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Bridging the Generation Gap in Arts and Culture Leadership: Taking the First Steps ([1](#))

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This is the second of two articles on the generational transitioning of leadership in the arts. The first article, *Boomers, XY's and the Making of a Generational Shift in Arts Management*, sets the stage by outlining the similarities and differences in style, education and perspective that define arts and culture leaders from the Baby Boom and Generations X and Y (XY's). It further explores how this generational overlap can affect the ways in which they work together in the field of arts management. The article's overlying premise is that through acknowledgement and acceptance of the generational diversity in our own ranks, both emerging and established leaders can work together to ensure a strong future for our nonprofit arts and cultural institutions. This second article focuses on some of the ways in which arts institutions, community arts groups, and the people who lead them may take the first steps to bridge the divide with mutually beneficial results.

It is often easy to assume that good leaders are seasoned through training and experience and that as a result, the best leaders must be well over 40. A quick check reveals, however, that Alfred H. Barr was asked to be the founding director of the Museum of Modern Art at the age of 29. Louis Sullivan designed the Wainwright Building, one of the world's first "skyscrapers," at 35. And Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. led the Montgomery Bus Boycott when he was 27 years of age. Each one, encouraged by others probably older than they were, accepted a leadership challenge at a young age and found success. Understanding that age and leadership ability are not mutually exclusive, one can wonder how many young people in our midst could influence our arts and culture organizations with equal success and how could we encourage them to lead?

With all the discussion and research around the impending leadership gap (Tierney, 2006; Leubsdorf, 2006; Deitrick and Creager, n.d.), the focus has been on the perceived lack of qualified executive directors to fill current jobs when baby boomers retire. However, little has been put forth to examine how we can prepare those currently in middle management positions to take the lead. Thus, by focusing on those who have chosen arts management as their professional field and building their capacity to lead, we can at the very least ensure that they will also be qualified for them.

Environment

One of the reasons that it is important to focus on what we have rather than what we think we will have is that the current landscape of arts and culture institutions is changing as the existing environment changes. As such, we do not know how our arts and culture organizations are going to look within the next ten years and whether our current assumptions about arts leadership will continue to hold true. *Critical Issues Facing the Arts in California: A Working Paper from the James Irvine Foundation* (AEA Consulting, 2006) stated that "the 40-year push to create more nonprofit arts organizations has not been accompanied by an equally powerful and effective drive to generate demand for their programs and services" and that "the number and size of nonprofit arts organizations now exceeds available public and private sources of support" (p.5). What this means for the future of arts management is that organizational mergers, consolidations, or even elimination could impact the number of community arts organizations and institutions that require human resources. Similarly, studies looking toward the future indicate that the nonprofit model itself will come under greater scrutiny as the commercial arts sector becomes more entwined with the nonprofit sector through changes in media and technology; the future may hold a different model that incorporates both for-profit and non-profit corporate practices (Kunreuther, 2003; Irvine, 2006). The Irvine report indicated that "creative entrepreneurs are no longer taking the nonprofit model as a given and instead are working through a variety of temporary and hybrid structures that best support their work" (p. 20). If this is what the future is holding for our arts and culture field, it will be the XYs that will be required to lead the community through it successfully. Thus our leadership development work should emphasize how we, emerging and established leaders, can work together to nurture and train current young administrators in ways that enable them to influence the future in innovative and creative ways. While there are a variety of programs and efforts launching around the country, the focus of this article will center on three arenas for strengthening our relationships for a stronger leadership transition: 1) Dialogue; 2) Inclusion through shadowing; and 3) Mentorships. These particular areas have been selected because they exemplify the concept of bridging the gap through the use of methods that both require and allow for "give and take" between the generations.

Dialogue

Dialogue and two-way communication are some of our best tools for bridging the generational divide. With them comes the building of cross-generational relationships and shared understanding. Each generation has strengths to share and weaknesses that the other can help overcome. Dialogue can take place through community roundtables, specifically designed networking events, and purposeful facilitated meetings of the community's leaders and emerging leaders. In some communities with programs developed through the Americans for the Arts Emerging Leaders Initiative(http://www.artsusa.org/services/emerging_leaders/default.asp), events have been implemented that specifically convene the two groups for facilitated discussion. Groups such as these can begin a local dialogue around the future of arts leadership and how the transition can happen successfully.

Similarly, by opening lines of communication, emerging leaders can share with those still in decision making and policy making positions what they know of their generation and how to work with it as the field adjusts to new forms of technology, new genres of art, and new definitions of "arts and culture". A recent growth in research and planning by public and private foundations, government entities, and cultural think tanks has led to the identification of building new audiences and increasing cultural participation among their top priorities for funding and policy development. If these plans and reports are aimed at affecting change in the next five to ten years, understanding the cultural needs and desires of the next generations will become an important factor in establishing effective strategies. As Joan Spero, President of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation noted, "smart organizations are creating new marketing strategies, changing programs, rethinking organizational structures and board composition...all in an attempt to reach new audiences" (Garrard, 2006). Including emerging leaders at the table becomes a strategy for ensuring future organizational sustainability when it is recognized that younger arts administrators have an innate understanding of their generation's motivations as well as a fresh point of view. Together these can aid in the development of new systems or new programs when teamed with the established leaders organizational expertise and experience.

Inclusion through Shadowing

One-on-one conversations can also take place when established leaders allow emerging leaders to shadow them at departmental and work-related community meetings and then follow up with a discussion about what happened. The emerging leaders can be encouraged to share their perceptions and ask questions as the established leaders listen, share insights, and respond to questions. This kind of shadowing can also help develop the soft skills (e.g. advocacy, political strategizing, meeting etiquette, and protocol) that established leaders feel emerging leaders need to master. As Vitale (2003) noted, another step is to include emerging leaders in the organization's board meetings:

Below the deputy director level, only those in development jobs seem to have opportunities for regular contact with board members and others who might help their career advancement. Since executive directors spend much of their time interacting with the board, lack of exposure becomes an obstacle to further growth. (Section B; p. 61)

Including younger staff in these meetings can be a way of providing experiential training in one of the most important aspects of the nonprofit management structure. In addition, it helps the board become more familiar with the emerging leaders in their ranks and to hear what they have to say.

Mentoring

Mentorship programs are an effort to share knowledge and train the future generation in ways that go well beyond shadowing. Often initiated with private funding, programs such as Theatre Communication Group's (TCG) Future Leaders program, funded by Doris Duke and Andrew W. Mellon Foundations, (http://www.tcg.org/grants/newgen/newgen_index.cfm) or the Mentor Connection Service at the Illinois Arts Alliance, part of their *Arts Leadership for the 21st Century Program* funded by Sara Lee Foundation, (<http://www.artsalliance.org/mentor.shtml>) can yield significant results. These programs were both developed following research designed to determine the major challenges and opportunities faced by their constituent fields (professional theatres and Illinois arts and culture organizations respectively). These and other similar studies have identified significant community concerns regarding leadership succession as well as younger artists and administrators leaving the field for potentially better paying commercial opportunities (Sato, 2004, Valkanas, 2003, Irvine, 2006). (2) Their response has been the creation of carefully designed mentoring programs that take place over one or two years.

Features of mentoring programs may include direct, personal interaction between the mentor and mentee, a matching service to identify the most effective mentor/mentee team; a time commitment (i.e. one to two-years); and/or a mutually developed program with goals and learning objectives identified and agreed upon by both parties in advance. The TCG program even includes assistance with repayment of student loans, full time salary support for the mentee and travel grants to observe best practices. Mentoring programs help "bridge the gap from training to professional life" (Sato, 2004) and "allow both parties to learn from each other and grow professionally" (Illinois Arts Alliance Foundation, 2006). Having been established in 2000, the program at TCG has documented highly successful outcomes. Corey Fischer, former co-artistic director of Traveling Jewish Theatre stated that the mentoring program saved the organization, "had we not been able to start cultivating a next generation, I frankly don't think the company would have survived." (Sato, p. 152) Michael Fields, Managing Artistic Director of The Dell'Arte Company, observed that, "it was beneficial to have a different generational, cultural and

experiential voice at the table." (Sato, p. 152) While Stephen Buescher, the Dell'Arte Company mentee shared that "[the] mentoring program ...put me around the table where all the decisions got made...where I had not been invited before." (Sato, p. 150)

Programs like Future Leaders and the Mentor Connection Service can be as expensive and elaborate - or as simple and efficient - as the creators develop them to be. Eve Childs, an emerging leader in San Diego's Emerging Leaders of Arts and Culture Initiative, liked the idea of being mentored so much that she created a mentoring program where one did not exist. The Mentorships in the Arts Program (MAP) was started to connect young arts administrators with seasoned arts professionals. Currently, the fully volunteer effort has set up nine mentor/mentee pairs who have made a one-year commitment to work on a set of agreed upon learning goals. Outcomes from this program will not be available until summer 2007; however, Childs (2006) has described the preliminary results: "already I see a common understanding and mutual respect growing between the two groups. I see the Emerging Leaders are more inspired and carry themselves with more confidence while the mentors are learning to trust the younger generation has something to offer and will carry the torch just as they have done for so long."

Next Steps

Bridging the gap can start as a discussion that takes place in an emerging leader peer networking environment and then moves out to include established leaders and institutions. Convening bodies like professional associations, local arts agencies, and service organizations can be the first to take the lead in their communities with after hours gatherings at which people are invited to share their experiences and ideas. Philanthropic organizations such as local foundations and state and local arts agencies can encourage the creation of cross-generationally responsive strategies by developing funding programs that instigate mentoring programs, community-wide convenings, and other related leadership development efforts. Whether it is through inexpensive initiatives like shadowing and peer support groups or multi-million dollar mentoring and leadership succession programs, each community should be challenged to discern for itself what appropriate efforts it can make for its emerging and established leaders and then take the steps to implement them.

This article has touched on only a few of the many ways that we can begin to bridge the generational divide in arts management. The issues of emerging leadership, generational transitions, and leadership succession are multi-layered. The discussion can easily become emotional as established leaders personally struggle with the idea of retirement and emerging leaders experience frustration as they wait for their turn to move up. It is important, however, that we try to build a bridge because the strength of the future of our field depends on people working together regardless of age or years of service. With all of the changes in the external environment that are challenging non-profit sustainability, and with the future of the public's participation in arts and culture as a whole in question, we need all of our collective imaginations and abilities to ensure survival well into the 21st

century.

1. This is the second of a two part series. Part one was published in the [August 2006 issue](#) of *CultureWork*.
 2. For extensive research and resources on leadership succession and the role of emerging leaders, see the Illinois Arts Alliance/Foundation website at <http://www.artsalliance.org/leadership.shtml>.
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