Theater Management
Knowledge Base

Paper

YALE
SCHOOL OF
DRAMA

GOING PRO

A SURVEY OF ATTITUDES ABOUT PROFESSIONALIZATION IN
NONPROFIT THEATER MANAGEMENT
2013

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the winter of 2012-13, four hundred and five nonprofit theater managers completed a survey designed to collect data on attitudes toward professionalization in the theater management field. This is the first known survey of its kind and is intended to kindle a discussion and highlight additional questions that should be asked.

The survey looked for attitudes about the following indicators of the existence of a profession: a full-time occupation; formal training; a professional association; a code of ethics; use of the professional association as a major reference; belief in service to the public; belief in self-regulation; a sense of calling; and a belief in autonomy. (See p. 5 for an explanation of the framework.) Some of the findings will seem self-evident to managers who have paid close attention to the field over time. Other findings may stimulate discussion and, perhaps, movement in the state of professionalization in the field.

Here are the major findings:

- Size of organization, not attitude of the manager, correlates with artist compensation.
- Managers of larger organizations compensate staff and artists better; focus more on their mission; rate the board as a more important constituent; and report having more rewarding careers than managers of smaller organizations.
- Managers do not consider the public (as distinct from their audiences) to be an important constituency.
- Managers of smaller organizations seek more guidance from outside sources than managers of larger organizations.
- Managers who spend more of their time on administrative and organizational leadership issues are more satisfied and better compensated than those who spend more of their time on artistic issues.
- Managers consult with their peers much more often than they consult with the service organizations to which they belong, and about different issues.
- Managers generally believe that individual managers have the expertise to recognize and deal with their own problems rather than needing to rely on the judgment of external parties (e.g., the board, peer managers, or auditors).

WHY INVESTIGATE PROFESSIONALIZATION?

While there is a dearth of research on theater managers' attitudes toward professionalization, sociologists have been studying the causes and effects of professionalization in other fields for decades. When studying professionalization in theater management, we can draw on a long history of the establishment and investigation of other professions. Over the centuries, the clergy and practitioners of law and medicine established their fields as "professions," and members of other groups holding expertise have studied these original professions in order to determine how they function and how professionalization might be replicated. The impetus toward professionalization stems from a variety of sources, including social closure, which "occurs wherever the competition for a livelihood creates groups interested in reducing that competition,"[1] and a desire for control of colleagues by colleagues.[2]

In 1983, the sociologist Robert Golembiewski proposed a model explaining how professionalization might be related to improved performance (figure 1).[3] While this model speaks to general motives for professionalization, it is useful to connect the model to the argument for professionalization in theater management. If theater managers are able to demonstrate prudent and good (meaning, in this case, "ethical") practice, an ability to regulate that practice across the field, and an effort to continue developing such practice, then we could reap the projected benefits. Golembiewski's model suggests that these benefits would include enhanced public trust, self-esteem, and rewards
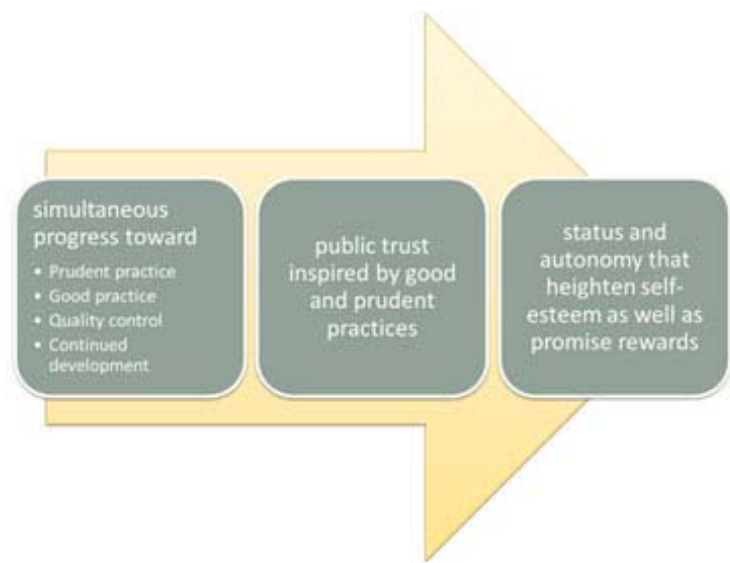
(Fig. 1 - Golembiewski's model of improved performance through professionalization)

The model suggests that increased "public trust" could result in greater creative or budgetary license for theaters, "self-esteem" could result in a desire to stay in the field and greater staff morale, and that the "rewards" of professionalization could range from greater audience loyalty to improved donor confidence and improved compensation for managers themselves.

The sociological perspective on nonprofit theater history in the United States in the 20th century reveals impulses toward professionalization in our field. After the Depression and WWII, the decline of Broadway touring operations left a gap in the American theatrical landscape. Starting in the late 1940s a few enterprising pioneers such as Nina Vance and Margo Jones launched indigenous theaters to fill that gap, with the help of the Ford Foundation.[5] Some regional theaters were able to offer managers (and sometimes artists) a "full-time occupation"—often seen as one of the key attributes of a "profession." Educational institutions such as Yale School of Drama[*] and Brooklyn College[†] established graduate training programs in arts administration usually offering a Master of Fine Arts or equivalent advanced degree. The creation of theater training programs fulfilled another traditional definition of a "profession": its members must be able to acquire a formal education in the subject.[6] Founding of field service organizations such as Theatre Communications Group (TCG, founded in 1961) and bargaining units such as the League of Resident Theatres (LORT, founded in 1966), and the subsequent expansion of the services they offer, were additional half-steps toward professionalization; yet these organizations cannot claim to be "professional associations" in the same way as the American Bar Association or American Medical Association can because they do not have the power to establish standards of legitimacy for practitioners.

> "The arts are essential to the fabric of our society and the people who create that work, beginning with the artists, deserve the opportunity to have some kind of middle-class life based on their work."
>
> *– Roche Schulfer*
> *Executive Director*
> *Goodman Theatre[4]*

Examining the motivations of small companies brings the research up to the present. Such companies strive to achieve "professional" status out of a desire for stability and increased earnings, which would allow them to produce their art on a more regular basis. In an interview, Artistic Director Steve Cosson of The Civilians says of the company: "We would love to be able to actually produce our work in New York more regularly, to be able to plan and say, 'That show's going to be ready that season, so let's produce it, and maybe with a partner.' But to be able to actually pull the trigger and decide to do a show—that is something we're not able to do."[7] Organizations such as Elevator Repair Service want to grow their budgets in order to improve the quality and quantity of their art as well as the quality of their lives as artists. Artistic Director John Collins explains the benefit of a larger budget and a professional staff: "[If] we pay the actors more, if we give people involved more in return, then we can do more. We can work, we can rehearse more often, we can rehearse during the day—we don't have to rehearse at night."[8] If a company has more time available, it's logical to assume that it could produce either a higher quality or greater quantity of work or both. Whether smaller organizations are capitalizing on their own success or partnering with larger organizations that can provide them with professional-grade resources, the leaders of these smaller organizations are seeking to enhance their level of professionalization so that they can make art better.

As regional nonprofit theater comes into increasingly frequent contact with other theater-making organizations across the performing arts spectrum (engaging in Broadway transfers on the one hand,

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[*] Theater Administration program founded in 1965.

[†] Performing Arts Management program founded in 1972.

and presenting small ensemble companies on the other), the field needs to develop a greater understanding of how professionalization can improve theater management.

BACKGROUND

Over the past century, members of a variety of occupations—from engineers to accountants to pharmaceutical statisticians—have attempted to evaluate their fields' ability to meet ever-changing definitions of what a profession is. [9] In 1964, sociologist Harold Wilensky aggregated his observations of a range of traditional professions to identify a list of indicators of professionalization that he believed were recognized across a wide range of fields.[10] This survey asked respondents questions intended to determine to what extent they perceived each of Wilensky's indicators as existing within the field of nonprofit theater management. After examining the presence or absence of Wilensky's indicators in our field, we can then consider whether we are content with the status quo, would prefer to enhance some aspects of professionalization, or are comfortable without others. Wilenksy's list of indicators (as refined by another sociologist, Richard Hall)[11] appears below:

Structural Indicators
1. Creation of a full-time occupation
2. Establishment of a training school
3. Formation of professional associations
4. Formation of a code of ethics

Attitudinal Indicators
5. Use of the professional organization as a major reference
6. Belief in service to the public
7. Belief in self-regulation
8. A sense of calling to the field
9. Autonomy

"The greatest threat to the not-for-profit sector is the betrayal of public trust, the disappointment of public confidence. Virtually all knowledgeable observers of the not-for-profit scene believe that an overwhelming proportion of not-for-profits are honorably run...that admirable context, however, does not provide much protection to the sector when a sequence of highly publicized disgraceful not-for-profit misdeeds occurs."

– Joel Fleishman,
Professor of Law and Public Policy,
and Director of the Heyman Center
on Ethics, Public Policy and the Professions,
Duke University[12]

The indicators above provide a useful starting point for an evaluation of professionalization in the theater management field. The concept of professionalization has changed over time, so Wilensky's model should be looked at in the context of the industry it attempts to describe, but not as a definitional tool for what a profession must be (i.e., this is not a cookie-cutter approach). Bureaucracy, for example, is a complicating factor in the study of professions—a lawyer who works in the legal department at an investment firm and who is overseen by a non-lawyer may have a different perception of the value of self-regulation from a lawyer who works in a law firm and who is overseen by another lawyer. Due in part to the expansion of the definition of "profession" to include practitioners working within a larger organization, sociologist Linda Evans has argued that in these "new professions … autonomy has evidently given way to accountability."[13] This distinction is just one

way in which the model above may need context when used to describe any field, and this is certainly true as we make observations about professionalization in theater management.

Evaluating the Indicators of Professionalization

We can use the indicators above to place theater management on a continuum of "professionalization."

The structural indicators are relatively easy to assess. We do have a full-time occupation and training programs. We don't have professional associations, relying instead on service organizations, peer relationships, and even representatives from foundations to help determine and maintain a level of prudent practice. However, since none of these groups have power to erect a barrier to entry into the profession of theater management, they do not meet the definition of "professional associations." Furthermore, there is no universally accepted code of ethics in our field.

The attitudinal indicators are more difficult to assess, and require interpretation. Since we don't have professional associations, we cannot use them as references. We do, however, use service organizations and peers as references quite frequently. Absence of professional associations, codes of ethics, and minimum standards also indicates that theater managers are not interested in peer regulation. While theater managers strongly believe in service to their audience, they do not share a strong belief in service to the public at large. Regarding autonomy, the data suggest that we are confident in a manager's ability to use his or her own expertise, but not in a manager's ability to judge the actions of peer managers. (The medical profession, for example, has put in place peer accountability mechanisms, such as morbidity and mortality review boards). Finally, while the survey does not ask directly about a sense of calling to the field, the data on proportion of career spent in the field, feeling rewarded in the career, and recommending the career to others suggest that managers who entered administration earlier feel more called to the field than those who entered it later.

This study is designed to broaden the discussion of what it means to be a professional in our field. By analyzing the data, we can determine where our strengths and weaknesses lie as a group whose greatest collective desire is—I believe—to make art better.

METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the survey creation, dissemination, and collection method, as well as some of the risks taken and tradeoffs made.

