

Nonprofit Professional Theatre Executive Leadership:
Seeing 2020 and Beyond

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ABSTRACT

This study approaches examining nonprofit professional executive leadership through a qualitative study, based in the content analysis of secondary data from the leadership biographies of 30 different nonprofit theatres across the nation. Organizations of various sizes and budgets were included to provide a comprehensive examination of executive leadership, with attention paid to education and experience in the nonprofit and theatre realms. This research will add foundational data to aid to professionalize the field of arts managers/executives by providing information for the standardization of qualifications. It examined these qualifications through the lens of visionary leadership theory and upper echelons theory. The principle of multiplicity and unity was used to provide a theoretical basis for understanding how the field of theatre operates. The findings of the study include a graduate-level degree as the most common educational level, with a Master of Fine Arts specifically being the most common among artistic directors. It also found the experience realms of nonprofit and theatre were not separate, but rather, that most leaders gained their experience within a nonprofit theatre, equating the two realms in years of experience. An average of 20 years of experience was found in relationship to both the artistic and executive/managing director. Additional observations regarding word choice and important, ancillary information included within many of the biographies are discussed. Overall, the application of the visionary leadership theory and the upper echelons theory to the field of nonprofit theatre leadership was confirmed by the data from the study. The research ends with a discussion of potential expansion of research in the field as well as real-world applications of the findings.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

What did you do to pass the time in quarantine? Most people turned to their television—whether it was their favorite series or movies. While TV and film are very lucrative, for-profit performances, they would not exist without the foundation of live theatre. Live theatre has a for-profit sector in Broadway and with touring companies, but the demand for quality live theatre extends outside of New York and large performance halls. Enter the nonprofit professional theatre. Given the importance of theatre and performance, it is only natural to want to learn more about the people who lead this sector.

Before one can begin understanding who a leader is, the concept of leadership must be understood. Leadership is a nebulous idea. Nonprofits are a confusing and complicated third sector of business to those who are mostly versed in traditional public and private sectors (Newton, 2015). Arts, and the more specific realm of theatre, are seen as taking certain types of people with positive and negative connotations (Dunham & Freeman, 2008). What does this mean for nonprofit professional theatre leaders? To say these leaders must navigate murky waters is a disservice to the complicated nature of their positions, and yet few understand what qualifications make a successful nonprofit professional theatre executive. While qualifications become important in justifying whether the leader is successful, an understanding of the concept of leadership is the foundation. When building this foundation, it is best to begin with theory.

Leadership theory has shifted significantly over time. Carlyle (1907) said, “the history of the world [is] the history of great men” (p.18). Referring to the foundations of leadership theory—the great man theory explains that leaders are not made but are born: there is simply something innate within certain men that makes them effective leaders (Judge et al., 2002; Van Wart, 2003). Later known as trait theory, the idea of a distinct difference between leaders and followers lasted until the 1940s, when behavioral theory became the presiding leadership theory. Behavioral leadership theory looked at what leaders did rather than who they were, which implied the ability for leadership to be learned (Duygulu & Çıraklar, 2009). The study of leadership has continued, with Langford et al. (2017) noting that in 2015 there were more than 30 different models and theories of leadership. Despite the scholarship, Abfalter (2013) noted the studies tend to be scholarly and academic rather than the applicable. He noted there is little to transfer to the real-world applications and called for more studies using qualitative methods to evaluate what true leadership looks like (Abfalter, 2013).

The context is critical, as nonprofit leadership is vastly different than for-profit leadership. Peasley et al. (2018) found the nonprofit sector is the fastest-growing area of business. The nonprofit sector is a powerhouse for the U.S. economy, representing 5.4% of the gross domestic product and contributing \$887 billion to the economy (Peasley et al., 2018). Beyond the dollar signs, nonprofits account for more than 10% of employment in the private sector, making it one of the largest areas for job creation (Peasley et al., 2018). Nonprofits are mission-driven organizations rather than profit-generating organizations, and as such, have unique needs and parameters in which they operate that take a distinct skillset. The recessions of the recent past—the 2008 recession

and the current post-pandemic one (Voss & Robinson, 2020)—have hit nonprofits harder than other sectors, and studies show leadership is the key to sustainability in uncertain economic times (Nave do Adro & Leitão, 2020). As such, understanding leadership is important to sustaining this sector.

Drilling down within the nonprofit realm, Cray et al. (2007) noted that arts nonprofits are different than other nonprofits, and Besana et al. (2018) reminded us that theatre is different from other art forms. The audience, time constraints, and other components make theatre a different type of beast from those of, say, a museum or ballet. Felix et al. (2017) put forth that art nonprofits are not simply charitable organizations, but are providing a service for a community, not completely unlike a health organization; however, the service of a theatre is subject to personal taste. Beyond simply the audience, the governance style, leadership structure, funding streams, and other logistics of running a theatre call for leaders who are not only well versed in management, but also in the artistic field in which they work (Reynolds et al., 2017). Carey et al. (2019) found creative leaders are often more qualified for their position than their counterparts in the business realm. Yet Lohmann (2001) and Abfalter (2013) recall there has not been an adequate amount of research within this area of nonprofit leadership, either.

Research Question

This study will address one research question: *what qualifications do professional nonprofit theatre executive leaders hold, in terms of their education and experience?* To answer this main question, three sub-questions will be examined: *what level of education do executive leaders hold?; how many years of nonprofit realm experience do executive leaders have?; and how many years of theatre experience do executive leaders have?*

The answers to these three sub-questions reveal the answer to the main research question by providing the foundational data. While these may not seem like critical questions, the field of arts managers/executives is still a job, not a career. As Heidelberg (2019) and DeVereaux (2019) pointed out, according to the gold standard of field professionalization measurement—Wilensky’s 1964 five-step process—the art executive is still on step two. As such, this is where the findings from this research will come into play. Applications of other prior arts leadership studies (Grier-Key, 2012; Norris-Tirrell et al., 2018) determine whether a generalizability to tangentially related findings of previous scholars is appropriate, acting as an external validity marker.

Critical Prior Research

Prior research in this area is slim; however, two particular studies are close to comparable, but provide different approaches on the same general issue of arts leadership. Grier-Key’s (2012) research presented a quantitative review of gender and education through the survey of arts nonprofit leaders. The data was used to determine how five areas of nonprofit leadership applied as well as affected the issues the leaders felt were most pressing for their nonprofits (Grier-Key, 2012). Norris-Tirrell et al.’s (2018) research used the LinkedIn profiles of 12 nonprofit executives to review gender, education, age, mission-focused career experience, and sector-specific experience. Then numerical assignments were applied to each and the researchers proceeded with a quantitative review (Norris-Tirrell et al., 2018). While both studies contribute to the field, neither looked at the specific area of theatre. Additionally, the review of these leadership qualifications is exploratory in nature and not theoretically grounded.

Important Theories

There are three theories to frame this study: the upper echelons theory, visionary leadership theory, and the principle of unity and multiplicity. The upper echelons theory states the performance of an organization can be linked to the characteristics of the leader (Hambrick, 2007). It specifically notes education and experience can be used to predict leadership effectiveness (Kuenzi & Stewart, 2017). Ince Aka et al. (2010) tied education level to effective problem-solving skills, while Yeager (1978) found education and experience affect the perception of the effectiveness of a leader. Phipps and Burbach (2010) argued because leaders work within the higher, more strategic levels of an organization, the organization begins to reflect the values of the leaders, which are created through education and experience. This theory provides the foundation of why education and experience are worthy of examination.

The theory of visionary leadership will provide the framework by which leadership potential and success will be measured. Visionary leadership falls under the overriding transformational leadership theory but is a unique approach (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). Taylor et al. (2014) noted this form of leadership provides for the capacity of the members of an organization to be harnessed and applied to meet the demands of the organization's stakeholders. It is applicable to nonprofit theatres because it works best with creatives, as the leader supplies the framework for goals, priorities, values, beliefs, structures, measurements for progress, and other critical organizational components without restricting the path to meeting them (Taylor et al., 2014). A visionary leader provides the vision and thus the meaning of the work (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). As what makes a successful theatre leader is explored in Chapter 2, the

utilization of this leadership theory will become apparent through this study. Visionary leadership will provide the framework for nonprofit theatre leadership.

The principle of unity and multiplicity helps explain the uniqueness of theatre. Successful theatre will be fully explored in Chapter 2. This principle is “pulling together a cohesive whole [while] encouraging an explosion of individual and idiosyncratic activity” (Dunham & Freeman, 2000, p.18). It is a relatively new concept, proposed by Dunham and Freeman in 2000; however, it helps to provide an overarching principle by which successful nonprofit professional theatre leaders must abide and places theatre within a theoretical framework. This principle explains how the multiple components of theatre leadership come together to create a single production (Dunham & Freeman, 2000).

Significance of the Problem

This study addresses Abfalter’s (2013) call for a qualitative exploration of real-world leadership within the professional nonprofit theatre sector. Heidelberg (2019) and DeVereaux (2019) continued to point to gaps in the arts nonprofit executive leadership studies, noting how the field is not yet professionalized according to academic standards. As Dower (2019) noted, nonprofit arts organizations are full of leaders with unprecedented tenure. Many of the key leaders were founders of the organization and have yet to retire, leaving all of those involved—staff, boards, even the public—unprepared for a leadership shift. The results of this study provide what qualifications are common for nonprofit theatre executive leaders, in terms of education and experience. Moreover, these findings help provide the basis for Wilensky’s (1964) step two of professionalization—the standardization of qualifications for a position.

Application to Public Administration

Nonprofit administration is similar to public administration in many ways. Both have diverse stakeholders, rely on governmental financial support to run, and are beholden to the public (Robichau et al., 2015). Beyond these, many scholars look at parallels inherent to the motivations of their leaders (Lee & Wilkins, 2011; Chen & Bozeman, 2013), as well as performance measurement parallels between the two sectors (Moura et al., 2019). More to the point though, Green and Haines (2016) pointed out nonprofit and community organizations began as a stopgap for services the government and public administration organizations were unable to fulfill. In this regard, nonprofits are an extension of public administration, and a relatively new one at that. As such, nonprofit leadership studies are applicable to the public administration field as an extension as well as a supplement to the many research streams that continue to find parallels between leaders of the two sectors.

Dissertation Outline

Beyond the introduction, which provides the foundation for the literature review, the remainder of the dissertation includes the following sections: an in-depth literature review, the methodology for this study, the results of the research, and a discussion. The literature review takes a deductive approach, beginning with leadership studies and moving to visionary leadership, followed by nonprofit literature, then moving toward the arts and then theatre sectors. The uniqueness of a nonprofit theatre leadership position is explored, briefly touching on success measures, to underscore the undefined nature of the field.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology for this study. The design and methods are reviewed, followed by the data sources and measures. Delimitations and limitations are stated before providing the data analysis for the results. Chapter 4 reviews the data collection process, followed by the results this research found. It provides for the education and experience, as well as additional observations. A summary of the findings is provided before moving to the last chapter.

Chapter 5 applies the visionary leadership and upper echelons theories to the findings, confirming their applicability to this niche field. A general discussion of the findings within the context of the theatre world is next, followed by potential applications of the research. Opportunities for future research are explored before providing an overriding wrap-up of the dissertation.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

To lay a proper foundation of previous studies, literature on leadership, nonprofits, specific components of nonprofit theatres, qualifications, and the special considerations nonprofit theatre leaders must address will be reviewed. This will provide a deductive review of previous literature to understand the field. One must understand leadership theory before applying it, and one must have the overall nonprofit sector context prior to understanding the niche nonprofit realm of theatre. By providing this approach, the literature goes from broad to specific in the three critical areas: leadership studies, the nonprofit field, and the theatre world. Much like the theatre realm itself, this literature review applies the principle of unity and multiplicity by exploring the components and then tying them together to create a single review.

Leadership

A general review of leadership definitions and theoretical history will begin this chapter. The broad leadership approaches will briefly be discussed, followed by a review of the visionary leadership theory.

Leadership Definition

It is important to address the definition of leadership. As Anderson et al. (2017) noted, “Although scholars have difficulty in agreeing on a definition of leadership, the average person seems to have no problem identifying leadership in everyday life” (pp. 248-249). Duygulu and Çıraklar (2009) defined leadership as a relationship between a

subordinate and a superior, with the superior influencing the behaviors of the subordinate. Northouse (2007) seconded the idea of influence, with a process component of how the influence steers people towards a mutual goal. Boyatzis (2011) looked at leadership as a conglomeration of competencies, which are the ability to behave in a way to show the intent of the behavior and further the organization towards a goal. Abfalter (2013) argued leadership is not a thing at all, but rather an agreed-upon idea: a social construct in which context, the supposed leader's behavior and knowledge, and the agreed-upon reality are what makes up a leader and thus leadership. These are just a few examples of the varied definitions and approaches that litter the leadership field of study.

