Striving for Success in Times of Change: Leadership in Nonprofit Theatres

THESIS

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Abstract

The question of what constitutes a good leader is an important area of scholarship for many sectors including the government, business corporations, educational institutions, and nonprofit organizations. The nonprofit sector is growing and becoming more institutionalized, which calls for further research to examine how leaders can best deal with this change, and how this growth is impacting the sector. This research will explore leadership practices and styles, and how these methods impact nonprofit organizations. Because of my personal background I have focused on nonprofit theatres in Columbus, Ohio. Nonprofit theatres are unique to other organizations because the art form requires high levels of collaboration; and like other arts organizations, involves large amounts of risk. As will be seen, the nonprofit theatre sector is growing rapidly in America; these organizations need good leadership to survive in a challenging, ever changing environment. Columbus, Ohio hosts a diverse collection of nonprofit theatres, and supports a thriving artistic community. I have used a case study of five nonprofit theatres to provide information on the current status of nonprofit leadership. While nonprofit organizations are led by boards, this research focuses on the executive or artistic director, to examine how one individual can influence and lead an organization. An in-person interview was conducted with the identified leader of each theatre. Anonymous online surveys were sent to other members of the theatre (including board, staff, and ensemble members) to provide information on how the leader is viewed by
others in the organization, and give insights on the leaders interpersonal relationships.
Research reveals that nonprofit theatre leaders in Columbus, Ohio are hard workers, lead
by example, and are generally liked and appreciated by their subordinates. Leaders
struggle with communication, the growth of their organizations, becoming overwhelmed,
and delegation. Nonprofit organizations are greatly influenced by funders; leaders make
many decisions about programing and organizational structure to better align with
funders demands. This research provides a glimpse into the current status of nonprofit
leadership in theatres. Best practices for leaders have been identified to help leaders of
all organizations succeed through times of increased competition.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

This research is inspired by my personal curiosity into the topic of leadership and nonprofit management. I have worked with a variety of nonprofit organizations and theatres in many roles, including professional, artistic, and patron. Through these interactions I have observed the impacts of leadership and wish to learn more on the topic. There is a large quantity of literature on the subject of leadership which spans many disciplines including business, military, religious, government, and the creative sector (Conger, 1988; Dicke, 2011; Faust, 2000; Heimovick, 1994; Jinkins, 1998; Neuschel, 2005). This wide range of disciplines suggest that the topic of leadership is important to many different types of organizations and people. This thesis will focus on the nonprofit sector because that is where my academic and professional experience lies, and because the nonprofit sector is experiencing growth, of interest to research. As will be seen in the National Endowment Report All America's a Stage, the nonprofit theatre sector is growing in all regions of the country. This unprecedented growth calls for more research in this sector to examine how this growth affects art organizations, and if the growth is sustainable. This growth creates new challenges for nonprofit theatres, making the role of good leadership in these organizations more important than ever. As the literature (Mason, 1996) will show, change is the true test of good leadership; the nonprofit sector is currently undergoing unprecedented change. I hope that this research
will add to the discussion of what makes a great leader. While the board of directors is integral in the leadership of a nonprofit, this paper will focus mainly on the leadership of the executive director (or artistic director), as the individual with the most authority to generate change in an organization.

I chose to focus my research within the discipline of theatre because of my past personal experience with the art form and with the theatre community of Columbus. I earned my B.A. in Theatre from The Ohio State University; this experience gave me not only knowledge on the discipline but background into the theatre community of Columbus. While living in Columbus for the last seven years I have cultivated relationships with the leaders and participants of many theatres throughout Columbus. These relationships have allowed me access to the organizations researched that I may not have had within another discipline.

Nonprofit Organizations

Nonprofit organizations are unique; I will define and describe nonprofits to better understand the environment nonprofit leaders operate in. Nonprofit organizations are mission, rather than profit, driven. The nonprofit sector is difficult to define because nonprofit organizations are a wide range of sizes, structures, and missions. Nonprofits seek to fulfill needs that other agents of society (the government and for-profit corporations) are not meeting (Dobkins, 1994). Nonprofits are organized, governed, and taxed differently than for-profit organizations. For-profit organizations have stock holders, while nonprofits do not. “The purpose of a Nonprofit is to fulfill its mission; the purpose of a business is to return profit to its shareholders; the purpose of a government
agency is to serve the public” (Cole, 2011). Nonprofits are stewards of the community’s resources and work to meet community needs (Howard, 1994). Nonprofits can be viewed as providing services that the government has failed to provide, or viewed reversely, the government provides services that nonprofits have failed to provide (Hodgkinson, 1989).

The nonprofit sector may also be called the voluntary sector, noncommercial, or nongovernmental (Hodgkinson, 1989). Nonprofits are sometimes referred to as the third sector, along with sector one: for-profits, and sector two: the government. The lines between the three sectors are currently blurring (Hodgkinson, 1989). Nonprofits serve a societal purpose, and often utilize a volunteer force (Dicke, 2011). Many nonprofits receive tax exempt status under section 501 of the Internal Revenue Code. There is some difficulty in determining what qualifies an organization for this tax exempt status. Nonprofits receive this benefit from the government because they provide service to society (Hodgkinson, 1989). The nonprofit sector is growing rapidly. Between 1998 and 2008 the number of nonprofits increased by 32.7% (Cole, 2011). This growth warrants further research into the nonprofit sector to examine how leaders deal with this change and new challenges it creates. Whether growth in the nonprofit sector will continue at this rapid pace, or if the past decade is a unique peak, remains to be seen. Further research can help nonprofit leaders discover best practices to ensure the sustainability of their organizations during these times of change.

Nonprofit organizations are fundamentally different than commercial organizations and government agencies in areas of governance and leadership (Herman,
Nonprofit organizations are governed by a board of directors, sometimes called a board of trustees. The board is legally responsible for the nonprofit and is expected to provide leadership for the organization. For-profit boards are only responsible to their stakeholders, while nonprofit boards are also responsible to the public. Nonprofit boards are made up of volunteers dedicated to the mission of the organization (Axelrod, 1994).

Nonprofit boards have many responsibilities, the most important is to see that the organization fulfills its mission. Boards must create a long term plan for the future of the organization. Boards are responsible for overseeing financial management; they develop and approve the budget. This is particularly important for nonprofit organizations who frequently deal with scarce resources. One of the most significant impacts a board has on an organization is choosing the executive director, who is then responsible for acting out the board’s directions (Axelrod, 1994). The executive director is hired by the board to assist the board (Heimovic, 1994). The board must also support the executive director and make sure that he or she has the resources to do the job. The executive director and the board are dependent on one another. The board is at the top of leadership responsibility, but the executive director will know most about what is going on within the organization (Heimovic, 1994). A successful executive director will work with and through the board (Axelrod, 1994). Board members are traditionally expected to fundraise for the nonprofit, either by donating themselves or finding donors within the community. Board members are often chosen for membership due to their personal connections, financial contributions to the organization, or because they possess a desirable trait or skill, like business savvy and accounting. Boards are expected to
monitor the organization’s programs and services, and ensure that these services are in line with the mission. Board members are responsible for advancing the public image of the organization, and may often speak on behalf of the organization with the media (Axelrod, 1994).

The board is responsible for creating policy, and staff members are responsible for implementing that policy. Executive directors will often influence policy; the board will rely on the executive director because he or she has the most knowledge about the workings of the organization. The board is expected to focus on long term planning while staff members handle day to day management. A board that is too involved in the administration of the nonprofit may reveal an underlying problem in the organization (Axelrod, 1994). There are many challenges facing nonprofit boards. Many board members do not receive training for their role and are unclear of their duties (Tschirhart, 2012). Board development is often not a priority until the organization encounters a crisis, revealing organizational weaknesses (Axelrod, 1994).

Nonprofit arts organizations generally fall into three categories: performing arts, visual arts, and support organizations. Performing arts traditionally include theatre, dance, and music. This research will focus on performing arts organizations only, specifically theatre. Some nonprofit arts organizations employ dual leadership, incorporating an artistic director and an executive director. These positions are often equal in authority and both answer to the board of directors. The artistic director is often responsible for artistic vision, while the executive director is responsible for administration (Kirchner, 2011). Dual leadership is commonly found in organizations
requiring specialized knowledge, like in health care organizations or the arts. The artistic
director will have a background in this specialized field, while the
administrative/executive director has experience in business (Tschirhart, 2012). This
distinct organizational structure makes the research of leadership in nonprofit
organizations unique from the examination of leadership in other settings where dual
leadership does not occur. Dual leadership can make organizational hierarchy less linear
and more complicated than in a traditional organizational structure. Because of this
leaders in these situations may face unique challenges which could benefit from further
research.

Nonprofit Theatres

The National Endowment for the Arts released the report *All America’s a Stage: Growth and Challenges in Nonprofit Theatre*, which examined nearly 2,000 nonprofit theatres between 1990 and 2008. The report revealed that the number of nonprofit theatres in the United States has doubled in a fifteen year period. There are now theatres in every section of the country, including previously underserved rural areas. Half of all theaters in the country are located in the seven most populous states: California, New York, Texas, Florida, Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. The report revealed that nonprofit theatres are vulnerable to economic downturns. Audience trends for nonprofit theatres are unchanging or in decline. Nonmusical theatre has experienced a steady rate of audience decline, dropping 16% over six years (All, 2008).