The survey aimed to (a) collect as much attitudinal and demographic data as possible, and (b) be short and simple enough that a critical mass of executive leaders would take the time to fill it out. The goal was that a manager could complete the survey in 15 minutes without having to look up any facts about his or her theater, and the survey therefore relies on managers' memories. This goal limited the depth of the responses, sometimes requiring generalization to groups of theaters within a range (e.g., "theaters with budgets between $1 million and $3 million," rather than "theaters with an average budget of $2 million"). This goal also introduced into the calculations a potential for error if a manager entered incorrect information.

Who Was Surveyed?

- 501(c)(3) organizations
- Performing Arts designation
- NTEE code "Theater"
- Budget of $200K or more on most recent IRS Form 990
- Chief executive on management side

How Many?

- 1,027 organizations
- 765 invitations sent
- 405 usable responses

While many different organizations can be considered theaters, this survey focused on organizations that appear in the Guidestar database of nonprofits, are currently registered 501(c)(3)s, identify as performing arts organizations with the National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE) code A65 (Theater), and have annual budgets of over $200,000 as of their most recently filed IRS Form 990. Including theaters below that budget floor would have taken exponentially greater time it to compile the contact information for managers of organizations.

In October 2012, 1,027 organizations matched these criteria. The purchase of TCG's contact list and a reasonable amount of web searching provided contacts for 765 managers at these organizations. A best effort was made to identify the most senior management executive at each organization, as distinct from the most senior artistic executive. There were a statistically insignificant number of instances in which two co-equal executives led an organization in both management and artistic matters, in which case both executives were invited to participate. The word "profession" and its derivatives were mentioned in the introduction to establish what the survey is about, but participants were never asked whether they considered themselves professionals or whether they agreed with any particular definition of the term. Participants were promised a best effort at anonymity in all data analysis and publication.

Snapshot of Respondents

405 respondents represent:

- Managers with a combined experience of 7,185 years in the field (including years in marketing, development, and other administrative areas)
- Theaters with a combined pool of 5,378 full-time employees
- 59% of all the Regional Tony Award™ winners
- 59% of LORT member theater managing executives
- 47% of TCG members

The volume of respondents represents a large portion of the theater management population, and is therefore a good approximation of the field as a whole. The margin of error for the study is ±3.79%, which means that the statistics presented should be quite accurate when expanding the analysis beyond the respondents to the whole population. The significance of statistics presented is less than 0.05, which means we can be reasonably confident that, were the study to be conducted again, the same results would be achieved.

Correlations

Following standard statistical guidelines for a margin of error of this size, the strength and direction of a correlation can be determined by its "r value":[14]

- $r > 0.5$ indicates a strong positive correlation
- $0.5 > r > 0.3$ indicates a moderate positive correlation
- $0.3 > r > 0.1$ indicates a weak positive correlation
- $r < -0.5$ indicates a strong negative correlation
- $-0.5 < r < -0.3$ indicates a moderate negative correlation
- $-0.3 < r < -0.1$ indicates a weak negative correlation

This formulation is used throughout the paper.

Limitations

As with any survey, the author, the form, and the respondents may have an unintended effect on the results. Contact email addresses were considered unavailable when a theater's website required submission of a web form to get in touch with a manager rather than making the email publicly available. Since this was a voluntary survey, there may have been a self-selection bias in which managers chose to answer the survey. It is possible that, because the survey included questions for which some possible answers were more socially desirable than others, participants chose to answer in a desirable or aspirational way rather than truthfully. TCG member theaters may be overrepresented in the sample due to the availability and efficiency of their contact list. Furthermore, the effort to make the survey easy enough to complete in 15 minutes sacrificed depth of questioning that might have allowed some less traditional theaters to complete the survey in a manner that would reflect their organization's situation more thoroughly. Several managers wrote in to say that they made a best effort to fill out the survey even though some questions did not offer answer options that represented

their theaters. Finally, the ranking questions are purposefully restrictive; they do not tell us how important respondents think each of the choices is in general, only how important they think the choices are in relation to each other.

The survey's major limitation is that it represents a single moment in time. With few exceptions, this survey cannot be used alone to examine trends. It would be useful to conduct the study again after a proper interval of time in order to determine the direction in which the field is moving concerning particular issues.

SAMPLE GROUP PROFILE

This section gives a brief visual overview of the nonprofit theater field as context for interpreting the results of the survey.

Most Organizations are over 20 Years Old

The majority of the organizations surveyed are over 20 years old (figure 2.1)

Age of Organizations (Fig 2.1)
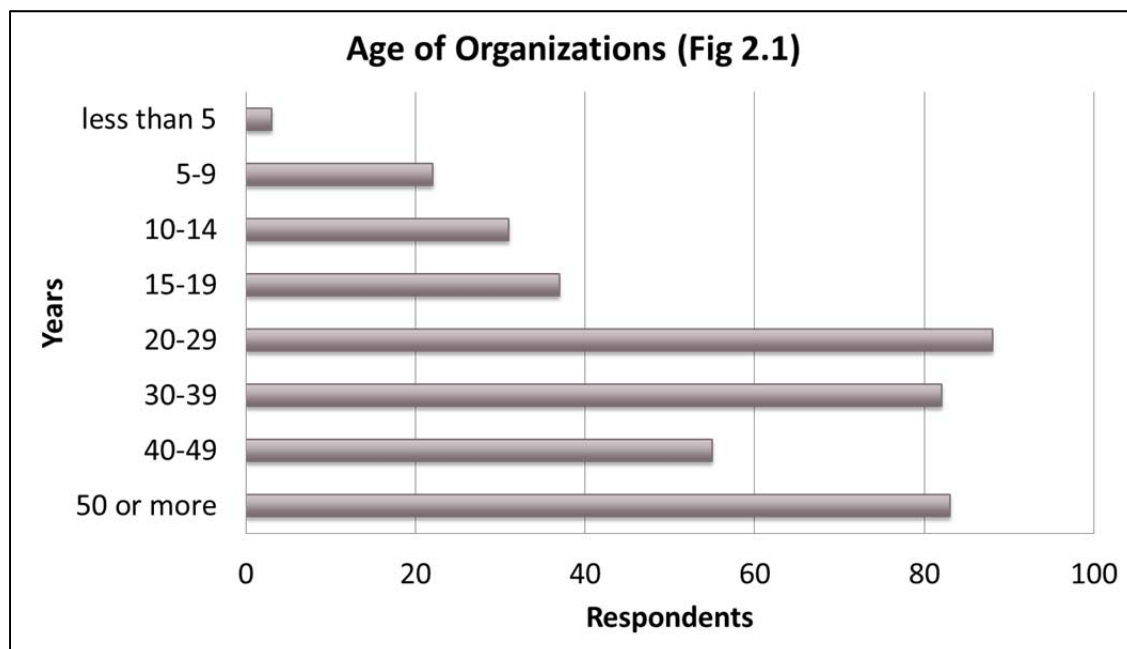
### *Most Organizations Operate with a Budget under $3 Million*

Managers were asked to report on the size of their budget as of fiscal year 2012. As the study took place between October 2012 and January 2013, managers who had not completed their fiscal year by the time they took the survey were asked to use their most recent projections. Most of the organizations have annual budgets under $3 million (figure 2.2). The chosen budget groups are analogous to the TCG Fiscal Survey budget groups.
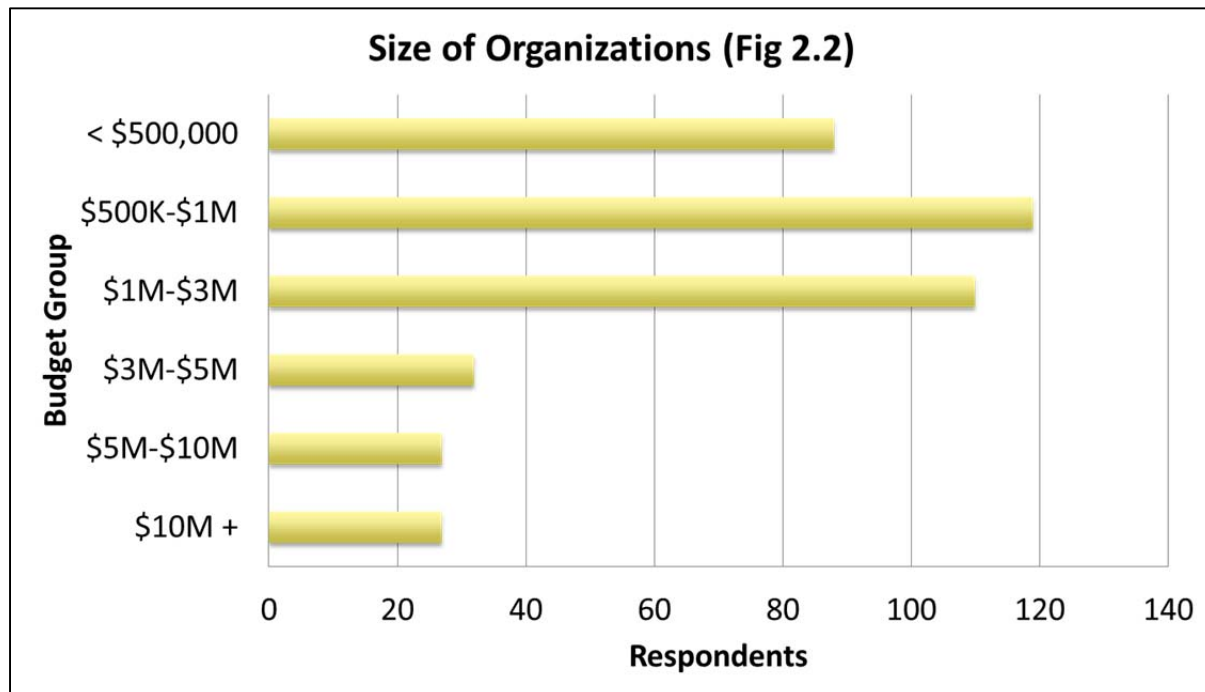
The Average Budget Is Better than Breakeven

The majority of theaters have either a balanced budget or a surplus for FY12 (figure 2.3).[‡] The data show no correlation between a theater's size and whether it has a balanced budget or surplus. Managing a theater with a deficit positively correlates with a perception of the field as more difficult than it used to be (r = 0.14). Managing a theater with a surplus positively correlates with a perception of having a more rewarding career (r = 0.12).