For this study, Reid and Karambayya's (2016) specific definition of leadership being a reciprocal exchange and dynamic process that involves multiple stakeholders seeking a collective outcome will be used, as it aligns best with the visionary leadership theatre nonprofits need. Reid and Karambayya's (2016) definition was the most natural, as it included multiple stakeholders. Additionally, the visionary leadership theory provides for an exchange of vision from the leader to the organization, which they include through their exchange and process portion.

Leadership Theory

The theory behind leadership has had a turbulent past without a single theory rising to the fully accepted version. The great man theory of leadership, or trait theory, as it was retroactively named, was the only theory until the 1940s. In the 40s, leadership became less about who the person was, as it was about what the person did, which was then named behavioral theory (Duygulu & Çıraklar, 2009; Nystedt, 1997). The shift from trait theory to behavioral theory opened the door of leadership to everyone, as it

became something that could be taught, learned, and continuously improved upon. Behavioral leadership dominated academia until the 1960s, when the interaction between the leader and their followers drew focus (Duygulu & Çıraklar, 2009; Nystedt, 1997). Academics and business professionals alike recognized that different contexts required different types of leadership. Considered situational or contingency leadership theory, the follower or employee became a recognized part of what makes leaders effective (Duygulu & Çıraklar, 2009).

In the 1980s, the Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and other personality theories became more mainstream and the focus of what leadership theory should entail (Nystedt, 1997). It was not a complete return to the great man theory, but rather, it linked one's personal traits to the behavior one displayed, thus creating an effective or ineffective leader. A decade later, all the aforementioned theories were conglomerated into a holistic approach—acknowledging that leadership is more than a single focus and is a comprehensive and dynamic occurrence (Nystedt, 1997). Leaders affect the behaviors and thus outcomes of their staff, but the staff also affect the leaders. Organizational effectiveness and success became an environment with changing climates, of which leadership was a heavy component, but not the only component. As Langford et al. (2017) noted, more than 30 leadership theories that are prevalent and accepted vary in focus, but all take a holistic approach to leadership.

Leadership Approaches

Leadership approaches are typically broken down into two basic groups: transactional leadership and transformational leadership. Transactional leadership focuses on a specific action or result—a transaction—and grows from there (Nave do Adro & Leitão, 2020). As Rhine (2006) points out, transactional leadership has an extrinsic focus. Transformational leadership focuses on the intrinsic motivation of the employee (Rhine, 2006) and provides shared goals for the individual and the organization to motivate behaviors that result in success. Transformational leaders provide an individual approach to an organizational goal (Nave do Adro & Leitão, 2020). Within the different types of transformational leaders lies the visionary leader, who provides an overriding vision for the organization that is shared by the employees. This vision provides a foundation on which all activities and guidance are based (Taylor et al., 2014). Vision is a key force in creative organizations and thus provides the framework for nonprofit professional theatre leaders.

Visionary Leadership

Visionary leadership is a version of transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Taylor et al., 2014). Rhine (2006) called vision the only necessary leadership trait to be successful and differentiated it as the ability to see the future rather than just the ability to plan for the future. To Rhine (2006), vision is linked to passion and an internal drive the leader has, which shines through and inspires the employees. The very nature of it provides the correct environment for creativity to thrive and business to succeed—particularly if creativity is the business (Rhine, 2006). Dunham and Freeman (2000) called the concept of vision in business the thing that brings the

inspiration, collaborative nature, and exceptional performance to an organization. It goes beyond simply the creative and is an almost intuitive connection to internal and external stakeholders, which allows the organization to be seen at a gestalt level while maintaining individual-level direction (Dunham & Freeman, 2000).

While this may sound like a revisionist great man theory, visionary leadership is rooted in reasoning that aligns with the nonprofit field. As Anderson et al. (2017) noted, the perception of a leader is important and related to their effectiveness. As the workforce changes, generational make-up shifts along the way. Millennials currently make up the bulk of the workforce. Leadership likability is key to motivating this generation. Visionary leadership is thus ideal for them, as Taylor et al. (2014) found this style to provide a workforce cohesion, inspire commitment to the organization, and provide trust between the leader and the employee—all resulting in an increased performance outcome. For theatre organizations, trust is a key component, which visionary leadership styles foster. Kearns et al. (2015) found that the value of trust is exponentially higher in nonprofit leadership roles than in other businesses. Visionary leadership allows trust to foster automatically and encourages its growth.

Visionary leadership often comprises various intelligences, all of which aid a leader in communicating the vision and creating a culture of success. Keeney and Jung (2018) found three intelligences of particular importance to visionary leaders: emotional, cultural, and systems. Emotional intelligence gained buzzword status in the 1990s, but provides for a leader to not only understand, monitor, and regulate their own emotions and reactions, but also the same for those around them. Cultural intelligence takes emotional intelligence a step further by interpreting emotions and behaviors within the

organizational culture as well as within the employee's personal culture (Keeney & Jung, 2018). This allows for the personalized adaption successful visionary leaders offer their employees. The third intelligence is systems, which provides the interpretative power to see the connections and relationships between the components of the organization in a way that allows for change to happen. Systems intelligence sees the components that create the organization, but also how the organization fits into the overall external context of the community and sector (Keeney & Jung, 2018). Systems intelligence helps the leader coordinate the effective use of all the organization's resources (Rhine, 2006).

While leadership has a long history of theories and updated approaches, this study will continue with the definition provided by Reid and Karambayya (2016) as the starting point and use the theoretical foundations of visionary leadership, as started by Burns (1975), and its evolution to Taylor et al.'s (2014) application of it to the nonprofit realm. With leadership explored regarding its pertinence to this study, the review of previous literature then moved to nonprofit organizations.

Nonprofit Organizations

In this section, considerations for the overall nonprofit sector are discussed. These are in comparison to the for-profit sector, which is generally the focus of prior leadership studies. From there, the arts nonprofits are discussed, as arts nonprofits are completely different than health nonprofits or social service nonprofits. Finally, theatre nonprofits will be explored as a unique consideration within the arts sector. Within the exploration of nonprofit theatres, the importance of theatre to society and theatre governance are explored. Theatre governance includes the dyad of leadership and the

board of directors before providing insight into the theatre finance, an area all theatre executive leaders must address to be successful.

Nonprofit Sector

Nonprofits are different than other sectors, as their existence is solely to provide the public with a social good expressed within their mission (Berlan, 2018). Nonprofits do not have financial shareholders in which the profitability of the organization is a measure of its success. Berlan (2016) suggested mission completion should hold the same value as profit maximization does in a for-profit business. Despite nonprofits being around in some form or another for hundreds of years, academic literature did not appear on nonprofits until the 1970s (Norris-Tirrell et al., 2018). Nonprofit academic theory was solidified in the 80s, providing a clear answer to ‘what is a nonprofit?’, but shifted in the 90s and early 2000s to focus on nonprofit management and aim to professionalize the sector in a comparable manner to the for-profit sector as the market value became evident (Nave do Adro & Leitão, 2020).

Despite the very name defining these organizations as not making a profit, and providing them tax-exempt status, it does not preclude them from making an economic impact. Charles (2018) found there were 1.5 million tax-exempt organizations, which included 1.2 million private foundations and public charities. These organizations provide for \$887 billion to the U.S. economy, totaling roughly 5.4% of the gross domestic product (Peasley et al., 2018), \$1.5 trillion in revenue, and \$1.45 trillion in expenses (Newton, 2015). They employ more than 10% of private sector jobs (Peasley et al., 2018). Nonprofits may not make money for themselves, but they contribute a significant portion to the U.S. economy.

Unlike for-profit businesses, the benefactors of nonprofits are the public. Wellens and Jegers (2014) used the term stakeholder to provide for the unique position of nonprofits. Freeman (1984) defined stakeholders as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by an organization’s achievement” (p. 46). Stakeholder is a broad term but allows for a parallel comparison to the for-profit sector, as much as it can. It is important to understand who the nonprofit stakeholders are, as those who hold the organization responsible are inextricably linked to those who will do well within the leadership position, bringing success to the organization.

Art Nonprofits

Within the nonprofit sector, art nonprofits are a specific and important subsector, as Cray et al. (2007) pointed out. Just like the traditional nonprofit sector, art nonprofits are a valuable section of the U.S. economy. Art nonprofit organizations create around \$64.8 billion in economic activity and provide \$27.5 billion in government revenue (Cohen & Davidson, 2017). The sector employs around five million people in full-time positions (NEA, 2020). Positions within the arts are unique, as they are the least likely to be lost to technology. Carey et al. (2019) found 89% of positions in the arts have zero risk of being replaced by artificial intelligence (AI) or automation. Even as technology grows and AI becomes more human-like, the nature of art jobs protects them from the threat of replacement.

Beyond the mission-driven nature of being a nonprofit, art nonprofits work to help create meaning in life, as art reflects society (Balfour & Ramanath, 2011). Study art and you will find what the society needs and wants, how they approach problem solving, and what is important in relation to social causes (Brown, 2014). As Burks (2018) points

out, many organizations form as a nonprofit because the product is difficult to define and measure. The arts are almost always nonprofit, as the success of their product is exceptionally subjective. Arts host a cultural exchange of ideas and values, which align with their mission but do not produce something the consumer can take home (Keeney & Jung, 2018).

Theatre Nonprofits

Theatre nonprofits are a subsector of the arts nonprofit realm. Just as with other nonprofits, nonprofit theatres are driven by their mission rather than profits for shareholders (Nave do Adro & Leitão, 2020) and produce an intangible benefit rather than a profit (Brown, 2014). In 2018, the theatre sector infused the economy with \$2.7 billion in payments for goods and services and employed 160,000 artists, solidifying its space as an economic giant (Voss et al., 2019). For the public, 39 million people were in a theatre's audience, with one million season ticket holders (Voss et al., 2019). The Theatre Communications Group identified 1,855 theatres as professional nonprofit theatres, which produced 170,000 performances within 21,000 productions (Voss et al., 2019). Nonprofit theatres may not produce a profit, but they do produce an impact.

Theatre, more than most subsectors, blurs the lines between nonprofit and commercial organizations, as it has a product that sells to the community, but the product is an experience (Balfour & Ramanath, 2011). Theatre is unique in that it is a shared experience for all involved (Besana et al., 2018), allowing time to be manipulated as the audience is taken from the mundane of reality to the place and time of the characters (Felix et al., 2017). As such, theatre can only be judged after it has been experienced (Besana et al., 2018).

Professional nonprofit theatre came about in the late 1940s, as people wanted live theatre without having to travel to New York City's Broadway to see it (Voss et al., 2000). As demand grew in the 1950s, the National Endowment of the Arts began in the 60s, allowing for further expansion. As theatres continued to expand, the community connections began to take root. The governing board of directors emerged from the community (Voss et al., 2000), and in addition, many of the actors and other art professionals were residents of the community. These relationships formed a collective identity for the theatre community (Balfour & Ramanath, 2011).

Although there are other arts within the arts nonprofit realm, theatre generally has a lower attendance rate than other visual art forms. This is likely due to theatres having a finite amount of space for people to gather and the product (the play) must be experienced as a group within a limited timeframe (Daniel & Kim, 2018). A museum, as an example, has a product (e.g., painting or sculpture) that can be experienced whenever the patron would like to see it and on their own schedule. Theatre performances are once, perhaps twice, a day, but have a clear start and end time, making the window of experience contained (Daniel & Kim, 2018). Despite this potential challenge, theatre is an important part of the nonprofit sector and of the community's life (Diba & d'Oliveira, 2015).

Importance of Theatre.

Donahue and Patterson (2010) noted, "the impact of any one not-for-profit theatre is usually felt within a single community" (p. 2). As noted previously, theatres employ many artists and spend vast amounts of money on supplies and payroll. Although Voss et al. (2019) found the purchasing power was around \$2.7 billion, the true impact is larger

than this number, as the people who work in the theatre live in the community. The work brings them to the areas, allowing for communities to thrive. Community is where the real importance of theatre lies (Voss et al., 2019).

