participate in the study. Written consent of respondents was taken before starting the interview/discussion, and notes and transcripts of recorded interviews (with permission from the interviewee) were provided to the respondents after for verification and edits, if any.

iv. Survey

An online survey was administered to stakeholders from the technical and transversal skills sector.⁷ An analysis of the responder data has been used to further support and supplement the insights collected during interviews and FGDs. The survey was taken by **150 respondents** with **97 complete responses** and **53 partial responses**. The survey results not only helped glean insights into logistical aspects of the course (such as preferences about its duration, the language of instruction, theory vs practice components etc.) but also helped compare and contrast the responses received during fieldwork about other important aspects such as motivations to learn, career portfolios, project budgets and other important areas of training. The triangulation of data from the survey (such as gender vis-a-vis income, location vis-a-vis training opportunities) has also brought out interesting trends about how the sector functions.

⁷ The full survey as circulated among respondents is available in Appendix C. This document can be supplied additionally upon request.

4. Representation of respondents

In selecting the study respondents, we ensured a balanced approach across various parameters. The representation matrices below only refer to The categories of transversal skills chosen for the study (light, sound, set, costume and video designers; light, sound and video technicians; stage, event and production managers) were mapped across the following variables:

i. Gender

Gender-wise representation		
	M	F
Light Design	7	2
Sound Design	4	0
Light & Sound Design	1	0
Costume Design	0	6
Set Design	5	2
Stage Management	1	3
Production Management	4	3
Stage & Production Management	1	0
Sound Technology	2	0
Video Technology	0	0
Light Technology	1	0
Diverse	8	0
NA	1	2
TOTAL	35	18

ii. Region

North, South, East, West, North East including a diverse range of Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities such as Mumbai, Bangalore, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Pune, Guwahati, Pondicherry, Panaji and Shillong

Region-wise representation						
	East	West	South	North	NE	TOTAL
Light Design	1	5	2	1	0	9
Sound Design	0	0	3	0	1	4
Light & Sound Design	0	1	0	0	0	1
Costume Design	2	3	0	1	0	6
Set Design	0	3	2	1	1	7
Stage Management	0	2	0	2	0	4
Production Management	1	3	1	1	1	7
Stage & Production Management	0	1	0	0	0	1
Sound Technology	0	2	0	0	0	2
Video Design	0	0	0	2	0	2
Light Technology	0	1	0	0	0	1
Diverse	0	3	4	1	0	8
NA	0	1	1	1	0	3
TOTAL	4	25	13	10	3	55

iii. Sector

(freelancers, theatre and dance company representatives, educational institutes, event management companies, service companies or vendors, researchers and live entertainment and performing arts (LE & PA) venues

Sector-wise representation											
	Individual	Theatre / Dance Company	Theatre Mgt. Company	Edu. Institute	Event Mgt. Company	Service Company/ Vendor	Academic	Venue	Professional Org.	TOTAL	
Light Design	5	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	9	
Sound Design	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	
Light & Sound Design	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	
Costume Design	4	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	6	
Set Design	4	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	7	
Stage Management	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	4	
Production Management	0	3	0	1	2	0	0	1	0	7	
Stage & Production Management	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	
Sound Technology	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	
Video Technology	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Light Technology	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	
Diverse	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	5	0	8	
NA	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	3	
TOTAL	22	8	1	3	2	6	1	8	2	53	

5. Limitations

- a. **Lack of available and robust data:** Because of the informal nature of the sector, there is limited data and statistics on the size of the sector and cultural professionals. Whatever employment and professional skills data is available is often inconsistent with other data sources, including occupational standards and census data, and is difficult to garner and triangulate.
- b. **Exclusion of non-urban elements:** The scope of the study was limited to English-speaking cultural professionals mainly covering Tier 1 and 2 cities in India. The scale and variety of the theatre traditions and operations, covering traditions in rural India that work within different language contexts, requires a much larger scope and timeline for such a project, which was not under the remit of this specific study.
- c. **Exclusion of caste and class as parameters of representation:** Similarly, parameters of representation such as caste and class were not considered in the scope of the study for similar reasons as explained above.
- d. **Representational challenges:** Due to the composition of the sector and the way it functions, certain parameters have a skewed representation, particularly in the cases of gender and category. In the case of the former, the sector is more male-dominated, which led to a slightly biased male to female ratio in terms of respondents in the case of both interviews and survey respondents. Similarly, when it comes to genre, light and sound seem more visible categories than set, costume and video. Since production budgets don't often allow for specialisation, it was seen that professionals working solely with set, costume or video in theatre were far lesser, and thus less accessible, as compared to light and sound.
- e. **Challenges due to COVID-19:** The study focused on skill needs, gaps and learning behaviours of transversal skills professionals despite the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. While the study takes into account additional concerns emerging from the pandemic-related lockdown and skill upgradation, it doesn't focus solely on the subject.
- f. **Survey data:** Out of 150 total respondents, only 97 were complete responses. Of these, for the purposes of the study, we have also taken into account the complete responses to at least 3 of the 4 sections of the questionnaire – the questions in sections on respondent profile, pathways to entry and learning behaviours (some have not provided inputs on the programme design section). Respondents who have

partially completed the survey beyond this point have been excluded from the analysis.

6. Overview of the technical and transversal skill sector in India

For the purpose of the study on live entertainment and performing arts, production designers, technicians and operators under light, sound, stage, video set and costume have been consolidated and are being viewed under the 'transversal and technical skills landscape'. While there are several professionals working in these domains in India, such consolidation of skill sets has not been undertaken formally.

The National Classification of Occupations under the Ministry of Labour and Employment acts as a compendium for occupational information and plays an important role in maintaining standards of occupations. The classification is also used in all types of censuses and surveys in India dealing with skills data. There is the National Skills Development Council,⁸ an autonomous, quasi-Government agency that is tasked with creating skills classification. However, given the lack of central policy in mapping the evolution of the sector and its actors, most of these agencies have variegated methodologies of data collection, archiving and retrieval, which means it's usually difficult to estimate the number of professionals working under these heads and extrapolate them for our study.

a. Educational and Training Landscape

Respondents stated that while there are several diplomas and certificate programmes and one-off workshops for learning these skills, there isn't a robust set of formal educational options for a professional to specialise in these areas.

There is some amount of training in allied programmes such as those offered by Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and vocational training options. Many technicians and operational professionals in the cultural sector have trained on the job (often informally). Transversal skills professionals may have also received training in traditional theatre and performance studies programmes or acting schools. The training landscape for each of these professionals differs on the basis of the area of transversal skills that the professional specialises in and has been further outlined below.

i. Light, video, sound design and technology

Formal training options range from vocational courses (via Industrial Training Institutes) to modules in each of these as part of more formal courses in film production, theatre

⁸ National Skills Development Council. Available [here](#).

and performance studies. The Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) has a three-year PG Diploma Course⁹ In Sound Recording & Sound Design. There are several certificate and diploma courses by private institutes. There are no formal, in-depth degree and masters courses in stage production, light, sound and video technology for the stage.

A few theatre courses in the country have some transversal skills training as part of their curriculum. These can be found in [Annexure i](#).

Upskilling also typically occurs through one-off workshops, online learning via Youtube and specialized websites and informal training on-the-job. These can be found in [Annexure ii](#).

“...Courses that exist in this country, as touted as they are, as being theater and performance studies courses, are generally acting courses with little bit of a pinch on directing. Maybe writing. There’s very little focus on technical, managerial skills and entrepreneurial skills.”

— A director and actor

“We’ve given a certificate at the end of it saying — “Hey, X person has done a three-week long whatever, lighting design programme”. I mean, it’s just a piece of paper at the end of the day. It doesn’t have any “value” in the outside world because it’s not a formal degree or accredited educational Institute certificate.”

— A light designer

ii. Set and Costume Design

As compared to the rest of the skills mentioned, stage and costume have a relatively more formal educational landscape. The National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), an autonomous fashion design and technology institute established in 1986 under the Ministry of Textiles, has been at the forefront of costume design and production with 17 campuses across the country. There are several more private and public schools of fashion in India that offer training at various levels. Set design draws its professionals from the fields of visual arts, film production and architecture. FTII has a three-year PG Diploma Course¹⁰ in Art Direction & Production Design. Aside from that, several film schools offer a course or two in production design as part of their film studies courses. Under visual arts, commercial arts and exhibition design are pathways towards set design. Several architecture programmes also have modules in set design and light design for architectural spaces, which potentially lend themselves to application in LE & PA.

⁹ FTII- Sound Recording & Sound Design course. Available [here](#).