Later in the survey, managers were asked to rank how important it was to them to keep the organization financially healthy (ranked against variables such as "stewarding the mission" and "supporting the artistic vision"). The relative importance to the manager of keeping the organization financially healthy shows no correlation with whether the organization posted a surplus or a deficit in their FY12 budget.
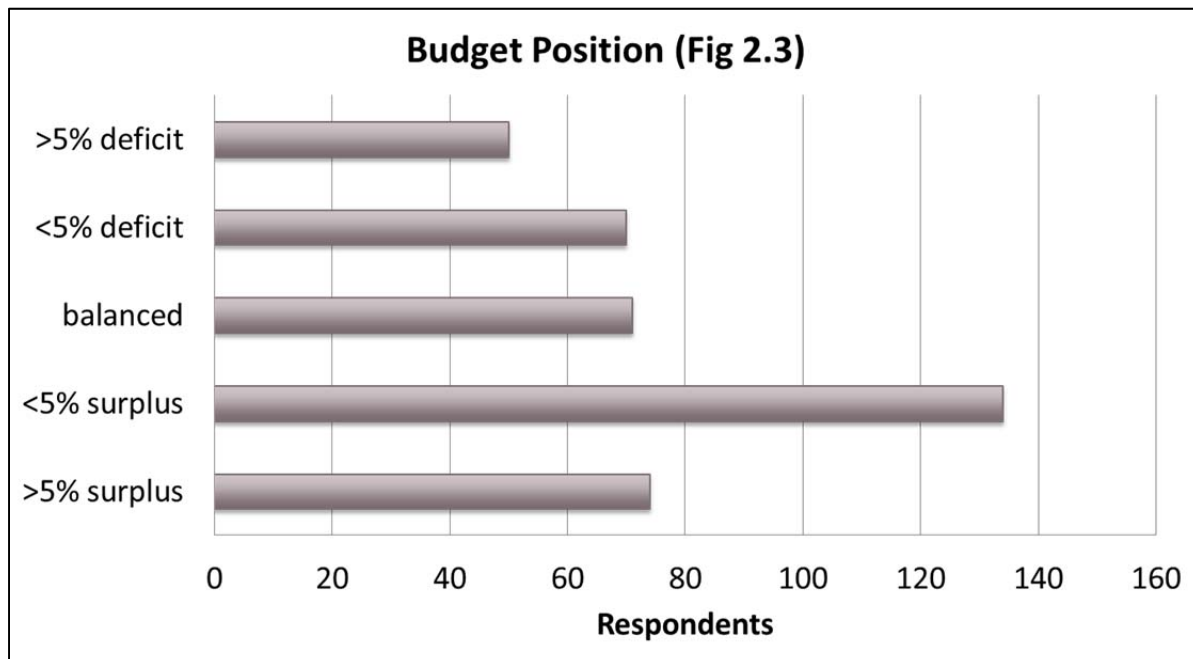
[‡] This survey finding presents a somewhat more rosy picture than other recent research.

Earned vs. Contributed Income

Average earned income = 55% of total income
Average contributed income = 45% of total income

Larger budgets positively correlate with a higher proportion of earned income ($r = 0.20$) over contributed income.

Urban Organizations Experience Greater Competition

While organizations face disparate numbers of competitors (figure 2.4), there is a positive correlation between being located in a more urban environment and facing more competitors ($r = 0.22$). Facing more competitors is negatively correlated with an organization offering a subscription service as part of its earned income strategy ($r = -0.21$). (This somewhat surprising survey finding might benefit from further research.)
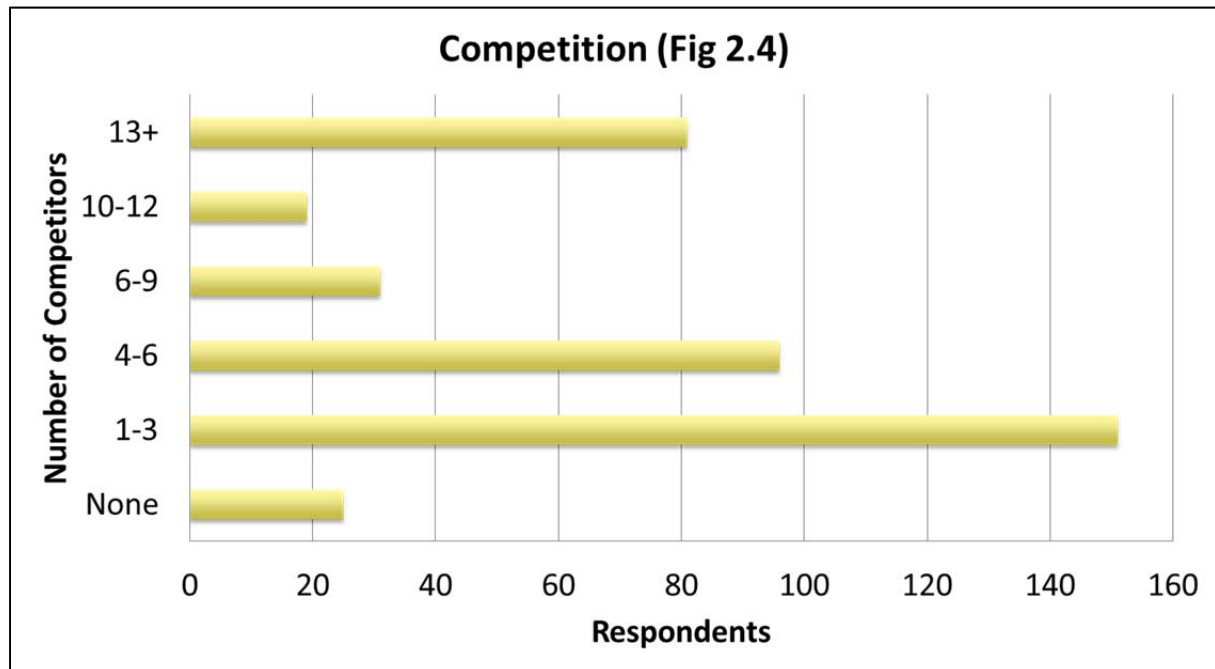
***Many Factors are Related to Diversity of Income Sources***

Organizations are using a wide variety of income generation strategies. Organizations rely on an average of 7.5 of the 11 income types listed in figure 2.5. "Other income" encompasses:

- Concessions & merchandise
- Co-production funds
- Corporate support
- Education income
- Membership fees
- Royalties
- University support
- Venue rentals

Analysis of the data reveals that older organizations are more likely to have endowments (r = 0.40). Several factors positively correlate with having a greater diversity of income sources:

- Larger staff (r = 0.37)
- Larger board (r = 0.44)
- Bigger budget (r = 0.35)
- Organizations run by non-founders (r = 0.24)
- Managers who spend more time on administrative issues rather than artistic issues (r = 0.24)

However, many of these factors also positively correlate with each other, so determining the factors with the strongest influence on the relationship may require further research and analysis.
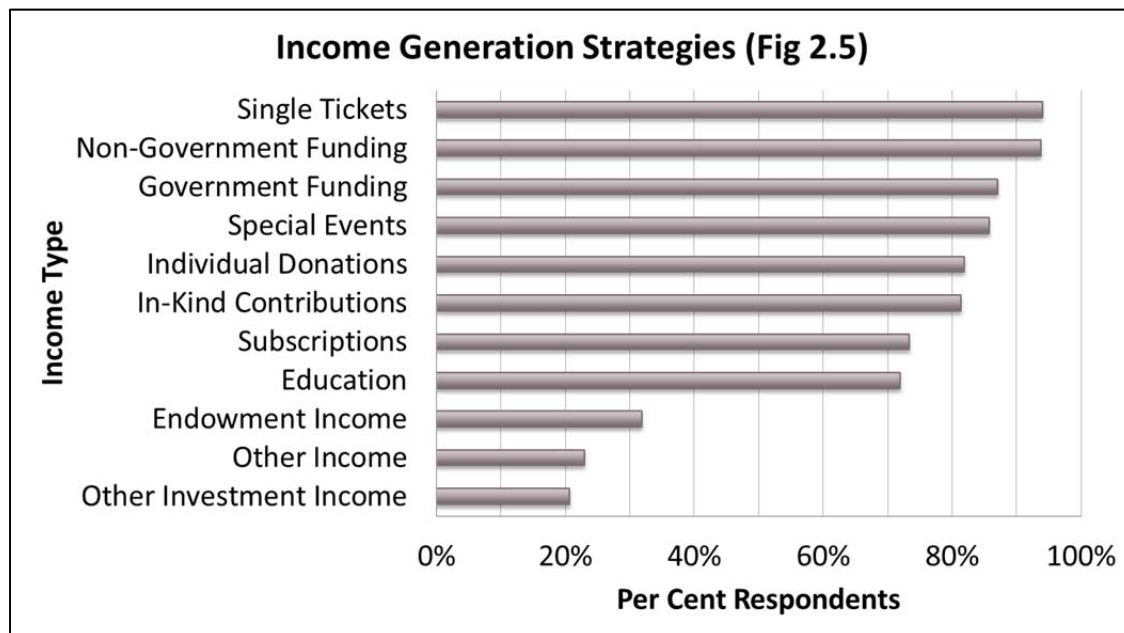
Average Weekly Artist Salary is Low

Figure 2.6 represents weekly salary ranges for non-staff artists. Since this survey question only asks about non-staff artists, it is possible that the responses do not fully represent several additional types of artists, including those in ensemble companies and artists who hold multiple positions within a company. It is also the case that asking for an average weekly salary range removes the distinctions among director, actor, stage manager, designer, and other artists who may individually be paid more or less than the average for the organization. The data suggest that artist salary is *not* correlated with the importance a manager places on artists as a constituency of the organization. Some organizations claim that serving artists is a major part of their identity, and while there are plenty of ways to serve artists other than through salary, this metric represents an important indication of the value of the artist to the organization. However, data analysis reveals no relationship between whether a manager considers artists to be an important constituency and how well his or her organization compensates those artists.
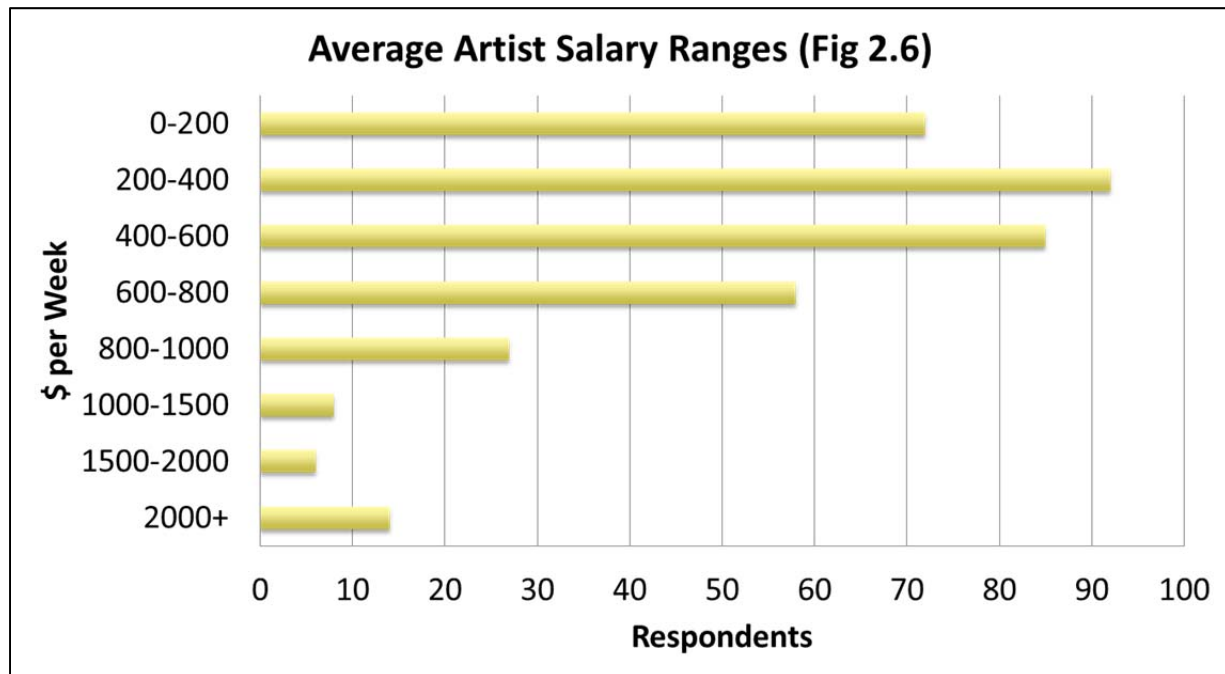
Artist Salary Improves with Budget Size

While the salary of non-staff artists does not correlate with managers' perception of such artists' importance to their organizations, it does positively correlate with size of organization (r = 0.43).