Theatres are more than economic outlets. Theatres supply a comprehensive benefit to the community and the individuals living within it (Kim et al., 2018). Providing creative outlets enriches neighborhoods, as it can open the door to tolerance and an appreciation of the differences within the community (Forenza, 2017). Theatres are almost always completely inclusive, which allows for the self-determination of a diverse group coming together to create an identity (Halperin, 2002). This idea of a collective identity formed through theatre has been proven to cross the artistic barriers and allow for social and civic change (Forenza, 2017) as the shared beliefs continue outside of the theatre space.

Theatre helping to create community is a natural conclusion given the social nature of the art form. Theatre is an experience, but it is more than the single show. The social nature begins with the rehearsals of the actors and the building of the show from the technical side (Bell, 2016). When an audience is added, the experience begins in the lobby before the show, extends into intermission, and continues even as people leave the space. A theatre experience is not based on the show itself, but on the interactions between the audience and the actors and how they respond to the show (Bell, 2016; Shaomian & Heere, 2015).

These interactions are what create theatre, not the specific show, as theatrical creation contributes to strengthening the community identity (Diba & d'Oliveira, 2015). Understanding how theatre contributes to the community identity is important, as this

shared identity is what allows theatre to become a point for social change. Chou et al, (2015) noted theatre is unique in that it is pre-formative, or a “formative expression of what is yet to come” (p. 609). Theatre provides a way for tough social issues to be addressed without the negative feelings of confrontation. When covering a complicated social issue, theatre can empower one to think about their personal perspective while also learning about a different one (Bell, 2016). Underlying assumptions on personal and community levels are revealed through theatrical pieces, and when done effectively, this generates conversation around the topic (Keller et al., 2019). The community can work to break down economic barriers and increase intergenerational access (Donahue & Patterson, 2010).

Theatre can bring about change on a personal level beyond uncovering societal issues. Fernández-Aguayo and Pino-Juste (2018) found theatre and theatre-making can have a therapeutic effect on people. It can be used to train people to avoid conflicts by its ability to encourage one to hold a mirror up to oneself. This adaptive learning benefits the physical, mental, and emotional needs of the people involved, allowing a higher level of development to occur (Fernández-Aguayo & Pino-Juste, 2018). Diba and d’Oliveira (2015) found, in young people in particular, the cultural exposure allowed for a more comprehensive personal awareness, which made them more aware of issues with peers and within society, allowing them to hold the community to a higher standard. This level of self-awareness is often tied to the promotion of overall health. The creativity, imagination, and engagement produces an arena for personal growth, allowing for a more formed version of self to be co-created with those who are also engaged (Chou et al., 2015).

At both a community and individual level, the importance of theatre is that it allows for identity not to be the pre-determined one placed on oneself by society, but the one created within a culturally aware environment, creating opportunity for a well-rounded view of the world to be instilled (Balfour & Ramanath, 2011). Theatre supports the community economically as well as emotionally. A community's identity can be created through theatre, but it can also be changed through theatre. While theatre is not the hub for every community member, it can function as a hub for the community.

Theatre Governance.

Nonprofit professional theatre has a unique form of governance. Although there are hired executives to handle the day-to-day, decisions are not made in a vacuum. Unlike other nonprofits, theatres often have a dyad leadership model, created by an artistic director and an executive or managing director. Beyond these positions, the boards of directors are key components of the nonprofit world, but in theatres, the make-up of boards and the level of interaction is different than in other nonprofit sectors (Tschirhart & Bielefeld, 2012).

Dyad of Leadership.

A dyad of leadership for nonprofit theatres consists of two executive leaders who share power but have a different focus. The artistic director (AD) focuses on the art while the executive or managing director (E/MD) focuses on the business side (Tschirhart & Bielefeld, 2012). Noted as functional differentiation by Kleppe (2018), this dyad of leadership pools artistic issues into one and administrative, economic, and technical issues into another. It is most often to keep the purity of the art, also known as artistic

autonomy, by removing the complication of business demands, preventing them from interfering with the quality of the artistic product (Kleppe, 2018).

The artistic director is focused on the performative aspect of the theatre (Abfalter, 2013). The AD works on perfecting the artistic product and upholding the level of excellency the organization seeks to achieve (Reynolds et al., 2017). They are charged with the creation and production of the performance (Reid & Karambayya, 2016). Often thought of as the more dominant of the two positions, the AD steers the direction of the organization to increase the social capital it has within the community. Important to note, the personal social capital an AD brings with them is a critical component of their success (Cray et al., 2007).

The executive or managing director is focused on the efficiency and financial sustainability of the organization (Reynolds et al., 2017). The E/MD works to establish an effective and efficient administrative protocol to ensure the organization will continue its viability (Grasse et al., 2014). The E/MD must work to generate revenue and oversee the administrative functions of the organization (Reid & Karambayya, 2016). While this role does not rely on social capital, it does look at the E/MD's record of accomplishment in other administrative positions. A key component of the E/MD job title is to ensure resources are being directed to the mission-related work while sustaining and obtaining more revenue (Grasse et al., 2014).

The dyad of leadership is unique to performing arts nonprofits (Keeney & Jung, 2018). It developed as an answer to the call for artistic integrity while maintaining business acumen. Until the 1960s, the AD was the equivalent of a CEO in the for-profit sector. While this was positive for the artistic side, ADs traditionally have no business

training and little time for administrative tasks (Peterson, 1986). This period was also when the legitimacy of arts management began to expand into the educational field, bringing new professionals in with specific training and experience to manage the business side of the arts (Peterson, 1986).

Distinctive to arts management, Reid and Karambayya (2016) called this governance dual executive leadership, noting the roles of the leaders are split between the two distinct pathways of artistic and administrative. Despite it being widely accepted and almost unquestioned in the theatre field (Reynolds et al., 2017), Reid and Karambayya (2016) pointed out it makes no logical sense from a business standpoint. Why would anyone want to split a role that is so critical to an organization's success? The dyad or dual executive leadership system was developed in the arts to answer the unique demands they must meet (Reid & Karambayya, 2016). Both positions show parity of importance to the organization's future, as the artistic demands have a representative at the executive table, as do the business demands (Reynolds et al., 2017).

To make this unique leadership situation work, particularly when individuals are often hired independently of one another, trust in the overall mission is critical. Several scholars (Keeney & Jung, 2018; Reynolds et al., 2017; Voss et al., 2006) believe there must be inherent tension and division between the two roles, but Reid & Karambayya (2016) disagree. If both leaders understand the need for each other, they can then see the symbiotic nature of their relationship. Trust lays the foundation of this success. Reynolds et al. (2017) found these types of leadership dyads are most successful when they drop the romantic idealized leader picture and work together to achieve the same goal. They argued there need not be tension but rather negotiation between the two areas

of focus. After all, an artistic organization cannot exist without the art, but the art cannot be created without the funds. These two positions are symbiotic to one another (Reynolds et al., 2017).

Board of Directors.

The board of directors is another unique area of nonprofit theatre governance. While for-profit companies may have a board of directors, the uniqueness here lies in the make-up and the authority wielded by a group of volunteers. The general idea of a nonprofit board of directors is to maintain governance and fiscal oversight of the organization (Adams, 2017). The boards are charged to watch over the executive leaders and hold them accountable; often art boards go unsupervised themselves (Adams, 2017). Unlike in other areas, the boards of nonprofit theatres are volunteers from within the community and often have extraordinarily little, if any, expertise in the artistic field themselves (Voss et al., 2000). Most members are driven by a desire to help with a good cause (Jäger et al., 2013). Despite their altruistic motives, the boards of arts organizations often find themselves hindering more than helping the organization.

Nave do Adro and Leitão (2020) found most nonprofit arts leaders complained of disconnected and unenthusiastic board members who provide little guidance, demand extreme oversight, and often add additional levels of stress to the actual managing of the organization. Newton (2015) found nonprofit boards are weaker than their for-profit counterparts, largely because they are disconnected from the actual business of the arts and they tend to pay attention to minutiae rather than the larger picture. These boards are meant to provide financial oversight and to ratify policy; however, they are often engaged in trying to make policy and handle decision making (Newton, 2015). The problem is

that their information comes from the staff, which means they are often receiving only parts of the entire picture (Adams, 2017). Notwithstanding the responsibility of the staff to supply the details needed for a decision-making body, the board is often forced to go off of incomplete or inaccurate information, rendering their decisions as less than comprehensive (Gibelman & Gelman, 2002; Newton, 2015).

Effective boards ensure they have a positive and complementary relationship with the executive leaders they have hired (Nygren & Ukeritis, 1992). They recognize that the success of a donation-based organization is often not the financial bottom line, but rather the societal good the organization is providing (Jäger et al., 2013). Successful boards focus on the quality of the reporting measures rather than the bottom line, as comprehensive reporting will allow for a true picture of the organizational accomplishments to shine through (Burks, 2018). Perhaps more importantly, successful boards have confidence in the organization's leaders and their ability to plan, prepare for, and handle the unexpected (Nave do Adro & Leitão, 2020).

Theatre Finance.

While theatre finance may not seem important to understanding nonprofit leadership, the unique place that donors and funders have within the realm of fiscal sustainability is a critical consideration of making a nonprofit theatre successful, and thus will inherently fall to the leaders to address. In 2015, nonprofits received more than \$375 billion in charitable donations, with the arts seeing a 7% growth from the previous year (Charles, 2018). Although a large portion was from governmental grants, the bulk of it was from individuals. As such, individual patrons play a large part in making a nonprofit theatre successful.

Donors are individuals, while funders are large foundations and government entities. Both hold the organization to a high standard of transparency and professionalism. Funders generally look for artistic innovation and conservative fiduciary decisions (Reid & Karambayya, 2016), while donors look for “responsible” behavior (Wellens & Jegers, 2014). The nebulosity of “responsible” is not lost on nonprofit leaders when trying to act in such a way. Charles (2018) found most funders and donors rely on financial indicators pulled from annual reports or Form 990s from the IRS. This allows them to see where their funds are being used. Using donations for services and programs is seen as more responsible than spending them on administrative overhead or long-term debts. With donors, the likelihood they will directly benefit from the service will increase the likelihood of them donating (Charles, 2018). This is congruent with Felix et al. (2017) finding that for arts organizations, donors are more like consumers, as they are likely to partake in the mission work.

Beyond donations and funders, arts nonprofits are unique as they also have a product they can develop earned income from to supplement the charitable giving. Voss et al. (2000) found performing nonprofits provide about half of the cost of a production by earned income, leaving the rest to be covered by giving. While it may seem like a standard market financial approach could be taken, there are too many incongruent components, making for-profit financial theory not applicable to the nonprofit arts organization (Grasse et al., 2014). Despite the differences, financial sustainability is still critical if the nonprofit wants to continue its work. Financial measures are simply an indicator for the capacity to do the mission work rather than a measure of success (Kim, 2017).

It is important to remember that within the arts nonprofit realm, competitiveness with each other and with outside commercial entities is a real concern (Kim, 2017). The 2018 Theatre Communications Report found that most theatres worked with a negative capital bottom line (Voss et al., 2019). It is perhaps due to the continuing decline in funders—both governmental and foundational, as federal giving was down almost 20% and local funding was down almost 30% in 2018. Despite individual donations rising 34%, expenses continue to rise as well, and attendance is declining (Voss et al., 2019). These components are examples of areas the E/MD would be focused on, with the AD focused on attendance, as attendance is often seen as a reflection of community support (Kim, 2017). Either way, these are critical components the dyad of leadership must tackle if they wish for their organization to continue.

Nonprofit Theatre Leadership Considerations

As the foundation for the unique governance and financial structure has been laid, as well as the placing of the arts within the nonprofit sector, there are still additional considerations the leaders of the theatres must consider, which often fall outside of the previous discussion areas. These include the uniqueness of managing a creative workforce, the challenge of providing a unified product through multiple channels (the application of the principle of unity and multiplicity) while meeting multiple stakeholder demands, and the responsibility to lead an organization with a mission. Additionally, the qualifications a nonprofit theatre leaders needs will be discussed.

Unique Considerations

“There’s no business like show business” is a lyric everyone has heard in some context or another. However, when it comes to leading a nonprofit professional theatre organization, show business is your business, and with it comes all the uniqueness of an art form wrapped in a business façade. Abfalter (2013) noted that leading creative people is a challenge for all organizations—Mintzberg (1998) called it “herding cats”—but creative people describes the entire workforce in an arts nonprofit. This creates a space for arbitrary leadership measures for the arts nonprofit. Leadership plays a key role in the creative process, particularly when the output may or may not be inherently creative. Theatre is an experience, and experiences are inherently emotional; thus nonprofit theatre leaders are emotion creators for both the audience and their workforce (Abfalter, 2013).