¹⁰ FTII- Art Direction & Production Design course. Available [here](#).

iii. Stage and Production Management

Training for stage and production management primarily occurs under event management. There are several private event management training institutes offering diplomas, such as the National Academy of Event Management and Development (NAEMD), EMDI Institute of Media & Communication, National Institute of Event Management (NIEM) and Indian Institute of Learning and Advanced Development. NAEMD offers a three-year Bachelor's Degree and a two-year Masters in Event Management & PR. However, transversal skills professionals in theatre and dance don't necessarily use the event management training route as a formal career pathway into the field.

b. Upskilling options

There are several one-off courses that take place from time to time across these fields. International cultural organisations (British Council, Goethe-Institute, Alliance Française, Pro-Helvetia Swiss Arts Council) and embassies play a key role here as they often enable the exchange of professionals through cultural projects. Indian cultural professionals go abroad for residencies and productions that enable cross-cultural learning in these areas. These organisations also organise several workshops in India as part of their existing projects. For instance, in 2017, Pro-Helvetia Swiss Arts Council conducted a lighting workshop for beginners by Swiss light designer Sarah Büchel. It also conducted a workshop called 'The Found Stage: Sound and Site' in Manipur in 2018.¹¹ The British Council often organises technical skills workshops with visiting professionals from the UK to India for showcase events each year. One such example was the lighting design and skills workshop organised in Bengaluru in 2017.¹²

In addition to these workshops, there are art and theatre management courses and sector conferences and forums that have created several learning contexts for transversal skills professionals as well. Although they are mainly aimed at managerial and producing professionals, they still form unique and significant projects and networks for the sector to rely on for professional upskilling. These include the ARThink South Asia (ATSA) fellowship, Strategic Management in the Art of Theatre (SMART) by India Foundation for the Arts and India Theatre Forum, and Ninasam Theatre Institute.

Some respondents, who could afford it, opted for longer-term in-depth courses in other countries in specialised areas such as light design, sound production and costume design and production.

¹¹ Anon., 'Workshop - 'The Found Stage: Sound And Site' In Manipur', *Pro Helvetia Swiss Arts Council*, 2018. Available [here](#).

¹² Christoph, 'Lighting Design And Operation Skills Workshop', *Auroville Art Service*, 21 August, 2017. Available [here](#).

c. Infrastructure gaps

Respondents highlighted significant infrastructure gaps that hamper continuous learning. These range from available venues, infrastructure within those venues, lack of production budgets to lack of quality professionals.

While the general concern was fewer venues, respondents noted the disparity of quality in available spaces for performance as being the larger issue. While there are several venues available, they are multipurpose auditoriums that often lack the equipment needed to stage a live performance, including the adequate number of lights, ramps, acoustics, etc. Maintenance of these spaces — the stage, upgradation of equipment, seats, skilling of professionals — was highlighted as another area of concern.

“In a lot of places, our show was cancelled because of the surface of the floor. If the floor is up/down, or if it's not wooden, or the floor is not made of cement, and it is made of mud, then these are the issues that our shows face.

... so the actors are not able to move in case their foot goes in, etc. What these people do is they lay down a red carpet over it. See, you lay a red or a green carpet for the audience, so they think a national or international show is happening.”

— A production manager

There is a lack of available resources in the public domain that help with better planning. Resources such as publicly available information on equipment vendors in different cities, AUTO-CAD drawings of stages and their exact dimensions, and databases of various skilled workers, could help professionals save time in coordination and develop effective production processes for the teams to follow.

There is little to no coordination between teams of venues and freelance professionals, which leads to all sorts of challenges from lack of accountability, increased production times to production crises, especially in situations when venues and freelancers have not worked before.

“Venues ask for a tech rider, everything, and then do what with it? After you go there, they ask you the same question, “Sir, how many mics, how many channels, what do you want?” So why do we do this homework of sending tech riders and preparing for the concerts?”

— A light designer

“In India, no, we don't follow a production schedule. We take much longer to do our production bit. We take longer for lighting, set-up. That means you need to

work longer hours... We work 16 to 18 hours. At times, my teams have slept at the venue overnight because they are so exhausted."

— A stage manager

Respondents also noted that most venues have an in-house staff that is not always cued into the changing needs of the community and ensuing production challenges follow.

"A play is on, and you go the other day, like check the sound and all... and most of the time I get a buzzing kind of sound... and these guys... they don't really get it, they think there is some problem with the laptop or something."

— A sound technician

Respondents also noted that not all areas of transversal skills deal with infrastructure challenges but instead have to contend with financial constraints. As a costume designer noted, 'the quality and variety of skills and raw material available for costume design in India is quite high as we are already the hub for manufacturing clothes. The challenge is finding the budgets to pay for this material and *karigiri* (craftsmanship)'. Limited budgets also mean limited time for professionals to design and experiment with the space.

"You have to get it (lights) from suppliers, use it and then take it off and leave. It's shrinking the available time for a designer to completely express them."

— A light designer

The lack of formalisation in the sector also leads to a lack of recognition of the professionals involved in this field by way of awards, critical writing on the field and a general lack of legitimacy for the careers.

Organisations rarely share information and best practices across the sector. Also, there is very little archiving/ recording of the work that occurs in the sector – so while there is plenty of practice on the ground (a cultural innovation lab of sorts), it does not get translated into a set of best practices and guidelines for the sector as a whole. Whatever is generated is rarely shared beyond the organisation and the closed network of partners and associates. This lack of recording and sharing information and creating best practices and guidelines were especially felt in areas related to processes (e.g. for stage management, production), research and archiving, and broadly in areas of safety.

The safety aspect was especially singled out as an area that urgently requires set processes and best practices to reduce the frequency of hazardous situations, such as equipment falling and audience and team members injuring themselves, or vendors and businesses facing losses due to accidents and broken or destroyed equipment.

d. Since 2015

In the last five years, India has seen an influx of new venues and corporate organisations producing musicals: these include corporations such as Disney¹³ and BookMyShow¹⁴ doing musicals and scaled-up live entertainment; corporate-led initiatives such as Aadyam;¹⁵ and venues moving into musicals such as Kingdom of Dreams and the NCPA.¹⁶

This has allowed professionals to get more rehearsal time and equipment to work with. A well-rehearsed play means one where every professional—from an actor to a sound operator—gets the time to hone their craft on the production. This allows for more skill development. This also led to, as one respondent noted, “corporatisation of budgets”, leading to better pay scales.

“From 2016 onwards, I was lighting for at least one production for Aadyam every year. That kept adding to my understanding of design as an aspect and also with the kind of different directors I got to work with.”

— A light designer

“I would say that I was pretty good in small-medium spaces. I wasn't that good at proscenium until Aadyam. I was forced to up my game. I think I worked on 13 of the first 20 Aadyam productions across the first four years. So, Aadyam there has been good to me, in terms of the range of things that I'd been able to access, where I've been able to practice my craft, the things I've been able to employ in the practice of my craft, the scale that I've been able to all and xyz.”

— A light designer

At the same time, several respondents noted the disruption caused by the arrival of these organisations on the sustainability of such productions and the pay scales. Many of these productions have limited runs, and despite the initial funding provided to develop the play, theatre groups often find it challenging to sustain these shows owing to infrastructure and budget challenges. Furthermore, other theatre productions that run on a smaller scale are unable to provide the same pay scales to the professionals, leading to further uncertainty in sustaining a career in this space.

“Most of the time Aadyam does not really run after the Aadyam shows... they suddenly give you a lot of money. You're not used to that kind of money for creating a production of that scale. Running that production becomes a big problem because when your production value is of that nature, there's a running

¹³ Anon., 'Disney brings Broadway musical to India', *BBC News*, 2 October 2015. Available [here](#).

¹⁴ Bindu D Menon, 'BookMyShow to produce Disney India's musical Aladdin for Indian stage with local talent', *The Hindu Business Line*, 27 February 2018. Available [here](#).

¹⁵ Anon., 'Aadyam Theatre from Aditya Birla Group Launches Digital Edition, to be Streamed via Insider.in', *EVENTFAQS Media*, 21 September 2020. Available [here](#).

¹⁶ Anon., 'Forget books films have been adopted as a plays', *The Free Press Journal*, 30 May 2019. Available [here](#).

cost to it. Then, that show has to be either downsized to fit into a budget or it has to be closed entirely.”

— **An actor and educator**

“One of the reasons that *Aadyam* and *Book My Show* and even the new NCPA productions are going to turn out to be extremely problematic in the future is that they have inflated the market. They have given people a right to expect things that cannot be expected without them (these organisations). And that's incredibly short-sighted and unfair... we need to ask, is that what is actually broken?”