The growth of the nonprofit theatre industry may not be good news. The National Endowment for the Arts report found that the biggest challenge facing nonprofit theatres
is that the supply has grown much faster than the demand. An increasing number of theatres are now competing for a decreasing number of audience members. Individuals and foundations are the biggest contributors to nonprofit theatres; theatres in the United States are relying more heavily on these sources of income than any other (All, 2008). Columbus Art Market Sustainability Analysis (2011) found that donors in the Columbus area are becoming exhausted with constant request for donations from nonprofit organizations. With theatres relying more heavily on donors, and donors becoming increasingly tired of giving, nonprofits need strong leaders to creatively overcome this challenge and secure funding for their theatres. Donors need to see more of a return on their investment, and nonprofit leaders may need new tools for soliciting donations in the future.

In Theatre Management in America (1974) Langley disagrees with the NEA’s analysis that the growing number of theatres could be a bad thing. Langley states that competition in the performing arts is healthy for the industry. This growth and increased competition makes the nonprofit theatre community ideal for researching leadership at this time, because it will take great leadership for an organization to survive in this competitive environment. Theatre going is a habit that is cultivated over many years. Audiences exposed to high quality theatre will demand more high quality theatre (Langley, 1974). A continuous availability of theatre is necessary to cultivate theatre going habits in a community. Having multiple theatres is beneficial for this, because it is unlikely that one theatre company would be able to provide continuous theatre opportunities. It is easier to share an audience than to create one; a new theatre company
will have better luck in a community already accustomed to attending theatre, than in a community with no theatre (Langley, 1974). Variety in theatre styles and programming allows an audience to be shared, rather than divided. The audience is the most important human resource of the theatre. “The community in which a theatre operates is the immediate family to which it belongs” (Langley, 1974 p. 275). Theatre leaders must be aware of the boundaries of their community, and the influences that impact it (Langley, 1974).

Nonprofit theatres face challenges earning income and producing high quality art. “Theatre is a business, and it is an art” (Green, 1981, p. 1); these two characteristics do not need to be in conflict with each other. Earning money, however, should not be the goal if a theatre wants to produce with artistic merit (Langley 1974). Like all nonprofits, nonprofit theatres must have a clear mission and strategic plan. Nonprofit theatres must focus on fulfilling their mission and producing art, not on making money. This does not mean that theatres are free of financial concerns. “Nonprofit corporations are not organized in order to go bankrupt or lose money any more than are the profit corporations” (Langley, 1974, p. 16). Leaders in nonprofit theatres must balance the financial needs of the organization with the artistic goals of the mission.

Theatres face unique challenges due to the collaborative nature of the art form; “Theatre is a human enterprise” (Langley, 1974, p. 27). The teamwork environment of theatres makes the role of a strong leader, who excels in communication, especially important. As Langley explains, “Creative energy is the most difficult of all forces to place in harness and put to work” (Langley, 1974, p. 27). Nonprofit theatres in America
vary greatly in capacity and resources. The larger the capacity of a theatre, the higher the cost of running it. Smaller theatres may have an advantage, in that they can take risks larger theatres cannot (Green, 1981).

Columbus, Ohio

From spurring economic development to cultivating community involvement, nonprofit theatres impact the city of Columbus in many ways. The nonprofit theatres I have researched are committed to the city of Columbus. Nonprofit theatres are helping to revitalize neighborhoods in Columbus, and provide an environment for community involvement. Columbus, Ohio was chosen for this research due to its vibrant artistic community, unique economic opportunity, and variety of successful nonprofit theatres. In 2011 AMS Planning and Research conducted an analysis of the sustainability of the Columbus arts market. This research found many trends in the city of Columbus which are mirrored nationwide. These include a decline in participation in benchmark arts activities (classical music, opera, ballet, non-musical theatre) by as much as 30% since 1982, arts philanthropy ranking seventh place in ten charitable organization categories, and nonprofit theatre companies experiencing stagnate buying power over the past decade. These nationwide factors found in Columbus, Ohio, make Columbus an ideal city for arts research. Results found in the city of Columbus can likely be applied to comparable cities across the country. The report found that there has been a substantial increase in the local entertainment sector with the founding of many new organizations over the past decade in Columbus. This confirms the National Endowment for the Arts
findings that the nonprofit theatre sector is growing nationwide, and is growing in Columbus.

Columbus Arts Market Sustainability Analysis (2011) examined similar cities to see how the Columbus arts sector compares; these cities include Austin, Minneapolis, Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Nashville, and Louisville. On a scale of “vital, sustainable, or viable” this report designated the arts sector of Columbus as “viable”. This means that Columbus has “the capability to function in the short-term, but limited in the capacity to adapt and grow” (Columbus, 2011). Columbus does show many similar qualities to “vital” cities, displaying that there is meaningful market potential in Columbus. The report states “Columbus’s arts and cultural organizations face a difficult and challenging environment.” This environment calls for strong leadership to bring Columbus’ artistic organizations to a stable and thriving place. Great leaders are needed to incorporate these artistic organizations into the core of Columbus’ future. The report has a hopeful outlook for the Columbus arts markets if action is taken now to sustain it. Leaders in the arts organizations need to align goals with those of community leaders. Arts organizations can do this by pursuing partnerships with business, government, education, sports, and tourism organizations (Columbus, 2011). The report advises arts leaders to pursue efficiency through strong management practices. The arts are an important part of the quality of life for any city. Columbus city leaders have shown interest in incorporating the arts into the regional and economic plan detailed in Columbus2020! Which seeks to improve Columbus by adding new jobs, increasing personal income per capita, and becoming a nationally recognized leader in economic development by year 2020. If the
arts sector wants to be a part of Columbus’ growth and development, strong leaders are needed now to help arts organizations through this transition.

My research will focus on five nonprofit theatres within Columbus, Ohio. The city of Columbus was chosen for its vibrant art scene and growing theatre community. The Places Almanac calls Columbus "One of the nation's best metro areas for the arts" (The City, 2014). As the largest city in Ohio, Columbus is a representation of the Midwest theatre community in audiences and capacity. Columbus houses a diverse theatre community; the nonprofit theatres I will examine have different missions and artistic goals, while serving the same audience base. The theatres researched include a children's theatre, a theatre that focuses on musicals, a theatre that focuses on original work, and a theatre that produces all new works. Columbus was chosen for research because it provides representation of many kinds of theatres. In the May 2011 issue, American Style Magazine listed Columbus in its top 25 big cities for art, describing Columbus an ideal place for arts research (Fultz 2011).

In the September 2014 issue, Forbes Magazine ranked Columbus the number one opportunity city in the country. Factors leading to Columbus receiving this ranking include employment opportunity, low cost of living, access to a major university, and a top-tier hospital. These elements, in addition to the efforts of the city’s Young Professionals Initiative, which works to attract and maintain young adults in the city, lead to a thriving arts and cultural scene, which makes Columbus an excellent candidate for research in the arts sector. Forbes emphasizes that new businesses will have an easier time “making their mark” in Columbus than in a larger city, this can also be applied to
nonprofit theatres and may explain the increase Columbus has experienced in the entertainment sector (Carlyle, 2014). These qualities benefit the nonprofit theatre community in Columbus and create an environment where arts organizations are able to take risks and survive. In the October 2014 issue of Columbus CEO Magazine, Kenny McDonald, the Chief Economic Officer of Columbus 2020, stated “Our region is experiencing unprecedented growth and our future is very bright. We stand on the shoulders of many who have created a terrific platform that we can all take to an even higher level” (McDonald, 2014). The growth in both the region of Columbus and the nonprofit theatre sector make this research valuable. In a visit to Columbus, Jane Chu the Chairwoman of the National Endowment for the Arts commented, “Columbus is just thriving, and the arts here aren’t off by themselves in a silo. The civic leaders and the artists, they’re all engaged. There are lots of conversations and collaborations” (Grossberg & Gilson 2014). Leaders throughout the city have uniformly acknowledged the importance of the arts and cultural sector to a vital Columbus (Columbus, 2011). Nonprofit arts leadership is more important than ever to strength this sector and the city of Columbus.
Chapter 2: Leadership

There is a large volume of literature on the subject of what makes a good leader, spanning from the corporate business world, to the military, to classical philosophy (Machiavelli, 1532; Heimovick, 1994; Jinkins, 1998; Neuschel, 2005). Leaders have a clear vision of an improved future and are challenged with moving their followers toward that goal. Dwight Eisenhower defined leadership as, “The art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it” (Mason, 1996, p. 227). There are many different philosophies and theories on practicing good leadership. Some debate whether leaders can be made or if certain people are born with innate characteristics that make people want to follow them. Most authors now agree that anyone, at any level of an organization can be a leader. While opinions on leadership vary, there are certain practices and characteristics that scholars agree a good leader should possess (Conger, 1988; Dicke, 2011; Faust, 2000; Heimovick, 1994; Jinkins, 1998; Neuschel, 2005).