Creative teams make theatre work in a unique way. Most work is nonlinear, with Abfalter (2013) noting creative professionals are “heuristically guided but rather unpredictable at a detailed level” (p. 297). As theatre productions are a composite of areas, this works; however, it does require a project-focused approach, with the importance of artistic networks guiding the work. Leading these short-term employees and projects provides for the importance of a professional community, with the freedom for individuality being limited. Thus, a nonprofit arts leader must display social intelligence to provide autonomy to the professional while guiding the product to meet the community demands (Abfalter, 2013; Taylor et al., 2014). It is not the leader’s job to ensure creativity takes place, but to ensure the diverse components are able to create a coherent, complex, and cohesive result. An effective leader is noted as being authentic with vision and expertise showing through. The effectiveness is not determined by the

outsider, but by the perception the staff has of the leader (Abfalter, 2013). Leading creatives is a game of reputation, which is partly why the AD's experience is so important.

Retaining a creative workforce is another complex component. Unlike in other sectors, the feeling of happiness plays into whether an arts nonprofit has a high rate of turnover (Nave do Adro & Leitão, 2020). This is more than simply job satisfaction. As Nave do Adro and Leitão (2020) pointed out, artists have an intrinsic motivation that is linked to what they describe as passion. This passion provides a unique need that must be fulfilled. The artists who make the theatre run do it for artistic fulfillment, which is a combination of job satisfaction, personal happiness, and a sense of personal and creative fulfillment. It is beyond the job satisfaction measured in other fields and is something unique to the art sector (Nave do Adro & Leitão, 2020). For ease of understanding, the term satisfaction will be used in this study. The behavior of the leaders is directly related to satisfaction, with satisfaction, psychological empowerment, and corporate citizenship having a direct effect on the output of the team (Nave do Adro & Leitão, 2020). These intangible needs have made nonprofit arts leaders more effective than their for-profit counterparts when it comes to managing for the future. Creative art professionals are impassioned and dedicated professionals, which can create highly disciplined workforces and a true sense of community (Dunham & Freeman, 2000).

Arts nonprofit leaders must balance the internal and external demands from the various stakeholders and governance bodies. This calls for a management of people and resources, often across partnerships and alliances, while meeting the demands of those who fund the organization (Keeney & Jung, 2018). Arts organizations have always

operated in an environment rife with uncertainty and full of vulnerability, where context is idiosyncratic. The demands to be fiscally responsible and yet innovative are just as at odds as the need to produce something with artistic integrity that appeals to the masses. The very survival of the organization is dependent on the need to satisfy these competing demands (Reid & Karambayya, 2016). Leadership in the arts is more than just a management of resources—it includes the struggle to meet an unmeetable mission, for if a mission were completed, there would be no more need for the organization (Rhine, 2006).

Arts nonprofit leaders work with a variety of issues, but one is the very nature of their product: every production is a different and new product (Voss et al., 2000). Often these organizations are think tanks, creating a new piece and then testing it before it moves up to the likes of Broadway. Providing the initial iteration of any product means there is nothing to use as an example or to compare the product against (Voss et al., 2000). As a leader of a team of creatives, these positions often deal with nonroutine and idiosyncratic tasks that are extremely specific to their organization, making the human capital value of the leadership position higher than in other fields (Gjerløv-Juel, 2019). These positions often have overly complex tasks, from the high level of strategic alignment to potentially filling in for a facilities manager when a show is going on (Norris-Tirrell et al., 2018). An effective nonprofit arts leader must have knowledge in volunteer management, productivity for the field, and an appreciation and understanding of the field itself (Norris-Tirrell et al., 2018). Arts nonprofit leaders must juggle the paying customers with the social donors and funders, meeting everyone's need while

growing the public's trust and attachment to the organization (Balfour & Ramanath, 2011).

Despite many theatres having a board of directors, the role of the board is open to interpretation in its implementation at best. This leaves the organization with little to no external oversight, providing the leader with a large latitude to determine priorities in both funding and activities. Most nonprofit employees are intrinsically motivated, removing the worry of keeping tabs on the staff (Newton, 2015). A high-functioning nonprofit will ensure the diverse stakeholder demands are considered and balanced when setting a course for the organization. To do this, the leadership must take the time to build relationships and understand the expectations of each stakeholder. Theatres are unique, as they have standard nonprofit stakeholders as well as an audience or customer to contend with. These customer or patron relationships are often the hardest, as the customer will tell the organization what they think it wants to hear rather than the truth for fear of seeming unenlightened (Wellens & Jegers, 2014).

The person who fills each leadership position can be seen as a statement by the board on the organization's priorities and preferences (Kuenzi & Stewart, 2017). The issue is that experience influences our professional identities, and to fit within this culture, one arguably must have experienced it prior to understanding it. It can become a bit circular in reasoning. One defining quality is that a leader at this level must be able to think collectively to consider the entire organization rather than simply worrying about individuals (Kuenzi & Stewart, 2017). More importantly, leaders at this level must be value-added, or bring a needed resource to the organization (Taylor et al., 2014).

Art nonprofit leaders are held to a positive standard, meaning the staff expects them to communicate in a positive and presumptively successful approach, while abstaining from voicing the negative (Silard, 2018). Perhaps it is because these positions are the center of the organization. As such, these leaders are expected to be problem solvers, abstract thinkers, and effective and persuasive communicators who can build trust in the organization by building trust within themselves (Kearns et al., 2015). An effective nonprofit leader can motivate the organization to work towards mission fulfillment, even when they realize it will never fully occur (Nygren & Ukeritis, 1992).

Qualifications

To meet all the demands previously mentioned, a successful leader must have certain qualifications. Many leaders predate the educational opportunities, thus trying to determine a clear set of qualifications is complicated. However, it is possible to look at what research tells us are common qualifications in successful nonprofit leaders. Lohmann (2001) noted that most arts leaders tend to begin their careers in the artist realm and transition to the leadership realm later in their career. Dower (2019) noted that few leaders have previous experience leading a nonprofit of comparable size when they finally obtain their position.

Dunham and Freeman (2000) noted that successful leaders are trained to achieve cohesiveness within the goals across an organization and are provided the freedom needed to ensure their staff can complete the task. Keeney and Jung (2018) found that nonprofit art leaders are different in their general career path than their for-profit counterparts; however, they also noted job descriptions for these positions tend to highlight intangible traits such as leadership behaviors, motivation, and cognition, which

may not be reflected in education or experience. This is congruent with Rhine's (2015) finding that the concept of vision tops the list for qualifications of nonprofit theatre leaders. It is important to note that the idea of vision is often tied to one's personal passion and is thus an individual quality, not a measurable one (Rhine, 2018).

Educational level is, however, measurable. One's level of education is important, as Grier-Key (2012) found those with a formal education tended to display leadership behavior more effectively in five specific areas—leader behavior, advocacy, human resource development, institutional sustainability, and not-for-profit finance. In fact, those with a master's degree were able to function within higher-level issues than those with a bachelor's degree or no formal education (Grier-Key, 2012). Kim and Daniel (2020) found only 2% of leaders had degrees in public administration or arts management, but they noted that more than 50% of their data pool was over the age of 50 and thus outside the range of this educational subject. Norris-Tirrell et al. (2018) found that 56% of their nonprofit leaders had graduate degrees, with 15% obtaining them during their tenure in the leadership position. Guthrie (2019) found that among the tips for up-and-coming nonprofit leaders, encouragement to get an advanced degree of some kind was stressed.

Experience is another point of qualification that has some merit for measurement. Reynolds et al. (2017) noted the newest to arts leadership are often bringing more administrative experience than their predecessors, and most have some passion or connection to the artform they will lead. In fact, 63% are formally trained as artists in some realm, with 50% of those trained in the realm they now manage; for example: theatre executives having theatre realm experience (Reynolds et al., 2017). Norris-Tirrell

et al. (2018) found that while there was no clear path everyone would have taken, programmatic experience in the nonprofit sector was common among their subjects. The fields most common to supply art leaders included fundraising, communications, and finance (Norris-Tirrell et al., 2018). Many leaders do not have the experience needed to match the position; however, they all have experience in nonprofit and mission-driven work (Stewart, 2016). It is of interest to note their experience was with other nonprofit firms, as almost no one ascended the ranks to leadership positions within their current firms (Mankin et al., 2006).

The last consideration of qualifications includes the intangible components of what being a leader truly is. Abfalter (2013) noted, “being true to oneself appears to be a precondition of artistic work” (p. 302). The only way to measure leadership is through behavior. Standards for artistic judgment are notoriously hard to quantify (Cray et al., 2007), and the very nature of the artistic business realm means the knowledge building for effective leaders can be invisible to those outside of the positions (Velli & Sirakoulis, 2018). Visionary leadership is missing this component, as arts nonprofits need someone to recognize the greater good, placate all the diverse stakeholders, and motivate the staff to work towards a singular mission, all of which comes from having a vision (Rhine, 2006).

Success

The last component of consideration on what qualifies an effective nonprofit theatre leader is success or failure. For leadership positions, the nonprofit organization’s measurement of success should be considered, as well as what success for the leader may

look like. These are not hard rules or established qualities, but rather a comprehensive look at what success within the nonprofit theatre realm is.

Nonprofit Theatre Success

From a socio-cultural perspective, a successful nonprofit theatre is something novel, appropriate, useful, or valuable to a specific group (Abfalter, 2013). For theatres, this output is judged by the audience as an interpretative ability rather than a novel idea (Abfalter, 2013). Voss et al. (2000) pointed to the tension between creating something that meets customer satisfaction and producing something of artistic value. Audiences are not always honest in their opinions (Wellens & Jegers, 2014). Despite the inherent issues in this approach for measuring success, the demand for some type of performance measures continues to grow for the arts nonprofit subsector (Newton, 2015).

Historically, nonprofits were measured from a fiscal point of view. Since expenditures are broken out, the ratio of programmatic expenditures was used to measure success, as it shows the amount of financial effort that went into them (Grasse et al., 2014). However, financial expenditures are not always effective for measuring organizations without profits. Another suggested measurement of success that is more aligned to mission-driven work is audience attendance, often seen as a reflection of the quality of the organization (Kim, 2017) or a commitment from the general public (Daniel & Kim, 2018). This precludes those who might benefit from the offering but cannot afford to go or who go on donated tickets (Kim et al., 2018). As Balfour and Ramanath (2011) pointed out, unless there is a concerted effort, the audience to theatre productions will remain a white, educated, upper-middle class patron. While attendance is good,

most theatre missions focus on variations of bringing the arts to everyone—although everyone is certainly not included in the standard theatre audience.

Beyond the organization's overall revenues, fundraising dollars are also a measurement for success. This seems reasonable, particularly since the call for tangible results is often made by their funders and donors (Velli & Sirakoulis, 2018). The trick is to not rely upon these metrics so much that the focus shifts from the mission to meeting the demands of funders and donors, also known as a subsidy trap (Kim et al., 2018). Nonprofits feel more responsibility to those who help provide funds than those who are simply supporters (Raman, 2016).

Perhaps the best measure of success, proposed by Helmig et al. (2014), is that nonprofits should reach for the realization and fruition of their mission. They noted that organization sustainability is critical to mission fulfillment, so determining additional measurements has merit, but only in the way they connect and reflect the organization's approach to their mission. Velli and Sirakoulis (2018) argued any measurement for nonprofit arts organization should be multidimensional and comprehensive in an attempt to capture a snapshot of effectiveness. They proposed measuring the financial outcomes, artistic activity, and audience satisfaction to create a holistic view of the organization (Velli & Sirakoulis, 2018). Brooks and Ondrich (2007) proposed something similar, noting that artistic quality comprises the material quality, technical factors, and benefit to society. With lofty measurements such as these, it becomes easier to see why administrative and artistic leadership are split.

Leadership Success

The last component to consider is what standard the actual person in the leadership position will be held to when defining their success. Brandt and Laiho (2013) put it plainly when they said, “the quality of life depends on the quality of our leaders” (p. 45). Just as measurement of organizational success is nebulous at best for these types of organizations, so too are the measurements for their leaders. Abfalter (2013) argued leadership is a social construct and thus success will emerge from the narrative and construction of the concepts the leader is supposed to manage. Nave do Adro and Leitão (2020) said leadership should be measured by how it shapes an organization, and the leader should be evaluated against their entrepreneurial vision. But much like the rest of the sector, how does one measure leadership when it boils down to their behavior (Duygulu & Çıraklar, 2009)?