— **A production manager**

In terms of education, the number of students opting for courses in humanities has registered an increase,¹⁷ while the enrollments in fields like engineering and medicine have either increased marginally or have decreased.¹⁸ According to a 2014-15 report by India's Ministry of Human Resource and Development, “At the undergraduate level, the highest number (40%) of students are enrolled in Arts/ Humanities/ Social Sciences courses followed by Science (16%), Engineering and Technology (15.6%) and Commerce (14.1%).”¹⁹ Conflating this is the rise of private universities in India. Between the second half of the 1990s—the period during which the initial private universities were established—and 2008, the number of deemed universities in India increased from 33 to 116 (UGC 2018). A majority of these new institutions were set up with private capital (Gol 2014).²⁰ In addition, the Ministry of HRD had issued an Executive Order in September 2011 for the National Vocational Education Qualification Framework (NVEQF). This led to the University Grants Commission (UGC) to launch a scheme on skills development based higher education as part of college/university education, leading to Bachelor of Vocation (B.Voc.)²¹ Several universities have begun to offer a Bachelor of Vocational Education in theatre, such as Wilson College in Mumbai that offers a BVoc in Theatre & Stage Craft.²²

There are cities and pockets with the potential to stage works of scale that are seeking specialisations and experience in transversal skills. These include cities like Mumbai and Delhi, cultural festivals, foreign cultural organisations, events industry, related sectors. More information is available in [Annexure i](#), [ii](#), [iii](#), and [iv](#).

¹⁷ Rashmi Dhanwani and Sonam Shetty, 'Arts Management in India' (Mumbai: The ArtX Company, 2019. Available [here](#).

¹⁸ Kankana Roy Jain, 'Despite negative perceptions, funding constraints, toppers choose arts to 'understand the world better', *Hindustan Times*. 6 May 2019. Available [here](#).

¹⁹ Government of India, 'All India Survey on Higher Education (2015-16)', (New Delhi: Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2016). Available [here](#).

²⁰ Anirban Sengupta, 'Rapid Growth of Private Universities: Transformation of the University Space', *Economic & Political Weekly*, 30 May 2020. Available [here](#).

²¹ University Grants Commission, 'UGC GUIDELINES FOR B.Voc'. Available [here](#).

²² Wilson College- BVoc. in Theatre & Stage Craft. Available [here](#).

7. Key insights from the research

a. Sector composition and career pathways

The cultural sector in India can be described as an informal sector without an overarching policy framing its evolution and growth. As seen in the India Cultural Policy Profile,²³ culture, as a mandate, is under the remit of the Ministry of Culture, under whom institutions such as Sangeet Natak Akademi and the National School of Drama are managed. Aside from this ministry, there are 11 different central government ministries that are involved in culture, some of the relevant ones being:²⁴

1. Ministry of Education, which deals with arts education, and technical education relating to crafts
2. Ministry of Human Resource and Development. which deals with a total of 153 educational and cultural institutions, including the Indian Council for Historic Research (ICHR), Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) and National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT)

With such a wide remit, there is little recognition of theatre as a legitimate and secure career with defined pathways. Many transversal skills professionals in the cultural sector do not come with a university degree and often learn on the job. Formal apprenticeship models in the cultural sector are almost non-existent. However, transversal skills professionals form the backbone of events and productions across all sectors, and work either as freelance professionals with portfolio careers, are employed with performance venues, theatre and event management and production companies, or for vendors hired for sound, light or set design and construction.

i. Pathways to entry

A majority of respondents credited their first brush with theatre through exposure at the school or college level or introduction via a family member who is already working in the culture sector. Therefore, entrants to the sector have social and cultural capital, which determines their pathway to the sector.

Most training occurs on-the-job, with some who can afford it and are determined to upskill undertaking intensive programmes abroad. The latter end up in niche specialisations in light, sound, costume and production, while the former take up more generalist jobs in the sector and are often found to multi-task across sub-sectors.

²³ Ashish Raj Adhyaksha, P. Radhika and Raghavendra Tenkayala, 'Country Profile: INDIA', *WorldCP-Asia*, 2013. Available [here](#).

²⁴ A full list of the existing Ministries has been provided in [Appendix ix](#).

Acting is usually the first port of entry into the transversal skills space, where they play a small role ‘and help out on lights or sound’, as a couple of respondents stated. From thereon, they work in multiple roles in various productions or try to seek more experience in their area of interest in transversal skills, thereby deepening their training on the job.

The sector is also characterised by a lack of adequate information and knowledge on career pathways and progression.

“You ended up doing everything, from doing jhadu (brooming) in space, to doing lights. Sometimes, costumes, sometimes acting, everything I did. Especially when I was in student activism there (the city they lived in), you cannot really choose. You have to basically — people identify your skills, and they tell you to do things.”

— A theatre educator and researcher

“You had to make yourself relatively indispensable, and also multifunctional in a sense, so there was no room for specialisation unless you were doing it as a hobby, which I was not at the time. So, and also it's just interesting when you're 17 and 18 years old, and you get into this, you hang around a lot at rehearsals or at shows, and then you get pulled in, one day you are asked to help carry a platform. Then, the next thing you're operating sound for a play two months later.”

— An actor and director

“I wouldn't say there's a lack of knowledge on the network, but there's a lack of information or a lack of accessible content around, okay. I want to be a stage manager. What, what does that mean? I want to manage a creative thing, like theatre, what does that mean?”

— A production manager

ii. Career portfolios

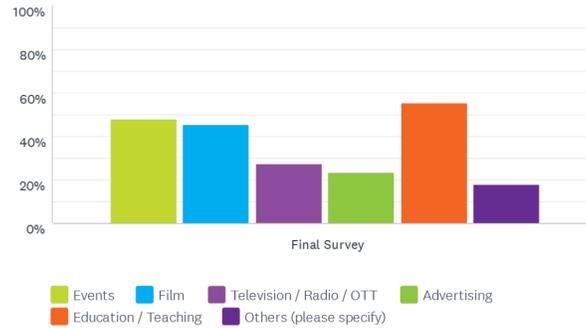
Most transversal skills professionals have extremely diverse career portfolios: A sound designer is likely to work across production, acting, light, sound, stage management and activism, cutting across theatre, politics, dance and film over the course of her/ his/ their career.

Aside from their skills being utilised within performing arts, respondents rated a few specific allied sectors where they are employed. Of the 106 responses received for this question, education (57%), events (48%), and film (45%)²⁵ were the three most recurrent allied sectors these professionals worked in.

²⁵ The survey participants could choose multiple sectors, therefore the sectors are not mutually exclusive.

Q13 Aside from live entertainment and performing arts, please pick the other industries you work in.

Answered: 106 Skipped: 44



	EVENTS	FILM	TELEVISION / RADIO / OTT	ADVERTISING	EDUCATION / TEACHING	OTHERS (PLEASE SPECIFY)	TOTAL
Final Survey	48.11% 51	45.28% 48	27.36% 29	23.58% 25	55.66% 59	17.92% 19	217.92% 231
Total Respondents	51	48	29	25	59	19	106

There are several reasons for such a diverse career portfolio. For many, it was about maintaining the financial sustainability of a career in this space.

“People like me, we make our money out of doing ad films, out of writing or advertising. Sometimes we make our money on various things, right? We have to, and we’ve had to diversify our skills. Most people make films. They write books. They write for magazines. They teach.”

— An actor and director

“So see, while making a set, you won’t make much money. Because making a set is quite expensive and laborious. Since I do lighting also, I have lighting equipment, and I charge for my professional fee as a designer. I make money through the hiring of equipment and designing and lighting.”

— A set designer

For others, a diverse career portfolio is motivated by a desire to learn more across productions of various scales.

“You also get bored of these singularities. For instance, I began with doing fashion and then realised, oh my god, that’s not what I want to do. There is no storytelling for me within this. And then also going and doing product design, alongside fashion, and then going to do costume design and then also prosthetics and hair and make-up, alongside. Of course, teaching, and also being

a technician. You generally also become a technician within all of this. You start working with light to create some costumes. You start working with latex and prosthetics again.”

— A costume designer

iii. Socio-professional relationships

The interpersonal and professional relations within this space is characterised by deep camaraderies, friendship and a sense of community. It also helps with getting work opportunities. Key players include directors, producers, seniors in the field, and lately Disney, BMS and similar corporations.

“... up to a few years ago in theater, it was very much about whom you work with and not necessarily what you worked on or what you work as. It was a lot of camaraderie and a lot of ‘feel-good’ company hanging out, which is great.”

— A theatre director and actor

Career progression in the sector often happens through referrals, mostly by those in creative positions of power such as directors, producers and managers.

While collaboration and teamwork were stressed upon as crucial to the success of a production and in a professional’s career, respondents also highlighted concerns around respect and trust among professionals and other members of the team, especially directors and performers.