Figure 2.7 represents the average non-staff weekly salary ranges by portion of each budget group that pays in that range. As the chart shows, larger theaters tend to pay their non-staff artists better[§]. While the lowest budget group (n = 78) pays 44% of its artists $0-200 per week, the highest group (n = 21) pays 43% of its artists $800-1,000 per week.

Please see appendix 3 to view each budget category separately.

Artist Salary by Budget Size (Fig 2.7)
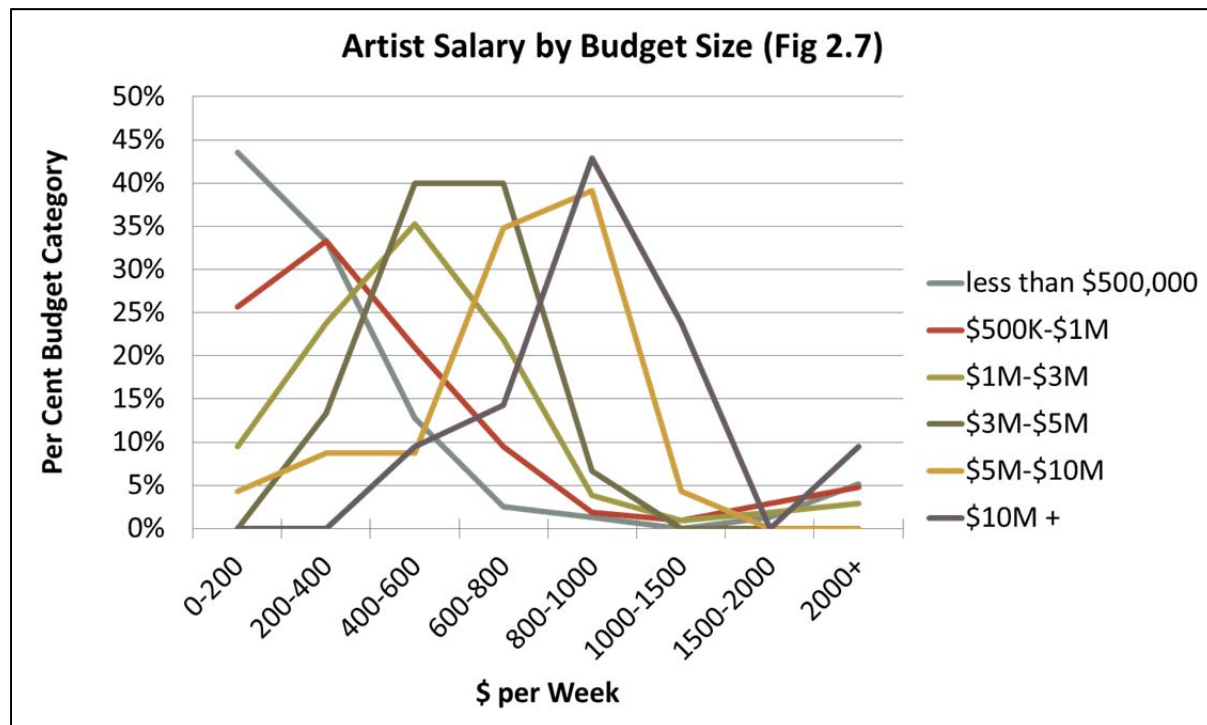
[§] Collective bargaining agreements specify minimum weekly salaries based on the size of the theater. These agreements typically bind larger theaters to paying higher weekly minimums, which may account for this effect.

FINDINGS

I have categorized the findings of this study according to the indicators of professionalization observed by Wilensky and discussed in the Background section. The nine factors are:

1. Creation of a full-time occupation
2. Establishment of a training school
3. Formation of professional associations
4. Formation of a code of ethics
5. Use of professional organization as a reference
6. Belief in self-regulation
7. Belief in service to the public
8. Autonomy
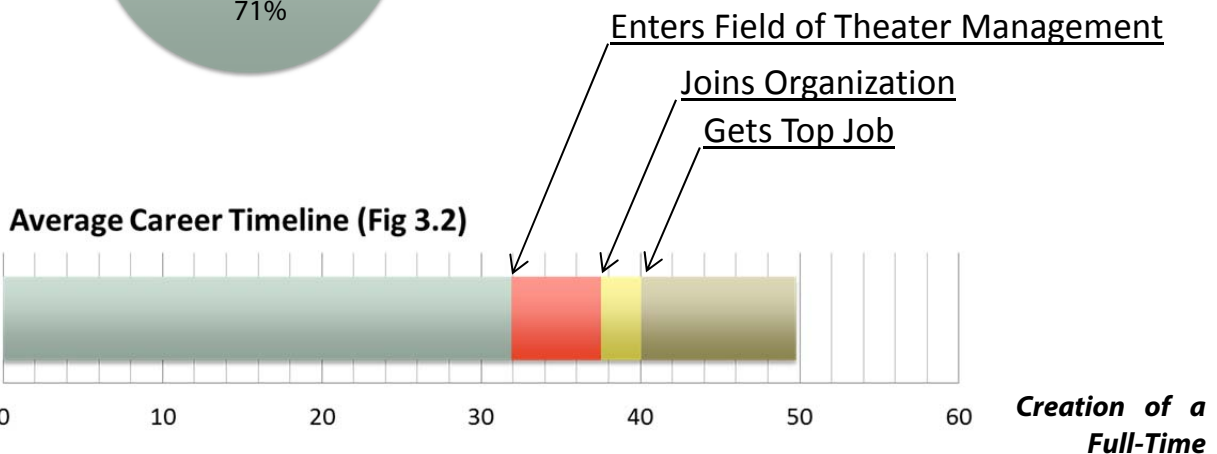9. Sense of calling to the field

Creation of a Full-Time Occupation

Since at least some of the respondents replied that managing a theater was their full-time occupation (i.e., they are both employed full time and spend 100% of that time on management issues), we can say that the field fulfills Wilensky's first criterion in a broad sense. The data reveals that 90% of managers work full time, while 100% of the organizations at which the managers work have at least one full-time employee. Founders make up 20% of the respondents. The average manager:

**Manager Time Split (Fig 3.1)**

art 29%
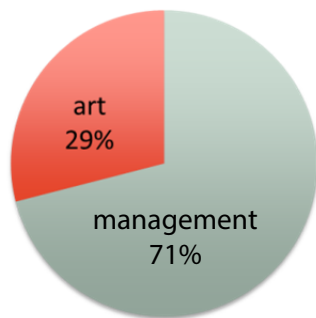
management 71%

- Spends 71% of his or her time on administrative and leadership issues and 29% on artistic issues;
- Entered the field of theater management at age 32;
- Joined his or her current organization at age 38;
- Entered his or her current position at age 40; and
- Is about 50 years old.

Enters Field of Theater Management

Joins Organization

Gets Top Job

Average Career Timeline (Fig 3.2)

0   10   20   30   40   50   60

***Creation of a Full-Time Occupation (continued)***

Of the managers surveyed, 59% are men and 41% are women. On average the men receive higher salaries than the women, as shown in figure 3.3, and work at larger organizations. Salary correlates with years in the field (r = 0.40), and men have more years of experience in the field (19 years for men versus 16 years for women).
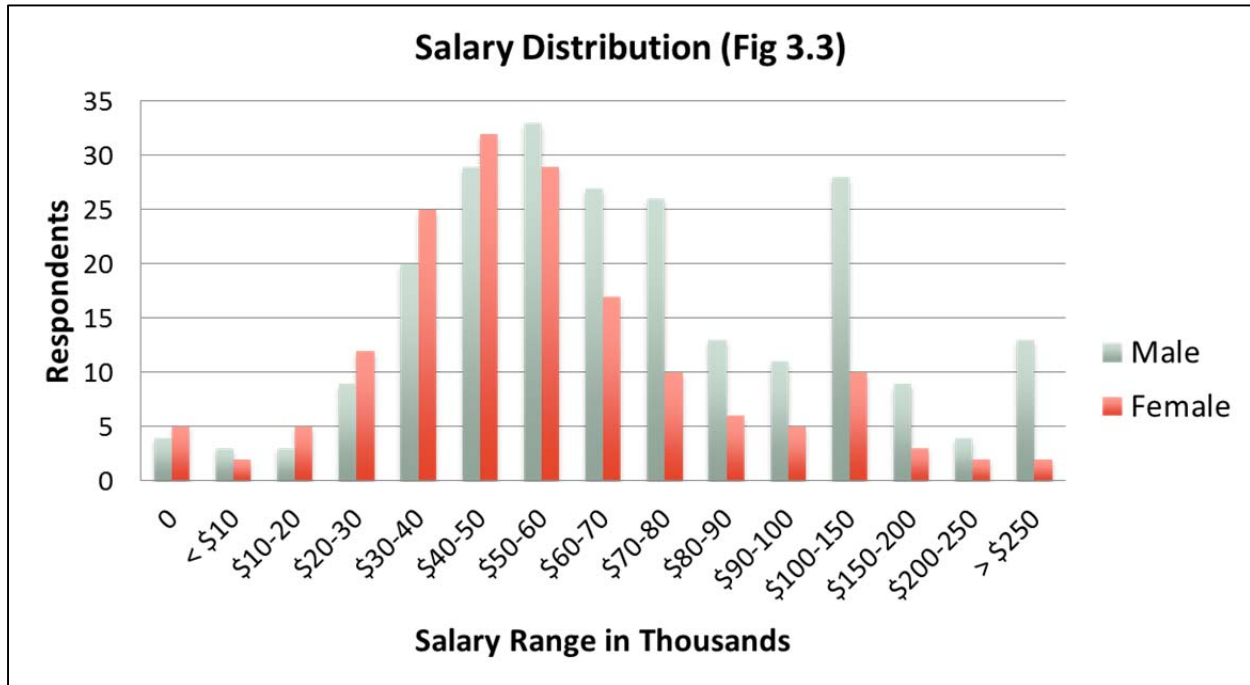
Creation of a Full-Time Occupation (continued)

Most organizations have limited access to professional development opportunities. Of the development opportunities listed in figure 3.4, managers' own organizations offer an average of 1.7. Some organizations also offer their full-time employees seminars, workshops, coaching, and access to certificate programs. Most organizations that offer "other" professional development provide it on an *ad hoc* basis as funds allow.