Characteristics

As Robert Neushchel describes leadership in his book The Servant Leader (2005), “Leadership is more judgment than knowledge, more art than science, more human relations than savvy. This is why it cannot be learned like a formula or conferred like a title” (p. 25). Character and personality traits are more important in a leader than even intelligence (Neushchel, 2005). Great leaders portray integrity, maturity, consistency, enthusiasm, and perseverance. These qualities create respect in followers. Leaders set
demands of excellence for their organization, and good leaders display this through example in their own work. A leader will not demand hard work of their employee without first demonstrating hard work themselves. When someone is following a great leader they are inspired to be better, and feel that they are genuinely cared about. Employees want to feel that they are trusted and respected. A leader gains trust and respect by first giving it to his or her employees. An efficient leader will delegate responsibility and power throughout the organization (Neushchel, 2005). Research has found that people want their leaders to be honest, forward thinking, inspiring, and competent (Murphy, 2011). Scholars use varying terminology to describe these characteristics, but agree on their importance.

Great leaders can draw out the best and diminish the worst in their followers (Mason, 1996). Good leaders generate loyalty in their subordinates. They are completely committed to the organization and the mission of the nonprofit. Subordinates need to be able to trust their leader in order for healthy working relationships to exist. Leaders need four qualities for generating trust: constancy, congruity, reliability, and integrity. Good leaders support their coworkers and honor their commitments. An effective leader will view their employees as whole human beings, with many goals, desires and needs (Mason, 1996). Leaders should be perceived as completely fair and consistent. Strong executive directors have a solid knowledge of their field and business practices. Leadership is built from experience. Leaders must learn from mistakes and recognize room for personal growth (Neushchel, 2005).
The politician and philosopher Machiavelli discussed the characteristics of leadership in his treatise *The Prince* in the 16th century. Machiavelli believed great leaders possessed "virtu", which is made up of the elements integrity, courage, flexibility, talent, and prudence. Good leaders are self-aware, poor leaders are surprised by their faults (Jinkins, 1998). Leaders display integrity by doing what they say they will do. “The leader needs much more than integrity to be successful. But without integrity and trust nothing else matters much” (Neuschel, 2005, p. 121). Leaders must be more than just words, they need to display the capability to follow through with their promises.

Good leaders recognize conflict and diverse opinions within their organization. They are committed to the truth and do not give in to the temptation to believe the organization is better off than it actually is (Jinkins, 1998).

The literature agrees that change is a true test of leadership (Mason, 1996). A leader who has courage in times of adversity creates trust and calm within the organization. Courage allows the leader to take charge and make the right decision, not the easy one. Good leaders must act decisively. Leaders with courage can turn moments of crisis into moments of opportunity (Jinkins, 1998). Leaders need to take responsibility for the organization. “Since chief executives are going to be held responsible, they should take full control, running things as they think best” (Jossey-Bass 1994, p.140). When an organization is facing hardship or scandal the leader, often the executive director, will be the one asked to take the fall and resign. Poor leaders are preoccupied with self-survival (Jinkins, 1998).

Leadership Practices
Leadership should not only exist at the top of an organization. Good leaders develop future leadership for the organization. Followers will in turn lead how they are led. “The ultimate test of a good leader is to grow another good leader...” (Neushchel, 2005, p. 97). Successful executive directors can effectively lead through sub leaders. Great executive directors utilize the power of their employees and push people to be more productive. “Continuous improvement is an important and meaningful organizational goal” (Herman, 1994 p. 616). Good leaders are constantly trying to improve themselves and improve their organization.

Communication is important in all aspects of an organization. Leaders must be a superb communicators to effectively run a nonprofit. The executive director is responsible for communicating the governance of the board to the rest of the organization, and for providing the board with all the information it needs to make effective decisions. Before followers can carry out a leader’s instructions, they must understand the leader. Leaders must in turn listen and understand their followers. Open lines of communication lead to a healthy organization and happy employees. It is important for executive directors to be consistent and follow through with what they say they will do. Good leaders feel empathy for their subordinates; they care for their employees on both a professional and personal level. Executive directors should help their subordinates reach their goals. Satisfied and fulfilled employees will be more effective than disgruntled and bored ones (Neushchel, 2005). Managers who attend to the personal needs of their employees will generate more productive workers (Hodgkinson, 1989). Executive directors also need to show leadership outside of the
organization. A leader’s personal network and political activities can lead to the success or failure of an organization (Jossey-Bass, 1994).

Values and morals permeate an organization. It is the leader’s job to set and live by this code of values. Leaders must create a climate that supports the values they want their subordinates to work by. As former chair of IBM Thomas Watson said, "I firmly believe that any organization, in order to survive and achieve success, must have a sound set of beliefs on which it premises all its policies and actions" (Hodgkinson, 1989, p. 265). An executive’s career can end due to a failure in these values. Leaders of organizations must be responsible and trustworthy, or subordinates will not follow them.

Leadership Styles

There is a large volume of literature on leadership styles, ranging from classical works by Machiavelli and Plato, to modern online quizzes to help you discover your leadership style. Some authors categorize style by the way in which one does their work, others define style by personality traits, or interpersonal relationships. There is a plethora of leadership styles and definitions of those styles. One thing most of the literature agrees on is that one leadership style is not superior to the others. Style is largely based on the personality of the leader and often changes depending on the circumstances. Each leader must represent him or herself in the style they are most comfortable with, that best suits their personality (Neushchel, 2005). Many styles are based on the amount of power an organization gives a leader (Mason, 1996). It is important for leaders to have adaptability and flexibility to use different styles of leadership that are most effective in
specific situations and contexts (Jinkins, 1998). Not all subordinates will respond to the same style of leadership. It is important that leaders understand their followers and know which methods will best motivate them.

Many authors, including Faust (2000) and Mason (1996), categorize leadership style in three forms: autocratic, democratic (or consultative), and laissez-faire. Autocratic leaders have complete authority over their employees and make decisions on their own. They are likely found in organizations with a clear hierarchical structure. Examples of autocratic leaders are clearly seen in a military setting. Democratic leaders take subordinates input and make group decisions. These leaders are most likely found in a team work environment (Faust, 2000). Laissez-faire leaders take on the role of a group member and assume that their employees are self-motivated. Laissez-faire leaders are hands off and allow their subordinates to work independently (Mason, 1996).

Leaders may be task oriented, which emphasizes establishing work relationships, responsibilities and procedures; or they may be relationship oriented, which focuses on social and emotional needs (Tschirhart, 2012). Another style of leadership is the servant leader. These leaders are not concerned with egos, and place the needs of the organization above their own. Servant leaders follow the philosophy of Plato, which recommends that leaders govern for the benefit of the governed (Neushchel, 2005).

Another style of leadership is the charismatic leader. Charismatic leaders draw in followers with their attractive personalities. These powerful personalities are particularly useful in politicians and leaders of nonprofit organizations. Charismatic leaders create faith in their followers, and then use this faith to reach the goals of a shared vision. This
faith ensures loyalty and involvement in the followers. Charismatic leaders excel at creating cohesion within groups (Mason, 1996). Some of history’s most famous leaders can be described as charismatic leaders, including Winston Churchill, Martin Luther King Jr., and Adolf Hitler. “Charismatic leaders’ effectiveness consists of formulating a vision and instilling faith, articulating the vision, building and maintaining trust, and symbolizing” (Conger, 1988, p. 34).

Manager vs. Leader

Successful organizations need a leader and a manager; sometimes these roles are filled by multiple people and sometimes one person must be both. Great leaders, if not managers themselves, must understand effective management so that they can support their managers and create a healthy work environment. Understanding the distinctions between managers and leaders can help nonprofit staff better understand and fulfill their duties. Mason (1996) and Galli (2011), agree on the descriptions of these two roles. Managers act as a task leader, their work is calculative and systematic. They use authority and reason to communicate with subordinates. Managers’ power is often given to them formally by the organizations (Mason, 1996). Managers focus on the daily operations of an organization. They make sure tasks are accomplished and are responsible for utilizing human and material resources. Managers can be described as left brained; they use “logic, words, parts, specifics” (Mason, 1996). Nonprofit leaders are managers in many ways due to the variety of roles leaders in that sector fill.

Leaders’ tasks are more emotional and relational. They focus on motivating group members. They utilize cultural norms and persuasion. Leaders use the emotional
and spiritual resources of an organization like values, commitment, and goals. Leaders focus on the long term goals and values of the organization. Leaders can be described as right brained, using “emotions, images, wholes, relationships” (Mason, 1996). They will inspire people and control the direction the organization grows in. Some organizations use the board for this definition of the leadership role, while the executive director acts as the manager (Galli, 2011). Neuschel (2005) notes a fear that universities are only producing managers, not leaders. Successful organizations are likely run by people who have the capability to be both strong leaders and efficient managers. Leaders of nonprofit organization are often required to manage and lead the organization due to the unique organizational structures of nonprofits (Bezboruah, 2011).
Chapter 3: Nonprofit Leadership

While leadership styles and best practices are similar across many settings including the corporate business world, government, the military, and religious organizations, there are some challenges and qualities that make nonprofit leadership unique. Due to the nature of donations and government funding, nonprofit leaders have different duties and crises in regards to financial management, than their for-profit counterparts. When elected to leadership positions, politicians have instant enemies of individuals who ran against them, and constituents with differing political affiliations. Politicians must devote a large amount of time working against forces that want to unseat them from their positions. According to Mason (1996) nonprofit leaders do not have to deal with this issue as much as governmental leaders do; however, it is equally possible that nonprofit leaders deal with staff members, board members, and outsiders who wish to unseat the leader from their power.

Leaders in nonprofit organizations need to be particularly charismatic and appealing because nonprofits rely heavily on donations and volunteers. It is extremely easy for a volunteer to leave an organization and join a new one; volunteers are not bound by formal contracts or the professional consequences an employee may face when trying to leave an organization (Mason, 1996). Employees have a more difficult time leaving an organization and often face major life changes in order to do so. Quitting a job can affect
an employee’s retirement, income, health insurance, and professional network. Leaders in the business world can count on monetary rewards and contracts to provide their employees with incentive to stay. Nonprofit leaders do not have this luxury when it comes to their unpaid volunteer force. They must develop relationships with volunteers, and provide them with motives to stay with the organization. According to Mason (1996) leaders in nonprofit settings are less likely to have an authoritarian style because they need to cultivate a sense of community. Expressive leaders are particularly important in the nonprofit setting to inspire and help the organization reach goals (Mason, 1996).

Nonprofits frequently have moral and social based missions, which may cause nonprofit leaders to have more challenges regarding morals than their corporate counterparts. "...nonprofit management may well include more complex forms of moral responsibility than do other types of management" (Hodgkinson, 1989, p. 262). As servants to the public, nonprofit leaders have a high commitment to ethics. Executive directors often serve as the face of the nonprofit. In this role they must display the values and morals that align with the nonprofit’s mission (Hodgkinson, 1989). While it is true that commercial organizations often require their executives to sign morality agreements, the ethical expectation is higher with leaders who use public money.

Challenges to Nonprofit Leaders

The nonprofit sector faces many challenges. Between 1998 and 2008 the number of nonprofits in America increased by 32.7% (Cole, 2011). With the growth of the sector there is an increasing need for the professionalization of nonprofit organizations. Nonprofits have been accused of behaving unprofessionally in regards to business
practices (Bezboruah, 2011). This is often seen in poor financial management and grant reporting. The unprofessional behavior of some nonprofits creates problems for the whole sector. Nonprofits will have difficulty securing funding if donors and grant makers do not trust that their funds will be managed properly. This creates the need for nonprofits to become more professional (Bezboruah, 2011). The leaders of the nonprofits take the blame for the failures of their organizations, it is therefore up to the leaders to bring their organizations up to professional standards.

Nonprofit leaders must fill many roles for their organization. “The primary functions of nonprofit management include planning, clearly defining roles and responsibilities, budgeting, accurate accounting and reporting, tracking performance and evaluating results and outcomes, and collaborating, coordinating, and networking with external agencies including donors and the community” (Bezboruah, 2011). Historically nonprofit managers did not have business training like their for profit counterparts. Nonprofit managers were often volunteers motivated by their passion for the organization’s mission. Today the nonprofit and corporate sector lines are blurring, calling for more professionalization in the nonprofit world (Bezboruah, 2011). An increasing number of universities have started offering degrees and classes in nonprofit management (The Ohio State University; Boston University; Syracuse University; New York University; University of Southern California; Purdue University; Harvard University; John Hopkins University; Arizona State University; and others). This will better prepare nonprofit leaders to manage their organizations.
The largest challenge facing nearly every nonprofit organization is the need to secure funding. Some nonprofits have become more concerned with survival than with providing service (Hodgkinson, 1989). Staff members of nonprofits spend a great deal of time seeking grants and donations so that their organizations can survive. Financial hardships make it difficult for nonprofits to procure adequate investments in new technology and human capital. The need for funding and the scrutiny placed on nonprofits’ management of funding further calls for the professionalization of nonprofit management. “Nonprofit organizations are not only becoming more businesslike in their revenue generation but also becoming increasingly led by trustees and executives who have been recruited from businesses” (Bezboruah, 2011).

Grant givers and donors frequently want a nonprofit to prove its sustainability by being able to support itself through earned income. Some nonprofits secure funding through commercial activities. These activities can be “fee for service” in which the nonprofit charges a fee for the services it provides. Commercial practices can be “unrelated business activities” in which the activities do not relate to the mission of the organization. For example a nonprofit might rent out its space to other organizations when it is not in use. This business activity benefits the nonprofit financially, but does not help further the mission. Another form of commercial activity nonprofits can engage in is “related business activity” where the activity furthers the mission of the organization. These commercial activities can get nonprofits into trouble regarding their IRS tax exempt status. Small businesses often complain that nonprofits are competing with them while receiving special treatment from the government. Nonprofits also need
to be careful that their commercial activities do not lead to mission drift (Hodgkinson, 1989). Nonprofits need strong leaders to accomplish the challenging task of ensuring that their organizations have funding, while not falling into mission drift.

Nonprofits struggle with maintaining efficient human capital, because they typically cannot pay salaries competitive with for-profit businesses, and therefore struggle to attract talented employees (Bezboruah, 2011). Those with business and management degrees often have higher salary expectations than a nonprofit can meet. Nonprofits who do pay their employees wages competitive with the corporate world are often accused of not spending enough money on services by the media. Many nonprofits are operated by volunteers or part time employees, and the temporary nature of these workers’ employment may lead to poorer results, compared to those of full time employees (Bezboruah, 2011). Volunteers often lack the skills and knowledge needed to perform their jobs efficiently. High turn overs in work and volunteer force can cause instability in the organization. These challenges call for strong leadership to guide an organization through frequent staff changes, and to help employees be successful in positions they may not have adequate training for.
Chapter 4: Methods

I chose to conduct this research through a case study; as defined by John Crewswell in *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (2013) a case study is the study of real life, contemporary context, bounded by time and place. My research is bound by the city of Columbus, the nonprofit theatre sector, and takes place in the present. My data collection involved two parts: an online survey and an in person interview. Five nonprofit theatres were chosen for my research. One theatre was not able to be contacted until after the analysis of the other theatres was completed. The fifth theatre has been added as last minute resource, and therefore was not able to participate in the survey portion of the research. These theatres were chosen based their geographical location with close proximity to downtown Columbus; due to their locations the theatres will have the same audience pools and community influences. Each theatre has a distinctive organizational structure and mission. While the theatres have many things in common, they each represent a unique niche in the theatre community. Their missions range from a focus on new works, generating original work, producing musical theatre, and children’s theatre programing. These theatres represent the oldest nonprofit theatre in Columbus and the newest. One theatre has no paid staff, two are entirely professional, and two utilize a combination of paid staff and volunteer workers. A distinct leader of each theatre was identified, through research on the theatre’s organizational structure and
website, to be interviewed as the representative leader of the theatre. Due to the varying organizational structures of the theatres the title of the leaders identified varied. The artistic director was chosen for interview, if the theatre had one, because artistic directors represent the long term artistic vision of the organization. Artistic directors answer directly to the board, and are responsible for communicating their artistic vision to the rest of the organization. If the theatre did not have an artistic director, the closest equivalent to that role was chosen. One leader was called the executive producer, one the producing director, and another the president of the board. Two of the leaders interviewed are volunteers at the theatre, and three were full time employees. While these titles and roles vary slightly between the theatres researched, each person fit the position of being the theatre’s leader. These leaders are responsible for artistic vision, mission fulfillment, and management of the theatres. The leaders were contacted by email and personal connections. Interviews were conducted in person and recorded; transcripts were generated for each interview. One of the four leaders interviewed asked that his name, and the name of the theatre he represented to remain anonymous. He felt that this allowed him to speak more freely than he would if he had to worry about negative consequences in response to his answers. In order to protect each of the theatres researched, the leaders’ and organizations’ names will not be included in this document.

Through online research about each theatre, and with the help of the leader, a list of suitable participants was compiled to complete the online surveys. The goal of the survey was to provide information about the leader through other members of the theatres perspectives. Survey participants included staff, board, and ensemble members. Survey
participants were emailed a voluntary, anonymous online survey. Twenty five people completed the survey; due to variation in the organizations size, some theatres had more participation in the survey than others. The first survey had fourteen participants, the second had seven participants, and the third had four participants. One leader decided not to participate in the online survey portion of the research. This leader is a board president, not an artistic director, and felt that the questions in the survey did not directly relate to his role, and therefore could not provide an accurate representation of his leadership.

Interview Data

Four leaders were asked thirteen questions which addressed leadership characteristics, leadership performance, and leadership in the nonprofit sector. The participants’ main points have been abbreviated and complied below. If more than one participant gave the same answer it has been noted.

How do you define good leadership?
- Lead by example (set the bar for everyone else) –three participants
- Provide Guidance
- Provide Support
- Help employees find fulfillment
- Willingness to admit mistakes
- Create a healthy work environment –two participants

How is this role different from past leadership experience?
- More risks in the arts
- More responsibility –two participants
- More aggressive in roles with less power, nicer to coworkers in this role
- In past had difficulty managing people I had nothing in common with

What is your leadership style?
- Democratic –four participants
• “Go with the Flow”
• Unintimidating –three participants
• Comfortable with ambiguity
• Willingness to do any tasks subordinates are asked to do –three participants

What are your strengths as a leader?
• Work ethic –three participants
• Efficiency
• Willingness to take blame when things go wrong
• Care about subordinates
• Fearless
• Committed
• Excited to give others credit
• Comfortable with ambiguity
• Many varied interest

Do you have any weaknesses as a leader?
• Do not delegate enough –two participants
• I always think I’m right –two participants
• Impatient
• All or nothing kind of person
• Forget to give others credit
• I’m very opinionated

How do you measure or evaluate your success as a leader?
• Artistic quality
• Setting and achieving goals
• Through the leadership qualities of subordinates
• If the audience enjoyed it
• If those involved in the process enjoyed it and want to do it again
• Were actors/artists empowered –two participants
• Seeing others in the organization take initiate and do work on their own
• Seeing members of the company grow –two participants

What are the most important aspects of your job?
• Creating the season and producing shows –three participants
• Providing support
• Developing talent
• Narrowing focus
• Overall big picture
• Teaching others within the organization
• Representing the organization to the public
What are the biggest challenges you face as a leader?
- New challenges that arise as a small organization becomes larger and more institutionalized —three participants
- Continuing to push yourself to do new and challenging things —two participants
- Dealing with the board
- Coping with burnout —two participants
- Not having full time staff —two participants
- Paying the bills
- Interpersonal relationships affecting the organization

How does the board impact your work and decisions?
- Need to play by the board’s rules because they have the power
- Want to maintain artists on the board to protect the mission of the organization
- Important to empower your board and ask their input
- The board is there to provide support and make the director’s job easier
- The board has lost its focus

How do outside influences impact your work and decisions?
- Other theatres influence programing and season selection
- Funders influence show choice, organization structure, decisions to collaborate, and the creation of new programs —two participants
- Season schedules are designed around community events so the audience is able to attend shows
- The competition with technology gets harder and harder, technology influences our shows as we attempt to give the audience what it likes
- The audience influences policy and season choices
- The city influences our collaborations and limitations

Are the challenges for leaders of art organizations different than the challenges leaders in non-art organizations face?
- Similar in the bottom line aspect, have to balance your books or face consequences
- Nonprofits are not trying to make money they are trying to serve the community —two participants
- Art is subjective, there are not quantifiable things that make it good
- It is hard to know if you are succeeding because you don’t have the tangible goal of making profit
- Risk is much higher in the arts

Is it important for the leader of an arts organization to have practical experience with the art form?
• Leaders need to understand and appreciate the art or it will affect the artist and the staff. –two participants
• Leaders with other business expertise need to be represented on the board
• Leaders need to have experience with the art form so the artist will respect them

If you were going to step down from your leadership role, what advice would you give the person filling your shoes?
• Boards come and go, don’t get wrapped up in politics
• This too will pass
• Have a life outside of this organization -three participants
• Be respectful of peoples’ life circumstances and time
• Lead by example
• Have a good understanding of finances and how your decisions affect the bottom line
• Understand the artwork inside and out
• You need to understand people

Interview Analysis

The interviews provided insights into the current practices and challenges of nonprofit leaders. When asked to describe good leadership, three of the four participants responded that good leadership is leading by example. This concept was largely supported by the literature (Neushchel, 2005); subordinates respect leaders with demonstrated high work ethics. Participants further elaborated that good leaders “lead from the front,” do consistent good work, and set the bar for the rest of the organization. By setting high standards of excellence for themselves, these leaders elicit higher standers from others in the organization. All four leaders stated that they do not ask people to do anything they are not willing to do. Examples of cleaning bathrooms, and sweeping the sidewalk were given to explain that these leaders demonstrate their commitment to their organizations by doing undesirable tasks alongside their followers.
Leaders performing these menial tasks is particularly common in small nonprofit organizations where all workers are expected to chip in to keep the organization running. Two participants believe that good leaders create healthy environments for their organization; this involves creating an atmosphere where people feel comfortable voicing their concerns. According to one participant, “Good leadership is delegation, it’s determining the needs of areas and then finding the person to fulfill those needs, and setting bench marks for them to finish those tasks.” One participant stated that powerful leadership requires a willingness to admit when you have made a mistake; he further concluded that the problem with many leaders today is their unwillingness to admit when they are wrong. As the literature (Neushchel, 2005; Mason, 1996) shows, subordinates trusting leaders is crucial for effective leadership; leaders who admit mistakes will increase trust in their followers. Admitting mistakes and working not to replicate them is crucial for organizational survival. During these times of growth in nonprofit theatres, leaders may be encountering unfamiliar territory; it is likely that leaders will make mistakes, as two participants explained they sometimes must learn as they go. Being able to admit and learn from mistakes is more important for good leadership than ever before. Two leaders mentioned the challenges brought on by dealing with new technology. Customers have new expectations and tastes that are influenced by constantly changing technology. For example one participant explained that the marketing system they used ten years ago is no longer effective. These theatres, like other types of organizations, must adapt to new technology quickly, which calls for strong leadership and the willingness to learn and try new things.
One participant focuses on the importance of the community in fulfilling his leadership goals, stating “… a leader provides guidance and insights, but recognizes that the changes and the problem solving comes from the larger community.” This supports the findings in the literature (Langley, 1974) of the influence the community has on a nonprofit theatre. Another participant elaborated on the importance of the community, “You have to spend a lot of energy understanding the circumstances around you. And that means having a powerful network of information gatherers.” Collecting this information and implementing it into management decisions allows a leader to effectively generate change. Participants view good leadership as providing guidance, fulfilling the mission of the organization, and helping employees find personal satisfaction. All four participants acknowledged the importance of caring for those who follow you; this concept is also represented in the literature (Neushchel, 2005). These leaders view the members of their organizations as more than just employees (or volunteers), referring to them as a family and a tribe. One participant stated that when a person participates in the theatre they are “…now a part of the family forever.”

All of the participants felt that they are democratic leaders; they enjoy taking input from others throughout the creative process and in administrative matters. Three participants explained that after a time of collaboration they make the final decision. While these leaders enjoy creating a teamwork environment in their organization, they also recognize that sometimes leaders must be aggressive and decisive to move an organization forward. All four of the participants admitted that at times they are unsure of what they are doing and are learning as they go. One participant explained
“…knowing that any choice is better than no choice. So I went in and started making choices.” Two leaders described themselves as “unintimidating” and felt that this characteristic makes it easy for subordinates to share their opinions. One explained, “I think I’m perceived as pretty easy to get along with, so there’s a family friendly sense to the organization. I don’t think anybody feels threatened by me.” One artistic director wanted more input from subordinates and created an artistic committee so that other members of the organization would be able to participate in the creative process. One participant explained that in some situations he is democratic (when choosing the shows for the season) and in other circumstances he is autocratic (during the final rehearsals of a show). Collaborative decision making is so important to one theatre that their creative team must make a unanimous decision before action is taken. The participant explained that this causes decision making to take much longer but also ensures that all members are behind a decision. This empowers subordinates and allows more people to take ownership of the organization. These leaders desire to include subordinates in decision making shows signs of strong leadership as described in the literature (Mason, 1996).

One leader explained that with maturity and experience his style has become more collaborative, “So I think that comes with maturity when you learn that the best way to succeed is to hire people better than you.” All of the leaders acknowledged that the final decision on issues was their responsibility, and that sometimes they make decisions members of the organization do not like. One participant finds it easier to be nice to coworkers when he is the leader, because “…there’s no reason to be a jerk to people that are subordinate to you, they’re already subordinate to you.” This participant feels he
must be more aggressive when in positions with less power, but when given authority acts with benevolence. One participant explained that taking input from others and “keeping the pulse of the organization” is important to ensure that the whole company is behind you. He felt that this is especially critical because most members of his theatre are volunteers and can walk away at any time if dissatisfied, this idea is supported in the literature (Mason, 1996). Although these participants are at the highest level of authority within their organization, they are not able to do what they want all the time. One participant explained, “This is not the organization that if I were king of the world I would have created. I’m working with a group and everyone has their ideas, and everyone works and feels differently than I would alone.”

As the literature shows (Neushchel, 2005) good leaders help to develop new leaders in their organization. One participant stated that the most important part of his job is to teach the other managers, and groom someone to fill his position. This leader wants all members of his organization to feel empowered, “We’re trying to encourage creative thinking at all levels all the time.” Another leader discussed the importance of helping members of the organization grow, “That’s a big part of my job, helping these people discover who they are as artist so they can grow and get even better.” These leaders strengthen their organizations by fully utilizing and empowering their workers, as the literature (Mason, 1996; Neuschel, 2005) suggests.

The participants have different ways of evaluating their success as leaders; all use interpersonal relationships in some way as a benchmark of good leadership. One stated, “I measure my success as a leader in the leadership qualities of the people under me.”
One leader knows he is successful when other members of the organization take initiative and follow through. Two leaders use the feedback of participants to gage a shows success; one leader explained that the opinions of ensemble members matter more to him than those of the audience. He wants to create work that the theatre company can be proud of and feel good about. Another defines his success by whether participants would want to return and do another show. These leaders frequent evaluation of their success allows them to quickly respond to problems and improve.

These leaders gain personal fulfillment from their roles; this is demonstrated by the two volunteer leaders through their dedication of countless hours of unpaid work. The two participants who are full time employees of their theatre both have a history of working in the for-profit sector, but left because their work did not provide personal satisfaction. One explained, “I tried to make money, I left the theatre, I went into sales. In 1976, in the first quarter I made as much money as I make annually now, but I hated it. It was just money, there was no reward.” The personal fulfillment these leaders receive from their work allows them to be better leaders; it fuels the hard work and long hours these leaders pride themselves on, and explains their deep caring for their subordinates. Leaders who are unsatisfied are less likely to provide such high quality work.

The participants provided many insights to support what the literature (Axelrod, 1994; Heimovice, 1994; Tschirhart, 2012) explains about the relationship between a leader and the board of a nonprofit. Being a manager as board members change can be difficult for nonprofit leaders, as the values and demands of the board change. One participant described board relations:
When it comes to how boards change, boards they come and go. Some boards want to be hands on, some boards aren’t hands on enough, some boards aren’t hands on at all. In the staffs’ mind the board should just be raising money, in the board’s mind sometimes they want to tell you what to do.

One participant is the president of the board for his organization. This role gives him responsibility for long term planning, he describes the most important aspect of his job as, “Knowing the overall picture, I am possibly the only person who has that freedom and opportunity.” This participant describes the board of his theatre as a “working board”; each board member is deeply involved in the management of the theatre. Some members are more traditional fundraisers and advisors, while other members are responsible for hands on tasks, like conducting the organization’s accounting. Each participant has a unique relationship with their board. One deals with a “rubber stamping” board; the board is there to provide support to the artistic director and very rarely challenges the director’s decisions. This board plays a passive role in the leadership of the theatre; the board trusts the artistic director and does not attempt to interfere in the running of the organization.

Another participant has struggled with board relationships throughout the years. He told stories of board members, who are not familiar with theatre or the nonprofit sector, struggling to understand the organization from their for-profit backgrounds. He elaborated:

Any job, any arts organization, board members tend to come from the profit world, which we want them to because we want their money. So their perception
of how a nonprofit should be run sometimes is counter to what is probably the best way for it to be run.

This leader explained the power dynamic between the board and the artistic director, “You have to play their game, whether you like it or not, because the board controls.”

One organization has an unconventional board structure, the participant is both the executive director and the president of the board. This board is made up of the eight person creative team that works at the theatre. They see this as an advantage to their organization because the board members have intimate knowledge about what is going on in the theatre. The board is able to make very quick decisions, compared to other boards with members who are not as familiar with the needs of the organization. The problem with this structure is that the board can become isolated and lack outside input and knowledge. To address this issue, the organization created an advisory board, which acts as a more traditional board (made up of members of the community from different fields), but does not have voting power in board decisions. This participant feels very strongly about the advantages of their unique board structure, and recommends that other art organizations adopt it.

As the literature (Hodgkinson, 1989; Mason, 1996) explains there are many differences between the nonprofit and for-profit sector, these leaders experience these differences most in the difficulty of the nonprofit business model (needing to earn revenue when the goal is not profit) and the subjective nature of art. One leader reflected that an investor would have to be “crazy” to invest in an arts organization, because the chances of earning profits are so low. This can create problems for nonprofit art
organizations as they attempt to become established and grow. These nonprofits face challenges measuring their success and impact. As one participant explained:

With profit organizations the profit tells them whether they succeeded or not.

With nonprofits it’s not that clean….Generally there are quantifiable things that make something good. Art is much more subjective, as far as what makes it good, and what people like, and what is going to keep them coming back. And therefore the bottom line is much trickier.

These leaders believe they deal with higher risks than their for-profit counterparts.

According to one participant:

The other difference is the rest of the business world has an economic model that’s based on something solid and when they experiment they’re doing it in a very small way, with a very small percent of their revenue. Every single time we put a new show on, we risk the whole thing…So the scale of risk that you repeat over, and over, and over is much, much higher here, and for all the arts. That’s the nature of the beast, but that’s also the thrill of being an artist.

Two leaders described the difference between their current role and past positions as having more risk as the leader of an arts organization. Nonprofit theatres needs strong leaders who are not afraid to take risks in order to survive. Being fearless without being reckless is a balance that leaders in all types of organizations must learn to be effective.

All but one of the participants believe it is important for the leader of a nonprofit arts organization to have practical experience in the art form. These leaders feel that effective management is not the only necessary quality for a leader of an arts
organization. Leaders without practical experience in the art form will not be respected by the artist, and will have difficulty communicating with the creative side of the organization. One participant further elaborated:

Arts organizations are a different animal than the for profit world. An understanding of the arts is important, and an appreciation. An understanding of the product, and the process, and the commitment – the energy, the time, and the love, that all go into the arts. If you come in with none of that appreciation, even if you’re a good manager, there’s going to be a missing element there that’s going to affect the staff, affect the patrons.

The Columbus Arts Market Sustainability Analysis (2011) found that donors in the city of Columbus are tired of being called on to save organizations that are in financial distress. The report found that donors are attracted to organizations who can demonstrate their contribution to the quality of life in Columbus, attract businesses and visitors, and draw positive attention to the city. Leaders need to be aware of donors’ needs and wishes so that they can successfully build positive donor relations. Funders have a large impact on nonprofit theatres. These theatres seek grants and donations from the same foundations (The Columbus Foundation), agencies (Ohio Arts Council, Greater Columbus Arts Council), and many of the same donors. Funders have influenced these theatres on show choice, organizational structure, collaborations, and the creation of new programs. One participant told the story of choosing a particular show for the season because he knew a potential donor was a fan of the shows topic. Two participants stated they have sought collaborations with other organizations because it pleases granting
agencies. One theatre has reorganized how they describe and present their programming to make it better align with a granters application categories.

All four participants elaborated on the challenges faced when a small organization grows into a larger more institutionalized organization. These leaders have intimate knowledge of how their organization has evolved: two participants were involved with the founding of the theatre, and three participants have been with their theatre companies for fifteen or more years. One participant explained that the role of leadership has greatly changed from when he first entered the company, “When the organization was small everyone did everything, there was no need to delegate, and no need to manage others.”

As this organization grew to include more staff, more traditional roles were implemented. This organization grew enough that it could split what was previously one leadership role into two positions: the executive director and the artistic director. This participant stated that delegation is one of his weaknesses because he is not accustomed to having staff that he can delegate too, “It’s not that I object to assigning stuff, I’ve just been doing it the same; sometimes it’s just as easy for me to do it, than to delegate it.” Leaders need to learn to adapt to these changes quickly to avoid challenges that could damage their organization.

As supported in the literature (Green, 1981), these organizations experienced the increased cost of operations as an organization grows. One participant stated, “The larger you become as an organization the more challenges there are to paying the bills.” All four participants mentioned the economic struggles of running a nonprofit organization. These theatres struggle to pay their bills and debt, while attempting to keep ticket prices
affordable for their patrons. As the organizations grow there are challenges in regards to legal regulations and fees. On participant lamented, “I don’t think people have the vaguest idea how difficult it is to be an entrepreneur given today’s legal realities.” As the organizations hire employees, open their doors to the public, and maintain their buildings they incur cost that have no possibility of generating revenue. One participant noted that being an established organization makes it more difficult to produce shows because there is now a higher standard of excellence. A theatre company celebrating its twentieth year, like one researched here, may find it harder to take risks than a new theatre company, whose audience has lower or unformed expectations. This leader explained, “We’re not a childish organization any more, we’re a business.”

Burnout or exhaustion is a large concern for these leaders. When asked what advice they would give to their successor, three participants emphasized the importance of having a life outside the organization. “Make sure that you want to be dedicated, but you also need to have a life.” One voluntary participant suggested his successor study time management to cope with the challenges of balancing this role with a full time job. One participant suggested that the burden of the role was so high, the organization would have to change the structure of the job before a new person could take the role. He advised:

Before you take this on you either do what I’m doing, which is a big commitment, or you figure out a way where you can be a more traditional board president, and not have to be the executive director and do these kinds of hours.
The issue of burnout was especially important to the two participants whose roles are voluntary. Burnout in leaders is sometimes the result of poor delegation skills, as explained by one participant, “I despise having to give someone a job and then having to finish that job when they drop the ball.” Two participants explained that it is easier for them to complete tasks than to take the time to explain the job to someone else in the organization. This can cause leaders to take on too much work and become overwhelmed. Three participants stated that they did not know the level of work and responsibility involved in their role when they agreed to take the position; one reflected that if he had known, he might not have accepted.

Other advice participants would give to their successor include lead by example, and have a strong understanding of the artwork. One leader advised that boards come and go; leaders should be aware of politics within their organization but not get wrapped up in them. Two leaders emphasized the importance of understanding the people in your organization and being respectful of individual’s life circumstances and times. Having a good understanding of finances, and how leadership decisions affect the bottom line, is particularly important to one leader. Another advised that “This too will pass,” one of the most important things a leader can do is not react to stress and keep a level head. This will help create the healthy workplace environment that is important to these leaders. This sound advice can be applied to leaders in all types of organizations, not just nonprofit theatres.

The fifth leader made contact at the end of this research, and was asked different questions than the other four, so that he might reflect on my conclusions and provide
feedback. This leader evaluates his success in many ways, using those around him to gage his effectiveness. He focuses on creating a climate of growth and learning, and cares more about developing the relationship between artists and the audience, than receiving awards or other accolades. This leader does not experience the conflicts with the board, as some of the other participants described. He has worked to change a “cheerleading” board into a more productive board; and views the empowerment of the board as one of his successes. This leader views his organization as successful when it engages with the community and produces change.

Like the other participants, this leader describes himself as a democratic encouraging leader; he explained, “The piece of my style that I am most proud of is that, I do not care so much about the failing or succeeding as I do about the ability to rectify failure and replicate success.” This leader encourages subordinates to take risks; he believes this practices helps the organization thrive through an ever changing environment. He agrees with another participant that the ability to admit mistakes is an important quality in a leader.

This participant does not feel that he struggles with the weakness of delegation, communication, and ego found in the other participants. He believes that he avoids these problems by setting clear expectations. One weakness he did reflect on was the challenge of being both the business leader and the artistic leader. Filling both roles requires this participant to set priorities differently than he would prefer if he only had to fill one role. While other participants explained how they have changed their organizations and programing to align with funders’ wishes, this participant denies that funders influence
his decisions. He explained that he does not “chase funding” but rather explains to the funders the community needs and how his organization can help fulfill them. This difference in attitude towards funders could be attributed to the fact that this participant’s organization is the oldest and largest of all the theatres researched. The smaller (in both staff and budget size) theatres may need to rely on funders more than this participant does. This participant believes the greatest challenge facing leaders is the danger of thinking they know everything; circumstances are constantly changing and leaders should not assume past practices will be effective in the present.

Survey Analysis

The members of the theatre organizations who completed the surveys had overall positive opinions of their leaders. Survey participants view their leaders in many of the same ways that the leaders perceive themselves. Both leaders and subordinates agree that these leaders are extremely hard workers, and lead by example. These subordinates are aware that their leaders have high expectations of them. One noted, “He never asks anything of people that he doesn’t ask of himself. He constantly pushes himself and others to be their ‘best’ versions.” Subordinates believe that their leaders care deeply about the organization and the people in it, a leadership trait highly praised in the literature (Jinkins, 1998; Neuschel, 2005). These leaders are viewed as putting the company first, above their personal lives and wishes. One staff member said:

He leads by being the first person to volunteer, by being pragmatic in situations that would cause others to throw up their hands, and by being selfless in giving up what he may want as a member of this organization to the needs of the many.
As the literature (Jossey-Bass, 1994; Neushchel, 2005) states, communication skills are very important for effective leadership. One survey participant praised the leader by saying, “He is quite proficient in speaking in the language of the listener.” This participant recognizes the leader’s ability to frame messages in different ways for different people, dependent on the listener’s comprehension. None of the leaders mentioned communication as one of their weaknesses, however some of their subordinates do. Survey participants commented that their leaders can be too harsh, moody, and overdramatic. What the leader may think of as honesty, a subordinate may view as brash. A hard working leader who focuses on efficiency may give an unintended impression to his followers. One participant explained, “He is direct, to-the-point, goal driven, and very busy. This can, at times, make his management style abrasive and cold.” These leaders do not consider themselves to have big egos, which is contradicted by their subordinates’ opinions. One leader who cited not having an ego and enjoying giving others credit as one of his strengths, was described by a subordinate as, “He has a big ego, like many people in positions similar to his, but this can result in him diminishing the efforts and contributions of others.” Subordinates holding a different opinion than the leaders’ self-description is not surprising. Leaders in all types of organizations should try to understand how their subordinates view them, so that any discrepancy in how the leader wants to be perceived, and how he or she actually is perceived can be addressed by the leader.

While subordinates commented on communication skills, stubbornness, and egos as areas of weakness in their leaders, they overall have feelings of admiration towards
their leaders. Subordinates feel that their leader cares about them, and feel inspired to work harder, knowing how hard their leader is working. One participant described his leader as, “…the leader I aspire to be someday.” Survey respondents feel their leaders excel at fulfilling the mission of the organization, dealing with crisis and problem solving, managing the financial health of the organization, aesthetic and artistic capabilities, and providing long term vision for the organization. In these categories leaders did not receive any negative ratings. Overall the leaders researched here are examples of good leaders, not just for nonprofit theatres but for any type of organization. These leaders follow many of the ideas about good leadership described in the literature, and are attempting to grow and become better leaders. This willingness to learn and try new things is a strong sign that these leaders will continue to be successful in this changing environment.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

Nonprofit theatres nationwide are experiencing growth; as these theatres become more institutionalized, leaders must deal with new regulations and increased demands. Many leaders are encountering unfamiliar territory, and must learn as they go. This research impacts the theatre community of Columbus, Ohio by providing insights into the strengths and weaknesses of its leaders, and the challenges that they encounter. Theatre leaders can find comfort in this research by learning that they are not alone in the challenges they face, and collaborating with their peers to address these common problems. Leaders who say they often learn as they go, can in fact learn from each other and from leaders in other industries.

Common challenges facing nonprofit leaders include:

- Scarce resources
- Leadership burnout
- Communicating with subordinates
- Delegating
- Interpersonal relationships interfering with daily operations
- Diminishing audiences
- Increased institutionalization
- Increased competition due to the growth of the sector
• Inability to attract talented workers due to low salary capabilities

While some nonprofit theatres can afford to pay competitive wages, others (like one researched here) cannot afford to pay their staff at all. More research should be conducted nationwide to discover reasons for diminishing audiences so that leaders can tackle this problem. Research is needed to find the barriers that are preventing participation in theatre (ticket price, convenience, quality of art, relevance of product) so that leaders can make their product more desirable to their community (Columbus, 2011).

Leadership burnout is a real threat to all types of organizations. Leaders who feel overwhelmed cannot meet their own standards of excellence or provide adequate service to their organization. A month after being interviewed one participant announced his resignation from his current leadership role; citing his exhaustion and the toll the position took on his personal life as the reasons behind his decision. This participant had mentioned leadership burnout as a challenge, and stated delegation as one of his weaknesses. Had this leader been able to create a stronger support system around himself, and delegated more tasks to others in the organization, he might not feel the pressure to resign due to being overwhelmed and personal reasons. Leadership burnout is costing this organization a strong, well liked, and long-term leader. Leaders in all types of organizations need to be aware of this challenge so that they can avoid it in their own organizations. Burnout can cause a leader to fail in his or her goals and professional role. Nonprofit boards should take action to ensure that their leader is not being over worked. A burnt-out leader may be the sign of an ineffective board that is not doing enough to
steer the organization and support the executive director. Leadership burnout is a sign that one person cannot do everything for an organization, and should not be expected to.

These common challenges can be avoided by good leadership. Leaders with superb communication skills can better delegate tasks to avoid leadership burnout. Charismatic leaders will attract talented workers by being the kind of leader employees want to follow. Employees are likely to be more willing to work for less pay if they have a leader who cares for them and helps them find personal fulfillment, this concept is supported in the literature (Hodgkinson, 1989). The challenges facing leaders and nonprofit organizations presented in this research apply to leaders in the for-profit sector as well. Issues like poor communication, subordinate dissatisfaction, big egos, and leadership burnout are challenges that face all leaders. Leaders need to be aware of these common weaknesses and problems so that they can take steps to avoid them in their own work.

Leaders in the nonprofit theatre sector of Columbus, Ohio represent many of the qualities of good leadership as described in the literature. This case study reveals that nonprofit theatre leaders are hardworking, dedicated, and care about their subordinates. From this research I have found best practices for leaders, which are supported by the literature (Cole, 2011; Conger, 1988; Jinkins, 1998) and can be applied to leaders not only in performing arts organizations, but in all leadership settings.

These leadership best practices include:

- Leading by example
- Making your subordinates feel that you care
• Creating a healthy work environment
• Taking risks, trying new things, and not being rigid in practices
• Willingness to admit mistakes and failures
• Clearly communicating expectations to subordinates
• Willingness to give others credit
• Interacting with, and responding to the community

These practices create environments that employees want to work in, which is especially important in a sector experiencing increased growth and competition, like the nonprofit theatre sector. This growth may be troubling for the theatre sector as the National Endowment for the Arts report (2008) found, or the increased competition can lead to a richer, higher quality sector as Langley (1974) believes. Nonprofit theatres are in an environment of crisis which can either turn to failure or become an opportunity for success; it is up to the leaders to determine which path their organization will fall on. If leaders follow the best practices outlined here they can successfully guide their organizations through this time of change. Strong leadership is the only way for this art form, with diminishing audiences, to survive.
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Appendix A: Interview Questions

How do you define good leadership?

Do you have previous leadership experience? If so how is this role different from past roles?

What is your leadership style?

How does your style impact your organization?

What are your strengths as a leader?

Do you have any weaknesses as a leader? If so how do you deal with them?

How do you measure or evaluate your success as a leader? How do you know you are being a good leader?

What are the most important aspects of your job?

What are the biggest challenges your face as a leader?