Like many considerations, boards of directors tend to use ambiguous terms and provide subjective standards for success. In fact, nonprofit leaders are expected to report the success of the organization to the board but are provided little more than trivial direction on what factors should matter, leaving the discretion up to the leaders themselves (Reid & Karambayya, 2016). A visionary leadership style can help alleviate this tension, as communicating a vision to the organizational staff that aligns with the mission of the organization provides an external guide on what is important. By providing this vision, the leaders set their own course for how to achieve the mission. Theatre is based on the production or innovation that supports the organization’s artistic endeavors. These are hardly quantifiable topics, making objective evaluation moot. And while several scholars suggest organizational effectiveness as a measure for leadership

success, there is no agreed-upon definition of what a successful organization looks like. Organizational effectiveness is a construct by those who are evaluating and varies from person to person (Rhine, 2018).

Rhine (2006) proposes evaluating leaders upon their vision: do they have a vision for the organization that will stand the test of time? Voss et al. (2006) noted effective leaders create an organizational identity that stakeholders can support. Cray et al. (2007) found leaders match style to the organizational culture and context of the moment. Nygren and Ukeritis (1992) noted leaders effectively collaborate with stakeholders across the continuum to engage them within the organization. Church (2014) noted the most important thing about measurements of success for nonprofit leaders: the how of leadership is just as important as the result of leadership.

Placing the Literature in Context

This review of the various components of nonprofit professional theatre leadership indicates leaders in this field must juggle and address more than their counterparts in the for-profit sector. What the literature says is an effective leadership style for nonprofit arts—the visionary leader—is easily reflected in the constant repetition of the need for these leaders to have a vision for the future and an effective communication of that vision (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Taylor et al., 2014). Nonprofit theatre leaders must inspire and activate the intrinsic motivation their staff bring to their positions in order to excite staff and produce their work. Within the past studies, and aligned with the upper echelon theory (Hambrick, 2007), it is apparent that having an advanced education and experience with the nonprofit and specific art realms is important. The last theoretical application—the principle of unity and multiplicity—is

demonstrated by the vast amount of considerations a nonprofit theatre leader must contend with (Dunham & Freeman, 2000). Even when determining success, there is no one component or standard; it is simply a conglomeration of various tasks and components. It is fitting, though, that these theories come together to build a theoretical foundation for a nonprofit professional theatre leader. Just like the art form takes many specialties to create a single production, so must a variety of theories be tied together to try and grasp what a leader in this field will look like.

Determining the Need

Abfalter (2013) may have been the first to call for a study to apply qualitative research methods to nonprofit leadership studies, but he is certainly not the first to point out limitations in previous nonprofit arts leadership studies. When Lohmann (2004) took over editing the *Nonprofit Management and Leadership Journal*, he noted that arts management was a specialty within the field that was notably absent from prior articles, despite it being a large percentage of the third sector of business. While this academic undertaking may not have an obvious call, it can be supposed that perhaps beyond the journals not accepting arts management articles, there is the possibility that arts leadership is an uncommon topic for journal submissions. Abfalter's (2013) assertion certainly provides for this to be a possibility. Reynolds et al. (2017) found the specialty required for effective arts management is not inherently aligned to traditional business methods, while Cray et al. (2007) noted traditional leadership studies are often too general, looking at best practices or acting as a referendum on the organization rather than at the person inhabiting the critical positions. Heidelberg (2019) pointed out that the assumption of arts managers as being a subset of business managers has hurt and

diminished the field's importance. Nave do Adro and Leitão (2020) noted even today, management capacity studies are mostly focused on private and public sectors rather than any field within the nonprofit sector.

Despite the lack of academic study, the third sector has an impending leadership shift coming. As Dower (2019) noted, nonprofit arts organizations are full of leaders with unprecedented tenure. Many of the key leaders were founders of the organizations and have yet to retire, leaving all of those involved—staff, boards, even the public—unprepared for a leadership shift. Norris-Tirell et al. (2018) found that 67% of nonprofit leaders expected to leave their position within the next five years. This would mean almost every senior leader in the nonprofit sector would likely retire within the next 8 years. Nave do Adro and Leitão (2020) confirmed the boomer generation is still expecting to retire from their positions within the coming years, and yet the nonprofit sector is concerned with a lack of qualified leader options to replace those exiting. Combine this with Heidelberg (2019) and DeVereaux's (2019) findings that the field is lacking in professionalization, and the need for a study of what theatres find important for their leaders' qualifications becomes critical.

Arts nonprofits often find a direct connection between their leaders and success, as Peasley et al. (2018) found mismanagement in these organizations tends to be detrimental to their community, staffing, and success. Norris-Tirrell et al. (2018) supported this finding by noting the most important factor in predicting organizational success and sustainability for nonprofits was their leader; unlike other fields, arts nonprofit leaders require higher-than-average levels of expertise (Abfalter, 2013). Despite this, Kuenzi and Stewart (2017) found little information in the nonprofit field

about the qualities of their executive leadership. Norris-Tirrell et al. (2018) echoed this, suggesting a research gap regarding educational and career experience of art nonprofit executives, in opposition to the importance these areas hold for the field. Educational levels of arts executives are directly related to the innovation and business sustainability of arts nonprofits, according to Nave do Adro and Leitão (2020), while experience in the field creates the trust, networks, and social capital arts leaders need to succeed with their staff and the community (Abfalter, 2013). With these details being so critical to nonprofit success, there is a pressing need for more research to fill this gap.

Summary

This chapter provided an extensive literature review over leadership, nonprofit organizations, nonprofit theatre leadership considerations, and success measurements. Following a deductive approach, this chapter applied the principle of unity and multiplicity to its review. The application of the principle provides a sample activity for readers to understand the nuances of theatre leadership: each piece is completed individually, and then put together to create a final product. The chapter then provided the necessary literature context for the methodology in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology for this study. It will begin with the research purpose, which grounds the study within the field. It continues with a statement of the research questions, followed by research methods, data sources, data analysis, and measures. The chapter concludes by providing the assumptions and limitations of the study.

Research Purpose

Heidelberg's (2019) research uses the Wilensky (1964) timeline of field professionalization methods to outline where nonprofit art leadership positions are in the five-step process (see Figure 1). While Wilensky's 1964 timeline is a little outdated for this field, as Heidelberg (2019) points out, the establishment of training programs for this field is actually finding a generally accepted criterion for these executive leadership positions. This is partly due to the variants of "the arts" and partly due to the current make-up of the field. One potential reason is no one who has been in the position for the last 20 years is suddenly going to become unqualified for a job they have successfully been doing. Thus, Heidelberg (2019), supported by DeVereaux's (2019) literal textbook

on being an arts leader, calls for there to be studies to create a starting point by evaluating the current leadership.

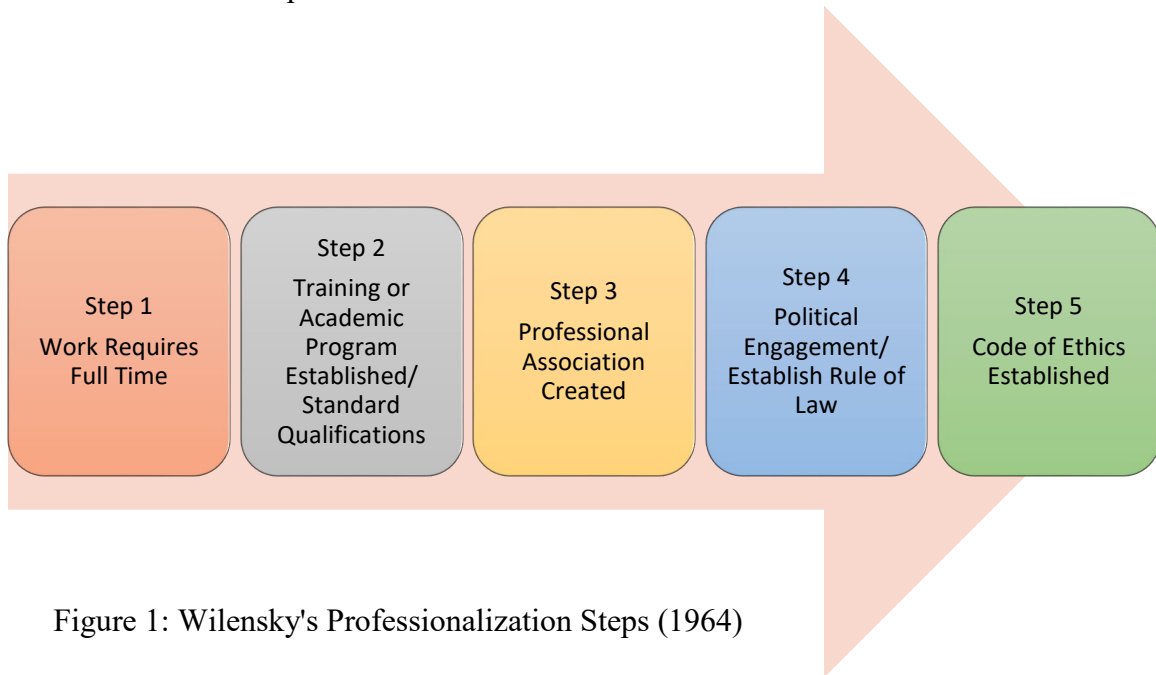


Figure 1: Wilensky's Professionalization Steps (1964)

The purpose of the study is to aid in the formulation of standardized qualifications and criterion for becoming a professional nonprofit theatre executive, in support of the professionalization of the field. It also determines if previous, generalized arts executive research is applicable to the theatre field and supports the application of two leadership theories to this subsection of leadership. There is currently not a universally agreed-upon theory of nonprofit arts leadership, and this work moves the development of a theory forward and contributes to the field.

Research Questions

This study explored the theoretical qualities of arts nonprofit leaders. In order to explore this, the following research question was addressed: *What qualifications do professional nonprofit theatre executive leaders hold, in terms of their education and experience?* Upper echelons theory notes that education and experience are predictors of success of leadership (Hambrick, 2007; Kuenzi & Stewart, 2017; Phipps & Burbach,

2010). Education is also tied to problem-solving and communication skills (Ince Aka et al., 2010), which are foundational skills for visionary leadership (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Taylor et al., 2014). These areas, also identified by Heidelberg (2019) and DeVereaux (2019), are the missing areas of knowledge and research needed to help professionalize the field. Based on previous research of general arts executives (Grier-Key, 2012; Norris-Tirrell et al., 2018), and to build the criterion portion of the analysis, the following sub-questions are addressed:

- Q₁: What level of education do executive leaders hold?
- Q₂: How many years of nonprofit realm experience do executive leaders have?
- Q₃: How many years of theatre experience do executive leaders have?

By exploring these sub-questions, the theoretical qualifications of executive arts leaders emerged to answer the overarching research question. A foundation for defining the standards of nonprofit theatre executives based on the theoretical definitions is laid, providing answers to Heidelberg (2019) and DeVereaux's (2019) suggestion of a professional definition of the field. From there, standard qualifications can be explored for theatre executives to effectively communicate and problem solve, as defined in the visionary leadership and the upper echelons theories.

Research Methods

A qualitative study of the current executive leadership of 30 nonprofit professional theatres was conducted to understand what theoretical qualifications exist for executive leaders in nonprofit professional theatre. This study examined the essential qualifications of nonprofit theatre executives, as Lune and Berg (2018) noted this is the basis for qualitative design. This research did not seek to confirm theory, but rather to

explore the theoretical foundations for nonprofit theatre leadership. The leadership qualities were analyzed to confirm if the visionary leadership and the upper echelons theories provide a base to a nonprofit theatre leadership theory through understanding education level, nonprofit field experience, and theatre experience.

Content analysis reviews information to determine “patterns, themes, assumptions, and meaning” (Lune & Berg, 2018, p. 182). A content analysis of secondary data was conducted as the appropriate method for this qualitative design. The education, nonprofit, and theatre experience levels provided the information from which those patterns emerged using secondary data (Lune & Berg, 2018).

