Elevating Artists' Voices: Examining Organizational Dynamics Between Ballet Company Dancers and Leadership

Thesis

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Abstract

This research aims to elevate dancers' perspectives of the operational dynamics within a major U.S. ballet company to better understand their working relationship to the Dual Executive Leadership (DEL) team and their role as critical contributors to the development of an arts organization and broader arts policy. Examining the case of Miami City Ballet, this study gathers feedback from dancers on how they interact with the company's DEL team, comprised of the Artistic and Executive Directors, and how these interactions impact their work. The central questions ask how ballet dancers perceive dynamics of communication, trust, value, and respect in their working relationship with company leadership. Using narrative inquiry as methodology, dancers were asked to share their stories of interactions with the DEL team through a survey and interviews. Twelve (12) dancers completed the survey, and of those, five (5) agreed to participate in a follow-up semi-structured interview. Findings suggest opportunities for improving communication practices to foster more connection between dancers and leadership, for developing a work culture that invites feedback and is based on mutual trust, and for reconsidering how dancers are valued as key contributors to decision-making spaces. These findings add an important new perspective to research on leadership and organizational studies in ballet and the arts more broadly.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1. Introduction

Existing research in leadership and organizational studies in the arts focuses heavily on understanding the relationship between functional roles of "directors" – the Artistic Director, the Executive Director, and the board of directors. Within the arts, applications of leadership theory to studies of ballet companies expand upon our understanding of two of these directors, the Artistic and Executive Directors, as part of a Dual Executive Leadership (DEL) team, the dominant management structure in the field of ballet. However, in a ballet company context, leaders must be assessed through their relationship to their employees, especially the dancers around whom the entire company's mission and vision are built and realized (Duffy, 2022). These dancers are the lifeblood of ballet organizations, yet their work is often relegated to the margins in research on how leadership structures operate in these institutional spaces. Research in the areas of leadership and organizational studies fails to fully consider the role of the employed ballet dancer as an active agent in the leader-follower dynamic and overall ballet company development.

Ballet companies stem from a tradition of aristocracy dating back to the 16th century (Homans, 2010). It is an art form whose language and structures were developed by a few privileged white men (Homans, 2010). Today, the form's narrowly defined expectations are preserved through ballet companies that have been criticized for perpetuating an exclusionary culture that values only thin, able, white bodies (Carman, 2014). In the U.S., this culture is under growing scrutiny as dancers and industry leaders grapple with how to develop more inclusive practices for every member of a ballet organization (Gaines, 2019). As the industry seeks to evolve to better serve more diverse workforces and audiences, dancers voices should be amplified as key perspectives for shaping and executing this vision.

As a former professional ballet dancer and aspiring arts management leader, I have participated in arts organizations from multiple professional perspectives. During my career, I have wrestled with the power and related racial, gender, and economic inequities that pervade the educational and professional systems of the ballet industry. As a dancer, I felt that my peers and I had insight and knowledge to contribute to the conversation and decision-making happening at the organizational level. But, as leadership made a lot of decisions on our behalf, only rarely was our perspective sought, usually based on labor union agreement guidelines for engagement with these processes. I recognized that the working dancers were facing obstacles to being fully recognized as change agents in these organizational spaces. This spurred a desire to better understand what these obstacles are and, in doing so, take an initial step toward promoting the potential role for artists' voices within leadership and organizational decision-making. In response, I designed this study, which asserts that scholarly research needs to forefront ballet dancers as critical agents within the operations of ballet organizations to shed light on how their perspectives can reveal key insights into the successes and challenges of company leadership.

To begin this research, this study examines how dancers' perspectives can inform our understanding of ballet company leadership within the case context of the Miami City Ballet (MCB). As an elite U.S. ballet company with a unique DEL team of two women of color and a non-unionized company of dancers, Miami City Ballet offers organizational dynamics that have been only sparingly researched. Using my unique access to former peers in the field, this research applies narrative inquiry methodology and asks currently employed MCB dancers to share stories about how they perceive the company's DEL team, communication practices, as well as feelings of trust, value, and respect in their relationship with this leadership. The primary questions of this study have been developed from the hypothesis that professional ballet dancers'

perceptions of their relationship with company leadership play a significant role in shaping company culture and performance. These research questions ask:

1. How do ballet company artists perceive the dynamics of communication between themselves and the company's Dual Executive Leaders?
2. How do ballet company artists perceive the dynamics of trust between themselves and the company's Dual Executive Leaders?
3. How do these perceptions of leadership impact company artists' feelings of respect and value within the organization?

The objectives of this research are to identify opportunities for reshaping organizational dynamics in ways that better respond to and serve the working ballet dancer. The study's framework and findings have the potential to shift how ballet and arts leaders more broadly view the role of artists as employees who deserve agency in decision-making spaces, for the betterment of their work performance, organizational dynamics, and inclusive arts industries.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Dual Executive Leadership Structures

Many scholars have noted the growing adoption of practices from for-profit businesses in the non-profit arts industry, and Dual Executive Leadership (DEL) teams are one example (Caust, 2010; Cray et al., 2007; Reynolds et al., 2017). A DEL team is a "version of plural leadership…where two people in distinctive roles share the top job responsibilities of an organization" (Reid & Karambayya, 2016, p. 609). These leadership teams are the dominant structure used in U.S. ballet companies. Jo Caust is one researcher in this field who studies the implications of various management practices within performing arts organizations in Australia. Specifically, her work examines the way hierarchical organization structures and business paradigms operate within the arts industry (Caust, 2005 & 2010). Her research focuses on the structural makeup of the board of directors in performing arts organizations, but the insights she gathers can inform our understanding of DEL teams. In analyzing survey data of board membership from 19 major performing arts organizations in Australia, Caust found that the majority of members had a business background rather than an artistic one (2005). She also found that this majority has a significant influence on the "culture, structure, and practice" of arts organizations and may contribute to the employment of business practices at odds with the organization's artistic mission (Caust, 2010). This tension can pervade the organizational culture more fully through the Executive Director role, usually held by someone with a background in business, and the dynamics of power in their partnership with the Artistic Director.

Thus, this potential clash between artistic mission and organizational behavior is critical to understanding Dual Executive Leadership as a byproduct of the business paradigm influence in ballet companies. As a DEL team is employed to distinguish the business side of nonprofit

performing arts organizations from the artistic side, it establishes a clear delineation of priorities within two sides of a single organization. Its structure is intended to minimize the conflict between resources and mission through separate management (Reid & Karambayya, 2009). Additionally, researchers have suggested business practices and organizational structures continue to be adopted within arts organizations because they offer the perception of legitimacy to external critics (Cray et al., 2007). This goal of establishing legitimacy of an arts organization is strongly tied to its leadership. Specifically, to be perceived as externally legitimate by the tax-payer public, other funders, and policy makers, arts leaders increasingly need to present as fiscally responsible, socially conscious individuals who can ensure the organization's funding is supporting their sustained role in community and economic development (Menger, 1999). It is rare to find a leader who has the skills, desire, and personality to be both an artistic visionary and executive manager, but both are needed for an arts organization to be perceived as legitimate by both the arts and business industries. So, the adoption of dual leadership may allow organizations to maintain the position of an Artistic Director while expanding leadership to include someone with skillsets that appeal to the values and assessments used in corporate business practices (Hunter et al., 2015).

However, it is noted by management and organization theorists Wendy Reid and Rekha Karambayya that "from a traditional management perspective, the notion of sharing responsibilities at the top makes no sense" (2016, p. 609). Shared leadership can contribute to a disjointed vision, conflicting goals and communication, as well as relational tensions that trickle down through an entire organization (Reid & Karambayya, 2009 & 2016). Aspects of this relationship have been further studied by scholars Sarah Reynolds, Ann Tonks, and Kate MacNeill, who interviewed 46 Dual Executive Leaders at performing arts organizations in

Australia to analyze the dynamics between individuals in DEL teams (2017). The observations gathered through this study show how this leadership model is seen as a method for managing conflicting priorities in arts organizations through the division of distinct roles allocated between the two leaders (Reynolds et al., 2017). They also found that the nature of the leaders' relationship is informed by the needs of the art form. So, ballet companies, which feature regular on-site collaborative work were shown to have a much more equal relationship between artistic and executive leaders than disciplines with greater distance between creation and management (Reynolds et al., 2017). The most successful DEL relationships in this study were found to be built on the premise that the tension between artistic and business objectives are spaces for negotiation and growth (Reynolds et al., 2017). Nevertheless, this research fails to assess how such tension affects the broader organizational culture and work of the artists who contend with competing demands to varying degrees as well (Lingo & Tepper, 2013). Within a ballet company specifically, the question arises of who and what is centered in these spaces of negotiation and growth?

Still, it has been argued by researchers that DEL structures in performing arts organizations allow for innovation in ways that single-person leadership structures do not (Hunter et al., 2015). This argument claims that the shared responsibilities among DEL teams allow for constructive management of conflicting priorities (Hunter et al., 2015). Secondly, they find that a partner in leadership can support risk-taking innovation by sharing the responsibility of potential failure and acting as a sounding board for new ideas (Hunter et al., 2015). This potential for innovation within the DEL structure is informed by business priorities but happily aligns with the risk and discovery that is a natural part of the creative process.

Female Leadership in Ballet

Across these DEL team structures in major U.S. ballet companies, there are noted gender disparities, specifically in the role of Artistic Director (*Dance Data Project*, 2021). In the 50 largest U.S. ballet companies, women represented only 30% of Artistic Directors and 54% of Executive Director positions – a majority that first emerged in 2019 (*Dance Data Project*, 2021). This is despite the fact that female ballet dancers make up more than 70% of the field overall (Zippia, 2021). As an industry that grew from origins in 16th century European courts, ballet has a history of a single man dominating the decision-making (DeFrank & Nicholson, 2016). This tradition of patriarchal leadership is upheld by most U.S. ballet training schools and companies today. The result is an industry that undervalues female voices and systematically deters women from seeking and succeeding in leadership positions (Homans, 2010; Coates, 2014).