“There was also a real holdover from the eighties and nineties of cliques. If you worked with one company or one set of people, you didn't work with too many others. Because money and opportunity were limited, loyalty was an asset. It was an investment which you made... but also Thespo enabled this kind of mad cross-pollination where people just worked on each other's productions.”

— A light designer

“Like I have seen so many abusive designers who're abusing the technicians. Ki yahan pe thokne ka kaam hai thok kyun nai raha hai fatafat kaam nai karta hai...ye nai karta hai wo nahi karta hai. (Your job here is to hammer in the nails, why are you not doing it? Why are you not working quickly? You are not doing anything) They're not respecting the technicians, aur carpenter ko gaali de raha hai (and they are verbally abusing the carpenters)”

— A set designer

iv. Socio-cultural issues and access

Respondents noted several major concerns with respect to entry in the sector, which creates significant barriers to access and sustenance in the sector.

In India, the family plays a significant role in deciding the education and career options for a student. Because of the informal nature of the sector, lack of adequate educational options, and information on career options, theatre is not always seen as a favourable career option.

“Not seen as a legitimate career – so difficult to get buy-in from family to pursue.”

— An educator and actor

Respondents raised specific concerns around their experience of gender bias in the sector, specifically in the area of transversal skills, which is dominated by men. The latter inference was evident as several respondents we spoke to used the male pronoun (he/him/father-son) while referring to professionals in the transversal skills sector. This also implies a gender imbalance in the transversal skills space, leading to fewer female role models.

“Non-male giving instructions in this space is not looked at positively – you do not know where to draw the line. Being genderless is safer. But I don’t want to be gender-less. Why can’t I be a woman and still do this job?”

— A production manager

“I saw a female designer in Delhi. Then in my course in X country, I saw several women. It also gave me a bit of confidence to come back and say, “There were other women in my course who did it, and I can do it as well.”

— A light designer

“When you work with venues and the staff of the venues, it’s very difficult. I don’t think we face that much in NCPA because they are used to people, because they are used to women in power. Delhi has been a very difficult city and I think will be for a while, and even Kolkata. Sometimes it’s very obvious. Sometimes it’s very subtle, but it’s definitely there. That the dependency is always there. If I’m the sole stage manager, then I have to go to my director or my sound or my lighting designer who’s a guy to tell them this, and please get them to do this. I have had to do that.”

— A stage and production manager

Respondents also highlighted issues of class and social capital that determine who can pursue a relatively stable career in theatre. Respondents noted several names of actors, directors, producers who have decided to take up theatre as a career and have the skills and networks to apply for formal funding and grants.

*"... For people in a slightly less privileged position... Who, for example, doesn't know how to write an email. Or don't speak English very well, or don't know how to comport themselves in what is considered polite society or whatever the *** it's called. It's incredibly hard because, I mean, they just don't have the skills."*

— An actor and director

"You're also talking to one of the very few people who has been lucky enough to largely make his living from largely doing one or two things, which is either directing or lighting. I'm not going to say that I've had to struggle a great deal. This entails a degree of financial sacrifice that I was privileged enough to make. Oddly enough, I came from a comfortable enough background where I didn't have to necessarily make money for my parents, which means you can live with not making that much money."

— A light designer

Professional hierarchies (between performers and technical staff, directors and technicians, management and workers) lead to embedded inequities unique to the Indian arts ecosystem. Respondents pointed out specific examples around lack of credit, differential treatment.

"In India, hardly any credits, no credits for them...it's just that you do not want to share your success with anyone. It's not class or credit. Nobody wants someone else to get the name as much as them. This happens 99.99% with the technicians."

— A sound designer

"While travelling, they will put me in a star hotel where the directors and actors stay. They put my assistants in a different hotel, I'm not for that. I say either you put me with them or put them with me. You take the choice. I have been fighting for the past twenty years to do this. And now we get credits, in fact, now for set and lighting they call me technical director. It is almost equal to the director's thing. Even the brochure, the credits should mention my name and my entire team's name. So, I have been fighting for this for almost two decades now."

— A set designer

b. Learning behaviour and work mechanisms

i. Learning processes and preferences

Quality formal methods of learning and training are scarce in India such that most learning happens when a cultural professional takes the initiative to learn while 'on-the-job'. This includes learning from peers, learning via observation, learning while working with international touring groups, or having the opportunity to train and/or work in a foreign country. In the survey, 'learning via observation' and 'learning from peers' emerged as major contributors to respondents' growth and development in the sector.

Q10 Which of the following has helped you grow in this sector?



	AN APPRENTICESHIP	LEARNING FROM PEERS	LEARNING BY OBSERVATION	ONLINE TUTORIALS	ON-THE-JOB TRAINING	FORMAL TRAINING THROUGH A UNIVERSITY OR FELLOWSHIP	OTHERS (PLEASE SPECIFY)	TOTAL
Final Survey	22.45% 33	63.27% 93	72.79% 107	27.21% 40	67.35% 99	30.61% 45	14.97% 22	298.64% 439
Total Respondents	33	93	107	40	99	45	22	147

Observation has been one, like for most of us who have been trained on the job, looking at seniors operating things and then incorporating things from them and then being in constant conversation with different people. I mean, not just a senior who's associated with your discipline, but also seniors of other disciplines as well.

— A light designer

Further expanding on this point, the necessity to immerse oneself in various kinds of tasks and genres while starting out was often seen as key to gain a more holistic

understanding of work in the sector. This also includes working with different types of equipment and people nationally and globally. It is an expectation that one needs to dabble in any and all elements of the production.

“If it is five projects that they don't want to work on necessarily, but it's where they will learn a lot just by working on costumes or on sound or whatever it may be that they should because everybody has to go through phases of doing things they don't like.”

— A production manager

Actually, most consider this almost as a rite of passage — the need to learn the different aspects of production as well as make themselves versatile.

“For this production, you'll do sets; for this production you'll do costumes, and with that, you learn different things at different levels; one feeds into the other.”

— A costume designer

Among those who have attended international training or education programmes, several respondents highlighted the importance given to practical, hands-on aspects of learning.

“I get to travel to different parts of the country and work with different productions and get to experience all different kinds of settings all across the board. Something from the most rudimentary and archaic stuff to something which is extremely high tech is part of my journey in lighting.”

— A light designer

The opportunity to actually handle the lights and sounds on stage, assist in productions, create designs and then execute them through the course of their studies were deemed helpful.

One-off residencies, such as those organised by the British Council, Pro-Helvetia Swiss Arts Council, Goethe Institut Max Mueller, and other foreign cultural organisations, consulates and embassies, have been often cited as capacity-building initiatives that have been helpful. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in online workshops becoming a prime source of knowledge exchange and sharing too. While some respondents (especially sound and light engineers, and video designers) remarked that online learning resources such as YouTube videos or other discussion platforms are great tools, digital learning is not as widely prevalent as one might have expected.

“The internet, definitely. I learned everything I know, every editing skill, and I'm fairly decent at it now; it's all off the internet and YouTube videos... And since recently, in the last four or five years, I use a lot of creative common stuff. Over the

years, I've gotten to know forums where people share stuff. I now share my stuff, I put my projects up... It's also a great learning thing when they put their projects up. You're not just getting the final film, but you get access to their projects, and you can actually see technically how they've done what- oh, they've put this keyframe, oh, they used that effect."

— A video designer

Learning from vendors was seen as a crucial method of training, as expressed by both freelancers as well as venue technical leads, especially with respect to remaining up-to-date with new equipment and technology.

"The second process that we use is that whoever has supplied the new equipment, they also always, everywhere, send their technical team to get our staff trained. Plus we have our regular vendor who we give our maintenance contract of the equipment to. So, they also keep changing their equipment, they also keep changing their stuff."

— A venue technical lead

Venue technical leads also pointed out various other methods via which learning happens within their technical teams, which include:

- A. Mock simulations in the absence of real performers
- B. Arrangement of workshops/events or opportunities to learn from senior designers in the field when they come to the venue to work on other performances
- C. Creating back-up teams

"But there is also an overlap because I don't want each one to specialise in one branch because, god forbid, the guy falls ill or something like that, and our work stops. So, now what has happened is I've integrated my entire electrical team, every show, to assist...one person assists the light team, and one person assists the sound team. I'm building a second layer as a back-up. So, that's how I do my planning."

— A venue technical lead

Lastly, a repeated emphasis on the "basics" was noticed. This could be interpreted as the bare minimum qualifications that create a common lexicon for professionals to operate within. However, there was found to be no firm standard theoretical definition backing the same. For example, basics would mean something very different to a technician, as to an educator. For the former, basics would be the practical knowledge of working with the equipment in its "non-advanced" form, while for an educator it would be the theoretical/literature aspect of knowledge of the field.