Ruggiano and Perry (2019) noted secondary data analysis is approached in a new way, providing for new information. They pointed to the positives of no new cost incurred with its collection as well as a relief of the burden to participate from the subjects. While Ruggiano and Perry (2019) also noted, at times, other researchers criticize the validity of secondary data use because it is often subjective and affected by the content of the time, this study acknowledges the data source is influenced by the external sources: for example, publishing organizations. As the sources are publicly available, the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board determined the study was exempt. The IRB exemption can be viewed in Appendix A.

In Chapter 2, the importance of a theatre leveraging their leader’s social capital to help legitimize and strengthen the organization’s standing was discussed. In modern times, advertising this capital is done through the leader’s biography on the organization’s website. As Turrini et al. (2012) noted, a website is the best way to attract and keep audiences for arts organizations. The leader is a reflection of the board’s and

the organization’s priorities (Kuenzi & Stewart, 2017), thus what the theatre is advertising as their leader’s credentials can be viewed as a generalized endorsement of their qualifications. Understanding this, one can then begin to build a general criterion for what nonprofit professional theatre executives should have, aiding in step 2 of Wilensky’s (1964) professionalization of the field.

With any research method, there are necessary assumptions to conduct the study. The assumption of success is perhaps the most critical assumption of this study. The employment of these individuals at their positions is assumed to be an endorsement of the organization that their qualifications are correct to be successful at the job. This assumption is made based on the advertising of their bios as the social capital the organization feels it needs for legitimacy (Kuenzi & Stewart, 2017).

Data Sources

Group	Budget Size
Group 1	\$499,999 and less
Group 2	\$500,000-999,999
Group 3	\$1,000,000-2,999,999
Group 4	\$3,000,000-4,999,999
Group 5	\$5,000,000-9,999,999
Group 6	Over \$10,000,000

The data was accessed through each of the theatre organization’s websites, noted in Appendix B, as public information is defined as being about the subject without the subject being directly present or involved in a study. Thirty theatres were selected that utilize a dyad of leadership (Tschirhart & Bielefeld, 2012), so the

Table 1 TCG Budget Groups

executive leader data pool goal was 60 leaders: 30 artistic directors and 30 executive/managing directors. There were two organizations which utilize co-artistic directors, providing for a total of 62 bios: 32 artistic directors and 30 executive/managing

directors. These theatres are organized into six categories based on budget size. See Table 1 for the budget breakdowns. Both site selection and budget breakdown follow the Theatre Communications Group (TCG) classification, the same tool used by Rhine (2006). While the lists of theatres are non-exhaustive, as membership is voluntary, the budget groupings are mutually exclusive.

As the leading, and only, national professional theatre collaborative organization, TCG is a valid source to ensure the sites are categorized on the same, objective measures (Voss et al., 2019). The budget groups are based on the theatres' self-reported financials. Jennifer Cleary (2021), TCG's director of membership, noted the budget groups began as a way to delineate small, mid-sized, and large theatres, but over the years, the budget groups have been divided down more specifically as the membership grew (personal communication, 2021). DiMaggio and Stenberg (1985) noted budget size has the largest impact on capacity, while Amans et al. (2015) pointed to budget size to homogenize the field. Theatres can choose to allocate their budget in an infinite number of ways to meet their missions, so looking at overall budget size provides a stable and neutral guiding point. In previous studies, IRS 990 forms were used to determine theatre budget size and thus theatre classifications, but several scholars noted there were often discrepancies in 990 reporting that could affect the integrity of the groupings.

Brooks and Ondrich (2007) first noted that while 990s are the most common nonprofit financial record, 40% of organizations failed to properly include financial errors, leaving them to financial report footnotes. Kim and Daniel (2020) noted the inaccuracies of nonprofit 990s, pointing to classification errors of commonly misunderstood nonprofit components; for example, the program expenses were not

properly noted and were lumped into overhead costs. They attributed these discrepancies to the volunteers who often handle nonprofit taxes not fully understanding the nuances of the nonprofit world (Kim & Daniel, 2020). While this is understandable, when looking to group organizations based on their budget, overhead versus programmatic expenses can make a large difference. Theatres are thus grouped based on TCG self-reported budget size, greatly reducing the chance of misclassification.

Data Measures

Educational level was the first measurement for the study. Grier-Key's (2012) study found a master's degree correlated with the highest rating of effectiveness, and Guthrie (2019) noted the field is moving towards a master's degree as the expected educational level. Norris-Tirrell et al. (2018) also noted a master's degree or above was the most common. For this study, educational level was measured through four levels: secondary (high school or vocational training), post-secondary (bachelor's degree), graduate (master's degree), and post-graduate (doctorate degree).

Experience in the nonprofit realm was the second measurement for the study. Grier-Key (2012) and Norris-Tirrell et al. (2018) both found extensive experience within the nonprofit realm. Norris-Tirrell et al. (2018) and Abfalter (2013) noted nonprofit experience was perhaps the most important indicator of effective leadership. Experience was measured binarily (yes or no), followed by a subsequent measurement in years as a simple ordinal measurement, when a date was present. When a date was not present in the biography, roles in previous organizations and the number of shows mentioned were used to extrapolate an estimate for the ordinal measurement of years of experience. An

average of the years between the subjects was then found to determine the most common amount of experience that should be used to further the professionalization of the field.

Theatre experience was the third measurement. As with the experience within the realm of the nonprofit world, the importance of sector experience is noted by Grier-Key (2012) and Norris-Tirrell et al. (2018). Lohmann (2001) pointed to the path of artist to executive in his study, and Reynolds et al. (2017) suggested this area is more critical to artistic directors than to executive/managing directors. All previous scholars delineated the experience realms, and thus, so will this study. Theatre experience was also measured binarily (yes or no) followed by subsequent measurement in years as a simple ordinal measurement, when a date was present. When a date was not present in the biography, roles in previous organizations and the number of shows mentioned were used to extrapolate an estimate for the ordinal measurement of years of experience. An average of the years between the subjects was then found to determine the most common amount of experience that should be used to further the professionalization of the field.

Delimitations and Limitations

The delimitations of the study are numerous. Only theatres with a dyad of leaders were selected. This ensured accurate comparison and data collection for the two most critical positions. Voss et al. (2019) pointed to TCG as the leading, and only, organization dedicated to professional nonprofit theatres, thus the gold standard for research in this field. Only theatres that are members of the TCG were used to ensure the ancillary information is measured in a standard way, as done by TCG's research department to determine the groupings. As supported by Amans et al. (2015), the budget size breakdown was done to homogenize the organizations, but by evaluating them as a

whole rather than extensively within a certain budget range, the nuances of theatre size are not well explored.

The limitations of this study include limiting the findings to only those organizations which are affiliated with TCG and utilize a dyad of executive leadership. The TCG's budget classification provides a large range, thus applying again to only those TCG members.

Data Analysis

According to Lune and Berg's (2018) recommendations for qualitative research, this study was designed to follow a directed content analysis. The educational level, nonprofit experience, and theatre experience were explored through reviewing the biographies of the leaders. Application of the visionary leadership and the upper echelons theories is analyzed through measuring these three data sources. The analytical categories are education level, years of experience in the nonprofit field, and years of theatre experience. Once the data was collected, deductive analysis began by grouping the information into the subcategories applicable to each measurement. Thus, education was explored through the four categories (secondary, post-secondary, graduate, and post-graduate), and a numerical assignment of years was placed within the nonprofit and theatre experience categories. The results of the analysis in each category built a baseline criterion of qualifications for these positions in the field as the most common levels emerged and the pattern became visible.

The latent analysis of the data was the applicability of theory. Visionary leadership is earmarked by the ability to communicate a vision for the organization in a way that motivates the staff to fulfill it (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Taylor et al., 2014).

Howell and Avolio (1993) pointed to this type of leadership (visionary) as forecasting organizational success. The upper echelons theory notes education and experience as the leading predictors of leaders' success (Hambrick, 2007; Kuenzi & Stewart, 2017; Phipps & Burbach, 2010). As the research assumes success based on the employment of these leaders in these positions, the application of these theories was confirmed in the data. The criterion resulted in higher education (graduate or doctoral degrees) and extensive experience in both the realm and the art form.

As Patton (2001) noted, there are no agreed-upon rules for sample size in qualitative research, and thus he advised one to try to reach data saturation. He noted, "validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of cases selected" (Patton, 2001, p. 245). Saturation is reached when "the addition of more units does not result in new information" (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 183). By examining 62 leaders of 30 theatres, saturation is reached through the course of analysis. As such, saturation for each category was met when additional data points did not change the emergent theme. While all 62 leaders were included as data sources, when the analysis of each subarea (education, nonprofit experience, and theatre experience) was conducted, consistent findings quickly emerged.

Summary

This chapter provided the methodology for this study. The purpose of the research was reviewed first, followed by the research question, sub-questions, and method. The data sources and measurements were defined and ended with the delimitations and limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with the analysis of the study.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Chapter 4 provides the results of the study. It begins by providing data collection process specifics, followed by the raw data collected as it pertains to the research question. Analysis is then focused on these data points. Additional observations outside of the research question are included within the analysis section, followed by a summary of findings to prepare for the discussion in chapter 5.

Data Collection

To collect data, the biographies of artistic directors and executive/managing directors were downloaded from the websites of 30 theatres from 27 different states. A list of the theatres used is available in Appendix A. While no two theatres were within the same city, due to demand, there are some states with more than one city represented. Figures 2 shows a pin-drop map of the theatre locations. While theatre locations are East Coast-heavy at times, it is important to remember from the literature review that professional nonprofit theatres began from a desire to have Broadway-quality shows without having to travel to New York City (Voss et al., 2000). Within this perspective, theatre growth then began with New York City as the epicenter, providing potential reasoning for the heavy amount of theatres on the East Coast.

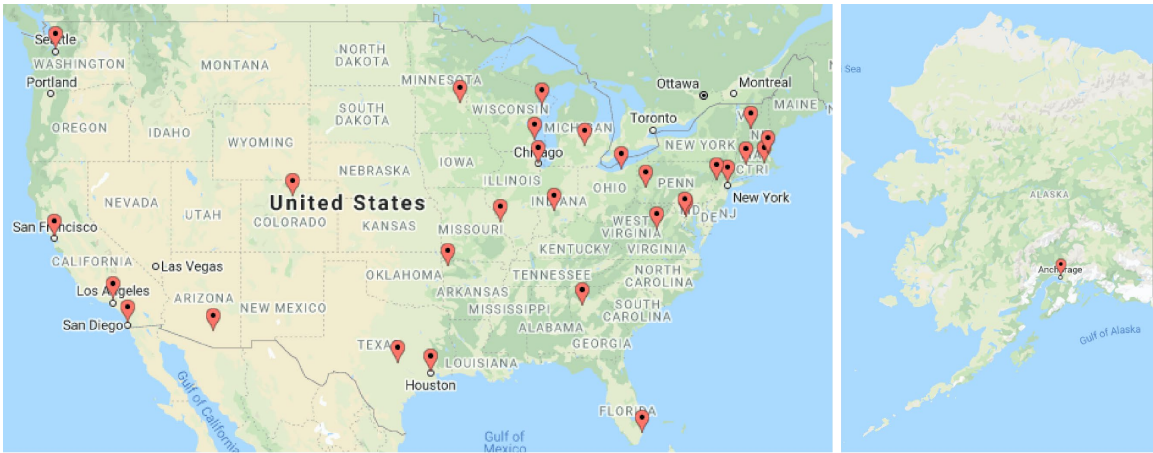


Figure 2: Theatre site locations

Within the biographies, standardized information was then collected to determine the education level and experience within the theatre and nonprofit realms. As biographies are narrative accounts of experiences, various components of information were pulled to determine the answers to the main research question. This data included the names, degree titles, descriptors for roles performed, the organization names with which the leader was associated, the names of shows, any award names, any previous positions they had held, and any memberships they currently held. If there were key descriptive components from the biographies which aided in answering the questions, those pieces were pulled as part of a general category. The data was then analyzed as described in Chapter 3.

Education Level

Education level was perhaps the easiest to ascertain, as most biographies (66%) contained a degree specification (e.g., BA, MBA, MA). This data was analyzed through four levels: trade school or certificates were considered secondary; bachelor's degrees were post-secondary; master's degrees were graduate; and doctorates were considered post-graduate. There were no leaders with only a trade school or certificate education,

nor were there any with doctorate degrees; however, there were many leaders with Master of Fine Arts (MFA) degrees. Within the art realm, MFAs are considered terminal degrees, meant for those who will be practitioners of arts rather than academics of arts (Maksymowicz & Tobia, 2017; Rosenstein, 2013). This provided an interesting quandary as to how an MFA should be coded if they are the end of the education chain, much like a doctorate is for other fields. Research has yet to determine how an MFA fits into the academic world either. Rosenstein (2013) noted that there was no agreement on what requirements a terminal arts degree should have, and there are no current doctorate-level programs for the arts. Maksymowicz and Tobia (2017) reaffirmed the empty landscape of doctorate-level programs for the visual arts but noted that the MFA's status as the terminal degree for the practitioner of the arts was first affirmed by the College of Art Association in 1977 and reaffirmed in 2008 by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design. They recommended the potential for a doctorate of fine arts (DFA), but pointed to the difference between the creative needs of the field and the standards of research and academia, noting they are likely never to meet (Maksymowicz & Tobia, 2017). Thus, for this study, an artistic director with an MFA was credited with a graduate/post-graduate level and then noted within the findings, as they are the practitioners of their art form and responsible for their organization's artistic integrity.

Experience Levels

Collecting data to answer the experience level question was more complex, as many of the biographies failed to provide exact dates. Thus, previous roles, organizations noted, and shows mentioned were used to determine these levels. According to the 2019 *Theatre Facts* report, released in December 2020, theatres averaged 10 shows per season,

with at least one being a special performance (e.g., for a holiday or children’s audience) and one being a reading or workshop (Fonner et al., 2020). Since these are not traditional shows, two shows were removed to determine a season for a theatre would include an average of eight shows. Gibelman and Gelman (2002) found the average time in a management position for nonprofit executives is around 3.9 years, once long-term (for them, more than 30 years) executives were removed from their study averages. This information—both the standard number of shows per season and the standard length of time within a position were used to determine an estimate on years of experience when a hard number was not available. If a person noted eight shows, it counted as a year of theatre experience, while a previous leadership position within a nonprofit organization was counted as four years of experience.

Findings and Analysis

The specific findings are presented below. Although there was to be 60 individual leaders, there were two organizations with co-artistic directors, which provided for 62 biographies total to be included within this study. The data is presented as an aggregate of nonprofit professional theatre leaders, and is broken up into data for artistic directors and data for executive/managing directors. Data within the budget groups is also presented as another level of separation. Specific trends and themes are noted for discussion in Chapter 5.

Education Level

Education level was present in 40 of the 62 leadership biographies (~65%). Only 17 of the biographies (~27%) contained no mention of education level, while eight of the leaders (~13%) mentioned degrees as they related to the school in which they studied. When the school was mentioned, it was assumed to indicate a bachelor's degree, with two exceptions: one mentioned being a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford, which is a master's degree program, and one biography mentioned two schools, which was assumed to be their undergraduate- and graduate-level schools. Collectively speaking, there were 14 post-secondary degrees (~23%), 21 graduate degrees (~34%), and 10 MFAs among ADs (~32%), accounting for graduate/post-graduate delineation. In total, there were 17 MFAs (~27%), but the seven MFAs among the E/MD group were not counted as practitioners of the art form, as they are responsible for the business portion, holding them with the graduate degree collective. The complete breakdown can be seen in Table 2.

For artistic directors, an MFA was the most common degree, with 10 out of the 21 degrees (~48%). There were five graduate degrees that were not MFAs, and six bachelor's degrees. There were 11 biographies (~18%) that did not delineate a degree, with four of those leaders being the founders of their organizations. For executive/managing directors, a graduate degree was the most common degree, with 16 out of the 24 degrees (~67%). There were eight bachelor's degrees and three biographies without degree notations. Although they did not meet the threshold of artistic practitioner, there were seven MFAs among the E/MD biographies.

Table 2 Educational Level of Leaders

Education Level/ Budget Group	Position	Secondary	Post-Secondary	Graduate	MFA's (for ADs)	Post-Graduate	No degree	Total
Budget Group 1	AD	0	2	0	4	0	0	6
	E/MD	0	2	4	0	0	0	6
Budget Group 2	AD	0	0	1	2	0	3	6
	E/MD	0	0	2	0	0	2	4
Budget Group 3	AD	0	0	1	0	0	3	4
	E/MD	0	2	2	0	0	2	6
Budget Group 4	AD	0	2	0	2	0	1	5
	E/MD	0	0	4	0	0	1	5
Budget Group 5	AD	0	1	0	2	0	2	5
	E/MD	0	1	3	0	0	1	5
Budget Group 6	AD	0	1	2	0	0	2	5
	E/MD	0	3	1	0	0	1	5
Total		0	14	20	10	0	18	62

Experience

Experience was not as well denoted as education; however, each biography contained components about previous experience. All of the sample population had not only theatre experience, but also nonprofit realm experience. As Voss et al. (2000) noted, this is to aid in building the social capital needed to legitimize not only the leader, but the organization. As experience was not as clear cut, standards were used to determine years for this study. The average time in a position, according to Gibelman and Gelman (2002), is about four years per position, and Fonner et al. (2020) noted there were about eight regular shows per season for a theatre. This standard was applied to extrapolate years of experience where needed.

Although there was sub-question delineation between theatre realm experience and nonprofit realm experience, there was not a significant difference between

the two in the bios. In fact, only three of the 62 biographies mentioned organizations that were not theatre—one mentioned their time at the Houston Symphony, one their time at Boeing, and one their time at their university press business office post-graduation. All three of these biographies were of E/MDs, but even with these mentions, the three leaders still had extensive theatre backgrounds. For the purposes of this study, the years per realm are still delineated separately within the table and were counted and evaluated separately. While research may delineate the difference in the nonprofit realm and the theatre realm, the real world does not make this distinction, which is visible by the lack of significant difference in the results.

As the experience tended to go hand in hand, there was often a higher level of theatre experience than nonprofit experience, providing support for Lohmann's (2004) observations of administrators beginning as artists. A general average across the groups can be seen in Table 3. Between the positions, ADs tended to have more theatre experience than the E/MDs, but not by a significant amount. Within the first budget group, the E/MDs had more theatre experience on average, but that was largely due to several founders skewing this number. ADs also tended to have more nonprofit realm experience than E/MDs, but since their experience was focused in nonprofit theatre, there was little distinction. Between the two realms, though, there was not a significant difference, as most people gathered their experience within nonprofit theatres, providing for an equitable amount of experience in theatre and nonprofit organizations.

Table 3 Average years of experience for ADs and E/MDs

Realm/ Budget Group	Position	Theatre Experience Average (in years)	NPO Experience Average (in years)
Budget Group 1	AD	19.5	17.2
	E/MD	23.5	16.2
Budget Group 2	AD	17.8	17.8
	E/MD	13	14.25
Budget Group 3	AD	23	23
	E/MD	19.3	19.5
Budget Group 4	AD	20.3	20.4
	E/MD	14	13.2
Budget Group 5	AD	22.6	24.6
	E/MD	23	23
Budget Group 6	AD	31.8	31.8
	E/MD	22.6	32

It is within the experience realm that the importance of experience relative to organizational size begins to show—those organizations within a higher budget group have more experience than those within a lower budget group. Additionally, although previous findings suggested the average length of time within a position was four years, this data suggests people were staying within their positions for significantly longer. This is likely due to the theatre specification within the nonprofit realm of this study, while Gibelman and Gelman (2002) were looking across nonprofit sectors. While it cannot be proven definitively, it was observed that there was a major shift in leadership within the early 2000s, as many of the biographies noted they joined their current organization pre-Great Recession. It could be suggestive of the volatility of the arts and nonprofit realm post-2008, meaning there was not a significant amount of movement in the field, but that is outside the scope of this study. What it does provide is that while four years may be the nonprofit realm’s executive average, that does not translate to the theatre realm of nonprofits.

Additional Observations

Mankin et al. (2006) noted that most arts organizations do not promote from within, and their executive leadership comes from outside hires. This was supported by this study, as only four of the 62 biographies noted that the leaders worked in other positions within the organization prior to their executive positions. Moore (2017) found that the theatre realm still contains a significant number of founders within the leadership. That finding was also supported by this study, although on a smaller scale. Of the 62 biographies, 11 of them were founders of their current organizations, and an additional five were founders of smaller organizations, which they left for larger ones. Lastly, the gender of leaders provided a noticeable data point: there were more male leaders (35) than female leaders (27) within the executive leadership of nonprofit theatres. This is counter to Grier-Key's (2012) findings of more females within NPO leadership positions, however, not surprising given the 2015 Wellesley Center study on nonprofit theatre leadership, which noted 73% of ADs and 62% of E/MDs were men (Erkut & Ceder, 2016). Grier-Key's (2012) study was nonprofit realm based, while the Wellesley study was theatre based.

Biographies of both E/MDs and ADs focused on peripheral accomplishments as well. Although it is not a nonprofit theatre, four AD and three E/MD biographies contained specific mentions of working on Broadway. Ten ADs and three E/MDs mentioned working internationally, which could be in either nonprofit or for-profit theatres. Film and television roles were also mentioned, with three ADs and two E/MDs referencing work in these mediums. Awards for work were also highlighted, with 27 ADs and eight E/MDs including either specific awards or being referenced as "award

winning” leaders. Memberships were also extensively mentioned, with 14 ADs and five E/MDs listing their memberships within a professional organization for their field.

Business accomplishments were also common within leadership biographies. Six AD and 14 E/MD biographies highlighted some form of business-focused accomplishment. Specifics ran the gamut from raising funds to commissioning works from playwrights. One-third of leaders also included being a member of another organization’s board of directors, with nine AD and 11 E/MD biographies mentioning board service to another organization. The most surprising finding was almost half of the sample—13 ADs and 15 E/MDs—held comparable positions at other companies previous to their current positions. This is in direct opposition to Stewart’s (2016) findings of executive leaders only holding the position once. It is of note that the leaders with previous experience were most common in budget groups 4 and up, suggesting that once budget sizes grow to more than \$3 million, boards prefer experienced leaders.

In addition to the concrete data observations provided above, there were patterns in how leaders described their experiences within their biographies. For example, the phrase “numerous” was often used to describe how many organizations leaders had previously worked with or how many shows they had directed. Alternatively, the phrases “among others” and “some favorites are” were also used to allude to additional experience not mentioned specifically within the biography. While this required the research to make assumptions and estimates for experience, it provides support that the leaders within these positions are at the top tier of their profession.

Summary of Findings

This study began by asking what qualifications a nonprofit professional theatre leader holds regarding their education level, experience in the nonprofit realm, and experience within the theatre realm. The findings of this study provide that a graduate degree among both the AD and E/MD are the most common level of education for their positions, with an MFA being a practitioner's terminal degree for the ADs. With regard to experience, there was not a delineation between theatre and nonprofit, as most leaders gained their experience for their positions within nonprofit theatres, providing for equitable levels of experience between the two realms. While the levels varied, there was an overall average of 21 years of experience for the executive level of nonprofit professional theatre.

The findings of the study provide a pattern of qualifications for executive leadership of nonprofit professional theatres. This pattern—advanced education and extensive experience within the nonprofit and theatre realms—provides the foundational information needed to standardize the qualifications for the position, according to Wilensky's (1964) five-step professionalization model. A discussion on the application of theory to the field, the application of the findings of this research to the field, and how the research can be expanded and refined is presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This chapter will discuss the results of the study and place them within the context of the theories. It will then discuss the additional findings and provide potential conclusions that can be drawn from this data. Suggestions for the application of these findings within the field of nonprofit professional theatre leadership will then be discussed. It will end with a discussion of potential research expansion and an overall summary of the research.

Theoretical Applications

This study began by providing two theories for framing the leadership of nonprofit professional theatres: the upper echelons theory and the visionary leadership theory. The upper echelons theory notes that higher education levels will provide for organizational success, as education and experience can predict managerial behaviors, which translate to organizational functions (Hambrick, 2007; Kuenzi & Stewart, 2017). There is a positive correlation between the leader's education and experience and the success of an organization. As applied to this study, the expected findings were of a higher level of education and extensive experience among leadership, which was exactly what was discovered. Leaders at the executive level overwhelmingly hold graduate-level degrees. When it comes to experience, determining what is a valid minimum is open to interpretation. The Rasmuson Foundation (2021), the leading foundation of arts in Alaska, provides one of the clearest career delineations: a mid-career artist is one with

steady progress within the last five to 10 years. Splitting the difference provides for seven years of experience to meet the mid-career professional level, with anything over 10 years providing for a mature professional. As the average years of experience was 21, the description of these leaders as being exceptionally experienced is an easy conclusion to draw. The upper echelons theory says a professional needs a high level of education and experience to be successful; the study's findings support this assertion for nonprofit professional theatre leaders.

Visionary leadership was the second theoretical foundation for how executive theatre leaders operate. This theory asserts successful leaders effectively communicate a vision that inspires employees to take ownership and buy in to the organization's work (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1975; Taylor et al., 2014). Ince Aka et al. (2010) pointed to education level as suggestive of the leader's ability to communicate, as well as Yeager (1978) pointing to education and experience as affecting the perception of the leader. This study uses the education level and experience level to support the assertion about these leaders effectively communicating their vision. Just as with the upper echelons theory, the advanced degrees and extensive experience found in this study allow for the conclusion of effective vision communication occurring within the organization to be drawn. Visionary leadership is thus being effectively employed by these educated and experienced leaders.

General Findings Discussion

Beyond the data supporting the application of the upper echelons and visionary leadership theories, additional conclusions can be drawn from the information the leadership biographies provided. As Cray et al. (2007) noted, the personal social capital

of the leaders, particularly in relationship to the AD, is part of how theatre organizations legitimize themselves in the eyes of the community. Within this, the experiences the leaders highlight within their biographies on the organizational websites are how this social capital is transmitted (Turrini et al., 2012). The language patterns noted in Chapter 4, such as “numerous,” “some favorites,” etc., are ways to increase the experiences without specifics. The mentions of Broadway, international work, and awards also increase the standing and aid to promote the idea that these leaders are above average. The business highlights most common in E/MD biographies, in keeping with Grasse et al.’s (2014) findings of business acumen for the position playing a key role, work to the same effect. Whether it is language or the addition of other accomplishments, the biographies are almost a persuasive narrative, aimed at convincing the public that not only are they going to be good at their jobs, but they are also exceptional professionals, and thus the organization is exceptional. Although one could argue a resume provides a similar means of communicating expertise, the biographies are self-selected information, presented in a narrative form. It is not unlike the way a theatre presents its wares—both the biographies and the plays tell a story. The biographies tell the stories of accomplishments and achievements of the leader to support the organization’s assertion that their production is the best. No one wants to see a mediocre play, just as no one wants to be led by a mediocre professional. All of the information is included in a biography to aid in the legitimization of the leader’s ability, which trickles down through the organization.

In addition, the information contained within the biographies provides insight into what is valued for these leaders. It is more than education and more than simple

experience. Almost every single biography mentions shows by name. There are other organizations included by name as well. Awards and/or memberships in professional organizations are included in many. By including information like this, one can assume these facts are valued. Perhaps it is the name recognition of the show or the organization or even the award; perhaps it is an effort to show national-level experience; or perhaps it was simply translating a traditional resume to a narrative that led to the inclusion of these details. Whatever the initial reasoning, the information suggests that simply showing a high level of education and experience may not be enough to convince a board or the public that a leader is qualified. While not academically supported, the idea of Broadway as a big deal is common among the theatre field and even within the general public. The idea of winning awards is a desirable level of acknowledgement, no matter the field. And the idea of international travel has always been tied to success in the United States, as it is commonly associated with being wealthy. The biographies were of organizations that stretched across the nation, but the information was similar, no matter the geography. Is it because it is valuable to the leader or to the board or to the public? Perhaps it doesn't matter to whom the value is tied, as it can be assumed there is value through its consistent inclusion no matter the audience.

Lastly, while this study took an approach to separate out theatre realm experience and nonprofit experience when evaluating biographies, the data showed the two realms were inseparable for these leaders. Not a single biography suggested that their current position was the first within the theatre or nonprofit realm. This suggests that for theatre executives, the art form and the business are always tied together. There is little movement to the theatre realm from other art forms, much less other non-art related

nonprofits. It can then be assumed that those who rise to the executive leaders of nonprofit professional theatres have always had theatre within their professional lives, even if it was through an artist-level role, rather than at an executive level. Fernández-Aguayo and Pino-Juste (2018) pointed to theatre affecting people on a personal level, with Balfour and Ramanath (2011) noting how theatre can help create a person's identity. Perhaps the idea that theatre is so engrained within these leaders that the two were never separated professionally is not surprising. And perhaps the success of these leaders in herding the creative cats, as Mintzberg (1998) once called it, is only achieved because the leaders were once those creatives in need of herding.

Potential Applications

The applications of this study are numerous. To begin, the findings here can aid in creating a standardized qualification description of nonprofit theatre leaders for the second step in Wilensky's (1964) professionalization model. Once a standard for education and experience is agreed upon within the field, the educational program requirements of these leaders can then be standardized to ensure graduates are prepared to meet the field requirements for their future positions. While this alignment is in process, these findings can be used by professional theatres in crafting their job descriptions for the positions and by boards of organizations when looking to fill an empty AD or E/MD position. These standards can also be used by foundations and funding organizations to help define the level of giving or evaluate an organization to gauge its viability. Once the positions require a certain level of education and experience, other leadership members and partners can then use this standard to judge

whether an organization has the capability of growth and capacity building to ensure their investment and support in an ongoing organization.

Beyond simply judging an organization, professionals who wish to one day fill these positions can use this research to determine how competitive their current experience is and to identify gaps that may affect their ability to grow. Identifying deficiencies is not meant to discourage, but rather to provide areas in need of improvement. This information can also be used to craft cover letters and provide guidance on what information to highlight on resumes and other job applications. If nothing else, this examination of the current qualifications within the field can provide information to anyone looking to make a move to nonprofit theatre leadership.

In addition to the real-world applications, this research helps fill a gap in current academia. As Abfalter (2013), Heidelberg (2019), and DeVereaux (2019) have noted, the information on nonprofit professional theatre leadership is lacking. This research provides critical foundational information to not only the research of the theatre field, but also of nonprofit leadership and overall leadership. The applications of the upper echelons theory and visionary leadership theory have not yet been applied to the nonprofit theatre leadership realm, but this study provides the first data to support that these theories are applicable, and the data readily reinforces their assertions on leadership efficacy. Even the principle of unity and multiplicity, used here to provide a theoretical understanding of how theatre works, has not previously been applied to the theatre realm, but can now be documented as a way to aid in the explanation of why theatre works in such an idiosyncratic way.

Future Research

As the findings within this research are foundational and just the beginnings of providing the needed data to continue the field down the path of professionalization, the potential for future research is expansive. Future researchers can replicate the process with additional theatres in both the community theatre and for-profit theatre fields to determine if the findings are limited to the nonprofit theatre realm or are consistent across the entire theatre field. Additionally, a more detailed look into theatre budget groups can be conducted to determine what effect the organization's budget has on the qualifications of its leaders. A future researcher could easily focus on just the artistic director or the executive/managing director to delve deeper into what qualifications are unique within their respective title/area of expertise.

Future researchers could also expand the data sources and cross-corroborate findings to provide more detailed data points. Many of the data points were estimates based on standard lengths of tenure and information provided within the single-source biography. Expanding sources to include LinkedIn profiles, connections with the leaders personally, and information from the organization could further deepen the understanding and provide more in-depth details to support these findings. An examination of leadership job descriptions and position openings could also be conducted using the same parameters to determine whether the field findings are aligned to the job descriptions and advertised desired qualifications. Continuing to expand where the information comes from and viewing it through different lenses within the field can deepen the understanding of the data and aid in translating it to real-world application.

Conclusion

This dissertation focused on examining the qualifications of the artistic directors and executive/managing directors of nonprofit professional theatres with membership in the Theatre Communications Group. It conducted a content analysis of secondary data using the biographies of these leaders on their organizations' websites. The upper echelons theory and the visionary leadership theory provided the theoretical base of the study, while the principle of unity and multiplicity provided the theoretical base for understanding how professional theatre operates. The application of these theories to the field of theatre leadership were supported in the findings, as the findings determined a graduate-level education with an average of 21 years of experience in the theatre and nonprofit realms were the leading levels of education and experience. Although the research approached the data with separate attention paid to the nonprofit realm and theatre realm of experience, the data showed this distinction was not a real-world delineation, as most of the leaders gained their nonprofit experience at theatres. Beyond the findings specific to the research questions, additional patterns were observed, including phrasing to suggest experiences not specifically mentioned in the biographies and information that was consistent in many biographies. The most notable additional information was the inclusion of awards, service in boards of directors outside of their current organizations, and previous experience at the level in which they currently serve. The goal of this research was to fill a gap, identified by Abfalter (2013), Heidelberg (2019), and DeVereaux (2019), in hopes of furthering the professionalization of the executive leadership of nonprofit theatres, using Wilensky's (1964) professionalization steps as a guide. Applications of these findings are apparent in the professional realm as

well as the academic realm. There are a variety of ways in which this research can be expanded and deepened, with some specific suggestions provided in Chapter 5. Those who may have the most immediate use of this research are perhaps the up-and-coming leaders, those who wish one day to fill the very positions examined within this research. Whether academia or other fields find this information useful will certainly not have as much of a direct impact as those who will lead the field of professional nonprofit theatre into the future. It is then for those future leaders to use this information to help them see 2020 and beyond.

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APPENDIX A: IRB EXEMPTION

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Institutional Review Board (IRB)

For the Protection of Human Research

Protocol Number: 04087-2020

Responsible Researcher: Amanda Cantrell

Supervising Faculty: Dr. Michael Blair Thomas

Project Title: *Nonprofit Professional Theatre Leadership: Preparing for 2020 and Beyond.*

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:

This research protocol is **Exempt** from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight under Exemption **Category 4**. Your research study may begin immediately. If the nature of the research project changes such that exemption criteria may no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before continuing your research.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

- *Upon completion of this research study all data (i.e. email correspondence, survey data, transcripts, name lists, etc.) must be securely maintained (locked file cabinet, password protected computer, etc.) and accessible only by the researcher for a minimum of 3 years.*

If this box is checked, please submit any documents you revise to the IRB Administrator at irb@valdosta.edu to ensure an updated record of your exemption.

APPENDIX B: THEATRE SITES

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Budget Group	Theatre Name	City	State	Website
Budget Group 1	African-American Shakespeare Company	San Francisco	CA	https://www.african-americanshakes.org/
	Cyrano's Theatre Company	Anchorage	AK	https://www.cyranos.org/
	Centenary Stage Company	Hackettstown	NJ	http://www.centenarystageco.org/
	Third Avenue Playhouse	Sturgeon Bay	WI	https://www.thirdavenueplayhouse.com/
	Williamston Theatre	Williamston	MI	https://www.williamstontheatre.org/
Budget Group 2	Boulder Ensemble Theatre Company	Boulder	CO	https://betc.org/
	Company One Theatre	Boston	MA	https://companyone.org/
	Cardinal Stage	Bloomington	IN	https://cardinalstage.org/
	Pangea World Theater	Minneapolis	MN	https://www.pangeaworldtheater.org/
	Waterwell	New York City	NY	http://waterwell.org/
Budget Group 3	Actor's Express	Atlanta	GA	http://www.actors-express.com/
	Cornerstone Theater Company	Los Angeles	CA	https://cornerstonetheater.org/
	Imagination Stage	Bethesda	MD	https://imaginationstage.org/
	Miami Theater Center	Miami Shores	FL	https://www.mtcmiami.org/
	Quantum Theatre	Pittsburgh	PA	http://www.quantumtheatre.com/

Budget Group 4	American Shakespeare Center	Staunton	VA	https://americanshakespearecenter.com/
	Court Theatre	Chicago	IL	https://www.courttheatre.org/
	TheatreSquared	Fayetteville	AR	https://www.theatre2.org/
	Stages Repertory Theatre	Houston	TX	https://www.stageshouston.com
	Northern Stage	White River Junction	VT	https://northernstage.org/
Budget Group 5	Arizona Theatre Company	Tucson	AZ	https://arizonatheatre.org/
	Cleveland Play House	Cleveland	OH	https://www.clevelandplayhouse.com/
	Seattle Children's Theatre	Seattle	WA	https://www.sct.org/
	The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis	St. Louis	MO	http://www.repstl.org/
	Trinity Repertory Company	Providence	RI	https://www.trinityrep.com/
Budget Group 6	Arena Stage	Washington, DC	---	https://www.arenastage.org/
	Hartford Stage	Hartford	CT	https://www.hartfordstage.org/
	ZACH Theatre	Austin	TX	https://zachtheatre.org/
	Milwaukee Repertory Theater	Milwaukee	WI	https://www.milwaukeeerep.com/
	The Old Globe	San Diego	CA	https://www.theoldglobe.org/