As in other industries, those women that do manage to ascend to leadership roles in ballet companies are subject to added scrutiny and judgment compared to their male counterparts (Meister et al., 2017). And like the arts industry overall (Menger, 1999), the ballet world is predicated on the idea that dancers are easily replaceable because of an oversupply of aspiring dancers. In the U.S., ballet companies employ dancers on short-term, annual contracts, and each year dancers face potential unemployment based almost entirely on their relationship with leadership – particularly the Artistic Director – and their decision whether to keep experienced, yet aging dancers or employ youthful talent at a lower cost. In addition, this tension from an oversupply of dancers is heavily gendered – many more girls and women pursue ballet careers than men, yet, in the case of Miami City Ballet and many other companies, there are nearly equal men and women employed – and female dancers are more likely to contend with a comparable replacement who is ready in the wings. Where the dominant currency is youth and compliance and the job market is incredibly competitive, women who develop more agency as they get older

find themselves at risk of being replaced by the next generation (DeFrank-Cole & Nicholson, 2016). A cited incident in the *Research Center for Arts and Culture*'s 2011 report on aging performing artists describes an aging female dancer's recognition and desire to speak to leadership about the fact that she was being underpaid for performances based on standard union rates (Jeffri, 2011). She was advised not to say anything because her employer would just hire someone else to take the job (Jeffri, 2011). This illustrates how female dancers develop more knowledge and agency as they age, yet systems and the inelasticity of the field often keep them from advocating for themselves.

This coincides with inherent contradictions in what it means to be a 'ballerina' (Coates, 2014). Women in this role must exhibit internal strength, resolve, and agency, yet portray an image of docility and obedience. Overcoming the common perception of ballerina as "object" to attain a leadership position is a challenge that few have been able to accomplish (Coates, 2014). Ballet dancers retire at a very young age, on average in the U.S. ballet dancers stop dancing at age 34 years old (Jeffri, 2011). This young age of retirement means that they must consider a second career, they cannot continue playing an instrument or acting into their old age as other performers might. So, circumstances inherent to the career, such as career timing and the required adaptive skills of "resilience," "tenacity," and "initiative," situate them to develop into leadership roles (Jeffri, 2011). Despite these opportune circumstances to transition to leadership roles though, overcoming the perception of ballerinas as governable rather than governing, is difficult to do for most women in the field. It is both required of the role of Artistic Director and a detriment to opportunities for aspiring female Artistic Directors.

All these challenges mean that women are more likely to opt out of pursuing leadership positions (Bear et al., 2016). The traditional gender roles which dominate ballet performance and

company culture may also contribute to an environment where women are less likely to naturally rise as leaders (Bear et al, 2016). On top of this, there is a noted difference in how contributions by women are perceived in ballet (Coates, 2014). Mainly, women in ballet who use "agentic strategies" associated with men, including assertiveness and self-confidence, may be perceived as incompetent primarily because these behaviors conflict with the expected gender norms of women, particularly ballerinas, as "nurturing" and "feminine" (DeFrank-Cole & Nicholson, 2016). Female ballet dancers must adhere to an image of softness and femininity that can cause them to be perceived as lacking the strength or "aggression" expected of a leader (DeFrank-Cole & Nicholson, 2014). Therefore, it is hardly surprising that these gender inequities are reflected in leadership demographics at ballet companies across the country.

Leadership Styles

Within leadership studies, theories of leadership styles are a significant part of analysis. Commonly identified styles include the charismatic, transactional, transformational, and participatory leader (Cray et al., 2007). Many researchers have examined how each of these leadership styles operate within arts organizations and DEL teams, identifying the strengths, weaknesses, and applicability of each in this industry context (Cray et al., 2007; Nisbett & Walmsley, 2016). Australian researcher Jo Caust sees a binary division of leadership styles within Dual Executive Leadership that consists of an Artistic Director with a transformational style and an Executive Director with a transactional style (2010). This view neatly aligns the two roles along divisions of process and outcomes, respectively, and assumes distinct yet complementary leadership styles must be present for the DEL relationship to work. Alternatively, scholars David Cray, Loretta Inglis, and Susan Freeman have gathered evidence

that suggests the effectiveness of leadership styles is dependent on the size, stability, and organization attributes rather than locked in by the demands of a DEL structure (2007).

Across contexts, scholarship asserts that female leaders are more likely to adhere to a transformational leadership style – one that promotes mutual trust between leadership and the rest of the organization (Duffy, 2022). In general, they are more likely to invest in personal relationships built on positive reinforcement and nurturing partnerships (Duffy, 2022). Researchers have also identified some key gendered leadership traits associated with women, including "enhanced creativity, stronger connections/inclusivity, and possibly improved financial results" (DeFrank-Cole & Nicholson, 2016, p. 81). They note that despite these strengths, women generally struggle to be perceived as "competent leaders" because their skillsets may not align with patriarchal notions of leadership (DeFrank-Cole & Nicholson, 2016, p. 86).

Despite these perceptions, scholars warn against "defining leadership (as many do) solely as a function of individual charisma or traits, as a bundle of behaviors or skills, or as a list of optional approaches and contingencies" (Fairholm & Fairholm, 2000, p. 108). Thus, I am wary to attribute too much credence to a single leadership style within the context of ballet, especially when so few women have had the opportunity to take on the DEL team roles traditionally held by men. The hierarchical and authoritative styles of leadership that are often associated with men are built into the institutional environment of ballet companies (DeFrank-Cole & Nicholson, 2016). Regardless of the leadership styles and behaviors of the women who are now getting opportunities to lead in these environments, a historical perspective tells us that they must contend with rigid traditions that may impede the application of more relational and transformative approaches. Thus, more than leadership style, I believe there are systemic,

structural barriers inherent to the ballet industry that pose a substantial hurdle to female ballerinas aspiring to leadership roles.

Ballet Dancers' Relationship with Company Leadership

While the formal structure of ballet company leadership usually resides in Dual Executive Leadership teams, a case can be made for viewing active leadership practice as the task of a team of artists within a performing arts organization. Canadian business researcher Laurent Lapierre has drawn on leadership theory and examples from the North American performing arts industry to argue this point: that leadership in arts organizations is mainly the responsibility of the artist(s) (2001). He views the Artistic Director as the lead manager, often working in collaboration with the shared management provided by the Executive Director and informed by the Board. Based on his experience and research, he sees both members of a DEL team as responsible for the management and facilitation of artistic leadership that should arise from the ranks of the working artist. This coincides with recent views in the field of leadership that consider the practice a "collective rather than a singular activity" (Ryömä & Sutama, 2019; Fairholm & Fairholm, 1999). Yet, despite this evolving outlook, there has been little research that focuses on how formal leadership roles relate to employees across organizational roles (Ospina & Foldy, 2010 as cited in Ryömä & Sutama, 2019). In the field of ballet, where dancers must continually negotiate their agency in the service of the artistic mission, their relationship to leadership – both the practice and those individuals working in leadership roles - is a dynamic ripe for study.

Additional research indicates that the work of dancers is rarely appreciated for its role in this labor system, despite observations that dancers exhibit decision-making processes and leadership practices that significantly impact the day-to-day work and the performance of the

company (Mattingly & Young, 2020). Dance scholars Kate Mattingly and Laura Kay Young of the University of Utah have found that the study of working company dancers, specifically members of the corps de ballet, "turns attention to the values of empathetic leadership and toward opportunities to dismantle authoritarian and patriarchal methods that have dominated pedagogy and histories" (2020, p. 133). This finding supports the need for further research into the working dynamics of dancers in a ballet company and their perception of leadership dynamics within the organization. Moreover, the perception of their relationship with leadership is shown to be significantly correlated to an employee's job performance, commitment, and satisfaction (Kangas, 2021). Yet, little research has been done to improve our understanding of the perception dancers have of the Dual Executive Leadership team within the specific context of a ballet company.

Trust and Communication in Leader-Follower Relationships

Ballet companies are mission-based organizations, and trust is a critical component to implementing organizational goals in-line with such a mission (Fairholm & Fairholm, 2000). Stated simply, "trust is as simple as believing someone," and it is said to be the most important aspect of the leader-follower relationship (Martin, 1998, p. 44). Leadership studies assert that it is the responsibility of organizational leaders to set the vision for an organization and build a culture of trust, for failure to do so is shown to result in an environment of "discord and disharmony" (Fairholm & Fairholm, 2000, p. 102; Martin, 1998).

Communication is the primary way in which this trust develops or falters (Fairholm & Fairholm, 2000). Those leaders who practice transparent and honest communication with their employees and peers create a culture of trust. In some scholarship, the Artistic Director's working relationship with dancers has been compared to that of a 'coach' (Moola & Krahn,

2018). Dynamics of the workplace mean that much of the Artistic Director's relationship-building with company members takes place in the studio during company class and rehearsal. As in the athlete-coach relationship, the ballet dancer-Artistic Director relationship relies heavily on trust because the dancers' career trajectory is based almost entirely on the subjective assessment of the Artistic Director (Moola & Krahn, 2018).

Value and Respect in Ballet Culture

In the study, "How to persevere in a ballet performance career: exploring personal wisdom of retired professional ballet dancers," researchers identified feeling valued and respected as key aspects of a successful career in the ballet industry (Kim et al., 2020). Yet, issues of devaluing dancers' voices and pain (both physical and emotional) arise as common practice within ballet culture. This study gathered narrative feedback from nine (9) retired professional dancers and their collective responses spoke to traditions of "disrespect, dismissal, and authoritarianism from the ballet management and others...during their performance career" (Kim et al., 2020, p. 11). These recollections of former ballet dancers provide a basis for further study into the systems driving these acts of disrespect and devaluation, including what such management practices look like from the perspectives of current dancers navigating similar challenges. This is where the current case study can contribute to our understanding of the working dynamics of value and respect within ballet.

In addition to this call for recognizing and uplifting dancers' perspectives, there is a growing call among arts advocates and researchers to recognize artists as "workers" that provide real and tangible value – economical, cultural, and otherwise – to our society (Lingo & Tepper, 2013). Scholars who study the sociology of work posit three dimensions of value: utility, identity, and commitment (Adler, 2021). These speak to how dancers assess value in their work:

on the basis of utilitarian rewards, expression of identity, and commitment reinforcement (Adler, 2021). Perceptions of leadership as either reinforcing or undercutting their individual value can directly impact a dancer's sense of self-worth and commitment to the art form (Adler, 2021). There is need for more research that considers the micro-level work dynamics of dancers, including how their perceptions of value impact their daily work, to better understand how labor demands influence the type and quality-level of art produced (Lingo & Tepper, 2013).

Chapter 3. Case Context

This study focuses on the perception of DEL dynamics within a single, elite U.S. ballet company, Miami City Ballet, from the viewpoint of the dancers. The unique leadership, background, and organizational identity of this company make it a case worthy of study.

Miami City Ballet

Miami City Ballet was founded in 1985 as a performing ballet company that specializes in the technique and choreography of George Balanchine (Miami City Ballet, n.d.). Its current mission is "to produce and present the highest level of dance performances throughout Florida, the United States and abroad, train young aspiring dancers, and develop Miami City Ballet School into a leader of dance education" (Miami City Ballet, n.d.). The company calls Miami, Florida home, and its history and vision for the future are deeply rooted in this community. Both current Artistic and Executive Directors grew up in Miami and returned to take on their roles with the ballet. Artistic Director, Lourdes Lopez, says of Miami, "People are open. People are nice. People want to have fun. I love that the city has been able to retain that and still be successful in business and the arts" (Bolden, 2013). In 2019, the city's population of 467,968 people was comprised of 63.8% Hispanic residents (DataUSA, n.d.). Thus, it is fitting that Miami City Ballet was the country's first ballet company to hire two Hispanic females as their leadership team. This leadership reflects the population of the community and contributes to the company as a unique case for study.