Similarly, the basics would differ for various fields and with time. For example, for most people working with light design, basics often implied areas such as how light works, the physics behind it, how electricity functions etc. while for a stage manager, this implied

drawing up of stage plans, drawing up prop lists, knowing stage right from stage left, marking cues and scripts, orientation and types of stages etc.

“Designers should have at least a basic idea about the materials and possibilities. We can't weld iron to wood, that is basic education. We can stick paper on wood, we can stick plywood on wood, we can stick cardboard on wood, we can stick thermocol on wood, these are the other possibilities. When designers know about these things, at least some basic knowledge, then the execution guy will be happy to work on that project.”

— A set designer

“The basics of how things came to be in the first place is, has to be incorporated in a technologically inclined course. Why are we lighting in a certain way? How did that come into being, how were people doing it earlier and what did they mean by doing it the way they were doing it? So that historical background, I think, is important to give you a sense of that human question, which is at the heart of the technique, because otherwise the technique is actually handicapped because it doesn't know what to do, then it will become like a lot of spectacle, without a point.”

— An educator

What emerged as a recurring theme though, is a skills/knowledge gap among professionals with respect to the basics, which needs to be constantly reintroduced.

ii. Motivations to learn

The motivations to learn have been wide-ranging. A majority of survey respondents indicated 'passion for the craft' as their prime reason for pursuing training activities, followed by a 'curiosity or a desire to learn new skills'.

“For me, whenever I join a training program or a workshop of some kind, it is to kind of add on to or think anew what I already know.”

— An academic and theatre practitioner

“What happens during the course is that I think there is enough of a love cultivated for this original medium because the people teaching on it are all passionately committed to theater.”

— An institutional representative

Q11 If you have pursued any of the above, what were your reason(s)?

Answered: 147 Skipped: 3



	DESIRE TO LEARN NEW SKILLS (CURIOSITY)	PASSION FOR THE CRAFT	CAREER PROGRESSION	STAYING UPDATED ON INDUSTRY STANDARDS	GENERATE MORE INCOME	OTHERS (PLEASE SPECIFY)	TOTAL
Final Survey	75.51% 111	78.91% 116	54.42% 80	50.34% 74	45.58% 67	6.12% 9	310.88% 457
Total Respondents	111	116	80	74	67	9	147

The excitement of the process of learning on new equipment, improving one’s skills to try something new and better in an upcoming show, and the practical applicability and immediate usefulness to one’s work are also seen as major motivations.

“For lighting people, if you say to them that you can do 70% of the work on your laptop before you get to the venue — it is an enticing situation! Because we are always strapped for time. You have vastly experienced people like X who are looking to add another bow in the quiver that they possess. For me, it was knowing that there’s another room in the house. For some people, it was understanding that: oh, there’s another room beyond this. It came from the same place, but it manifests differently.”

— A light designer

iii. Conditions of work

The conditions of work are often determined by the type of production that one works for. The size and budget of the production often determine the motivation, work schedules and type of tasks that professionals need to perform.

“When you work in a smaller theater show, where you probably have four props coming in and five actors, it’s very different from working on a very large musical show. To train the team and encourage them and push them all the time, saying that you need to do a hundred shows flawlessly because those people are

coming and paying a certain amount of money — is not easy. A lot of people don't want to do that. So encouraging people to do smaller shows versus bigger shows is difficult.”

— A stage and production manager

The lack of standardisation across work conditions, including pay, work hours, career progression, and entry mechanisms, makes the sector particularly vulnerable.

“It's definitely a job, and it should be paying, but because it's art, it kind of falls under this very odd banner of – does it really matter if you have a Masters or a degree or a PhD? So the whole industry is extremely unstructured in terms of, not just hierarchy or, like benefits, but also in terms of pay, in terms of hours, in terms of everything.”

— A sound engineer

iv. Sustainability of work and pay scales

The overarching response regarding working as a technical or transversal skills professional in LE & PA was that it is not a sustainable career. Be it with respect to the amount of remuneration, the number of hours of work or recognition, respondents agreed that financially and otherwise, it is a difficult sector to navigate and establish oneself in.

“It's awful, there is no sustainability. Absolutely. That's, I mean, that's for even people who are at the top level, in theater, there is no sustainability unless you are doing something to do with education.”

— A production manager

“Especially if you're young and getting into it, I absolutely don't see you earning enough money. The thing is, when I say I ended up doing it for free, it's because the amount of money that I'm being paid doesn't cover even my basic expenses.”

— A video designer

The informality of the sector and the lack of standardisation in pay scales implies that the average earnings vary radically depending on the type of production, the period and location of work and the level at which one works at (as a designer alone, or designer cum operator, as a technician etc.).

“I am speaking for myself here... Because I work in both Delhi and Assam. I don't get a lot of work in Assam as compared to Delhi.”

— A set designer

“Okay, there are fantastic engineers across India. Why are they freelancers? Because even now, they pay 30,000 rupees a month maximum for the sound engineer. With those 1000 rupees a day, what will anybody do in India today? Artists who come to perform in the concert are paid five lakhs for that day, and tickets are sold for eight lakhs. And the engineer there is getting 1000 rupees because he's on a monthly salary. Now, this again is a cultural problem here in India, which does not recognise that fields like sound engineering, lighting, make-up are serious stuff. We are not engineers. We are artists. We carve sound; we are not people who touch resistors and transistors.”

— A sound engineer

c. Skills assessment: gaps and needs

While the last five years have seen more robust work done by the National Skills Development Council²⁶ to create more structured vocational courses and qualification standards for transversal skills in this sector, there continues to be ambiguity in the sector around the qualification of these skills and the level of excellence.

In order to arrive at an appropriate assessment of skill gaps and needs, respondents were first asked to articulate existing understanding of skilled labour, followed by skill gaps in the labour workforce and barriers to accessing skills.

i. Existing notions of ‘skilled labour’ and ‘high-quality work’

“How to jigsaw puzzle things, like a space, in two different ways is important – on the stage, backstage or in packing too. You're actually designing for three spaces at one time... If you fail at one of the other two, no matter how good you are on stage, it hasn't really worked as a set.”

— A set designer

“You need to know these little nuances of how to handle the material, how to stitch it and also mend it just in case things go wrong.”

— A costume designer

“If you're EQing (equalising) a tabla player, you should know what the tabla sounds like and how to give artists the right sound. You should know how to give monitoring. And suddenly, and when artists are comfortable, they're like, okay, this guy, his sound was very good. They don't say the speaker of the equipment was good.”

²⁶ National Skill Development Corporation. *Skilling India's Youth, Shaping India's Future- Annual Report 2019-20* (NSDC, 2020). Available [here](#).

The understanding of high-quality work and level of skill was directly connected to the context the professionals operate in. The major inferences are below:

- The work environment of a transversal skills professional is often characterised by limited infrastructure and multi-tasking. A skilled professional would be able to respond and adapt to this context.
- Resourcefulness, adaptability, creativity and specialisation are seen as aspects of 'skilled labour'.
- Respondents valued a professional who has the ability to adapt to dynamic circumstances and spaces of production.
- A skilled worker is expected to be resourceful and creative in the way they use limited resources and problem-solve in pressure situations. Similarly, they are expected to have a good handle on budgeting and financial planning to be able to get the most out of the budget allocated to their work.
- A skilled worker understands the basics, the fundamentals of what they are doing.
- Knowing the 'material' and how it behaves is an important part of specialisation. In sound, light, video design and technology, the 'materials' are the lights, physics and an understanding of electrical engineering. In set and costume design, it is knowing the life cycle of a piece of fabric and the way it behaves on stage. For stage and production management, it is knowing architectural drawings and an understanding of all aspects of the production process.
- Respondents noted that professionals need to have an approach that's both lateral and multi-level. For instance, a set designer needs to design a set that doesn't just work well on stage but can also be packaged and carried easily. Or a costume designer needs to have the skills of a seamstress to respond to production issues that will emerge as the show is on.
- Finally, a skilled professional ultimately is one who has been able to hone their craft to a level that allows the performer or director's vision to be fulfilled.

Respondents further identified 'high-quality work' as which is:

- Adaptable to different venues and scales: Considering the standards of venues, ways of working of technical teams in different venues and availability of equipment in those locations, high-quality work in this space is to adapt to different venues and scales. A production should be able to scale up to a stage the standard of the JBT at the NCPA and a smaller venue in Bhopal.
- Resourceful & creative in its use of technology: Most venues don't offer a lot of equipment and tend to charge extra for additional equipment and rehearsal time. Since production budgets are low, professionals are expected to be resourceful and creative with very limited resources and use of technology.