Professional Development Opportunities (Fig 3.4)
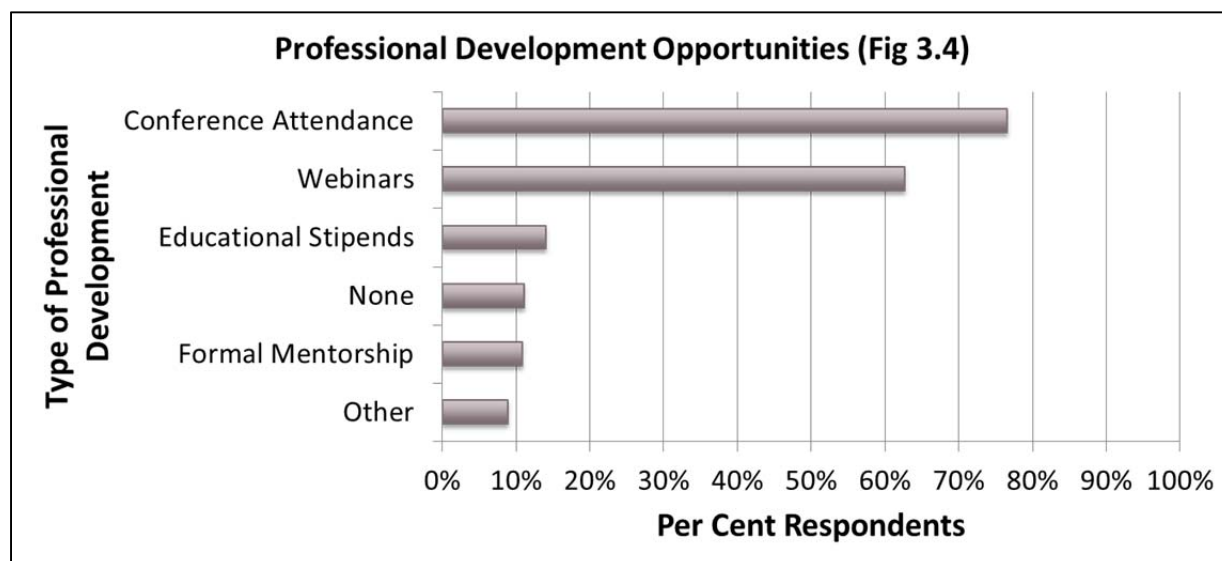
Establishment of a Training School

As with the definition of "full-time occupation" above, the theater field has access to training schools and therefore fulfills Wilensky's criterion. However, only 15% of respondents have formal training in arts administration.

Older respondents tend to have less formal theater education (r = -0.24), have spent a smaller proportion of their careers in theater management (r = -0.11), and tend to spend less of their time on management (r = -0.12) than younger respondents. Two related questions to examine are whether formal career training improves professionalization and, since theater management training schools have been established in the past 50 years, whether they are becoming a more popular route to management in the field.

Education levels are roughly equal between male and female respondents (figure 3.5).

"Our organizations are much more complicated than they were 20 years ago. So many of us realized that we would no longer hire ourselves to run these organizations."

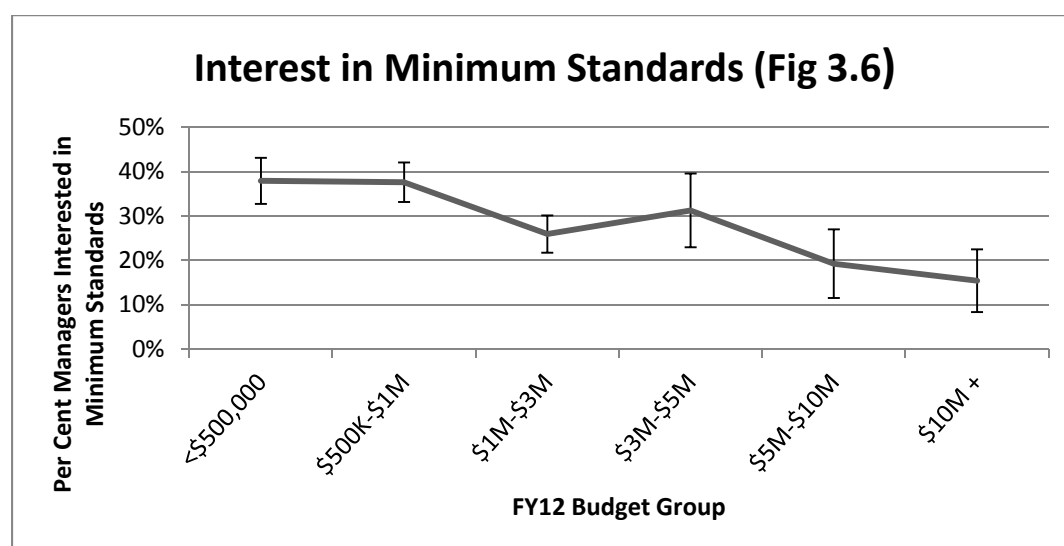– Susie Medak
Managing Director
Berkeley Repertory Theatre[15]
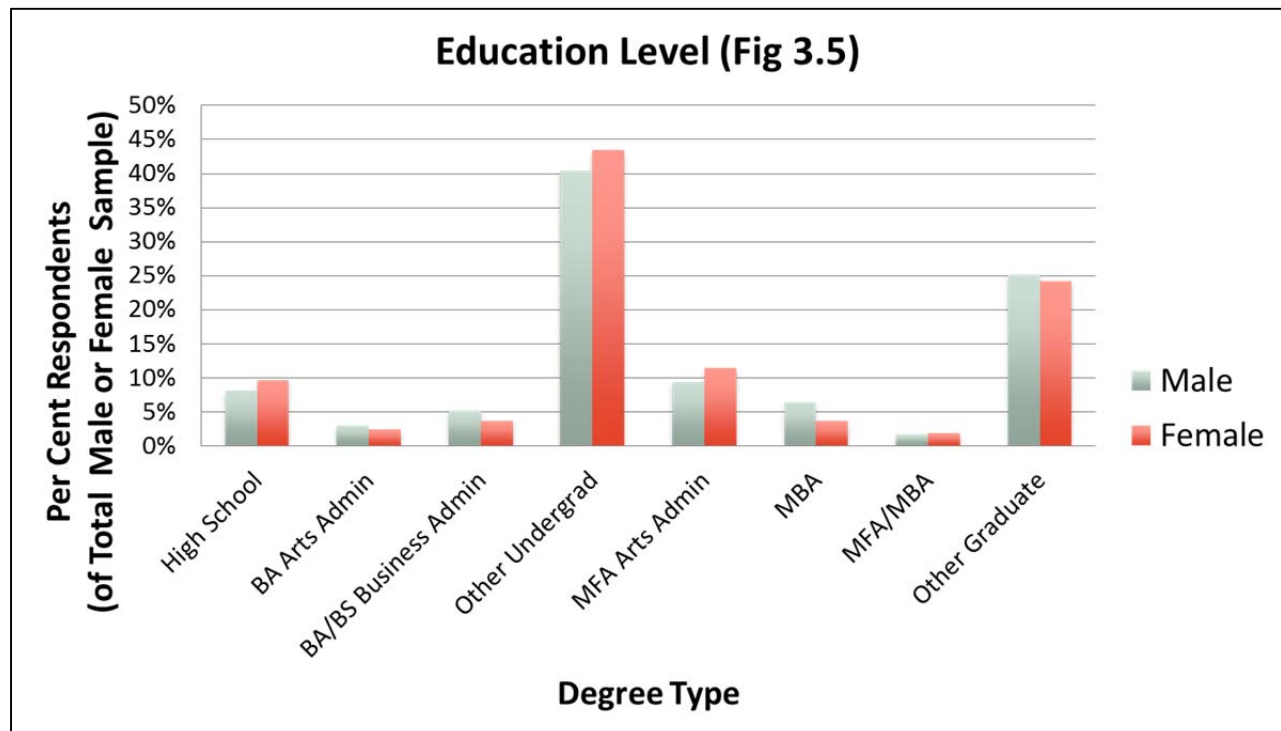
Education Level (Fig 3.5)

Formation of Professional Associations and
Use of Professional Organizations as References

Professional associations are designed to provide members with best practice guidelines, to enforce the code of ethics upon which the members have agreed, to communicate to the public which practitioners are legitimate, and to provide occupational closure—to create a barrier to entry and a mechanism for exit against those who do not or no longer meet the association's requirements.[16] We do not have professional associations in the theater management field because no organization that serves the field or some part of the field (e.g. TCG, Alliance of Resident Theatres/New York (ART/NY), LA Stage Alliance, LORT) fulfills all the criteria to be defined as one. TCG cannot enforce a field-wide code of ethics; ART/NY and LA Stage Alliance are regional organizations and also cannot enforce a field-wide code of ethics; LORT has a minimum standard of practice in its members' adherence to their various negotiated agreements, but it doesn't claim to have the ubiquity to represent the field as a whole.

Field service organizations are the closest we come to professional associations, inasmuch as they attempt to aggregate and disseminate best practices. The TCG website offers an example: "By providing a range of training, communications, research, and networking opportunities, TCG harnesses the knowledge of the theatre field for the collective whole."[17] Whether theater managers share knowledge at an industry conference or gain it through a publication, by enabling managers to gain field-related knowledge service organizations fulfill a necessary (but not sufficient) function of professional associations.

Is the industry interested in establishing minimum standards of practice along the lines of a professional association? According to the survey results, smaller organizations are most interested in establishing a minimum standard of practice. Managers of the smallest category of theater ($200,000 - 500,000 annual budget) are 2.5 times more likely to favor establishment of a minimum standard of practice than managers of the largest category of theater (figure 3.6). However, those who favor minimum standards are still in the minority at 31% of respondents.

Formation of Professional Associations and
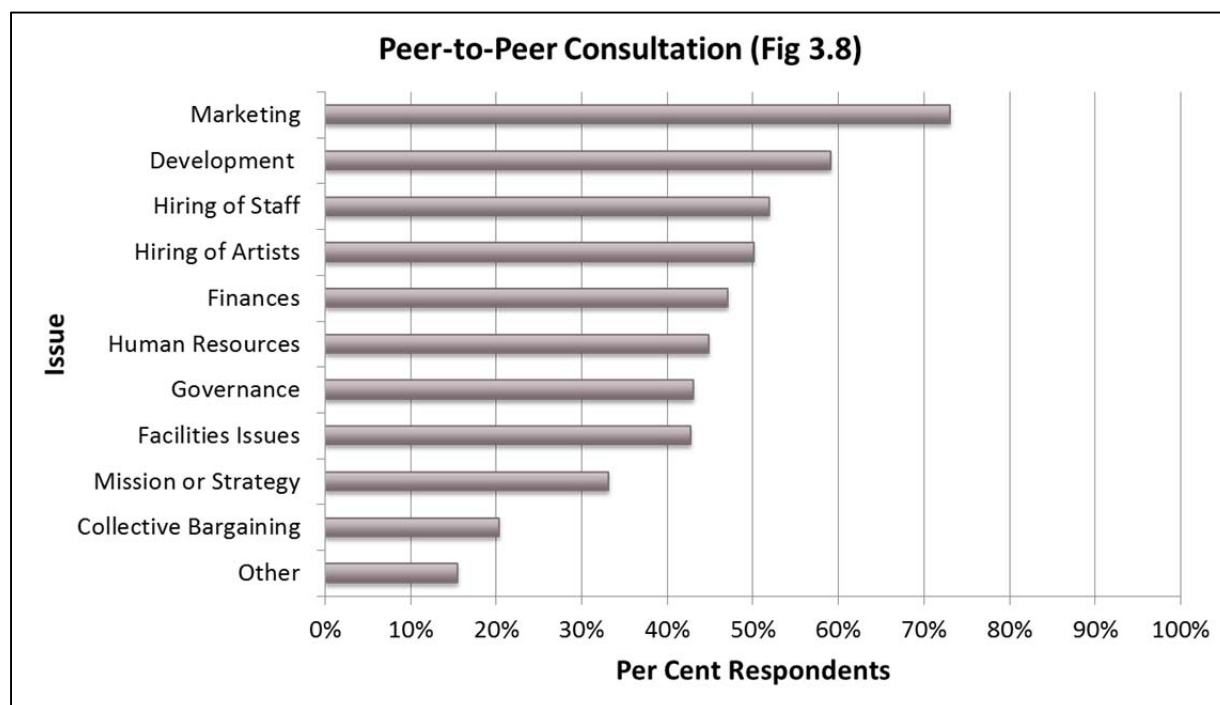*Use of Professional Organizations as References (continued)*

Both service organizations and peers are important sources of information about best practices. Therefore, the survey asked respondents to answer questions about their use of both types of resource.

Respondents listed over 70 organizations to which they or their theaters belong in a professional capacity. These organizations range from neighborhood associations to international consortiums and from Shakespeare-based groups to union bargaining units. More theater managers consult with service organizations about marketing than about any other issue. On average, the 315 respondents that claimed membership in at least one service organization consult with such organizations about once a month (figure 3.7).
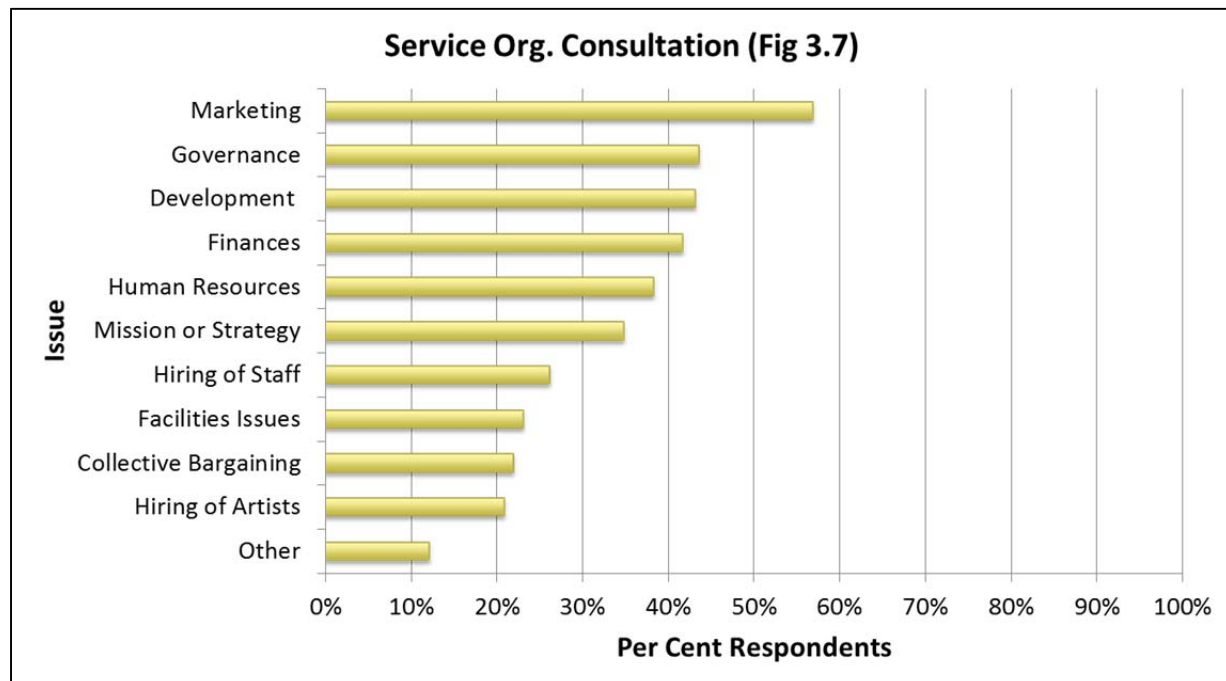

Service Org. Consultation (Fig 3.7)

Formation of Professional Associations and
Use of Professional Organizations as References (continued)

Theater managers consult about more issues with peers than they do with service organizations (figure 3.8), and the average frequency of peer consultation is about once per week.

Peer-to-Peer Consultation (Fig 3.8)

Formation of Professional Associations and
Use of Professional Organizations as References (continued)

Figure 3.9 highlights the issues about which more managers consult with peers than with service organizations. However, peer-to-peer consultation frequency may be inflated due to peer-to-peer consultation that is facilitated by service organizations through networking, forums, etc. Therefore, the data may provide an incomplete picture of the impact of field service organizations on sharing of best practices.
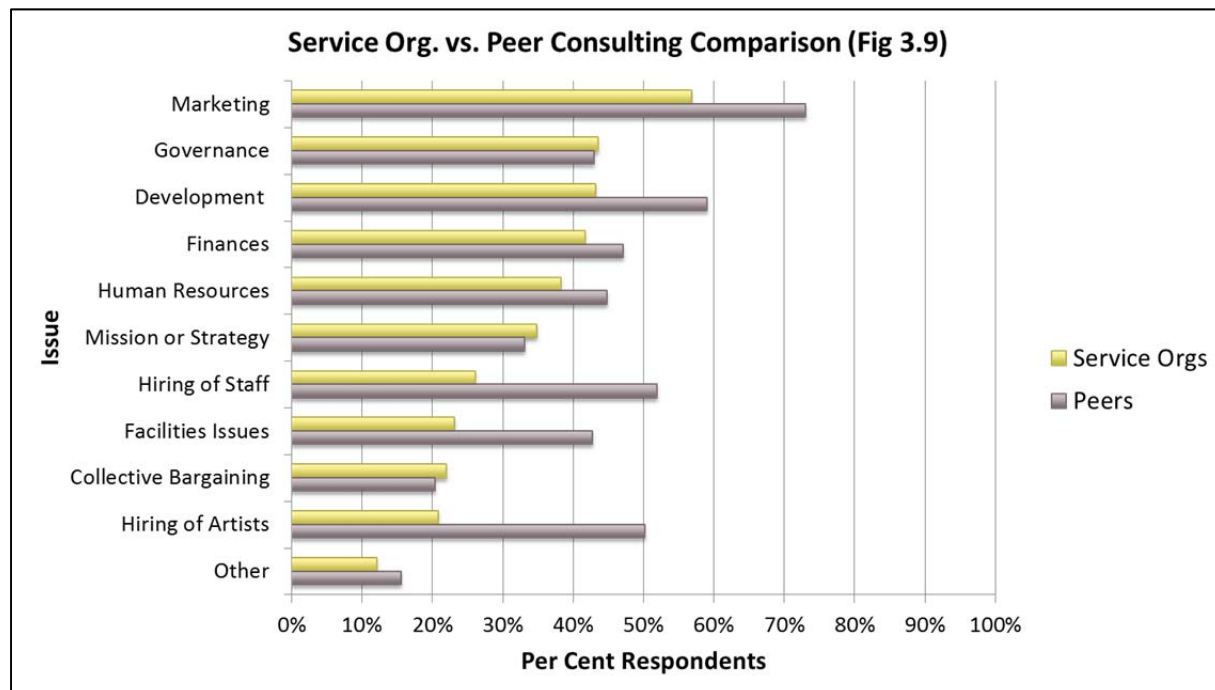
Formation of a Code of Ethics

There is no national, binding code of ethics for either theater managers or theater organizations. The survey respondents seem to approve of the status quo: 37% express interest in establishing a code of ethics, while 63% do not. Frequency of consultation with a service organization appears to be a significant predictor of interest in establishing a field-wide code of ethics. Forty-six percent of managers who consult with service organizations between once a quarter and once a month favor establishing a code of ethics, whereas only 25% of managers who never consult with service organizations favor establishing a code of ethics (r = 0.13).

Belief in Self-Regulation

Since theater managers have never elected to establish a professional association and therefore lack both a code of ethics and a mechanism for peer review, "self-regulation" does not appear to be a useful indicator for professionalization in theater management. While theater managers have decided not to hold themselves accountable to each other as a group, we can examine how managers relate to the constituencies to which they *are* accountable.

To Whom do You Report? (Fig 3.10)

Other 8%
Artistic Director 15%
Board Chair 15%
Board 62%
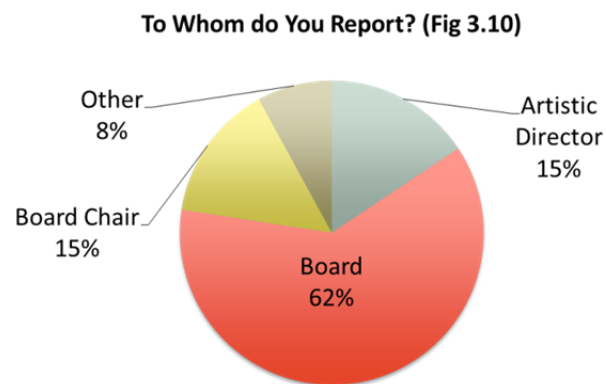
While a belief in self-regulation may not be a useful indicator of professionalization in theater management, the data suggest that the reporting structure in which theater managers work may affect their perception of their professional priorities. Managers were asked to rank the importance of various constituencies they serve, 1 being the highest and 7 the lowest. Managers who report to the Artistic Director rank the Artistic Director as a much more important constituent (average rank = 2.7) than the Board of Directors (average rank = 4.4), a difference of 1.7 points. For managers who report directly to the Board of Directors, however, there is only a 0.7 point difference between the importance they attribute to the Artistic Director (average rank = 3.6) and the Board of Directors (average rank = 4.3).

Belief in Service to the Public

As Nancy Roche writes in *The Art of Governance*: "Board members of arts institutions are aptly called 'trustees.' They, in partnership with the professional leadership, hold the mission of our institutions in trust for our artists and for our communities."[18] But who are these communities? Do our external communities consist of our audiences only? Or do we serve the public more generally? And does the field think about service to the public as a practical matter or as a philosophical underpinning, or both? Do theater managers believe in serving the public? Or only in serving their audiences? Fifty-three respondents out of 405 consider the public to be their most important constituent from the following list (by average ranking of most important to least important):

1. Audience
2. Artistic Director/Artistic Vision
3. Artists
4. Board of Directors
5. The Public
6. Foundations
7. Non-Board Donors

Autonomy

Autonomy relates to a professional's feeling that he or she has valuable expertise in a specific area of practice, the quality of which only other practitioners are qualified to judge (and belief in the value of which leads to codification through establishment of training schools, etc.).[19]

As mentioned above, respondents spend an average of 71% of their time on administrative and leadership issues and 29% of their time on artistic issues. Managers who spend more of their time on administrative issues rather than artistic issues are likely to:

- Have spent fewer years in their positions ($r = -0.23$)
- Have spent fewer years in their organization ($r = -0.25$)
- Not have been involved in founding their organization ($r = -0.24$)
- Have larger budgets ($r = 0.23$)

In order to determine the level of belief in professional expertise in the field, the survey asked respondents to imagine a scenario in which professional judgment could be brought to bear to determine a manager's level of professional expertise:

> Imagine that another theater, Theater X, ran a deficit and that the facts of Theater X's problem were readily available for inspection by anyone. Please rank the following groups and individuals by their level of expertise in determining whether the Managing Director of Theater X was responsible for the problem.

- The Board of Theater X

- Peer Managing Directors in the Field

- The Artistic Director of Theater X

- The Chair of the Finance Committee of Theater X

- The Audience of Theater X

- The Finance Director of Theater X

- The Managing Director of Theater X Him or Herself

- The Auditors of Theater X

The scenario is financial in nature, which is likely to skew rankings in favor of choices that include individuals with financial expertise. However, the exercise is designed to reveal correlations among different groups of managers in terms of how highly they value (a) the expertise of an individual manager, and (b) the expertise of peer managers.

In this hypothetical environment where all facts are available to all parties, the only criterion that separates the quality of the judgment of different groups should be their expertise in interpreting the facts. Therefore, if theater managers believe they have a specific expertise that is not shared by other groups,[**] they should highly rate the judgment of their peer theater managers compared to other groups whose expertise they should find to be less applicable.

On a ranking scale where 1 is the highest and 8 is the lowest, managers ranked "The Managing Director of Theater X Him or Herself" highest in expertise, with an average rank of 2.9. Forty-two percent of respondents ranked "The Managing Director of Theater X Him or Herself" as having the highest level of expertise. In contrast, peer managers received the second-lowest average rank at 5.2. Greater experience as a manager positively correlates with greater trust of peer managers (r = 0.19), meaning that more experienced managers are more likely to trust the judgment of their peer managers. No other variable that respondents were surveyed about correlates with trust in the expertise of peer managers.

Sense of Calling to the Field

Being called to a field is a socially desirable experience.[20] This makes it difficult to measure directly since respondents are likely to be influenced by a desirability bias in their answers. However, several questions in the study taken together suggest the degree to which respondents feel called to the field:

- What proportion of his or her career has a respondent spent in theater management?
- How early in his or her career did a respondent join the field?
- How rewarding does the respondent find his or her career in theater management?
- Would the respondent recommend a career in the field to young people?

Managers have spent an average of two-thirds of their careers in theater management (this statistic does not capture the portion of the population that managed in the field but no longer does, which is likely to skew the data toward a longer average career in the field than is reflective of reality). Respondents who have spent a larger proportion of their careers in theater management report feeling more rewarded (r = 0.26). Respondents who have been in the field longer have spent a greater proportion of that time in management (r = 0.55), which indicates that respondents are likely to stay on the administrative side once they make a career move to management. Finally, respondents who feel more rewarded in their careers are more likely to recommend joining the field to young people (r = 0.35). While interpreting these results provides an incomplete picture of the existence of a calling to the field of theater management, it provides a baseline from which further questions may be asked.

[**] According to Wilensky, this belief would indicate a professional mindset.

CONCLUSION

The data show that various aspects of a professional mindset are related to positive outcomes in the field: those who dedicate themselves to the field earlier and for a greater proportion of their careers report feeling more rewarded; managers who spend more of their time on administrative issues rather than artistic issues have larger budgets and a greater diversity of funding sources, which is likely to provide stability and/or flexibility during periods of organizational stress; managers tend to consult with their peers and with service organizations to different degrees about topics that are important to the field, so they seem to value the mechanism of sharing and improving upon best practices.

To reiterate the take-aways:

- Size, not intention, positively correlates with better artist pay.
- Managers of smaller organizations seek more guidance than managers of larger organizations.
- The field seems relatively uninterested in establishing accountability mechanisms.

This survey provides a very basic overview of how the theater management field thinks about professionalization. It would be desirable for this study to provide a springboard for further research and discussion about the current state and future direction of professionalization in theater management. Here are some questions to consider alongside the data:

- Why are we consulting more with peers than with service organizations on certain issues?
- Why are we not interested in minimum standards or a code of ethics?
- Why do we find a manager's understanding of his or her own situation to be so much better than the judgment of a peer manager? Do we trust the judgment of our peers? And are we not interested in accountability?
- Why are smaller organizations more interested in minimum standards than larger organizations?
- What causes the gender disparity in salary?
- What aspects of professionalization in nonprofit theater management do we want to change over time? And what would we like to keep the same?

THANKS

I would like to thank Alison Gerber, PhD candidate in Sociology at Yale University, for sharing her expertise in the area of survey design and implementation and for suggesting the bible of survey how-to books, *The Total Design Method* by Don Dillingham; Andrew Meyer, PhD candidate in Marketing at Yale School of Management, for his assistance with some advanced statistical analysis; Laura Freebairn-Smith of Organizational Performance Group for her notes on the structure of my analysis; the faculty and students in the Yale Theater Management Department for testing and improving this project at every step along the way, both formally as subjects and informally as extremely well-qualified and thoughtful colleagues and friends. I would like to extend special thanks to Doug Clayton, Crystal Diaz, Terence McFarland, and the rest of the staff at LA Stage Alliance for their vision in sharing this information with their members at LA Stage TALKS and to Jenny Byrd, Debbie Devine, Charles

Dillingham, and Elizabeth Doran for agreeing to be on the panel to discuss these crucial issues in our field. Finally, I would like to thank all of the participants who submitted their thoughtful responses to the survey that forms the backbone of this study – thank you for taking time in the midst of driving your individual organizations forward to help drive us forward as a field.

Any mistakes made along the way to producing this study are solely the responsibility of the author.

APPENDIX 1: THE SURVEY

Thank you for participating in this survey about theater management.

This survey is intended to measure theater managers' attitudes about whether they regard theater management as a "profession." By measuring attitudes about professionalization and beliefs about our field, I hope to uncover correlations between our attitudes and the ways in which our organizations function.

Assembling a picture of what a variety of managers think and feel about our chosen profession will contribute to the discussion about what nonprofit theaters should be looking for in their leaders, how we can better support our current leaders, and ultimately about how to empower the next generation of theater managers to continue to improve the practices of the field.

Assessing current attitudes and practices in the field and sharing the analysis of the data may lead us to a better understanding of how to support theater managers in the future.
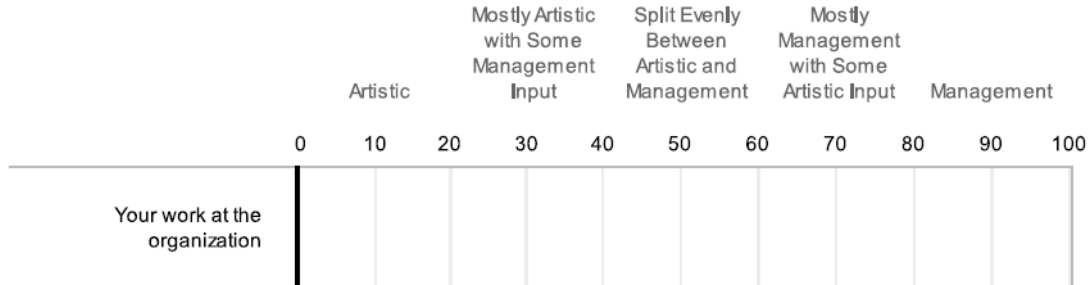
Thank you for your time,

Michael Bateman
Managing Editor
Yale Theater Management Knowledge Base

- The survey should take 10-20 minutes to complete.
- This survey is intended to measure the attitudes of theater executives (e.g. Managing Directors, Executive Directors, Producing Artists Directors, etc.) only. Please do not delegate this survey.
- If you are affiliated with multiple theater organizations, please answer for the organization you consider to be your primary professional commitment.
- All questions below refer to the occupation of theater management, including work on development, marketing, and finance. If you fulfill other duties (such as a second job or artistic duties), please complete the survey considering only your theater management duties.
- If your 2012 fiscal year has not yet ended, please complete relevant questions with your 2012 fiscal year projections.
- We will do our best to keep your information confidential. All data is stored in a password protected electronic format. To help protect your confidentiality, the survey does not contain information that will personally identify you.

Please answer the following questions regarding your role as a theater manager.

Please choose the option that best describes your work at the organization.

	Artistic	Mostly Artistic with Some Management Input	Split Evenly Between Artistic and Management	Mostly Management with Some Artistic Input	Management		
	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
Your work at the organization											

Is theater management at this organization your full-time occupation?

○ Yes

○ No

To whom do you report directly?

○ The Board Chair

○ The Board of Directors

○ The Artistic Director or Other Artistic Executive

○ Other – please specify

[   ]

What is your age?

[   ]

How many years have you been in the field of theater management (including management departments such as marketing, development, or finance)?

[   ]

How many years have you been in your current position?

[   ]

How many years have you been in your current organization?
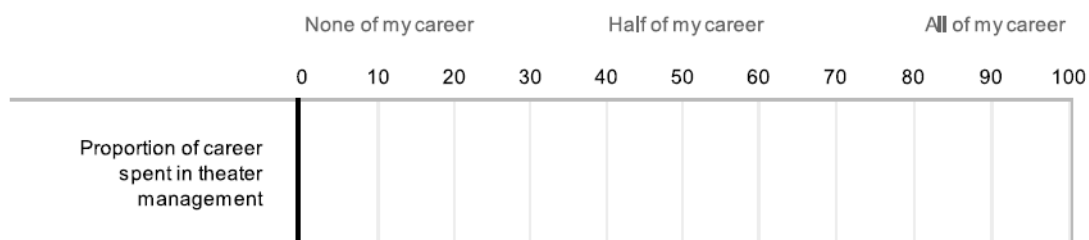
[   ]

Were you involved in the founding of your current organization?

○ Yes

○ No

How many executive leadership positions (Managing Director, Executive Director, Executive Producer, etc.) have you held in the theater management field including the current one?

○ 1

○ 2

○ 3

○ 4

○ More than 4

What proportion of your career have you spent in theater management so far?

	None of my career				Half of my career				All of my career		
	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
Proportion of career spent in theater management											

What is your gender?

○ Male

○ Female

○ Other – please specify

[   ]

What is your highest level of formal education?

- ⃝ High school degree or equivalent
- ⃝ Undergraduate degree in theater management
- ⃝ Undergraduate degree in business administration
- ⃝ Other undergraduate degree
- ⃝ Graduate degree in theater management
- ⃝ Graduate degree in business administration
- ⃝ Graduate degree in both theater management and business administration
- ⃝ Other graduate degree

What is your annual salary?

- ⃝ $0
- ⃝ $1 - $10,000
- ⃝ $10,001 – $20,000
- ⃝ $20,001 – $30,000
- ⃝ $30,001 – $40,000
- ⃝ $40,001 – $50,000
- ⃝ $50,001 – $60,000
- ⃝ $60,001 – $70,000
- ⃝ $70,001 – $80,000
- ⃝ $80,001 – $90,000
- ⃝ $90,001 – $100,000
- ⃝ $100,001 – $150,000
- ⃝ $150,001 – $200,000
- ⃝ $200,001 – $250,000
- ⃝ More than $250,000

Professional Interactions

Please answer the following questions about your professional interactions.

I am a member of a professional service organization (e.g. Theatre Communications Group, ART/NY, Theatre Bay Area) and/or my organization is a member of a professional service organization (e.g. LORT).

○ Yes, if so, which?

[   ]

○ No

I consult with a professional service organization about issues at my theater...

○ Never

○ Between once a year and once a quarter (1-4 times per year)

○ Between once a quarter and once a month (5-12 times per year)

○ Between once a month and once a week (13-52 times per year)

○ More than once a week (more than 52 times per year)

What are some of the issues you consult professional service organizations about? (please check all that apply)

☐ Development Tactics   ☐ Collective Bargaining

☐ Hiring of Artists   ☐ Governance

☐ Facilities Issues   ☐ Finances

☐ Marketing Tactics   ☐ Human Resources

☐ Hiring of Staff   ☐ Other – please describe
                                         [   ]
☐ Mission or Strategy Questions

I consult with my peers at other organizations about issues at my theater...

○ Never

○ Between once a year and once a quarter (1-4 times per year)

○ Between once a quarter and once a month (5-12 times per year)

○ Between once a month and once a week (13-52 times per year)

○ More than once a week (more than 52 times per year)

What are some of the issues you consult peers about? (please check all that apply)

☐ Mission or Strategy Questions   ☐ Hiring of Staff

☐ Governance   ☐ Collective Bargaining

☐ Human Resources   ☐ Facilities Issues

☐ Marketing Tactics   ☐ Development Tactics

☐ Hiring of Artists   ☐ Other - please describe

☐ Finances

Organizational Demographics

Please answer each of the following questions about the theater organization where you work.

Is your organization directly affiliated with any other nonprofit or commercial enterprise?

○ No

○ Yes - please specify

How old is your organization?

○ Less than 5 years old

○ 5-9

○ 10-14

○ 15-19

○ 20-29

○ 30-39

○ 40-49

○ 50 or more

What best describes your region?

○ Urban

○ Suburban

○ Rural

For what genre(s) is your organization known? (please check all that apply)

- ☐ European Canon (i.e. Shakespeare, Molière)
- ☐ American Canon (i.e. Miller, Wilson)
- ☐ Modern
- ☐ New Plays
- ☐ Culturally Specific Work
- ☐ Classic Musicals

- ☐ New Musicals
- ☐ Children's Theater
- ☐ Devised Work
- ☐ *Avant Garde*
- ☐ Dinner Theater
- ☐ Other – please describe

Within your geographic marketplace, how many other theater organizations are attempting to appeal to the same audience members as your organization?

- ○ None
- ○ 1–3
- ○ 4–6
- ○ 6–9
- ○ 10–12
- ○ 13 or more

What was the total budget for your organization for fiscal year 2012?

- ○ less than $500,000
- ○ $500,000 - $999,999
- ○ $1,000,000 - $2,999,999
- ○ $3,000,000 - $4,999,999
- ○ $5,000,000 - $9,999,999
- ○ $10 million and over

Please indicate whether your organization ran a surplus or a deficit for fiscal year 2012:

	Deficit greater than 5%	Deficit of 5% or less	The organization broke even	Surplus of 5% or less	Surplus greater than 5%
Surplus or deficit?	○	○	○	○	○

What was your organization's balance between earned and unearned (contributed) revenue in fiscal year 2012? (must equal 100%)

Earned	[0] %
Unearned (contributed)	[0] %
Total	[0] %

Please indicate which of the following sources of income your organization pursued in fiscal year 2012.

- [ ] Single Ticket Buyers
- [ ] Subscription Buyers
- [ ] Government Funding
- [ ] Non-Government Funding (e.g. Foundations)
- [ ] Individual Donations
- [ ] Special Events (e.g. Galas)
- [ ] Education
- [ ] Endowment Income
- [ ] Other Investment Income
- [ ] In-Kind Contributions
- [ ] Other income – please describe

  [_____]

What kind of employees do you have? (please check all that apply)

- [ ] Full-time
- [ ] Part-time
- [ ] Volunteer
- [ ] Paid Intern
- [ ] Unpaid Intern
- ( ) $0 – $200
- ( ) $201 – $400
- ( ) $401 – $600
- ( ) $601 – $800
- ( ) $801 – $1,000
- ( ) $1,001 – $1,500
- ( ) $1,501 – $2,000
- ( ) More than $2,000
- ( ) Not applicable

Full-Time Employees

Please answer these questions for your full-time salaried employees only.

How many full-time salaried employees did your organization have at the end of fiscal year 2012?

What benefits does your organization provide to the majority of full-time staff? (please check all that apply)

☐ Complementary Tickets to Organization's Productions

☐ Paid Time Off

☐ Health Insurance with Copay

☐ Dental Insurance with Copay

☐ Vision Insurance with Copay

☐ COBRA or Similar Post-Termination Benefit Participation

☐ Commuter Benefits

☐ Short-Term Disability (2–26 weeks)

☐ Long-Term Disability (27 weeks or more)

☐ Pregnancy and Childbirth PTO

☐ Flexible Spending Account

☐ Pension Plan Participation

☐ Matching Pension Contribution from Organization

☐ Other Retirement Contribution from Organization

☐ Other – please describe

What professional development opportunities does your organization pay for its staff to engage in? (please check all that apply)

☐ Conference Attendance

☐ Formal Mentorship

☐ Webinars

☐ Educational Stipends
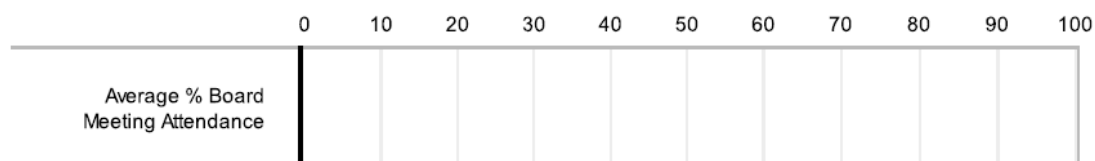
☐ None

☐ Other – please describe

Governance

Please answer the questions below about the governance of your organization for your fiscal year 2012.

How many members does your board of directors have?

How many full-board meetings are there annually on average?

What is the average _per cent_ attendance at each meeting of the full board?

	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
Average % Board Meeting Attendance											

Organizational Complexity

Please answer the following questions about your organization's production capacity during your 2011-12 season.

How many venues did your organization operate?

○ None

○ 1

○ 2

○ 3

○ 4 or more

How many venues owned by other organizations did you tour productions to?

○ None

○ 1

○ 2

○ 3

○ 4 or more

How many individual performances did you produce and/or present? (please give your best estimate if you do not have the number to hand)

- ⚪ 1-29
- ⚪ 30-59
- ⚪ 60-89
- ⚪ 90-119
- ⚪ 120-149
- ⚪ 150-179
- ⚪ 180-209
- ⚪ 210 or more
- ⚪ Not applicable

Theater Management Attitudes

Please answer the following questions regarding your beliefs about your organization.

Imagine the following topics could be separated from each other. Please rank them in order of importance to you (most important item at the top).

Stewarding the Mission

Providing a Satisfying Experience for the Audience

Keeping the Organization Financially Healthy

Leading and Supporting the Staff

Supporting the Artistic Vision

Please rank the constituencies you serve in order of importance to you (most important constituency at the top).

The Board of Directors

Non-Board Donors

The Audience

The Artists

The Artistic Director/Artistic Vision

The Public

Organizational Funders (e.g. government, foundations)

Imagine that another theater, Theater X, ran a deficit and that the facts of Theater X's problem were readily available for inspection by anyone. Please rank the following groups and individuals by their level of expertise in determining whether the Managing Director of Theater X was responsible for the problem (group or individual with most expertise at the top).

The Board of Directors of Theater X

Peer Managing Directors in the Field

The Artistic Director of Theater X

The Chair of the Finance Committee of Theater X

The Audience of Theater X

The Finance Director of Theater X

The Managing Director of Theater X Him or Herself

The Auditors of Theater X

Imagine you are conducting interviews for a successor to your current position. Please rate how important you consider the following values compared to other factors you may consider such as experience, references, or education.

	Not at all Important	Very Unimportant	Somewhat Unimportant	Neither Important nor Unimportant	Somewhat Important	Very Important	Extremely Important
A candidate who communicates with precision. (could involve: knowing and saying what you mean; communicating with intention; being persuasive; reaching varied constituencies with your message)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A candidate who delivers value. (could involve: keeping skills up-to-date; being a leader as well as a manager; using good analytical practices; delivering results; being reliable)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A candidate who follows a code. (could involve: putting the organization's interests first; doing the right thing even if there's a penalty for doing it; being a good steward of the art form)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A candidate who respects the value of time. (could involve: not wasting time; maximizing productivity; moving the task toward completion rather than just to someone else's desk; delegating effectively)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Do you think there should be, now or in the future, a written code of ethics for theater management practice such as exists in medicine or law?

○ Yes

○ No

Do you think there should be, now or in the future, an explicit minimum standard of theater management practice such as exists in medicine or law?

○ Yes

○ No

Attitude Toward Field

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion
Being a theater manager is/has been a rewarding career path for me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	☐
Being a theater manager now is more challenging than when I entered the field.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	☐
I would recommend that a young person interested in theater management enter the field.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	☐

APPENDIX 2: EMPLOYEE BENEFITS BY TYPE

Full-time employees enjoyed an average of 5.2 types of the benefits listed below.
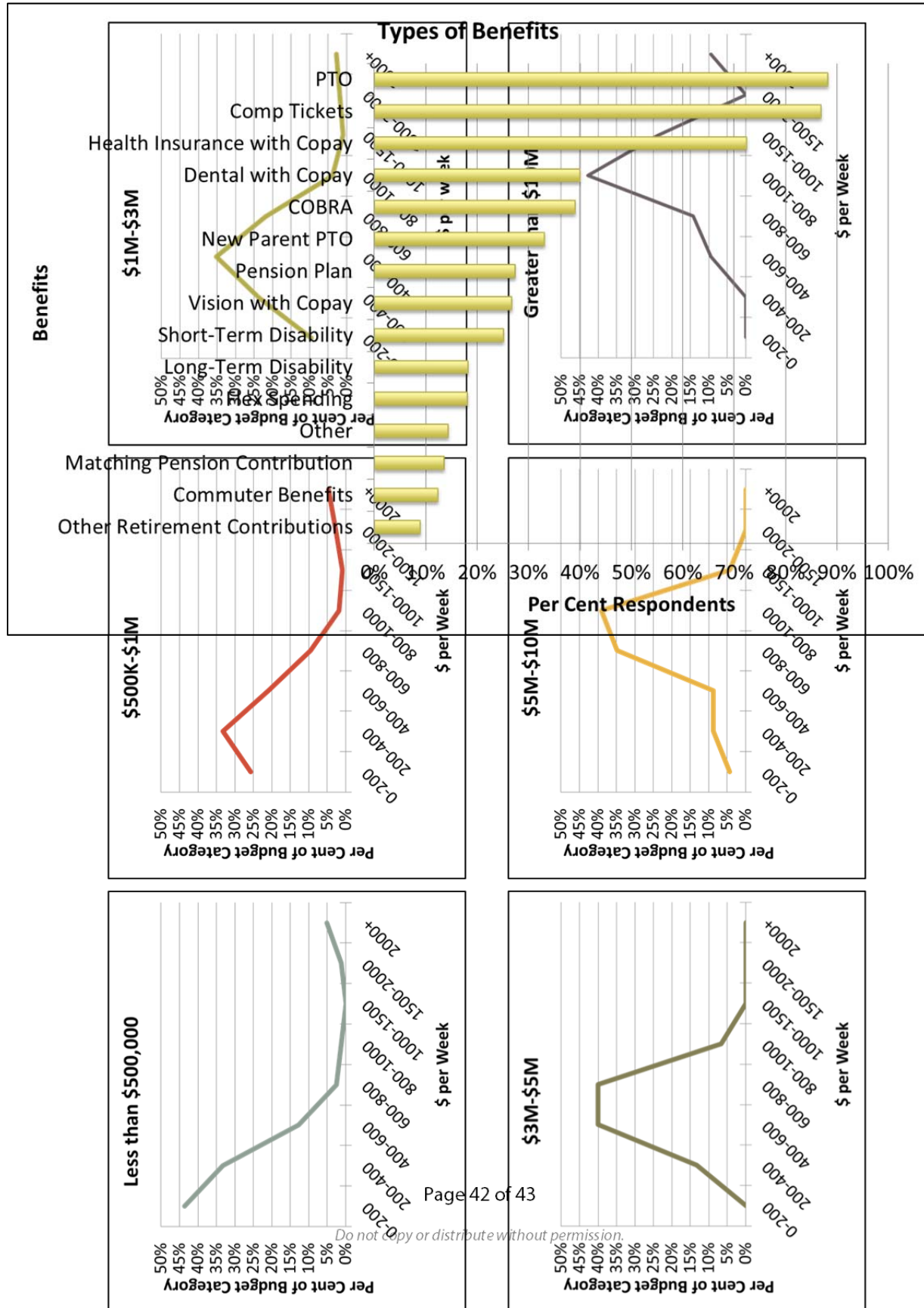
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