As a company, the artistic mission emphasizes Balanchine training and technique, and more than half of MCB's dancers have training experience at one of a few prominent Balanchine-based ballet schools, including its affiliated school as well as the School of American

Ballet and Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet (Miami City Ballet, n.d.). The Balanchine technique is renowned for its speed, precision, and athletic quality of movement, and though its creator, George Balanchine (1904-1983), was born in Russia, the style he developed in New York City during the 1930's is considered uniquely American (Allen, 2015). His style permeated the development of a national ballet identity and is said to have influenced "every ballet school and company in the U.S. today" (DeFrank-Cole & Nicholson, 2016, p. 75). Miami City Ballet is one of several major American ballet companies that continue to pride themselves on their tradition of carrying on this Balanchine style and legacy.

This historical context is essential to the identity and ongoing development of Miami City Ballet as an organization. The Balanchine origins of the company mean that the majority of the leadership, artistic staff, and dancers have been educated and trained at one of very few schools operating in traditional methods that have evolved very little in the past century. For most dancers, their training would have begun in early childhood and elevated to a nearly full-time workload of training over the course of approximately ten years (Staemer, 2018). By early adulthood (17-19 years old), they would have auditioned for a position within a ballet company. Most likely joined Miami City Ballet as corps de ballet members, the lowest level of the company's hierarchical artistic ranking system. Miami City Ballet's ranks and number of dancers within each (as of January 2022) are shown in Figure 1 (Miami City Ballet, n.d.). This figure illustrates the imbalanced dynamics of power and position within the company, with the majority of dancers employed in the corps de ballet. Most dancers will spend their entire careers as members of the corps de ballet, while a select few are promoted from within or seek more senior positions at other companies.

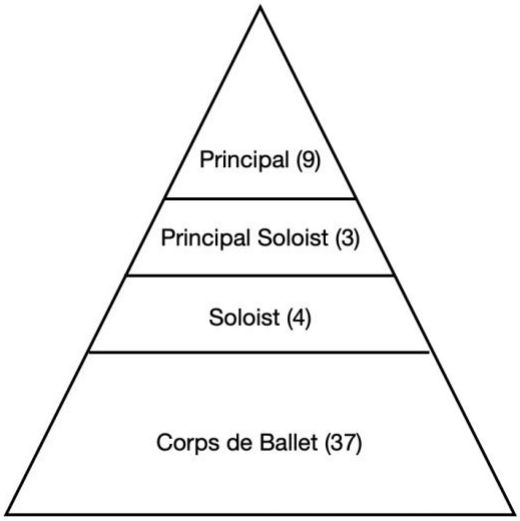


Figure 1. MCB's company ranks and total dancers within each, as of January 2022

Over the course of its more than 35-year history, Miami City Ballet dancers have been led by only two Artistic Directors, former New York City Ballet dancers Edward Villella (1985-2012) and Lourdes Lopez (2012-present). During her leadership, Lopez has worked with three Executive Directors, Daniel Hagerty (2012-2014), Michael Scolamiero (2014-2018), and Tania Castroverde Moskalenko (2018-present) (Miami City Ballet, n.d.). Within the field of ballet, the dominance of this Dual Executive Leadership structure of an Artistic Director and Executive Director partnership is another industry tradition that can be attributed to the success of Balanchine and his partnering Executive Director, Lincoln Kirstein (Larsen, 2013). Of the dynamics between Artistic and Executive Directors, Lopez has said,

> As an AD, you can't think, 'It's all about me,' because you are programming for your audiences, your dancers, your community. An ED can't think, 'It's about me making this company strong,' because it has two avenues: everyone comes together to create a

> mission. The AD creates a vision around that mission, and the ED helps put that vision in place. (Larsen, 2013).

This is congruent with the managerial vision for a successful DEL partnership, wherein both leaders work in collaboration across all organizational realms, so that artistic and business decisions are harmonious (Reid & Karambayya, 2016, p. 609). It is the typical structure of ballet companies because it allows for the hiring of two people who can balance the potential shortcomings of the other. Often, the structure enables the hiring of an Artistic Director who may have limited experience or knowledge in the business management side of organizational leadership. But the ideal use of this structure is a well-balanced relationship between two leaders who can collaborate across artistic and business decision-making processes.

In this study, the partnership of interest is that between Artistic Director, Lopez, and Executive Director, Moskalenko. While one female leader is rare, two is almost unheard of at a ballet company (note: there are some companies wherein a single female leader serves in the role of both Artistic Director and Executive Director). Lopez and Moskalenko's partnership breaks a gender barrier that has largely remained impenetrable by female leaders. As Hispanic women, their leadership also marks the first time two women of color have held these Dual Executive Leadership roles at a top-tier U.S. ballet company.

Female Leadership at Miami City Ballet

Though a number of U.S. ballet companies were founded with female artistic directors, now the majority are led by men (Allen, 2015). Former American Ballet Theatre (ABT) CEO, Rachel Moore, attributes the dearth of female leadership to the training environment of ballet dancers where "girls outnumber boys by almost 20 to 1" (Allen, 2015). Experts in the field recognize that this disparity supports more individualistic development among young men and

more homogenized obedience among young women (Allen, 2015). Therefore, as young dancers develop, these expectations are internalized and the need for men in the field allows them more freedom to be themselves without repercussion while the oversaturation of women in the field teaches them that they are easily replaceable if they veer too far from expectations. When compared to male dancers, who are far less represented in pre-professional training, there are many more pre-professional female ballet dancers of comparable skill level seeking professional jobs. This inequity of demand begins at the early stages of training, when young boys are enticed to attend ballet class with scholarship support while there is no shortage of interested young girls looking to attend class, so they are usually required to pay full price for the same training. As these dancers progress, the competition for professional jobs is steep among both genders, but for women, in particular, there is always another qualified female dancer vying to step into their role.

Both Lopez and Moskalenko are classically trained ballerinas who experienced this type of environment early in their development (Miami City Ballet, n.d.). Their successful ascent to directors of a major ballet company is unprecedented. As a result, their leadership has faced scrutiny from the industry and in the media. A premium is placed on these external perceptions in the field, while close examinations of the internal culture of working with these leaders remains shrouded in mystery and gossip. Witnessing this imbalance, it became clear that research was needed to understand the nuanced working relationship between MCB leadership and the dancers who represent the company on stage.

The Miami City Ballet Dancer

The ballet dancer is the lifeblood of a ballet company, and yet, they are largely absent from research into organizational culture and leadership studies in the field of dance (Duffy,

2022; Papaefstathiou et al., 2013 as cited in Moola & Krahn, 2018). In a 2019 report by the National Endowment for the Arts, dancers and choreographers made up the lowest percentage of the artist labor force in the U.S. and had the second highest unemployment rate (2019). Analysis of the field shows that jobs for ballet dancers are extremely scarce, and the number of trained ballet dancers is far larger than the number of paid work opportunities available (CareerExplorer, 2022). A career in ballet is an extreme case of the high risk associated with pursuing gainful employment in any art form (Menger, 1999). Ballet dancers manage the uncertainties of short-term, annual contracts, low pay, a high potential for injury, and short careers. Yet, ballet dancers often begin training at a young age and pursue careers in their teenage years, meaning that they make large investments in this career and coinciding identity as a ballet dancer early in life. Once they face the uncertainty and risks of a ballet career, they have already committed their life to this pursuit, and as sociologist Pierre-Michel Menger notes, "Inescapable commitment results in a highly inelastic labor supply function" (1999, p. 554). Thus, ballet dancers have little leverage to raise or address labor issues in the workplace.

This is why many ballet dancers are represented by a labor union, the American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA), while employed by a ballet company. However, Miami City Ballet dancers remain non-unionized, instead following AGMA's guidelines without the formal union agreements in place (Blair, 2006). One of the study's interviewees shared that the dancers have collectively felt that company administration respects the contracts they have negotiated over the course of the company's 35-year history and that remaining non-unionized allows them flexibility to adjust typical union language and rules to appropriately fit their unique company needs. Without a history of company administration abusing contracts or negotiations, the MCB dancers have elected to remain non-union to save on financial dues that they would be required

to pay to the union for representation. Regardless of union status, it is "common knowledge that performers will 'perform anyway,' [which] puts them in a precarious negotiating position (Jeffri, 2011, p. 18). These dancers recognize that they work in a system that is "highly inelastic" and rely on leadership to respect the parameters of their negotiated contracts, their main tool for addressing collective workplace concerns, whether unionized or not.

Researcher Positionality as Resource

I was trained in the Balanchine technique and had a seven (7) year career, performing with Balanchine-style companies New York City Ballet and Pennsylvania Ballet. Prior to my career, I received most of my training at the School of American Ballet that Balanchine created and was educated by teachers who worked with him in New York City Ballet. Pennsylvania Ballet, where I danced for most of my career, was founded by one of Balanchine's protégés, Barbara Weisberger, and was organized to operate with the same hierarchical and DEL structures as New York City Ballet. Throughout my career, dancing for multiple Artistic and Executive Directors, I came to recognize a distance between these directors and the dancers that was difficult to traverse. Approaches to leadership varied – some directors were very present in the studios and theatres while others were largely absent from the dancers' spaces – but regardless of approach, my peers and I perceived a barrier to constructive exchanges with leadership. When I transitioned to work as an arts administrator following my career, I once again noticed that dancers were left out of decision-making spaces and were often the last informed of important decisions. A desire to understand the cause of this division and identify opportunities for greater cross-functional work within ballet organizations precipitated this research, and these experiences inform every aspect of this study.

In recognition of my past experiences, throughout the research process I have practiced reflexive inquiry to better understand my positionality as a former professional ballet dancer, current student-scholar, and aspiring arts leader. My identities position me in the margins of the groups being researched in this study. I have both insider knowledge as a member of the ballet community and outsider perspectives as an individual that has been removed or adjacent to this world for more than five years. I relate to what some researchers have identified as a continuum of insider-outsider positionality, and this work is influenced by a perspective that moves along this continuum (Holmes, 2020). I have made conscious efforts to leverage the strengths of my insider knowledge while mitigating potential weaknesses such as bias and myopic views.

Research Questions

The three central research questions driving this research are:

1. How do ballet company artists perceive the dynamics of communication between themselves and the company's Dual Executive Leaders?
2. How do ballet company artists perceive the dynamics of trust between themselves and the company's Dual Executive Leaders?
3. How do these perceptions of leadership impact company artists' feelings of respect and value within the organization?