- Balance of technical excellence and work experience leads to better problem solving, which is a marker of high-quality work.
- A work of high quality has understood the script and its demands and has managed to bring that to the stage through the employment of tools they had at hand, i.e. sound, light, costume and set.
- Similarly, a good performance speaks to healthy collaboration between all team members – actors, director, writer, producers and transversal skills professionals – during the production process. A transversal skills professional has been able to, through their input into the production process and advice to the director/ actor, enhance the final show significantly.
- The finishing of the product (set, costume) and detailing is crucial to the experience of the production.
- High-quality work is work that keeps all stakeholders – crew and audience included – safe and strictly follows health and safety protocols during all phases of the production.

"The difference between somebody who is exposed, but not necessarily technically sound, versus somebody who's technically sound, but has zero exposure — the second guy is likely to perform much better."

— A light designer

"Good quality means what the script demands. Whatever I do, it should say something; for me, that is good design. It should support the director or the play concept."

— A set designer

"There are upgrades and downgrades everywhere. So, A) should be able to turn things around B) be able to understand the technicality, but specifically, when it comes to these particular avenues of...even set design, costume design, light design. And, of course the important element of creativity involved in that role. Because they should be able to transfer or transform... basically be able to advise on a vision because the vision might not be coming from an informed space in the set, especially in the technical areas."

— A sound designer

ii. Skill gaps

Nearly all respondents felt that recent entrants into the sector are not very well prepared for work in the cultural sector. A majority of those taking on technical roles were said to be under-qualified and required a lot of on-the-job training.

Respondents identified significant knowledge gaps as a precursor to skill gaps. Because there isn't any formal pedagogical learning both before they enter the sector (lack of formal training) and on-the-job (there is little shared pedagogical knowledge on transversal skills, e.g. papers on light design techniques), professionals come with limited knowledge of fundamentals and are not able to apply those principles in problem-solving or enhancing the quality of what they produce.

There are little to no formal sources of pedagogical peer learning in terms of journals and articles on the craft, conferences and seminars exclusively dedicated to transversal skills. This leads to limited upskilling on the pedagogical front for a professional with a few years of experience.

Areas identified as skill gaps:

"They all jump and want to become sound engineers the moment they finish college, but that's not the right thing to do. I think the basic qualification is to do at least two years of engineering. You'll get a lot of guys who are engineers, but if you try to question them on their technical skills, you will not get the proper answers."

— A sound engineer

"We have gotten into the habit of looking at the West in terms of thinking about upgrading skills. The problem is we're not generating our own new knowledge around these fields. If you are not generating any new knowledge in these fields, and you're only playing catch up with what is happening elsewhere, then you're always behind in the race, right?"

— An educator and director

"We don't really have a space where we can learn about various materials in terms of sets. There are so many materials that could be tapped into, but where do you go to learn those skills?"

— A set designer

- Respondents across the board identified a lack of 'the basics/ fundamentals' as a major skill gap. This was described as 'theory' around physics, engineering, colour; understanding of the material/ science behind how the material performs; and humanities training around theatre studies and history.
- There is a very limited understanding of the role of each professional in the production, and professionals are often asked to multi-task. A sound designer will often act as the operator as well. There is little clarity on the role of a stage manager, which differs from a producer and production manager.
- Because of the informal nature of the sector, respondents noted the lack of discipline in production management, which hampers coordination and leads to

a waste of time and resources. This includes providing proper technical riders, following up on those requirements by the respective accountable team members and others (e.g. venue technical heads), and ensuring that everybody performs to the expectations set out for them by the team.

- Health and safety protocols: This was identified as a major skill gap across the board, not just in the realm of production but also in managing the production team. Safety protocols of all production personnel, including women, was considered to be an important gap.
- Business skills in the gig economy: The ability to manage one’s own contracts, finances, budgeting is key in a gig economy, where many of the respondents fall.
- Respondents emphasised the need to develop soft skills — teamwork, interpersonal skills and attention to detail — for a professional to work seamlessly across various teams.
- Communication skills were rated as a key skill gap as a majority of professionals do not communicate in English. While this is not a disadvantage per se, it leads to limited opportunities to upskill as most one-off courses in these areas tend to be carried out in English.
- Particularly since 2020, digital skills have been rated as a major skill gap. This includes adapting one’s skills to the digital environment and for the screen.
- Empathy and respect: While this is not a skill per se, several respondents pointed to hierarchies that exist between transversal skills professionals and others, for instance, with performers and managerial professionals.

iii. Barriers to upskilling

The informality of the sector also leads to ambiguity around the benefits of upskilling. This ambiguity is seen in various dimensions of formal training, affordability of training and post-training work opportunities.

A majority of the respondents cited a lack of formal and intensive training programmes for training in all aspects of transversal skills and a lack of knowledge on what training opportunities are available as one of the first and foremost barriers to upskilling.

Of the 98 respondents who identified barriers to upskilling, high course fees (70%), unfavourable location (49%) and lack of time (45%) were some of the most significant barriers to upskilling that were identified.

Barrier	Unlikely	Somewh at likely	Neutral	Likely	Very likely
High course fees	4%	8%	17%	36%	34%
No guarantee of	18%	9%	31%	25%	17%

post-education work placements					
Lack of time	19%	15%	22%	30%	15%
Unfavourable location	19%	9%	23%	38%	11%
Language barriers (the course is in a language you are not comfortable with)	32%	10%	27%	23%	7%

Among other concerns was also the lack of clarity on post-education work placement opportunities which led respondents to question the ‘return’ on investment made in training.

The level of participants that such a training programme is targeted to (beginner or advanced) as well as the diversity of the cohort are other areas where respondents identified certain preferences.

With respect to course content, the intent of the programme, quality of facilitators and teachers, projected impact and course pedagogy were all areas where respondents needed additional information in order to take up such training.

A significant concern highlighted was that of hierarchies within gender, class and language. The technical and transversal skills landscape is a gendered experience, with most roles being led and controlled by men. This affects on-the-job learning, boundary setting, and the effectiveness of execution. In addition, several such courses have English as the medium of education, which keeps such courses outside of the remit of a large number of professionals for whom English is not the first language.

“There is a lack of legitimation of a backstage career within the best theatre training institutes in the country. So why should a training course give me the credibility and skills that I need to succeed?”

— A production manager

“The NCPA organised a masterclass by a professional... he's like one of the top six guys in the world when it comes to ETC ports. This two-day workshop... It was absurd because they had this guy, they had like 10 desks set up with monitors and visualizers. It was completely hands-on. He was wonderful. They also made it a point, correctly, to invite a lot of the NCPA technicians. But the immediate barrier, of course, is language and feeling very uncomfortable in that environment. Some of us who were comfortable with the language, were stepping in with translations or helping as much as we could. It's

not that anybody was deliberately discriminatory. It just happened. Language is a big one."

— A director and light designer

"One of the things that I have noticed happens is if in one of these sessions, you have someone with some more experience than the others, then the conversation kind of cascades into a different direction, wherein the instructor and the person who has got some more experience start dominating, or get into some concepts or some ideas, which are, out of the purview of the rest of the group, in the room, and which then makes it a little difficult for them to cope up with. They start losing interest in it. Or it happens in the reverse direction where you dumb it down so much for the beginners that the people who are slightly more advanced or, in the intermediate stage, I would say, they get thrown off by whatever is happening. There has to be this fine balance that needs to be struck."

— A light designer

8. Recommendations

Background

Before outlining our key recommendations, we highlight some of the 'ground realities' of skilling for the cultural sector in India. We believe these are important to take into consideration while creating viable skilling programmes and operating models.

Demand Considerations

- Limited willingness to pay for upskilling, in particular
- Limited demand for upskilling among seasoned professionals (they require vigorous lobbying)
- There may be limited demand for advanced skills given limited opportunity to practise

Sector Considerations

- Significant division between 'management' level and technical level of workers in the sector – formal/ informal or organised/ unorganised
- The sector is compartmentalised, so there is a lack of information flow across sub-sectors
- Lack of infrastructure and spaces, which means lack of opportunity to learn and use advanced skills
- We need to take into account that not all materials or infrastructure for international best practices are available in India. Instead, the focus must be to use existing materials in India to produce best practices.
- It is important to establish programmes that will go on to exist over multiple years and ensure continuity.
- A point that was made regularly was that skills training needs to be made context-relevant – both in terms of what works in India, but also in terms of appreciating the appropriate level at which skills in the industry are at. Previous experiences include having visitors teaching at a much too basic level, for example, being too theoretical, or teaching things that are not applicable.

For the NCPA/for the programme

General Recommendations

1. **Initiate a consortium of 10 arts venues in India:** NCPA can form a consortium of arts venues to develop a range of best practice documents and resources. These include architectural drawings of stages, contact lists of major vendors the organisations work with (to make it easy for touring)
2. **Training manuals and programmes for NCPA's technical equipment:** Mini workshops and short introduction sessions along with printed training material can be devised. This would allow for on-going and in-direct training of visiting freelance

professionals.