How does the board impact your work and decisions?

How do outside influences impact your work and decisions?

Are the challenges for leaders of art organizations different than the challenges leaders in non-art organizations face?

Is it important for the leader of an arts organization to have practical experience with the art form? What is your past experience with theatre?

If you were going to step down from your leadership role, what advice would you give the person filling your shoes?
Appendix B: Survey Questions

On a scale of 1-5 please rate your leader on the following:

1-poor 2-fair 3-neutral 4-good 5-excellent

Fulfilling the mission of the organization:

Dealing with crisis and problem solving:

Promoting wellbeing within the organization:

Managing the financial health of the organization:

Dealing with marketing and publicity:

Developing an audience:

Communicating with others inside the organization:

Aesthetic and artistic capabilities:

Providing long term vision for the organization:

Short Answer

How you would you describe your leader’s management style? How does your leader’s management, personal relationships, and work ethic impact the wellbeing of your organization?
Appendix C: Survey 1 Results

14 people completed this survey

1. Fulfilling the mission of the organization:

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Leader’s response: Good

2. Dealing with crisis and problem solving:

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Leader’s response: Excellent

3. Promoting wellbeing within the organization:

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Leader’s response: Excellent

4. Managing the financial health of the organization:

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Leader’s response: Excellent

6. Developing an audience:

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Leader’s response: Fair

7. Communicating with others inside the organization:

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Leader’s response: Neutral

8. Aesthetic and artistic capabilities:

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Leader’s response: Good

9. Providing long term vision for the organization:

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Leader’s response: Neutral

10. Short Answer: How would you describe your leader’s management style? How does your leader’s management, personal relationships, and work ethic impact the wellbeing of your organization?

The organization and leader’s name have been removed from answers to protect privacy. 6 participants responded to this question:

“______ is a lead by doing sort of manager. He works incredibly hard for the organization and has high expectations for how others will work for the organization. He doesn't tell people what to do but if they accept a certain position or take on certain responsibilities he does have expectations for how the job will be done. ______ is close friends with many inside the company and I think that helps him to get jobs accomplished.”

“His style is very commanding, which is good in certain senses: there is a distinct flavor to his direction and as a long-time member of the company, he knows very well what's productive and not for the benefit of the group & theater. Sometimes he can come off as a bit brash, but he is willing to listen to others’ ideas and input to see if it is possible to better a production (be it staging, costumes, publicity, anything really).”

“Work ethic is impeccable. No one in the company works harder than _______. It sets an example for all. As far as personal relationships, ______ makes a concerted effort to reach out to most members of the company. And has a strong relationship with many. It's cliché, but _______ wants the company to work hard and play hard, on and off stage. And I would say that’s his management style. If you work hard and play hard, good things are going to happen for the company on and off stage.”
“______ is analytical while he is artistic. He is a manager while he leads. He can analyze a show or situation to develop the best show or resolve a problem. His mixes his artistic vision and analyzing a show only to enhance his already keen abilities to develop a piece that speaks to an audience. ____ is a manager in that he is always organizing a spreadsheet or meeting or something that helps accomplish a larger goal. He knows where every dollar goes and where every dollar could come from. He knows how to his "staff" can be utilized to the best of the organization. ____ leads by being the visionary of choosing shows that constantly challenge and grow the organization and being the head promoter of their potential success. ____ leads by being the first person to volunteer, by being pragmatic in situations that would cause others to throw up their hands, and by being selfless in giving up what he may want as a member of this organization to the needs of the many. ____’s personal relationships with the organization range from very close to professional. He strives to treat everyone with respect, and communicate with them as the professional they are. His biggest asset that sometimes is taken the wrong way is his honesty. You always know where he stands and sometimes sensitivity gets in the way of understanding that this in a leader is a gift. If there is one thing Andy should improve on its his ability to open up to new situations and get out there to network. He is not a person to initiate new relationships on his own. This growth opportunity, if taken soon, will help to rise his leadership to recognition throughout the city.”

“____ is incredibly hard working and dedicated. He is the first one to volunteer and let's his dedication set the example for ensemble. As far as management style, you can trust him to be upfront and candid about any issues and concerns he or others may have. The one area he could work on is easing up on expecting the same intensity and candidness from everyone else. As a person of authority at the theatre, I don't think he always appreciates how seriously and personally people do take his comments. Overall, I do think ____’s commitment and drive is a major reason the theatre is alive and well in the Columbus theatre community.”

“He's very autocratic. It's his way or the highway. But he's a hard worker”
Appendix D: Survey 2 Results

7 people completed this survey

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### 6. Developing an audience:

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10. Short Answer: How would you describe your leader’s management style? How does your leader’s management, personal relationships, and work ethic impact the wellbeing of your organization?

The organization and leader’s name have been removed from answers to protect privacy.

Seven participants answered this question:

“Mr. is direct, to-the-point, goal driven, and very busy. This can, at times, make his management style abrasive and cold. He has a big ego, like many people in positions similar to his, but this can result in him diminishing the efforts and contributions of others. He has a penchant for being dramatic, and easily and quickly goes to extremes. This dramatic streak can manifest itself in pitting managers against one another, breaking someone down behind their back, or taking personal pot shots at employees that have nothing to do with the issue at hand. The upside of this behavior is that he gets the employees' undivided attention. He can be very compassionate, supportive, and understanding in one moment and extremely harsh in the next. His commitment to the long term survival of the company, however, remains constant and he shows unwavering tenacity to lead the company into the future. He has built (with the efforts of many long-term employees) a strong company and exemplifies the strongest work ethic of anyone I've ever known. He is a shining example of doing whatever it takes to get the job done, but he puts the job above all else, including family and needed "down" time. His expectation that management will follow suit in this results, at times, in a high stress environment. Overall, his approach creates a very efficient work environment that allows each individual to thrive based on their own hard work and direction from him.”

“He's a great leader and encourages others to do the same. He focuses on personal growth and is willing to assist any of his people on that journey. He's inspiring and motivational. He can be extremely hard and tough on his managers but it always seems to be in the company's best interest. His work ethic is incredible. Personal relationships or mood can sometimes color choices or how he treats an individual at any given time. Overall, an incredible boss, artist and administrator. Has and instills the kind of passion and vision that is needed to run a successful nonprofit arts organization.”

“He never asks anything of people that he doesn't ask of himself. He constantly pushes himself and others to their "best" versions. He is always re-evaluating our operations and thinking to see if "it still serves us well". Overall, it has been an absolute pleasure to work with him the past 25 years and to help create this wonderful entity.
“His greatest talent in the context of management is his pragmatic and logical approach to problem solving. He can easily cut to the heart of a problem and focus on the core issue at hand. A common difficulty, however, is that the people working with him on said problem often get hung up on emotions and trivial details. He then gets to make use of another skill he has developed over his many years: communication. He is quite proficient in speaking in the language of the listener. I've many times heard him say essentially the same thing to two or more people in radically different ways. As for his work ethic, whether or not this is true, it is at least a commonly held belief that, no matter how hard you're working, _____ is working harder. This gives all company members an ideal toward which to strive. The company itself benefits from these qualities in _____ by all employees being provided with a leader they know they can go to with personal and professional problems and trust that they will be listened to and that their issue will be addressed as quickly and efficiently as possible.”

“Honest, passionate, driven. The company comes first.”

“This company is the focus of _____'s life. He spends almost all of his time and energy and thoughts on it, whether that be problem solving or simply imagining the next step we could potentially take. His vision is only matched by his ability to visualize the path needed to achieve our goals.”

“______ isn't afraid to work harder, longer and more efficient than anyone else which gives him the moral authority to truly be a leader. In one day he can edit scripts, compose music, meet with bank leaders about sponsorship and bake pizzas for the audience. And he does all of this at a very high level.”
Appendix E: Survey 3 Results

4 people completed this survey

1. Fulfilling the mission of the organization:

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<th>Number of people</th>
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Leader’s response: Excellent

2. Dealing with crisis and problem solving:

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<tr>
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Leader’s response: Good

3. Promoting wellbeing within the organization:

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Leader’s response: Excellent

4. Managing the financial health of the organization:
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_Leader’s response: Excellent_

5. **Dealing with marketing and publicity:**

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_Leader’s response: Good_

6. **Developing an audience:**

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<tr>
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_Leader’s response: Good_

7. **Communicating with others inside the organization:**

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_Leader’s response: Good_

8. **Aesthetic and artistic capabilities:**

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**Leader’s response: Excellent**

**9. Providing long term vision for the organization:**

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**Leader’s response: Excellent**

**10. Short Answer: How would you describe your leader’s management style? How does your leader’s management, personal relationships, and work ethic impact the wellbeing of your organization?**

*The organization and leader’s name have been removed from answers to protect privacy.*

Two participants responded to this question:

“_____ treats everyone like a professional, from his colleagues to his littlest cast members. He has high expectations of everyone and demands excellence. Thanks to his drive for success, this company has thrived in providing opportunities and amazing experiences for children for many years.”

“______ is the ultimate example of someone who is willing to do anything for the organization and the people he works with. No job is beneath him, which makes the people around him want to work harder to try and keep up, while realizing they likely never will. He is the leader I aspire to be someday.”

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