By posing these questions, I hope to contribute to an understanding of the dynamics of communication, trust, value, and respect between ballet dancers and leadership, from the perspective of professional ballet dancers. As existing literature shows, research that considers leadership in ballet companies currently focuses on a top-down view of these dynamics, excluding the ballet dancers as critical social actors in the leader-follower relationship (Reid &

Karambayya, 2009 & 2015). The design of this study aimed at contributing insights to this gap in research is further detailed in the following *Methodology* section.

Chapter 4. Methodology

Narrative inquiry is a methodology that has gained popularity in response to emerging theoretical perspectives that recognize people as individuals within a specific "social context" (Clandinen, 2006 Ospina & Dodge, 2005). The field of organizational and management theory has applied this methodology to improve our understanding of leadership and "inform practical action" (Ospina & Dodge, 2005, p. 148). It is a methodology applied here for its usefulness as a way to examine social experiences and individual perspectives within a specific community. As the current study aims to elevate the voices of professional dancers in a conversation about ballet leadership, the narrative inquiry approach emerged as a natural method of research. Using surveys and interviews to gather stories from dancers, this research attempts "to understand intention and action" within the dancer-director(s) dynamic of a ballet company (Ospina & Dodge, 2005, p. 146). In the interviews, I posed questions that require the participant to recall moments of interaction between themselves and company leadership, describe workplace memories, and reflect on what work events mean to them. Moreover, this line of inquiry asked the participant to consider the intention behind the actions of leadership and to detail real-life examples of these actions.

To gather in-depth narratives, the scope of this research was narrowed to a case study of one elite U.S. ballet company. While all ten (10) of the largest U.S. ballet companies employ a Dual Executive Leadership model, I chose to focus this research on Miami City Ballet – the 9th largest company in the country (calculated based on 2019 annual expenses) (*Dance Data Project*, 2021). The reason for this choice was multifold. First, the choice to do an instrumental case study centered on the desire to study the relationship between dancers and leadership working for a major U.S. ballet company at this current moment in time and my access to these

individuals. By choosing one of the largest companies in the country this research considers leadership that is responsible for complex financial demands as well as demanding artistic pressures on a national scale. Second, by choosing Miami City Ballet, this inquiry considers gender and race as a critical component of leadership studies, as MCB is the only major company with leadership positions held by two women of color (*Dance Data Project*, 2021). In the ballet industry, where women and people of color currently hold few leadership positions, this qualitative, case study was an opportunity to better understand the field-specific dynamics of leadership by individuals with these intersectional identities (Creswell, 1998).

Lastly, as a former professional dancer, the company members at MCB represented the greatest proportion of dancers in my network among the major companies. I had contact information for several current dancers, including the company's Dancer Representative who agreed to help me facilitate the research. Additionally, I knew most of the dancers would recognize my name and relationship to the ballet world. I felt that our shared foundation of knowledge would help me engage with the dancers. I hoped they might recognize that I was an individual who understood the delicacy of this research within the ballet world, specifically, and be more willing to share their experiences with me.

There are recognized challenges to conducting a case study, including common perceptions that it is only a method for exploration, and it usually results in "unconfirmable conclusions" (Yin, 1981, p. 97). Nevertheless, it is a common form of inquiry in many research fields, including organizational decision-making, an aspect of the current study (Yin, 1981). When designed and executed with the clear intention of studying a bounded "contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context," it can result in useful data to inform proposed improvements in "knowledge utilization" (Yin 1981, p. 98-100). As a method, it allows for

examination of the interrelated nature of context and outcomes. Applied to this research, the case study design supports the analysis of the employee-leader relationship within the specific realm of a ballet company, a unique organizational environment.

Data Collection Method

Mixed methods were used to collect data over the course of two months at the end of 2021 and start of 2022. These research methods consisted of two parts:

1. An online survey distributed to all fifty-one (51) company dancers [See Appendix A]
2. Follow up semi-structured interviews with company dancers who self-identified as willing to elaborate on the responses they provided in the survey [See Appendix B]

Outreach to company dancers was facilitated by a company member in the role of company-elected Dancer Representative. The Dancer Representative shared the online survey to a private community Facebook page only accessible by current company dancers. The survey was clearly labeled optional and anonymous. Twelve (12) company dancers, a response rate of 23.5%, completed the survey over the course of two months.

The survey consisted of three (3) sections. The first gathered basic information about the respondent, including their position within the company (rank), the year they joined the company, gender-identity, and whether they had been employed by any other ballet companies in the past. The other two sections listed statements and asked participants to select the response that best described their feelings on a Likert scale that offered five choices: “Strongly Disagree,” “Disagree,” Neutral,” “Agree,” and “Strongly Agree.” These statements focused on company structure and leadership as well as current workplace culture. A single open-ended research question at the end asked if the survey respondent wanted “to share any other insights or information pertaining to [the] survey.” Finally, participants could opt-in to participate in a

follow up interview. The *Quantitative Findings* section details an aggregate breakdown of the survey participants' characteristics and their survey responses.

Six (6) survey respondents said they would be willing to be interviewed. Of these, four (4) completed interviews and another interviewee was identified through a recommendation from a colleague at the end of their interview. Five (5) interviews were conducted in total. Of these interviewees, three (3) were men and two (2) were women. All the interviewed dancers had been employed by at least one other ballet company before joining the ranks of Miami City Ballet, and they represented three (3) company ranks: Corps de Ballet – two (2), Soloist – one (1), and Principal – two (2). Principal Soloists were not represented in either the survey or interview responses. While this omits perspectives direct from the three (3) Principal Soloist dancers, the rank is similar in demands and culture to that of the Principal and Soloist ranks. Therefore, we can infer that the Principal Soloists' perspectives might be largely congruent to the participant responses gathered from dancers of these higher ranks.

Responding to Participant Needs

This study (Study #2021E1063) was approved as exempt from federal regulations requiring IRB review by The Ohio State University's Office of Responsible Research Practices and is in full compliance with the Human Research Protection Program's ethical standards. The study design was developed to use practical technology resources to easily facilitate connection from a distance while using appropriate measures to protect the confidentiality of participant responses.

To this end, all interviews were conducted via the online videoconferencing platform Zoom. In the past, there was significant concern that this method of conducting interviews was restrictive because of physical distance, an inability to assess an interviewees environment, and a

limited frame for observing an interviewees bodily response during an interview (Irani, 2019). These challenges are still present, but their effects may be lessened by the increased use and familiarity with the online video tools on the part of both interviewees and interviewer. For interviewees in this study, all had become familiar with Zoom over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, beginning with a transition to regular company classes and meetings via the platform in March 2020. Over the course of more than a year and a half, participating dancers had used this interface to adapt to the demands of their job as well as to connect with leadership and peers. Like many during this period of social distancing, videoconferencing platforms became a common way to work and socialize. Circumstances increased our collective comfort with this digital tool – a comfort that allows for a more comprehensive videoconferencing interview process. Access to and proficiency with these systems of communication support a less stressful interview environment that may enable participants to be more self-assured in their responses.

While balancing the potential that recording interviews might alter interviewees' response behaviors with the ability to gather transcription data, I chose to record all interviews. The online video format allowed for ease of recording and transcribing with limited disruption to the interview process. I relied heavily on the idea that the interviewing relationship is a "research partnership between the interviewer and the respondent" (Weiss, 1994, p. 65). This approach works well within the methodology of narrative inquiry and supports the research goal of elevating the participants' perspectives (Weiss, 1994, p. 66).

Questions of confidentiality were a recurring theme as I sought to engage both survey and interview respondents. While I took standard measures to notify all prospective participants of the confidentiality protocol that would be adhered to throughout the study, concerns that their feedback might somehow reach leadership and result in negative repercussions remained present.

The distributed survey was prefaced with a consent form detailing the purpose of the research, the rights of participants, and the confidentiality procedures that would be upheld. Additional assurances that anonymity would be maintained in any written report on the research were included in all recruitment materials as well. Despite this, I sensed hesitancy from some participating individuals based on confidentiality concerns. In these cases, I found my position as a former professional dancer became an advantage. I was able to communicate a personal awareness of the delicate nature of this research that eased some of the dancers' concerns.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Once the five (5) interviews were completed, I cleaned the recorded transcripts for legibility in preparation for analysis. Following a manual, inductive approach to coding analysis, I found that six (6) classifications emerged from participants' narratives over the course of the interviews (Leavy, 2017; Weiss, 1994). These classifications are drawn from words used directly by participants, and they include Feedback, Motherly/Maternal Approach, Covid-19, Fear, Trust/Truth, and Voice. Within these classifications, responses were further clustered based on negative or positive language, meaning, and tone. The results of this analysis are detailed in the *Qualitative Findings* section.

Chapter 5. Quantitative Findings

In alignment with the research questions, a 26-question survey was developed and distributed by an MCB Dancer Representative to all current Miami City Ballet company dancers via a Facebook post to their private group page. The survey consisted of three sections. The first gathered demographic information on survey participants. The second and third sections used a Likert scale as detailed in the *Methodology* section and asked participants to respond to statements about Miami City Ballet's company structure and DEL team, then to statements about their feelings in the workplace, respectively. A final open-ended question that invited participants to provide any other feedback relevant to the surveyed subject matter gathered narrative responses that will be analyzed as part of the *Qualitative Findings* section.

Twelve (12) dancers completed the survey and aggregate characteristics of these individuals are detailed in Table 1. Male and female dancers are equally represented in the sample, and this closely resembles the proportion of men and women in the company overall – approximately 45% and 55% respectively. Company ranks of participants are less representative of the overall population. As no Principal Soloists and only one Soloist completed the survey, these ranks are underrepresented while Principal dancers are overrepresented. However, the Corps de Ballet response rate is closely representative of the rank's 69% majority in the company. Within this sample, about one-third of participants have insights from previous employment at another ballet company that may be an influencing factor in their survey responses. Additionally, the overall company tenure represented by the sample is relatively long, averaging approximately 8.5 years. This may be under-representative of newer, less senior dancers in the company, though this population data is not readily available. Overall, limitations of the sample include the low response rate from only 23.5% of company dancers and the

unrepresentative distribution of this sample across company rank and overall tenure with the company. Still, the data collected offers preliminary insights into dancers' perspectives and serves as a useful baseline measure to test these perspectives in the study's follow-up interviews.

Table 1. Characteristics of Survey Participants (n=12)

	$\hat{p}$	$\bar{x}$
Gender		
Male	50.00%	
Female	50.00%	
Company Rank		
Principal	25.00%	
Principal Soloist	0%	
Soloist	8.33%	
Corps de Ballet	67.67%	
Previously Employed at Another Company		
Yes	33.33%	
No	66.67%	
Tenure with MCB		
Years		8.50

Survey responses from this sampling reveal several key areas of interest that require further inquiry and an aggregate analysis of them can be seen in Table 2. First, there is collective confusion regarding the nature of equal partnership and collaboration between the company's two Dual Executive Leaders. The first two survey statements assert opinions about this relationship that convey similar perceptions of authority and cooperation among the two leaders.

Results of these measures show that dancers seem uncertain if this relationship is a true partnership with equal collaboration or if one of the directors has more influence than the other. Second, based on the data, communication from leadership is not effectively serving the majority of respondents. More than half of those surveyed indicated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with claims that communication is open between leadership and dancers and that leadership generally communicates well with them. Third, the overwhelming majority of respondents strongly agreed that it is important to them that the company is well managed and organized. This indicates that dancers recognize their vested interest in the dynamics of decision-making happening throughout the organization, particularly in spheres of leadership. Finally, most dancers agree that they enjoy their job and feel it is secure. So, despite the identified gaps in knowledge and communication failures, the sampled dancers positively view their current and prospective work with the company. These insights serve as the basis for follow up questioning conducted during the five (5) open-ended interviews, and the nuanced perspectives gathered during these conversations are detailed in the *Qualitative Findings* section.

Table 2. Aggregate Analysis of Survey Responses (n=12)

SURVEY STATEMENT	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
The Artistic Director and the Executive Director are equal partners.	0.00%	**25.00%**	16.67%	**50.00%**	8.33%
The Artistic Director and the Executive Director collaborate closely in most organizational decision making.	0.00%	**75.00%**	16.67%	**0.00%**	8.33%
Company leadership keeps company artists informed of company matters.	8.33%	**41.67%**	16.67%	**33.33%**	0.00%
Company leadership communicates well with company artists.	0.00%	**33.33%**	16.67%	**41.67%**	8.33%
Company leadership makes decisions that advance diversity and inclusion in the organization.	16.67%	**66.67%**	8.33%	**8.33%**	0.00%
Company leadership appropriately considers the needs of company artists in decision making.	0.00%	**33.33%**	**25.00%**	**33.33%**	8.33%
I trust company leadership to make decisions in the best interest of company artists.	0.00%	**66.67%**	16.67%	**8.33%**	8.33%
I interact with the Artistic Director regularly.	0.00%	**25.00%**	16.67%	**41.67%**	16.67%
I interact with the Executive Director regularly.	0.00%	**0.00%**	16.67%	**41.67%**	41.67%
My interactions with the Artistic Director are generally positive.	16.67%	**50.00%**	8.33%	**25.00%**	0.00%
My interactions with the Executive Director are generally positive.	41.67%	**41.67%**	16.67%	**0.00%**	0.00%
I have confidence in company leadership.	0.00%	**75.00%**	8.33%	**16.67%**	0.00%
Communication channels are very open among leadership and dancers.	8.33%	**8.33%**	16.67%	**41.67%**	25.00%
It is important to me that the company is well managed and organized.	83.33%	**16.67%**	0.00%	**0.00%**	0.00%
Most leadership decisions intended to make the company a better workplace have been successful.	8.33%	**41.67%**	41.67%	**8.33%**	0.00%
I feel that my work is appreciated by company leadership.	0.00%	**50.00%**	16.67%	**33.33%**	0.00%
I feel that I am respected by company leadership.	0.00%	**83.33%**	8.33%	**0.00%**	8.33%
Company leadership values my opinion as a company artist.	0.00%	**33.33%**	41.67%	**25.00%**	0.00%
I enjoy my job.	41.67%	**41.67%**	0.00%	**8.00%**	8.33%
I feel that I am usually able to do my work to the best of my ability.	33.33%	**41.67%**	0.00%	**25.00%**	0.00%
I feel that my job is secure.	58.33%	**16.67%**	8.33%	**8.33%**	8.33%

Chapter 6. Qualitative Findings

I want to preface this discussion of findings by acknowledging that some of this research may come under scrutiny for its criticism of leadership and organizational practices within this case study. In one interview, a dancer stated:

> *I feel like every leader, because I've had three artistic directors now in my life and, every single one of them...everyone's going to pick out the bad qualities of a leader. (Interviewee #4)*

However, it is not my intention to try "to pick out the bad qualities" of the leadership in this study. Nor do I agree with one survey respondent who claimed:

> *I don't think a ballet company can be scrutinized with the same lens as you would a regular job. (Survey Respondent B)*

I recognize the loyal and protective tone in these statements and feel attuned to them as a researcher who is deeply familiar with and invested in the future of the ballet industry. I believe we can gain significant insights by applying knowledge about communication, trust, and identity within the workplace to the structure and operations of a ballet company. It is the goal of this research to use gathered data to identify opportunities for improving the relationship between dancers and leadership, based on intersections of existing scholarship and direct feedback from the dancers.

Analysis of the study's data reveals six (6) themes related to how dancers perceive leadership and workplace communication practices:

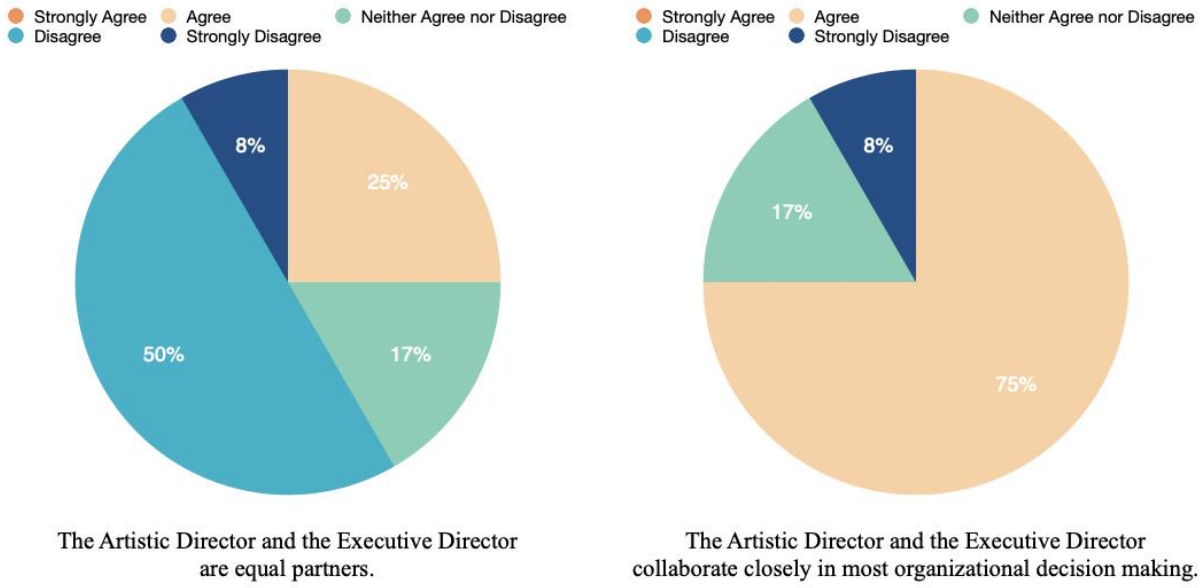
1. Organizational disconnect
2. Feedback mechanisms
3. Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic
4. Motherly/maternal leadership
5. Voice and silence
6. Dynamics of trust

Within these themes, variance of perception is related to two key participant characteristics – gender and company rank. This *Qualitative Findings* section describes the data sources of these emergent themes and the themes' relation to dancers' perceptions of leadership in more detail.

1. Organizational Disconnect

Two of the research questions posed in this study ask, "How do ballet dancers perceive the dynamics of communication (and trust) between themselves and the company's Dual Executive Leaders?" These perceptions are predicated on the dancers' knowledge of how the Artistic Director and Executive Director collaborate and make decisions. Yet, a majority of survey responses indicate that dancers do not feel the Artistic Director and Executive Director are equal partners, while a majority of dancers also believe that the Directors collaborate closely in most organizational decision making.

Figure 2. Breakdown of Surveyed Perceptions of DEL Partnership and Collaboration



The contradiction in these answers foreshadows the narrative responses gathered during interviews, which revealed that most participants had not really given much thought to these leadership interactions. When asked, "What do you know about the decision-making process of company leadership," interview responses included:

> *[Nothing] at all to be honest. I mean, I know the dancers – we're always kind of the last people to find out big decisions ...Usually we're not really involved in like, you know, or because we're like the talent but we're not the, you know, we don't have any say in the direction the company goes, or what rep[ertoire] we do. (Interviewee #1)*

I think they have meetings... (Interviewee #2)

To be honest, I don't ever think about everything that's going on upstairs [where the administration offices are located]. (Interviewee #4)

These responses reflect a division between the dancers and company leadership. Interviewee #1 goes one step further than admitting they know nothing about the decision-making process to reflect on their perception of the dancers as "talent...[who] don't have any say in the direction the company goes." This underscores the sense that dancers feel it is not their business to know this information because even if they did, there is nothing they could do with this knowledge. It is clear they feel they have no voice in these spaces of organizational decision-making, and so, they remain ignorant about major company operations.

Yet, the embodied responses of multiple interviewees reveal that several of them were embarrassed to admit their ignorance of this decision-making process. There were several participants who exhibited a long pause, a deep exhalation, or even a chuckle. These responses display a sense of discomfort at their lack of knowledge about how the DEL team works together to manage the company. While the majority of survey respondents were appreciative of both the Artistic Director and Executive Director, expressing a positive relationship with them each individually, they admitted to having little regular interaction and minimal understanding of the work they do. Out of twelve responses, none of them said that they interact with the Executive Director regularly, and only three reported that they interact regularly with the Artistic Director. Data

demographics show that the three who reported this regular interaction were the three Principal dancers who completed the survey. This supports the variance in communication between dancers and leadership based on rank – only those dancers of higher rank seem to have considerable opportunities to interact and build a personal relationship with at least one member of the leadership team. With a company staff of only a little over 100 artistic and administrative professionals (including dancers) who all work in close physical proximity within the organization's building, such a clear disconnect is alarming (Miami City Ballet, n.d.).

Thus, this unfamiliarity with company leadership's decision-making process is a blind spot for many of the dancers, but it is unclear to what extent it is self-imposed versus institutionalized. Survey results indicate that most dancers 'strongly agree' that it is important to them that the company is well managed and organized. So, it is clear dancers recognize their vested interest in leadership and their decision-making. But it is likely that some dancers feel it is simply their job to focus on the creative work in the studio and on stage – they have internalized this idea that they are 'the talent' – and they have adapted to remaining mostly unaware of the broader organizational dynamics. But for those who may desire a deeper understanding of and larger role in decision-making and leadership, institutional limitations such as those to be discussed further in this *Findings* section – particularly ineffective feedback mechanisms and the dynamics of trust in the organization – may inhibit them from achieving these goals.

2. Feedback Mechanisms

An underlying cause of the disconnect between MCB dancers and the DEL team appears to be failing communication structures, particularly feedback mechanisms. Opportunities to give and receive feedback are steeped in risk within this ballet company environment. Interviewed dancers spoke of an open-door policy for dancers to go and speak with leadership. To make use of the policy, dancers can email leadership to schedule a meeting at any time. While the policy appears to be applicable to both the Artistic Director and the Executive Director, the dancers interviewed were focused only on the potential to arrange meetings with the Artistic Director, likely because of her moniker as the de facto artistic decision-maker with power to affect the roles they dance and the career trajectory they have. But they expressed skepticism toward the open-door policy overall and noted key issues with the policy in practice.

First, it was mentioned that the likelihood of actively using the open-door policy to arrange a meeting was highly dependent on a dancer's rank or tenure at the company as well as their gender. Each of the dancers interviewed have been with the company for several years and expressed comfort with their status. They all said they would feel comfortable seeking a meeting with leadership if they felt they needed one. But several also noted that they do not think this would be the case for every dancer in the company. A male dancer of high rank said:

> *I personally never felt...that I needed to, but if I had I don't think I would have been afraid to, given my position. But I do know that some of the younger dancers, more particularly women in the company, probably would not have*

taken that channel if they were going through something and needed to seek advice or have a conversation. (Interviewee #2)

Two important things arise in his response. One is that he chooses not to take advantage of the policy because he feels comfortable and secure in his position. This indicates that higher ranked, more senior dancers are setting an example that it is not common to take advantage of this opportunity to give and receive feedback from leadership. This example likely influences the second point, which is that "younger dancers, more particularly women," are unlikely to use the open-door policy even if they do have pressing questions or needs that they would like to share with leadership. Despite the fact that female leadership has a gender-specific understanding of the unique concerns facing female dancers, since they once pursued the same work too, this does not seem to incite more engagement in the open-door policy. Precedent in combination with the instability of their position in the company inhibit their active engagement in this optional feedback mechanism.

Second, study participants who had used the open-door policy in the past expressed frustration about a lack of action in response to the conversations they had with the current Artistic Director. They questioned the "honesty" of the feedback they received, felt exasperated by this feeling that they had to go "fishing" for truth, and ultimately stopped engaging in meeting sessions because they felt their opinions and concerns fell on "deaf ears" (Interviewee #1 and #5). This history of ineffective meetings diminished their value among dancers and again set a precedent of nonparticipation in the policy.

Finally, this policy is the only established opportunity for individual dancers to give feedback. While they receive feedback in other informal ways, through leadership communications and in the studio when the Artistic Director teaches company class or rehearsals, they do not have other chances to provide direct feedback. Collectively, the dancers can provide group feedback through the two to three elected Dancer Representatives, chosen each season to act as liaisons between the dancers and leadership. However, this feedback focuses on group dynamics and needs. It does not allow for personalized communication of concerns or individual relationship building between a dancer and leadership. The open-door policy is the only established feedback opportunity and yet, few, if any, dancers choose to use it because of the challenges and frustrations noted by study participants.

In reaction to the frustration surrounding the open-door policy, the Dancer Representatives are in the process of proposing a mandatory formal evaluation policy in which dancers can gather from and provide feedback to the Artistic Director. They hope to institute a standard of at least one meeting per season between each dancer and the Artistic Director. It is a standard they hope will resolve some of the key issues of the open-door policy, including the rank and gender disparity of access, as well as the idea that dancers have to go "fishing" for honest feedback. However, challenges surrounding perception of the quality of feedback and the lack of faith in responsive action as follow-up will require more thoughtful approaches from leadership. Communication approaches that evolved during the Covid-19 pandemic, including more frequent leadership communication overall, regular company-wide meetings, and an increased display of

empathy and appreciation, may serve as a guidepost for how leadership can move forward in rethinking these formal feedback structures.

3. Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic

One unexpected finding from this research was the positive effect the disruption of the Covid-19 pandemic seems to have had on the relationships between dancers and leadership at MCB. As this research was conducted amid the pandemic and the Omicron variant surge, its influence on life and work are undoubtedly present in the findings. Though no questions were geared toward inquiry surrounding the effects of the pandemic, it naturally arose as a major factor influencing participants' perceptions of how they communicate with leadership.

As in many workplaces, the pandemic changed the way MCB's employees have worked and communicated for nearly two years. Dancers noted that they heard from leadership more regularly out of necessity, receiving more frequent email communications and participating in company-wide meetings, not a regular practice prior to the pandemic, via Zoom. The uncertainty of the circumstances meant that no one really knew when the shutdown of in-person rehearsals and performances would be lifted. So, company leadership had to closely monitor world events and communicate anticipated next steps to employees to prepare them for adjustments to operations.

In addition to a change in the communication frequency from leadership, the manner and perceived intention of these communications altered as well. The emotional impact of this disruptive shock seems to have reverberated through the organization and

resulted in an increased display of appreciation on behalf of leadership. As stated by one dancer,

> *It's (Covid) just a common thing that we're all thinking of, so I think that there is also like an appreciation coming from the artistic staff of like we're doing this, despite you know, some people maybe being afraid of getting sick. So, I think there's again a bit more thanking people...being appreciative of all of us coming together to put on, for example, we just put on 30 nutcracker shows, despite Omicron and everything. So, I think that has probably increased the amount of communication since pre-COVID. (Interviewee #1)*

It seems the pandemic both necessitated a shift in how and when leadership communicated with the company dancers and precipitated leadership's increased recognition of the dancers for their hard work during a challenging and unpredictable time. The emotional strain of the tumult is reflected in this attempt to connect through expressions of gratitude. One dancer spoke explicitly of how the Artistic Director appeared to change her leadership style to adopt a more relational and empathetic approach, saying:

> *I definitely do think that the pandemic did have an effect on how she treats us...like she's been a much nicer person I feel like to the company as a whole since the pandemic. (Interviewee #5)*

This response indicates that there was a clear behavioral shift in communication style exhibited by the Artistic Director. In addition, this statement emphasizes the impact of the Artistic Director's behavior on workplace culture more generally. It underscores a

collective sensitivity among dancers to the conduct and opinion of company leadership. This outcome invites us to consider how leadership might maintain these expressions of empathy as a method for recognizing dancers' efforts and building stronger dancer-director relationships.

4. Motherly / Maternal Leadership

While Covid-19 spurred this heightened display of appreciation among both leaders, it is clear from this study that these emotional responses are common in this DEL team. In particular, their mannerisms and style were described by dancers to be motherly or maternal. Both internally and externally, the Artistic Director and Executive Director appear to be leaning into their unique positions as part of a fully female leadership team. One dancer stated:

> *I think Miami City Ballet is sort of priding itself on being a female run organization. (Interviewee #1)*

Based on a review of public interviews with both the Artistic Director and Executive Director, this is undoubtedly true. They often express pride in their partnership and their barrier-breaking roles as Cuban-American women who comprise the only all-female DEL team at a major U.S. ballet company (Moskalenko, 2019). It is notable that they are Cuban-American women because these aspects of their identity are not widely represented in ballet leadership. But, within the interviews conducted, gender was the central influencing variable on perception that emerged from the dancers' narratives. While race and other factors of identity likely influence the perspectives of these

women's leadership in similar ways, I consciously chose to omit questions that would reinforce racialized perceptions during the interview process. Future research that gathers feedback directly from the DEL team might be more suitable to asking about the nuances of how race and other identities of individuals in these roles are perceived by working artists.

What did arise from interviews was a recognition of the role that gender plays in the approach to leadership these women take. Participants described both the Artistic and Executive Director as openly exhibiting leadership qualities such femininity, mothering, and nurturing that are seen as traditionally female (DeFrank-Cole & Nicholson, 2016; Duffy, 2022). Their motherly sensibilities came to the forefront of multiple interviews during the course of this research. In speaking about the Artistic Director, one dancer said:

> *She is a mother, so she does bring that to it, which I think actually helps quite a bit and she's motherly and I don't know if that's like the female side of being in that position, but like she does have a sense of comfort and then also like a sense of this is a business, you know. (Interviewee #3)*

It became clear that this maternal perception of both leaders pervades the company culture. But, whether or not this approach is in service of successful working relationships or a challenge to it was heavily contemplated by the dancers. The interviewee above believes there is a benefit to the motherly approach; they go on to say that they feel it helps female dancers in-particular because the Artistic Director can directly relate to their work and the specific challenges of being a woman in this industry.

However, a male colleague described her motherly way of relating to the dancers as somewhat "condescending," and questioned whether this approach was the path used because it is easier than building a relationship between equals.

This illustrates the common trappings women face in leadership positions. The use of women's 'feminine' strengths is continually in tension with the expectation that they display certain 'masculine' traits expected of leaders (Schneider & Bos, 2016, as cited in Johnson & Williams, 2020). An exception to this has been cited in recent scholarship though, which finds an increased appreciation for the traditionally feminine qualities of "caring, empathy, and compassion" exhibited by leaders amid the Covid-19 pandemic (Johnson & Williams, 2020). This may explain the positive perception of the previously noted communication changes that have occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic. Still, without more strategic consideration for formal feedback mechanisms and communication that fosters more individual relationship building between dancers and leadership, perceptions of infantilization may continue among dancers.

5. Voice & Silence

Within my conversations with dancers about these feedback mechanisms, communication practices, and leadership approaches, another major aspect of these relational interactions kept arising: the interpretation of meaning in silence. They spoke of how silence from leadership can be common and result in dancers feeling undervalued and insecure, and they shared that they often feel silenced. The gaps in clear and effective

dialogue already identified perpetuate the practice of silence from leadership and the silencing of dancers.

Ballet students learn early on that the teacher gives the most attention and corrections to the dancer(s) whose potential they are most invested in. So, starting at a young age, silence from teachers is interpreted as indifference or dislike and dancers are sensitive to these silences because they indicate stagnation in their career trajectory. If they are not getting attention in class, they are not being seen or valued, and therefore, it is unlikely that they will get cast well – be well-matched to performing roles – or they may even fail to secure a contract renewal. One dancer stated that this was the most critical way that their relationship with company leadership impacts their daily work, recalling:

> *Sometimes she'll give me one correction, sometimes she'll give me no corrections, sometimes she'll give me two. So, it's like, you know, you always like want to get attention from your boss...sometimes she just fully ignores you and pays attention to two other people in the class...you know the whole time. So, you kind of feel invisible when you don't get attention, which sounds like very, like I want attention...But it's just that's all we get is maybe a correction in class from her you know... [so it really is] hard to know where you stand otherwise. (Interviewee #5)*

As expressed in this quote, there is a hunger for constructive feedback among ballet dancers that makes communication hugely important in this work environment. There is immense value placed on it by dancers, and leadership knows this, because in this case, both were once dancers themselves. Yet now they wield the source of power, their voice,

and abstaining from critical dialogue with the dancers only perpetuates their almost mythical control over the careers of these dancers.

What results in turn is the silencing of dancers. No invitation for discourse exists and so the dancers remain unheard. As Albert O. Hirschman describes in his treatise on *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, environments where the workers have little options to leave, like the ballet industry, and where they do not have the opportunity of power to use their voice to effect change, are considered totalitarian in nature (1970). One dancer described the ballet company as a "dictatorship" and shared that they did not think this would ever really change:

> *That's just the dance world like there's no staff evaluations there's no, you know, I mean ballet really is a dictatorship in some ways... Because ours [the ballet industry] is more subjective and more personal...there's just no review of your director, I think, in general, it's just not a thing... I don't think it will be because you know as dancers, we're all replaceable. (Interviewee #1)*

These words cut straight to the heart of the matter – if dancers speak up, they risk being replaced. The power structure is imbalanced to the point that dancers have little leverage as individuals. This is why most dancers in a U.S. ballet company are represented by the American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA) labor union. But this is not the case for the dancers of Miami City Ballet. While they have adopted similar unionizing practices, including electing the Dancer Representatives and participating in collective bargaining to negotiate contracts, they do not have a formal degree of protection that a union might

provide. Once again, this adds increased risk to the act of voicing opinions and feedback for leadership. Even one of the most senior dancers in the company stated:

> *I feel like I wish that I could be more just on an even level, just like I could react more, say more... but I was told to be polite and respect the people in the front of the room, so I don't talk back. I don't ever sometimes say what I want to say. I'm just very polite. I nod my head and I go home and... We're all good. But maybe I wish that I could be a little bit more outspoken..." (Interviewee #4)*

This dancer expressed a desire to speak up more often but recognized that their personal history and respect for the field's traditions deters them from doing so. They recognize that speaking up to challenge traditions of how the studio is run or who has power in the room may incite conflict that is detrimental to their career trajectory. It raises the question: how might leadership create a culture where dancers feel as respected for their voice as they are revered for their artistic talents?

6. Dynamics of Trust

Interviews reveal the inextricable relationship between trust and fear in the work environment studied. Conversations that spoke of fear as the antithesis of trust emerged in multiple interviews. One dancer said:

> *I do think that there should be a certain amount of trust and foundation built over time. I don't think you can just walk into a place and expect to be treated like someone that's been there for 20 years...But ... there is a sense of fear from one's*

leadership that has sort of become a pattern amongst our particular profession. (Interviewee #2)

This alludes to a culture that breeds two extremes: earned trust or default fear. Most ballet dancers join the ranks of a ballet company when they are still teenagers, and their transition from the role of student to the role of company member may be one of the contributing factors to this default fear of leadership. Particularly because ballet dancers are taught to be perpetual students. There is always something more to learn and perfect, and the dynamics of a ballet class or rehearsal place the dancers in an embodied spatial relationship that has them follow the directives of the person at the front of the room – teacher, director, choreographer. They are situated in front of people meant to provide them with criticism. And while it is optimistic to say that this criticism is always constructive, sometimes it can be delivered in manner, tone, or meaning that negatively colors the way a dancer receives the messaging. Add to this, the subjective nature of the art form and the power structure in which those at the front of the room have complete control over the career progress of each dancer, it is understandable that fear becomes the prevalent feeling among dancers.

This pervasive fear is known to contribute to emotional distress and psychological harm among dancers from resulting anxiety, depression, self-harm, or other distressing emotions (Kelman, 2000). None of these are optimal states for dancers to perform at their best. Another research participant described how this culture of fear leads dancers to make decisions that are detrimental to their health:

> *There is so much fear in the workplace, especially in terms of communication. Still to this day dancers do not feel comfortable communicating their needs in fear of negative response or consequences. Dancers are still making choices to dance in pain or even injured in fear of losing future opportunities, or in fear of being seen as weak. (Survey Respondent A)*

Dancers adopt a survival mode when operating in this fearful space and apply their performance skills to convince leadership that everything is alright, that they can trust them. Over time the hope is that this display will become the basis of real, bidirectional trust wherein the dancers establish security in their position and the leadership trusts that they will fulfill the expectations of these positions.

But, contrary to this reality, there appears to be an expectation from the DEL team that company dancers inherently trust them. With the knowledge that, as one interviewee said, "nowadays, everybody is replaceable," the company dancers have little reason to trust company leadership. And yet, they must balance this with the reality that displays of trust in leaderships' decision-making is highly valued as currency toward earning real trust.

The question then becomes: how can leadership rethink communication practices to reduce the dissonance between expected blind trust and the workplace circumstances that fuel feelings of fear and questioning? The findings derived from this study may offer insights into where weaknesses in the dancer-leader relationship exist and opportunities for restructuring the workplace to improve their mutual understanding and respect.

Chapter 7. Discussion

Within this study, the cited survey results and narrative interviews provide rich data for a close examination of the relationship between dancers and leadership at Miami City Ballet. The critical findings of this research provide direct insights into the company dancers' perceptions of communication practices, as well as dynamics of trust, value, and respect in this relationship with the DEL team. Applying this study's findings to the three research questions posed, in this section I discuss what these findings mean for how we understand the labor of ballet dancers and their role as critical employees in the unique organizational space of a ballet company.

Research Question #1: How do ballet company artists perceive the dynamics of communication between themselves and the company's Dual Executive Leaders?

Both quantitative and qualitative data findings reveal a disconnect between dancers and the DEL team that results from ineffective communication or, often, notable silence on the part of leadership. Dancers perceive an active omission from decision-making spaces and practices. This, coupled with a perception that silence is actively employed by the DEL team to avoid entering an equitable exchange between dancers and leadership, leads to dancers' passivity in communicating their desires, needs, and challenges. There is a perception of one-way, top-down communication as the dominant mode of relationship building between dancers and leadership. Organizational attempts to shift this communication into a multi-directional system, such as the adoption of an open-

door policy, have only accentuated the perception that leadership withholds information and honest feedback from the dancers.

Though dancers crave feedback as perpetual students, the study's data suggests that lack of effective communication from leadership keeps them uninformed of critical decision-making processes within the organization. Dancers feel the effects of these strained communication dynamics in the company culture, yet they perceive their role in affecting them as constrained by the institutional systems which relegate them to serve only as "the talent." They are not invited into spaces of decision making, and thus, they remain unaware of how the leadership team interacts, collaborates, or makes decisions on their behalf. In addition to their relegation from these spaces of influence, dancers receive communication about these decision-making processes in ways that make it challenging for them to determine transparency and trustworthiness of the messaging. Individualized communication and feedback are not openly given or received by leadership and when feedback is coerced, dancers struggle to trust the information provided. These communication issues should concern company leadership and dancers alike, as it creates tension that can have detrimental effects on company performance. Additionally, in this space, where "talent may be conceived as embodying not only artistic abilities and technical skills, but also behavioral and relational ones," dancers rely on networks and relationships to build professional reputations (Menger, 1999, p. 558). But their ability to build relationships with leadership is challenged by limited and ineffective communication practices that this study has shown to negatively impact dancers' sense of security and success within the ballet company.

Interestingly, this lack of communication may also guard dancers from broader conflicts within the organization. That is, dancers do not seem to perceive a clash between the artistic mission and the business management of the company – even though this is a commonly recognized source of tension within the DEL relationship (Caust, 2005 & 2010; Reid & Karambayya, 2009 & 2015). This is likely the result of sparse and/or select communication of organizational decision-making by the DEL team. Dancers and leadership are the public faces of the company, and in this case study, the dancers comprise nearly half of the organization, so it is critically important that each of these employees be engaged in information exchange necessary to prevent misunderstandings, misperceptions, and other communication problems. Currently, dancers argue that this information exchange is not occurring in a way that supports their daily work.

The identification of this communication gap is a crucial first step in determining what managerial practices might be needed to resolve arising issues. There is a need for ballet leadership to more fully understand the labor dynamics of their dancers so that they can appropriately involve them in developing communication practices that serve the needs of the entire organization. While the Hispanic women leading Miami City Ballet represent progress toward challenging patriarchal traditions of ballet institutions, based on this study their actions too often uphold mechanisms of oppression. Specifically, Dual Executive Leadership teams, as the dominant managerial structure of ballet companies, have a responsibility to self-reflect on the ways in which their dynamic can better

communicate with the working artists they lead in order to begin to dismantle perceived institutional abuses.

Research Question #2: How do ballet company artists perceive the dynamics of trust between themselves and the company's Dual Executive Leaders?

The narratives shared by interviewees raise critical concerns about the dynamics of trust between dancers and leadership. Specifically, they indicate a dominant culture of fear that is at odds with leadership's expectation of inherent trust among dancers. Based on existing research on female leadership, which shows that compared to men they more often lead by fostering secure and trusting personal relationships, this study's findings challenge this generalization (Duffy, 2022). From the dancers' perspectives, the female DEL team within the context of this case has failed to build a culture of trust, and therefore, the dancers operate based on fear. The implications of this culture of fear can be seen in the limited sampling response in this study, as well as in the ballet field's perpetuation of a patriarchal bias, more generally.

First, the dominant distrust of leadership among the dancers likely influenced the responses collected for this study. The survey yielded fewer responses than anticipated – with a response rate of only 23% among company dancers – and based on findings regarding the dynamics of trust, it follows that a fear of voicing opinions regarding leadership was potentially a contributing factor to this low response. The subject of anonymity arose many times during my recruitment efforts, and there was a palpable hesitancy among dancers to speak their mind, despite reassurances that no personal

identifiers would be used in the data storage, analysis, or publication. Because of this hesitancy among dancers to voice their opinions, researchers and organizations must work harder to invite dancers' perspectives and insights into feedback gathering and decision-making spaces. Arts organizations aiming to create a culture of well-being, innovation, and open dialogue need to examine the ways in which distrust may be felt by artists within their work environments as well. At Miami City Ballet, the leadership team would do well to recognize their essential role in creating a culture of trust where dancers can feel secure to use their voice as vital members of the organization (Martin, 1998).

The second implication of the dynamics of distrust exhibited in this case study is that, culturally, the fear and insecurity it fosters aligns with the institutionalized patriarchy that dominates the field of ballet more widely. This study examines the practices of a DEL team made up of two women of color, an unusual composition for leadership in the ballet industry. Yet, the findings suggest, that these women adhere to many of the inequitable institutional systems of traditional ballet companies that uphold dictatorial power structures. While MCB's Artistic and Executive Directors have adopted a maternal approach to leadership that challenges the transactional and autocratic approaches historically dominating these spaces, it is an approach that appears to be inadequate in combatting the deeply engrained power inequities built into the ballet company hierarchy. In fact, it may perpetuate it further by simply repositioning the power imbalance through a lens of being empathetic and nurturing, traits which data suggests can be perceived as emotional manipulation or condescension. If the DEL team seeks to truly create a more equitable, inclusive work environment, they need to understand how

their leadership styles are perceived in order to adjust in ways that support individualized relationship-building with dancers with the goal of more positively affecting their daily work and overall job performance (Kangas, 2021). This study offers insight into how the DEL team needs to rethink efforts to break this cycle of fear and distrust. Doing so is an opportunity to restructure the dynamics of ballet companies to be more equitable and inclusive, but this transformation cannot be thoughtfully executed without the intentional consideration for dancers' perspectives.

Research Question #3: How do these perceptions of leadership impact company artists' feelings of respect and value within the organization?

Finally, this research demonstrates a collective sensitivity among ballet dancers to how company leadership does or does not demonstrate respect and recognize the value of their work. The dominant perceptions that communication is suppressed and distrust is the norm, contribute to tension between dancers and leadership.

The distance and fear between dancers and leadership within Miami City Ballet, contributes to dancers feeling and acting like students in a student-teacher relationship rather than fully evolving into a professional relationship of mutual respect as part of the dancer-director relationship. This perpetuates a heteropatriarchal system of power imbalance between dancers and leadership. When amateur ballet dancers transition to professional work their daily labor looks much the same as when they were students. The dynamics of the studio and stage do not change, and other than the addition of a paycheck and other utilitarian benefits, the dancer remains the pupil to the teacher, choreographer,

or director leading the room. As a result, the dancer continues to perceive the relationship as unequal – they remain subordinate to the "expertise" at the front of the room. One interviewee spoke of how a female Principal dancer dropped out of a program following constant criticism from a choreographer who failed to recognize that the dancer perceived this onslaught of criticism as beratement. This sort of disrespect for the dancer's individual needs and devaluing of the dancer's expert contributions irrevocably damaged her confidence and negatively impacted the entire company of dancers who had to witness these belittling behaviors and adapt when she could no longer continue in the role. Without clear avenues to safely voice her concerns, the dancer defaulted to a student-like response of submission and, in this extreme case, self-removal from the situation. Thus, we see from this and the study's overall findings that the preservation of the student role is in large part due to the structural systems of communication and the leadership-led culture of distrust and fear as fore-fronted in this study. Demonstrations of value and respect for dancers as experts in their role as artists *and* as arts workers appears to be largely absent.

Chapter 8. Conclusion

Miami City Ballet dancers' perspectives, as discussed in this study, provide a clear, albeit singular, case for how artists' voices can inform leadership's approach to re-envisioning more responsive and inclusive ballet companies. We see from this research that there are systemic contributors to the sustained gender inequities in ballet leadership – patriarchal structures of autocracy and hierarchical inequities – that shape the perceptions of two females of color who have managed to ascend to positions of a major company's DEL team. We should also take note of the ways in which this study brings attention to the perpetuation of institutional systems that fail to serve the working ballet dancer. If ballet industry leadership intends to create a culture that fosters dancers' agency as a critical part of inclusive practices, then they need to change how dancers relate to leadership within a professional ballet company. This study's findings reveal opportunities to create a safer work culture where dancers feel they will be heard and that their voices can effect positive change, where dancers feel they understand the organizational dynamics that impact their work, and where dancers and leadership trust one another and operate from spaces of mutual value and respect. Moreover, based on the responses of interviewees, all of whom had experience dancing for other ballet companies and DEL teams, they indicated that the operational dynamics of MCB are not atypical compared to other companies. With the exception of the gendered perceptions of MCB's female leaders as "motherly/maternal," this study's findings are closely linked to structural attributes of company operations and leadership typical of the ballet industry. To better understand how these findings may differ across institutions and DEL teams,

researchers and leaders in the field should aim to build on these findings in future studies that examine similar questions and perspectives at other ballet companies in both the U.S. and abroad. It would be particularly useful to compare these findings with those from dancers at a company with male DEL teams and other identity variations of working leaders in the field to see what can be learned from these different leadership team compositions. Throughout this future research, involving dancers in the assessment of the work cultures and operational policies of these organizations will bring artists' perspectives to the forefront, in recognition of the inextricable nature of artistic, leadership, and organizational priorities in these spaces.

At a macro level, the potential for major policy contributions from this research primarily emerges from the qualitative research employed – narrative inquiry. This methodology allows for the emphasis of "the perspective of those being studied; in effect, giving the subjects of research a 'voice,'" and this emphasis is commonly accepted as a feature of qualitative research that can make it a reliable contributor to "evidence-based" policy development (Veltri et al., 2014, p. 2). Research examining arts policy and arts organizations often centers language and perspectives of arts administrators and/or representatives of more externally legitimate fields, including economics, business, urban planning, and public affairs. Rarely does this research actively foreground the working artists – their needs, challenges, insights, et cetera – within these institutional systems. This study consciously elevates artists' perspectives within the operational dynamics of a major performing arts organization with the goal of spurring further investigation into how these actors contribute to the development of arts organizations and policy.

When speaking of the organizational dynamics within the ballet company, Artistic Director Lopez once said in a public interview:

> There's so much focus on the AD/ED relationship, but one has to look at the role of the board and their support, because that's really crucial to the organization. It's not just the AD, the ED, the dancers. It's all of us, and we're only as strong as our weakest link. (Larsen, 2013)

This statement shows a recognition for the dancers as a crucial part of the organizational system, yet the findings of this study show that treatment of them as such is inconsistent. Disruptions from the Covid-19 pandemic have led to some improvements in communication and demonstrations of value from leadership, but whether these will continue and grow as pandemic-related interruptions diminish has yet to be seen. It would be useful for future studies to examine to what degree these shifts in leadership practice are sustained or abandoned and how these impact the work of dancers.

If arts organizations are "only as strong as [their] weakest link," as MCB's Artistic Director asserts, then it is essential that artists be given more opportunities to learn and contribute to the collaboration and decision-making happening on an organizational scale (Larsen, 2013). Assuming this is not simply a performative claim, and MCB's Artistic Director truly seeks to strengthen all links within the arts organization, she has the power to shift the institutional dynamics to address weaknesses identified in this study. All arts leaders should consider their institutions as ecosystems whose structural integrity is equally reliant on every stakeholder. This study underscores ways in which artists are thoughtful, engaged, leading stakeholders in their workspaces.

They are an untapped resource for contributing to progressive decision-making within these organizations, and inhibiting their work with ineffective communication mechanisms, fear-inducing policies, or devaluing practices is detrimental to the future of arts institutions. There is a need for leadership to be more transparent about the decision-making process and the collaborative work of the artistic and administrative teams within arts organizations so that informed innovation and creative growth can occur.

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Appendix A. Case Study Survey

This survey is conducted as part of a graduate thesis research project in fulfillment of the Master of Arts in Arts Policy and Administration at The Ohio State University. All survey responses are anonymous. Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research project. If you have any questions, please contact Amy Holihan at holihan.5@osu.edu.

I. The following questions ask about your position at Miami City Ballet.

1. **What is your current position at MCB?**

    a. Apprentice
    b. Corps de Ballet
    c. Soloist
    d. Principal Soloist
    e. Principal

2. **What year did you join MCB?**

3. **What is your gender-identity?**

    Male female non-binary prefer not to say

4. **Have you been employed as a dancer at any other ballet company(ies)?** Yes/No

    a. If yes, please list the company(ies), your position with the company(ies), and the duration of your employment.

II. The following statements are about Miami City Ballet's company structure and leadership. In these statements, leadership refers to the company's Artistic Director and Executive Director. Please select the response that best describes your feelings.

1. **The Artistic Director and the Executive Director are equal partners.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

2. **The Artistic Director and the Executive Director collaborate closely in most organizational decision making.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

3. **Company leadership keeps company artists informed of company matters.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

4. **Company leadership communicates well with company artists.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

5. **Company leadership makes decisions that advance diversity and inclusion in the organization.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

6. **Company leadership appropriately considers the needs of company artists in decision making.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

7. **I trust company leadership to make decisions in the best interest of company artists.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

8. **I interact with the Artistic Director regularly.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

9. **I interact with the Executive Director regularly.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

10. **My interactions with the Artistic Director are generally positive.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

11. **My interactions with the Executive Director are generally positive.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

12. **I have confidence in company leadership.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

III. The following statements ask about your feelings in your current workplace
Please select the response that best describes your feelings. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. **Communication channels are very open among leadership and dancers.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

2. **It is important to me that the company is well managed and organized.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

3. **Most leadership decisions intended to make the company a better workplace have been successful**.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

4. **I feel that my work is appreciated by company leadership.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

5. **I feel that I am respected by company leadership.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

6. **Company leadership values my opinion as a company artist.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

7. **I enjoy my job.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

8. **I feel that I am usually able to do my work to the best of my ability.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

9. **I feel that my job is secure.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

10. **If you would like to share any other insights or information pertaining to this survey, please do so in the space provided.**

Appendix B. Semi-Structured Interview Guidelines

The study will address these research questions:

- How do ballet company artists perceive the dynamics of communication between themselves and the company's Dual Executive Leaders?
- How do ballet company artists perceive the dynamics of trust between themselves and the company's Dual Executive Leaders?
- How do these perceptions of leadership impact company artists' feelings of respect and value within the organization?

Specific interview questions will be drawn from the Case Study Survey and reviewed literature. Questions may include:

- Can you describe a recent interaction with the Artistic Director?
- Can you describe a recent interaction with the Executive Director?
- How does company leadership communicate with you as a company artist?
    - What communication channels do they use?
    - How would you describe the general tone of these communications?
    - How do you determine whether these communications are transparent? Trustworthy?
- How do you determine if the company is being well-managed?
    - What do you know about the decision-making process of company leadership?
    - How do you think company artists' needs are factored into this decision-making process?
- Can you describe a leadership decision that you feel was intended to make the company a better workplace?
    - Do you feel it has been successful in improving workplace culture?
    - In what aspects has workplace culture improved?
- In what ways does company leadership show you that they appreciate your work?
- In what ways does company leadership show you that they respect your work?
- What opportunities do you have to share your opinion with company leadership as a company artist?
- When and how do you gather feedback from company leadership?
- How do you think your relationship with company leadership impacts your daily work?
- What would you change about how you interact with company leadership?