For the sector

- 1. Introduction of formal, long-term programmes for technical and transversal skills, with financial support for the first few batches of graduates:** The importance of skilling programmes and a formalised approach to training, development and support of this ecosystem can not be emphasised more. There is an urgent need for more formal, longer duration theatre technology programs (BFA and MFA) with specialisations in light, costume, set, etc.
- 2. A platform or forum for sharing/publishing works dedicated to cultural professionals with technical skills:** Sound/light designers are not able to publish or share their work, and there's little reflection of the processes, systems and invocations employed, which could potentially evolve to a pedagogical approach. This could be done in collaboration with existing training institutes such as the theatre and performance studies courses at universities of the BVoc programme at Wilson College.²⁷
- 3. Mentoring platform or network:** Help create a platform to provide mentoring in the cultural sector.
- 4. Inclusion of transversal skills in theatre seminars and conferences:** Conferences, festivals and seminars in the performing arts can spotlight sections on transversal skills training, challenges and best practices. In conversations on creativity and craft of the performing arts, technical expertise, production design, and management need to be foregrounded and included in mainstream conversations. Similarly, awards bestow additional legitimacy and cognisance of excellence in the technical and transversal skills domains.
- 5. Template for production credit:** A major area of concern and feedback from the community was legitimising the work of transversal skills professionals. We recommend that NCPA (or the sector) puts a production credit template in place for every theatre and dance production team to give to the NCPA. This would include the names of all operators, technicians and designers in the transversal skills space.
- 6. Venue upgrade feedback mechanisms:** Most respondents pointed to a lack of feedback mechanisms and systems to venues by visiting professionals and vendors (who tend to have more information on the latest available equipment). Venues can create a post-show feedback form to be filled by the transversal skills professionals from a visiting production which can help venues compile a robust set of equipment, process and system needs. At the same time, venues can take the feedback from the transversal skills community while upgrading their systems.

²⁷ Wilson College- BVoc. in Theatre & Stage Craft. Available [here](#).

- 7. Regular maintenance of technical equipment and the need for stronger technical teams:** Venues need to have stronger technical teams that are employed full-time and who are accountable for maintaining the technical equipment and make a strong case for regular, relevant and resourceful upgrades within venues.
- 8. Developing templates for various processes:** There are several processes and documents required for effective, efficient and safe work in the sector. Protocols and templates around employment contracts, health and safety workers for transversal skills professionals, production schedule templates among others.
- 9. Database/repository of stakeholders:** Another suggestion that came up repeatedly across various interviews and FGDs was the need for a directory or database that could facilitate the work of all stakeholders in the sector, including vendors, cultural professionals with technical and transversal skills and venue personnel.

“But I think, suppose if I have to uproot from Kolkata and move to Bombay. I would not know where to start. Maybe we need a repository for that, so now that if I am now touring, and I have to make something in a city that I'm not familiar with, where do I go? Where do I find those resources?”

— A set and costume designer

“So, each one's got our unique thing. Maybe a directory is a place where we start from where you can access, from actors to technicians, to engineers. It gives us the opportunity to work within this entire framework of how to collaborate and corroborate with each other and get going.”

— A venue tech lead

- 10. Create best practice case studies, guidelines and processes:** The sector leaders highlighted that there is a severe lack of sharing information as well as limited recording of best practices and processes. It was therefore considered helpful if there could be a platform or repository with case studies, processes or guidelines that organisations in the cultural sector can follow. We, therefore, propose a practice-oriented and participatory research project done collaboratively between cultural sector practitioners and researchers to create a set of materials that record best practices for processes as well as guidelines that the sector can use. This could feed into MOOCs on the cultural sector – for example, art and cultural sector management MOOCs adapted for India ([here](#) is an example from Germany).

9. Conclusion

Despite being a sector that is a sector riddled with structural challenges, theatre and live entertainment rely on various nodes of semi-professional networks and relationships which often belies the deeper gaps that exist. These range from precarity of the flexible labour workforce typified in this economy, disparity of safety practices, a dearth of unions and associations primed to support the workforce, and lack of available financial resources and sustainability models to mark this space as a relatively sustainable career. Trends prior to 2020 pointed towards changing dynamics of the workforce with musicals and big budget productions whetting audience appetites and sponsor interest. However, the pandemic has not just brought live events to a halt, but also exposed the aforementioned gaps leaving the sector and its workforce vulnerable and open to all of the destruction that lockdown has caused globally. In this challenging time, the community has rallied around to create several formal and informal support networks such as the TheatreDost, Listening Post by IFA among others. Several fundraisers to support the community have helped professionals deal with medical and financial challenges stemming from the pandemic. However, these continue to be reactive, stop gap measures. A strong and fortified sector will need to be one where there is clarity and legitimacy of career opportunities, financial security within the precariousness of the gig economy, and a strong representative body that supports the community and can fight for the sector's right to relief packages. Issues identified in this study — the class, caste and gender dynamics; lack of infrastructure and training opportunities; and sustainability of work and pay scales — are merely symptomatic of the larger malaise in the informal nature of the sector. Any course, programme or growth structure for the sector will need to be aware of these challenges and structures within which the sector professionals operate, and will be required to create these opportunities not in isolation but with a tangent to support the sector's evolution and growth alongside its own ambitions.

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Appendices

Appendix A: List of all respondents

(Supplied additionally)

Appendix B: List of focus group discussions

(Supplied additionally)

Appendix C: List of questions as circulated among survey respondents

(Supplied additionally)

Annexures

i. List of notable formal courses

Formal Courses
Motley Theatre Design Course
Drama School Mumbai - Lighting Course (as part of an actor's course)
Course at DSM (Introduction to Design)
B. Voc. Visual Communication and Performing Arts- Jyoti Nivas College
Bachelor of Vocation (B. Voc.) in Theatre & Stage Craft- BBK DAV College for Women
Pro Sound Engineering Course at True School of Music

ii. List of notable institutes

Institutes
Wesleyan University, Connecticut, United States
Birkbeck College, London, UK
St. Anthony's College, Shillong, Meghalaya

National School of Drama, New Delhi
National School of Drama, Gangtok, Sikkim
Commedia School, Copenhagen, Denmark
IIT Madras, Chennai, Tamil Nadu
St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, Maharashtra
St. Xavier's Technical Institute, Mumbai, Maharashtra
School of Audio Engineering, Paris, France
University of Mumbai, Mumbai, Maharashtra
True School of Music, Jambrung, Maharashtra
Whistling Woods, Mumbai, Maharashtra
Film and Television Institute of India, Pune, Maharashtra
Full Sail University, Florida, United States
University of California, Berkeley, United States
National Institute of Design
National Institute of Event Management, Mumbai, Maharashtra
Raffles Design International, Mumbai, Maharashtra
London College of Fashion, London, UK
University of Delhi, New Delhi
L.V. Prasad Film & TV Academy, Chennai, Tamil Nadu
Drama School Mumbai, Maharashtra
Drama School Thrissur, Kerala
Sir J. J Institute of Applied Art, Mumbai, Maharashtra
Madhya Pradesh School of Drama, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh
Bharatendu Natya Academy, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh
Kala Academy, Panaji, Goa
Kalinga University, Raipur, Chattisgarh
Indira Kala Sangit Vishwavidyalaya, Khairagarh, Chattisgarh
Leeds Beckett University, England, UK

Christ (Deemed to be University), Bengaluru, Karnataka
Lalit Kala Kendra, SPPU, Pune, Maharashtra
University of Georgia, Georgia, United States
Wilson College, Mumbai, Maharashtra
Women's Christian College, Chennai, Tamil Nadu
National Institute of Fashion Technology, New Delhi
KM Music Conservatory, Chennai
Jyoti Nivas College, Bengaluru, Karnataka
BBK DAV College for Women, Amritsar, Punjab

iii. List of notable workshops/residencies/training programs

Workshops	Training programmes
Online workshop on lighting- Tech Quartet	Broadway Master class
Arghya at Thespo, Sunil + Hidaayat at Prithvi - one day workshops	YouTube Channel - Theatre With Dhanendra Kawade ²⁸
Workshops at Manipal University by Dhanendra Kawade	BOF - Business Of Fashion (courses on design)
Sunil Shanbhag's text training	UpGrad, Mumbai
Scenography by Deepan Sivaraman	

iv. List of venues and foundations

Venues and Foundations
Rympei Theatrical Club, Shillong
Theatre Nisha, Chennai
Studio Safdar, New Delhi
The Industrial Theatre Company, Mumbai
Prithvi Theatre, Mumbai
Jagriti Theatre, Bengaluru

²⁸ Theatre With Dhanendra Kawade. Available [here](#).

Oddbird Theatre and Foundation, New Delhi
Harkat Studios, Mumbai
Ranga Shankara, Bengaluru
The Cuckoo Club, Mumbai
GD Birla Sabhagar, Kolkata
India Habitat Centre, New Delhi
Sahamukta Concert Hall, Chennai
Tata Theatre, Mumbai
Kingdom of Dreams, Gurugram
Attakkalari Centre for Movement Arts, Bengaluru
Kamani Auditorium, Delhi
G5A Foundation for Contemporary Culture, Mumbai
The Neemrana Music Foundation, New Delhi

v. Pockets of Talent

Institutes	Cities/States	Spaces
Delhi College of Arts & Commerce, DU	Jaipur	Art Colleges
Ambedkar University, Delhi	Bhopal	Theatre Institutes
Ashoka University, Sonapat, Haryana	Chandigarh	Newly built theatre spaces
Kerala Kalamandalam, Cheruthuruthi, Kerala	Trichy	Inter-collegiate groups/competitions (festivals)
Sahitya Kala Academy	Guwahati	Theatre departments in IB Schools
Xaviers Mumbai	Patna	Student-run productions
Adishakti	Lucknow	Fashion colleges
NIFT	Mysore	Small towns and cities
Designing Institutes from Delhi	Shimoga	Amateur theatre groups

NID	Dharwad	Databases of India Theater Forum, Prithvi Theatre, Theatre Academy, and Sudashan Rangamanch- for regional and small scale working contacts
Ninasam, Karnataka	Hospet	
Drama School Mumbai	Kerala	
NIEM	Bangalore	
	Pune	
	Mumbai	
	Delhi	
	Assam	

vi. Qualification packs - Occupational Standards for the Media and Entertainment Industry²⁹

S. No.	Name of Qualification Pack	Brief Job Description
1.	Art Director (Set Designer)	Individuals in this job need to determine the visual appearance of the set. The art director designs all the key elements of the set and co-ordinates the construction/ execution of this creative vision.
2.	Hairdresser	Individuals at this job are responsible for designing the artists' look and changing his/her appearance for the shoot
3.	Lighting artist	Individuals at this job need to add light and shadows to the production in accordance to the established creative style
4.	Make-up artist	Individuals at this job are responsible for the design and execution of make-up for artists
5.	Music Composer	The primary function of the Music Composer is to conceptualise and compose original music and to direct the production of music for film, TV, independent artists and other forms of new media formats such as streaming online content, video games, etc. according to client's requirements.

²⁹ Media & Entertainment Skills Council, 'Qualification Packs & National Occupational Standards. Available [here](#).

6.	Music Producer	The role of the Music Producer is to arrange music under the direction of the Music Director / Composer and to lead and manage the production of original music based on the music arrangements approved by the Music Director/Composer.
7.	Music Programmer	The role of the Music programmer is to operate Digital Audio Workstations (DAW), music synthesizers, samplers and sound modules to program and sequence music according to the creative and musical requirements set by the music producer.
8.	Production Assistant	Individuals play an assistive/ supportive role across the production department and undertake a wide range of activities. This may include logistics, coordination, preparing documents and checking that equipment and materials are in place. All the activities outlined below must be read in the context of an “assistive” rather than “leading” role.
9.	Props Master	Individuals in this job need to mark-up the script for set props requirements. They need to procure these items, store them safely during the shoot and ensure continuity
10.	Set Carpenter	Individuals in this job need to understand woodwork requirements, manufacture the items and install them correctly on set.
11.	Set Decorator	Individuals in this job need to mark-up the script for set furnishings requirements. They need to procure these items, store them safely during the shoot and ensure continuity.
12.	Set Painter	Individuals in this job need to understand painting requirements, paint a variety of surfaces and produce desired effects.
13.	Set Plasterer	Individuals in this job need to understand plastering requirements, plaster a variety of surfaces and produce plaster components
14.	Sound Assistant	Individuals at this job are responsible for setting-up/disassembling sound equipment, aligning sound systems and capturing sounds as per production requirements, largely under supervision.
15.	Sound Designer	Individuals at this job design the sound concept for a production and select the studios/equipment for recordings.
16.	Sound Editor	Individuals at this job are responsible for preparing, organizing and editing sound sequences that meet the quality standards and requirements of production

17.	Sound Engineer	Individuals at this job are responsible for recording and mixing sound sources to create end-products that meet the quality standards and requirements of production.
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vii. National Classification of Occupations - 2015³⁰

Family	Skill Title	Skill Code (NCO 2015)
2655	Actor and Actress	2655.0100
2161	Architect	2161.0100
2166	Art Director	2166.0111
5142	Assistant Beautician	5142.0101
8121	Assistant Casting Technician	8121.3801
5141	Assistant Hair Stylist	5141.0201
7131	Assistant Painter and Decorator	7131.0101
7119	Assistant Scaffolder	7119.0301
2641	Authors, Journalists and Other Writers	2641.9900
3521	Broadcasting and Audiovisual Technicians, Other	3521.9900
3521	Cameraman, Animation	3521.0300
7321	Cameraman, Photomechanical	7321.1200
7115	Carpenter, General	7115.0100
2166	Character Designer	2166.0206
2653	Choreographers and Dancers, Other	2653.9900
2659	Circus Performers, Other	2659.0500
2166	Colour Key Artist	2166.0511

³⁰ National Classification of Occupations- 2015. Available [here](#).

2166	Colourist	2166.0512
2166	Commercial Artist	2166.0100
2659	Contortionist	2659.0400
2654	Dance Director	2654.0300
2653	Dancer	2653.0300
3432	Decorators and Commercial Designers, Other	3432.9900
2523	Design Engineer	2523.0401
5142	Dresser, Stage & Studio	5142.0500
7411	Electrician, Stage and Studio	7411.0600
2163	Fashion Designer	2163.0500
2652	Instrumental Musician, Percussion Instrument	2652.0500
2652	Instrumental Musician, String Instrument	2652.0400
2652	Instrumental Musician, Wind Instrument	2652.0600
2654	Lighting Artist	2654.0901
2151	LED Light Design Engineer	2151.0403
2151	LED Light Design Validation Engineer	2151.0404
3113	LED Light Repair Technician	3113.1002
2654	Lighting Artist	2654.0901
7532	Designer (Garment)	7532.0100
3432	Decorators and Commercial Designers, Other	3432.9900
2654	Director, Music	2654.0200
2652	Music Composer	2652.0100
2652	Musicians, Singers and Composers, other	2652.9900
9520	Street Vendors, Non-Food Products, Other	9520.9900

2654	Producer, Stage	2654.0600
2153	Sound Designer	2153.0511
3521	Sound Editor	3521.0511
2153	Sound Engineer	2153.0500 2
2153	Sound Engineer, Media	2153.0501
3521	Sound Recording Equipment Operator/Sound Assistant	3521.0401
3521	Supervisor, Broadcasting Audio Visual Projection and Sound Equipment Operations	3521.0600
2654	Production Manager (Motion Picture)	2654.0800
2423	Vocational	2423.0100

viii. Occupational Classification of Marginal Workers other than Cultivators and Agricultural Labourers by Sex - 2011³¹

Family	NCO Name	Persons	Males	Females
2451	Authors, Journalists and Other Writers	7540	6320	1220
2452	Sculptors, Painters and Related Artists	14384	12768	1616
2453	Composers, Musicians and Singers	35940	32768	3172
2454	Choreographers and Dancers	3860	2279	1581
2455	Film, Stage and Related Actors and Directors	6666	4881	1785
3113	Electrical Engineering Technicians	1643	1513	130
3131	Photographers and Image and Sound Recording Equipment Operators	32534	31159	1375
5141	Hair Dressers, Barbers, Beauticians and Related Workers	176099	145569	30530

³¹ Ministry of Home Affairs, 'Census Of India Website : Office Of The Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India', *Census India*, <https://censusindia.gov.in/2011census/B-series/B_25B.html>

ix. Indian Ministries dealing with culture

The other culture-related Ministries in India are as follows:

1. Ministry of Textiles, which runs the Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH), the Handicrafts and Handlooms Export Corporation (HHEC), the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) and the National Handicrafts and Handlooms Museum.
2. Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, which runs the Khadi and Village Industries Commission.
3. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, as well as the Department of Science and Technology, which deal with radio, satellite communications, television and cinema.
4. Ministry of External Affairs, which looks into international cultural relations through the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)
5. Ministry of Tourism
6. Ministry of Tribal Affairs
7. Ministry of Minority Affairs
8. Ministry of Commerce and Industry, which runs the National Institute of Design (NID)
9. Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports

