# Passing the Torch: An Exploration of Leadership Succession in Nonprofit Performing Arts Organizations in Oregon

By Michael Fisher | Spring 2010

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# **Abstract**

The purpose of this master's research project is to explore how nonprofit performing arts organizations in Oregon are addressing leadership succession. Challenges, such as an upcoming generational shift, are demanding that organizations prepare themselves for such transitions or open themselves up to many associated risks. The conceptual framework illustrates several topical areas to be examined. Research methods to be utilized include case study research at two sites, semi-structured qualitative interviews, and an extensive literature review.

# **Key Words**

- Leadership transition
- Succession planning
- Organizational sustainability
- Motivation
- Governance

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# **Chapter 1 | Introduction**

#### 1.1 Problem Statement

When attention is not focused on ensuring a smooth leadership transition an organization opens itself up to potential losses. These losses are primarily monetary, but there are also the losses of staff productivity and inefficient work.

Often the greatest loss to an organization from an ineffective leadership transition is the loss of mission-related activity and growth. When energies are focused elsewhere, mission-related opportunities are missed or are passed over from fear of change.

Despite the importance of having a smooth leadership transition to ensure that an organization has the most effective leader who can best serve its mission, there is still a need for more research in the nonprofit sector. Research in leadership succession helps organizations successfully navigate challenges such as an upcoming generational shift in the workforce, increased competition for leadership talent, and a working environment with increasing employee turnover.

### 1.2 Purpose Statement and Questions

The purpose of this study was to describe and understand leadership succession for Executive and Artistic Directors in nonprofit performing arts organizations in Oregon.

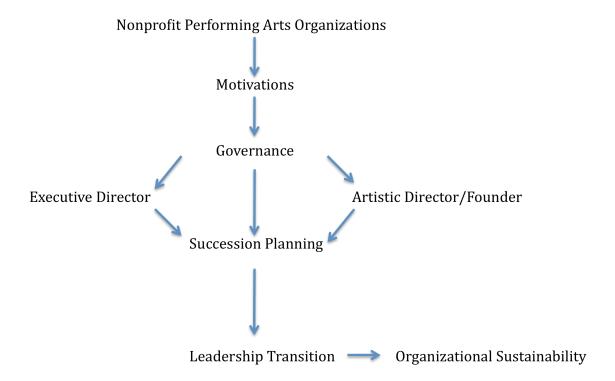
A conceptual framework maps the interaction of primary concepts and themes within this study (see Figure 1.1). Based on an understanding of the

demands for leadership succession, an initial literature review, conceptual framework, and research design, a primary research question emerged:

 How are nonprofit performing arts organizations in Oregon addressing leadership succession?

Additional questions surfaced that provide background information and supplement the primary research question:

- What are the motivations for an organization to engage with succession planning?
- Who is responsible for leading the succession planning and leadership transition process in a performing arts organization?
- Should the leadership succession plan be part of the organizations ongoing strategic plan and annual budget?
- What can an organization do to prepare for a leadership transition before the transition is needed?
- What does the leadership transition process look like for a performing arts organization?



**Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework** 

# 1.3 Assumptions and Biases

My personal and professional biases include my background as an artist in performing arts organizations, especially theatres, and my previous work for a consulting firm that specializes in management and leadership training for the private sector.

Through this research I hope to find out how nonprofit performing arts organizations in Oregon are addressing leadership succession. I hope to discover information on organizational policies and practices, trends, gaps, smart practices, attitudes, anecdotes, and other valuable information that will better inform the field on the issue of leadership succession and the practice of succession planning.

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1.4 Definitions

The following definitions are informed by and are consistent with industry

use and understanding.

• Flagship: Most prominent; large in size and budget; serves a mainstream of

patrons.

• Organizational Behavior: How people, as individuals and as groups, act

within an organization.

• Organizational Culture: The beliefs and values of an organization.

• Organizational Identity: Characteristics of an organization that are believed

to be fundamental, distinctive, and enduring by its members.

• Succession: The act of following in order or sequence.

Succession planning: The actions taken in preparation for a leadership

transition in the distant future.

• Leadership transition: The specific process of replacing a current leader

with a new leader.

1.5 Delimitations

• Geographic: Oregon

• Geographic: Urban

Organization Type: Performing Arts

Organizational Type: Nonprofit

• Organization Size: Flagship

• Role: Executive Director/Artistic Director

### 1.6 Limitations

- Generalizability
- Role of the Researcher

### 1.7 Benefit of the Study

The primary purpose or benefit of this study is to better inform and "paint a picture" for the nonprofit performing arts community about leadership succession and the role succession planning plays in overall organizational sustainability.

### 1.8 Methodological Paradigm

The methodological paradigm in which I position my research is the Interpretivist Constructivist orientation. With the research goal to understand the concept of leadership succession and the associated smart practices and motivations, the Interpretivist Constructivist orientation allowed me to be able to undertake a detailed exploration of related text and discover its meaning. Since no single performing arts organization is the same as another, and specifically the roles of the Executive Director and Artistic Directors within, the various individual contexts and realities provide their own perspective and knowledge on the subject and creates the many parts and connections that inform the overall research.

# 1.9 Research Approach

To better understand how nonprofit performing arts organizations in Oregon are addressing leadership succession, the adopted research approach was both

exploratory and descriptive. Neuman (2006) describes exploratory research as, "Research in which the primary purpose is to examine a little understood issue...to develop preliminary ideas..." (p. 33). Since the literature review revealed little knowledge on current leadership succession practices in performing arts organizations in Oregon, the exploratory approach assists in beginning the process of moving toward more refined research. The descriptive research approach is also utilized in this study in order to "paint a picture" of the case study sites and their leadership succession practices.

# 1.10 Strategy of Inquiry

Utilizing case-study research, an in-depth examination of detailed information on two separate sites was conducted. The primary strategy of inquiry was the qualitative research interview.

"When researchers choose to interview their study participants, they embark on an exciting voyage. Interviews have the potential to draw out richer information than can other data collection instruments...but only if the interviewers are well prepared and committed to letting respondents tell their own stories" (Terry, 2003, p.26). In order to more effectively research leadership succession in a given organization, it was important to utilize the method of conducting interviews to ensure that each individual had the opportunity to tell their own story.

When reviewing the literature on interview methods, several key issues emerged to provide insight on this qualitative research practice. As the interviewer, I needed to identify key informants who could provide intimate knowledge on the

research topic. I also needed to create a semi-structured process to provide both guidance and flexibility in questioning. It was also important that I be informed on the ethical considerations involved in conducting qualitative interviews.

# 1.10.1 Key Informants

DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) say that researchers who wish to conduct interviews need to identify 'key informants' who, "...are selected for their knowledge and role in a setting and their willingness and ability to serve as translators, teachers, mentors and/or commentators for the researcher" (p. 315). Terry (2003) and Fontana and Frey (2003) agree with DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) that a researcher must find an insider, a member of the group studied, who endorses the project and who is committed to its research goals. Fontana and Frey (2003) further say that, "Although the researcher can conduct interviews without an informant, he or she can save much time and avoid mistakes if a good informant becomes available" (p. 77). Terry (2003) further highlights this important first step by saying that the first task of every qualitative researcher should be to recruit key informants and stakeholders who are willing to be interviewed.

### 1.10.2 Semi Structure

Hopf (2004) says that the structure most frequently used when conducting qualitative research interviews is a flexibly applied semi-structured interview where, "...researchers orient themselves according to an interview guide, but one that gives plenty of freedom of movement in the formulation of questions, follow-up strategies and sequencing" (p. 204). DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) agree with Hopf (2004) when they say that semi-structured interviews are the most widely

used interviewing format for qualitative research. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) also agree with Hopf (2004) that the structure is generally organized around, "...a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee" (p. 315). Terry (2003) agrees saying that, "Other researchers would also be well advised to consider their carefully crafted interview questions as catalysts for conversation, rather that as prescriptive lists to follow in the same order..." (p. 26). Fontana and Frey (2003) add that the semi-structured interview allows the researcher to better understand the complex behavior of members of society, "...without imposing any a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry" (p. 75). The semi-structure is evident in Rob Kendt's 2006 interview with Bill Rauch in *American Theatre*. In the interview, Kendt's line of questioning is both structured, with specific topics addressed, and flexible, allowing for follow-up questions to the insights provided by Rauch.

### 1.10.3 Ethical Considerations

Because the objects of inquiry in interviewing are human beings, researchers must take extreme care to avoid any harm to them. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) identify four ethical issues related to the interview process,

- Reducing the risk of unanticipated harm
- Protecting the interviewee's information
- Effectively informing interviewees about the nature of the study
- Reducing the risk of exploitation (p. 319).

Fontana and Frey (2003) agree with DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) saying that ethical concerns regarding the practice interviewing include the right to privacy, protection from harm, and add informed consent to their own list. Beale, Cole, Hillege, McMaster and Nagy (2004) argue that the three basic ethical principles in qualitative field studies are, "...mutual respect, non-coercion and non-manipulation" (p. 141). The authors add that mutual respect involves understanding the point of view of others; non-coercion ensures that participants freely consent, and non-manipulation highlights the importance of informing participants fully about the purpose of the study and research procedures (Beale et al., 2004).

### 1.11 Case Study

Through purposive sampling the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and Oregon Bach Festival were identified for their unique experiences that would provide rich information. A third flagship performing arts organization was also identified, but decided not to participate in the study. Geographical proximity and access to key knowledgeable individuals was also a reason these sites were intentionally selected. Recruitment letters were sent to all potential participants, which included each organization's Executive Director.

Participants were all geographically located in Eugene and Ashland, Oregon, all male, and in an age range of 50-60.

The primary criterion for including or excluding potential participants was based on a participant holding a specific position within a specified organization and case study site.

# *Timeframe*

Research on the two case study sites began in February 2010, and ended in May 2010. Recruitment letters were sent and contact with potential participants was made in February. Interviews and collection of organizational documents took place in February and March. Member checks were conducted in April and May 2010.

### 1.12 Data Collection

In March and April 2010, one to four hour semi-structured interviews took place at each location. The data from these interviews was captured through an audio recorder and in-person note taking. Organizational documents were also collected at each case study site.

#### Data Collection Instruments

The Interview Protocol instrument was utilized in collecting data during the semi-structured interviews at the case study sites. This tool captured important information such as interview date and location, interviewee details, consent details. Please see Appendix C. A list of semi structured interview questions was also utilized in conducting case study site interviews. Please see Appendix D.

The Document Analysis instrument was utilized in collecting data from collected documents at each case study site. This tool captured important information such as collection date and location, document type, and reference citation. Please see Appendix E.

#### Recruitment Instruments

A formal recruitment letter was mailed to potential participants. The letter informed the participant about the purpose of the study, what their involvement would be, and provides necessary contact information and next steps. Please see Appendix A.

### Consent Forms

Similar to the recruitment letter, each potential participant received a consent form, which informed them about the purpose of the study, what their involvement would be, and provided necessary contact information. The consent form also addressed the participant's privacy, confidentiality, and emphasized their involvement as voluntary. Please see Appendix B.

# Data Collection and Disposition Procedures

The data collected through the semi-structured interviews was captured through field notes and by audiotape. They were then duplicated once by transcription into the Principle Investigator's computer, where it is stored in an external hard drive. All collected field notes and organizational documents are filed in a locked cabinet located in the Principle Investigators home office. At the completion of the study the data will not be destroyed for the purpose of future data analysis.

# *Preliminary Coding and Analysis Procedures*

Using the Grounded Theory Approach, codes were created to assign to units of text and data. Coding took place as the data was analyzed, allowing for additional

codes and themes to emerge from the data. Prior to data collection and based on the conceptual framework, five codes were identified.

- Motivation
- Governance
- Succession planning
- Leadership transition
- Sustainability

These codes were developed into a Codebook, with descriptions for each code and inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Strategies for Validating Findings

Strategies utilized to ensure validity of the study included triangulation through multiple data sources, prolonged engagement, remaining open to disconfirming evidence, member checks throughout the process for all study participants, peer debriefing, and maintaining thorough data and notes.

# **Chapter 2 | Literature Review**

Leadership succession planning has been described as a long-term process that an organization participates in to ensure that it has the necessary leadership to drive the organization to meet it's objectives and achieve it's mission (McKee & Driscoll, 2008). To better understand leadership succession and succession planning in nonprofit performing arts organizations I conducted a thorough literature review that was informed by my preliminary research questions and my conceptual framework. In the literature review I looked at the motivations, both benefits and challenges, which lead an organization to engage with leadership succession. I also looked at the concept of governance and who is ultimately responsible in an organization for leading succession practices. Next, I looked at the practice of succession planning, including both emergency and long-term plans, and how it is integrated into overall planning. Finally, I focused on the leadership transition process, including its pre-transition, transition, and post-transition stages.

McKee and Driscoll (2008) say that scholarly research in leadership succession has increased over the past twenty-five years. Yet, according to Manderscheid and Ardichvili (2008), "Despite the importance of understanding and correctly managing leadership transitions, research into the dynamics of such transitions, and into the development and training activities aimed at facilitating such transitions, is still scarce" (p. 114). Since little literature exists that speaks specifically to leadership transitions in nonprofit performing arts organizations or

arts organizations in general, many of the resources reviewed are directed towards all nonprofits in various industries.

### 2.1 Motivations:

### 2.1.1 Organizational Risk

When attention is not made towards ensuring a smooth leadership transition an organization opens itself up to potential losses. Manderscheid and Ardichvili (2008) say that these losses are primarily monetary. Their research shows that when a leadership transition fails it is estimated that the direct and indirect cost of the turnover can be 24 times the leader's salary (2008). Mandersheid and Ardichvili (2008) also report the loss of staff productivity, specifically amongst the ineffective leaders direct reports, peers, and supervisors. Neville and Murray (2008) agree with Mandersheid and Ardichvili and add that the loss of productivity caused by an unsuccessful leadership transition also forces the organizational staff to take on additional tasks they are not familiar with and, subsequently, their usual work begins to suffer. Allison (2002) also agrees, saying, "Failure typically results in a poor choice of a new leader and a fragmented, exhausted group of people" (p. 341). Allison further explains that the cost of a poor choice is, "...often in the form of opportunity costs, work that did not get done or growth that did not take place" (2002, p. 347).

### 2.1.2 Generational Shift

The upcoming generational shift illustrates a primary need for succession planning. Adams (2008) reports that there is an approaching, "...tidal wave of

nonprofit leadership transitions. Between 60 to 75 percent of nonprofit executive directors will leave their position in the next five years. Over the next decade, many baby boom leaders, who currently dominate the sector, will retire or move into less demanding work" (p. 1). With a major generational shift in the workforce looming, it is important for performing arts organizations to plan for a smooth transfer of knowledge between the incoming and outgoing leadership.

This smooth transfer of knowledge can be achieved if the current generation of performing arts leaders takes the initiative to reach out to the new generation.

Berger (2004) identifies the importance of the generational relationship when he explains:

Sharing leadership is another key issue that must be discussed as we think about succession. In a field often dominated by dynamic, idiosyncratic leaders, it can be difficult for others to grow and develop. It is critical to the succession process, within our individual organizations and within the field, that new voices be heard and that leadership roles be given to the next generation eager to contribute and to serve. (p. 80).

By committing to a "generationally-inclusive" succession plan, performing arts organizations are creating the opportunity for a dialogue to take place about the differences in generational leadership. This dialogue, in turn, allows each group to explore how they will address these differences. Differing perspectives can each contribute to success when placed in an environment that fosters open communication and the sharing of ideas. Cameron (2002) suggests that, "The organizational structures that supported one generation and their way of thought so

well are unlikely to serve an emerging generation as effectively – a shift with profound implications" (p. 4).

# 2.1.3 Funding Requirement

Many nonprofit organizations have been motivated to engage with succession planning as a requirement for a funding opportunity. Many granting agencies are beginning to ask grantees to provide succession plans, both long-term and emergency, for their primary leaders as part of the grant application process. Bonavoglia and Mackinnon (2006) describe how a nonprofit CEO who ran a training center for community leaders for twenty years and was about to retire, began to notice funders hesitating to commit their usual grants to his organization, calling it the, "worst possible response" to an outgoing CEO (p. 5). The grant maker admitted to the hesitation saying that they, "were right in there with everybody else, planning to see who the new CEO would be before promising support" (p. 5). Bonavoglia and Mackinnon (2006) say that situations like this are why, "Some funders urge their grantees to have in place a written leadership succession plan, covering both what would happen if the CEO needed to leave in an emergency and how the organization would handle a transition process. The plan should clarify the circumstances under which it would come into effect, along with key roles and responsibilities" (p. 6). Bonavoglia and Mackinnon (2006) further say that many grant makers place emphasis on the importance of encouraging organizational culture that embraces knowledge transfer and cross training among leaders.

# 2.1.4 Organizational Renewal

Neville and Murray (2008) say that organizations need to look at a leadership departure, "...as not only a leadership transition but a ripe moment for organizational change, realignment, and renewal" (p. 115). Upon learning about an upcoming leadership transition, many organizations fail to acknowledge the opportunity for change, growth, or renewal that a departure offers; instead they focus on the problems associated with the process of replacing the leader (Allison, 2002). McKee and Driscoll's (2008) findings further support this dichotomy. Their research shows that many employees view leadership transition as a challenge and that the organization would not be as valuable without the leader, but many employees also felt that leadership change could also have a positive impact and that there was a desire to make some organizational changes. Zeigler (1991) agrees with McKee and Driscoll and Allison when he expresses that some theater boards want a new artistic director to simply follow the formula created by the founder, while other theatre's want, "...a strong visionary director to chart a course of his or her own" (p. 65).

### 2.1.5 Maintain Artistic Vision

Continuing an organization's artistic vision is another critical motivator for succession planning. During a time of leadership transition, it is vitally important for a performing arts organization to have a succession plan in place in order to ensure that it maintains its artistic vision. For many performing arts organizations its founder creates the artistic vision. The founder is often the organization's primary driving artistic and creative force. When a founder or artistic director

decides to leave the organization, the artistic vision is placed in jeopardy. Ravanas (2006) describes how The Steppenwolf Theatre Company's founding members decided to move on to new projects but wanted to remain involved, so they decided to form an Executive Artistic Board. The board became responsible for selecting, mentoring, and advising the next artistic director. Ravanas (2006) says, "This carefully planned artistic transition allowed the company to maintain its original creative vision at a time of complete management transformation" (p.66). By appointing the Executive Artistic Board and putting a formal succession plan in place, The Steppenwolf Theatre Company ensured it would have the right leader to continue its artistic vision.

Maxwell (2000) presents a very different example, as seen through the Jose Limon Dance Company. When the company founder Jose Limon died of cancer the organization was left with, "...no strong organizational structure in place to support the company" (p. 2). At the time of his death, the company struggled to maintain its artistic vision and create an administrative structure. Without a plan for leadership transition, the company was forced to rely on informal language provided in Limon's will regarding his artistic legacy, which resulted in a fourteen year legal battle to maintain the rights to Limon's work. Eventually the company was able to hire an artistic director and create a Board of Directors. These actions, in turn, led to a clearly defined organizational mission and artistic stability.

### 2.2 Governance:

# 2.2.1 Board Responsibility

"Selecting an executive director is arguably the most important act a nonprofit board performs" (Allison, 2002, p. 346). Allison explains that the board of directors is the leader of the leadership transition process, since it has the authority for hiring and firing the executive director. Ziegler (1991) supports Allison's view when he explains that the task of leadership succession "...is naturally (and properly) the function of the board of trustees. It is the board of an arts institution that is the governor of succession; they manage the process and control it" (p. 65). Liteman (2003) agrees with Allison (2002) and Ziegler (1991) and further says that board members need to, "Recognize that raising the question (of succession) is your responsibility. If the board doesn't talk to the director about succession, no one will" (p. 2).

Hoping to take control of the leadership transition process in their own organization, Neville and Murray (2008) describe how the nonprofit organization Santropol Roulant formed a Strategic Futures Committee to address how they could be better prepared and resilient to leadership changes. Allison (2002) presents a much different picture of a board's motivation to address leadership transition when he says that, "...they often saw the task as an unwelcome and troubling burden" (p. 347). Allison (2002) explains that boards need to move beyond this perception and see the search for a new leader as a defining moment of their board term and, "an opportunity and responsibility to shape the future of the organization" (p. 347).

#### 2.2.2 Search Committee

Like the succession committee created at Satropol Roulant, Redington and Vikers (2001), Bonavoglia and Mackinnon (2006), and Albert (1999) propose a more communal approach recommending the creation of a search committee, which should include the board president, possibly two or more past presidents, and the full executive committee. Redington and Vickers (2001) suggest that staff should participate on the committee, but Albert (1999) believes that the staff should not play a formal role, using the transition process as a, "fresh opportunity to draw the lines clearly but sensitively between board and staff responsibilities" (p. 7). Bonavoglia and Mackinnon (2006) say that perhaps a senior staff member may be a part of the search committee, but "only if staff participation will not constrain board participation and with the understanding that staff members will not participate in all discussions and that confidentiality must be maintained. Redington and Vikers (2001) and Albert (1999) express the need for diversity on the committee in age, gender, race, and organizational function. Albert further says that the board president needs to, "Be sure that all committee members will give the necessary time and are knowledgeable, involved, and committed to the organization" (p. 4).

#### 2.2.3 Consultant

Since executive searches are demanding on both an organization's time and resources, many choose to hire an external consultant who will drive the search.

Albert (1999) believes that if an organization has the necessary resources it should explore this option since search consultants:

- Can devote large blocks of time to the process, which is sometimes difficult for volunteers to do
- Has extensive experience and resources
- Knows a large network of people who can identify potential candidates –
   including people outside the organization's geographic or program area
- Can provide objective counsel
- Can, without revealing what organization he or she is representing, approach candidates that board members may not be able to reach. (p. 5).

Bonavoglia and Mackinnon (2006) agree with Albert (1999) saying that:

There is a kind of objectivity and wisdom and experience that the consultant brings – not to mention getting the board to focus, keeping them on task, managing, just doing the work is a lot for an organization to handle. A consultant can also improve the process by helping an organization use the transition strategically toward ends such as diversifying its leadership, bringing in a new generation of leadership, reaching new constituencies, or increasing the capacity of its senior staff. (p. 9).

However, Albert (1999) also points out that an organization must not delegate making the final decision on who is hired to others, it is still the responsibility of the organization.

# 2.3 Succession Planning

Bonavoglia and Mackinnon (2006) explain that there is a difference between succession planning and leadership transition activities. The leadership transition

process is important when the director knows when they will be exiting. Succession planning is not tied to a specific date and can come in either the form of an emergency succession plan, which helps an organization function should the director leave in an emergency, and a long-range succession plan, which helps an organization strengthen its leadership capacity in preparation for a future transition.

Liteman (2003b) believes that a strong emergency plan is an important component of succession planning, emphasizing that an emergency plan, "not only provides for a line of succession but also ensures that those who may be called upon to assume other duties during an interregnum are able to perform them" (p. 2).

Beidler (2005) acknowledges that most boards do not discuss leadership succession, due to the overall fear of change. To help organizations overcome their apprehension and begin the process, Beidler recommends the following ways to provide advanced planning for leadership succession in an arts organization:

- Include leadership succession as a regular part of strategic planning
- The Board should do a periodic evaluation of the CEO
- Include a line item in the budget for transition expenses associated with changes in senior staff, including the CEO
- Records of each CEO search should be kept. (p. 254-255).

Liteman (2003b) adds that organizational leaders need to prepare for succession by laying the foundation for transition by:

 Creating a culture of evaluation: create, review and discuss yearly work goals for the executive director and board members

- Develop and maintain accurate job descriptions for the executive director and the board
- Make management development a priority
- Plan for the transfer of knowledge: document processes and standardize procedures
- This preparation provides the performing arts organization with a foundation from which it can begin the leadership transition process, should it become necessary.

Make a dry run: test and evaluate the system before you need it. (p. 11).

The organization will be equipped with the information and monetary resources needed to begin their search for the next director.

Liteman (2003a) emphasizes the importance of always having an updated strategic plan in order to successfully begin the leadership transition process. She says, "With a thoughtful and up-to-date strategic plan in place, an organization has a solid platform from which to launch a successful transition effort. Without such a plan, any succession effort it undertakes will rest on quicksand" (p. 2). Liteman (2003b) further says that:

Every strategic plan should have a section in which organization issues, such as growth and future staffing needs, are addressed. Since strategic planning focuses on the longer-term and on the organization as a whole, an annual review affords a great opportunity to look at transition issues, including leadership succession . . . Looking at succession planning in this context may help the conversation feel less threatening to the executive director and less awkward to the board. (p. 3).

Bonavoglia and Mackinnon (2006) agree with Beidler (2005) and Liteman (2003b) that succession planning needs to be a part of the overall strategic plan, just as fundraising strategies and operations questions are. By reexamining and updating their strategic plan, nonprofits will be prepared to address the future of their organization, its needs, and have a clear understanding of the qualities that will be required of a new director in order to successfully lead the organization.

The nonprofit sector has also begun to include formal management training systems as part of their succession planning. Armstrong and Ito (2004) acknowledge that arts organizations are beginning to look for ongoing professional development and leadership training for potential leaders, citing both the Theatre Communications Group's New Generations Program, a training and mentoring program for emerging leaders in theatre, and John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts' comprehensive management training program for aspiring performing arts administrators.

### 2.4 Leadership Transition Process

### 2.4.1 Smart Practices

Redington and Vickers (2001) field research reports the following recommendations on what are the most important factors leading to successful transitions:

- Time
- Be clear about the qualities sought in the new director
- Involve all segments of the organization's community

- Communicate
- Stay close to the mission of the organization
- Have a vision for the planning process. (p. 6-7).

Redington and Vickers (2001) also say that in the best-case scenario transition there would be at least eighteen months notice prior to transition to allow for a thorough planning and search process. However, Albert (1999) points out that, "many organizations will have only three to four weeks to identify and hire a new executive, and some will have only two weeks before the onset of a potential leadership vacuum" (p. 9). Albert (1999) and Bonavoglia and Mackinnon (2006) suggest that organizations, in order to gain some additional time for the transition process, either appoint another staff member as acting director during the hiring process, appoint a interim executive from outside the organization, or appoint another leader from the organization as interim executive.

Beidler (2005) agrees with Redington and Vickers (2001) that establishing a realistic timeframe for the search is important. Beidler further lists the following key factors:

- If you have hired a search firm, be very clear about what you expect from the firm and its method of operation
- Throughout the search, the board chair in particular is responsible for staying tuned in to staff feelings
- All stakeholders need to be assured that the organization will continue to fulfill its mission during the search process. (p. 260-261).

### 2.4.2 Pre-Transition

When examining the steps or activities of a leadership transition the objectives are commonly categorized into three stages or phases, including pretransition, transition, and post-transition. In the pre-transition phase, Redington and Vickers (2001) outline the following recommended steps in the transition process:

- Executive Director makes the decision to retire
- Board appoints a planning committee
- Board appoints a search committee
- The search committee advertises the position, collects resumes, and conducts interviews
- The search committee reviews finalists, some of whom are then called for second interviews
- The new executive director is hired. (p. 7-8).

Bonavoglia and Mackinnon (2006) add that in this stage the focus should also be on helping the current CEO decide on how to exit the organization, and to conduct an assessment on where the organization has been and where it is headed.

#### 2.4.3 Transition

In the transition phase, Redington and Vickers (2001) outline the following recommended steps in the transition process:

 Outgoing director can choose to spend up to one month with the new leader in the executive director position

- The successor is formally and informally introduced to organizational members, community leaders, donors, and colleagues
- The retired director remains in contact with the successor on a consultant basis for a brief period (perhaps up to six months) following retirement.
   (p. 8-9).

Liteman (2003b) agrees with Redington and Vickers (2001) that the new director should have access to the former director, if possible. Liteman (2003b) notes that, "Some organizations create the position of executive director emeritus to honor the founder and create a formal link between the past and future" (p. 7). However, Liteman (2003b) clarifies that the board should carefully define the responsibilities of this position and make it clear that this is an honorary and perhaps advisory position.

### 2.4.4 Post-transition

In the post-transition phase, Redington and Vickers (2001) outline the following recommendations in the process:

- The successor should allow an extended period of time (as much as two years) to learn the position, the organizational culture, and the community
- The successor should also allow for a "grieving" period following the director's departure
- The successor can make smaller changes within the organization when they
  are necessary in order to perform the executive's job effectively
- The successor should try to understand existing work styles and procedures in the organization and formalize those procedures that seem to work well

• If possible, all members of the organization should avoid comparisons between the retired director and the successor (p. 9-10).

Beidler (2005) and Bonavoglia and Mackinnon (2006) emphasize the post-transition phase as a period for strong ongoing support for the incoming director.

Beidler (2005) identifies the following ways in which the board of the performing arts organization can continue to support their new director post-transition:

- Someone, preferably the board chair, needs to check in with the CEO regularly to see how everything is going
- The new CEO should be encouraged to reach beyond the organization's board and staff for support
- If possible, the new CEO and board chair should attend a conference together that specifically addresses the issues of their partnership
- The CEO should expect regular evaluations
- The board should regularly assess it's own performance in supporting the CEO. (p. 266)

Several concepts, practices, and themes that emerged from this literature review informed data collection at case study sites, including both semi-structured interviews and document analysis, and will be further expanded on and explored in the findings and recommendations in the final chapter.

# **Chapter 3 | Case Study Analysis**

In order in answer the research question "How are nonprofit performing arts organizations in Oregon addressing leadership succession?" and how succession planning and leadership transition activities affect the sustainability and success of organizations, it was important to conduct case study research. The case study sites were chosen based on geographic proximity, researcher access to key informants, history and current engagement with leadership succession, and status as a flagship performing arts institution.

The first case study site was the Oregon Bach Festival located in Eugene, OR. Data collection included a semi-structured interview with the Executive Director and Board President and analysis of their website and other organizational internal and external documents. The second case study site was the Oregon Shakespeare Festival located in Ashland, OR. Data collection included a semi-structured interview with the Executive Director and analysis of their website and other organizational internal and external documents.

The Oregon Bach Festival and Oregon Shakespeare Festival were examined in order to gain a better understanding of succession planning and leadership transition activities within their organization. Each organization has its own unique history, practices, and perspectives on leadership succession, but when studied together they "paint a picture" of current succession practices in nonprofit performing arts organizations in Oregon.

# 3.1 Case Study 1

### Oregon Bach Festival

### Eugene, OR

The methodology for the Oregon Bach Festival (OBF) case study includes interviews with the Executive Director and Board President Dr. John Evans, as well as analysis of internal and external organizational documents including the Oregon Bach Festival: Five Year Business Plan: 2008-2012, Oregon Bach Festival 2008 and Beyond: The Funding Gap, Oregon Bach Festival Strategic and Organizational Assessment produced by the Pappas Consulting Group, Inc., and the Honor the Past, Celebrate the Future: The Oregon Bach Festival in Transition. Evans provides a wealth of information having participated in the transition into the Executive Director and Board President role at OBF and is currently planning for the upcoming transition of OBF's founding Artistic Director.

### 3.1.1 Organizational Profile

The Oregon Bach Festival celebrates the music and legacy of J.S. Bach through a seventeen-day festival held each year at the end of June and beginning of July in Eugene, OR.

OBF's mission is, "To inspire the human spirit through the art of music" (OBF, 2010a). OBF strives to provide the highest quality of performances and innovative educational opportunities, involving a broad-based community of musicians, audiences, and donors in a manner that assures the long-term

sustainability of the organization and continued accessibility to future generations. OBF achieves its mission through a variety of programs providing opportunities for both patrons and musicians. OBF's programs include the seventeen-day festival, master classes in conducting, a summer choral program for high school students, the OBF Chorus that performs throughout the festival, a composers symposium for emerging composers from around the world, and numerous events such as preconcert lectures and question-and-answer sessions with festival musicians.

The current festival programming structure provides a variety of musical experiences, featuring the Bach cannon as well as other genres, composers, and contemporary musicians. The 2010 festival schedule reveals OBF's diversity of programming, including mainstream performances such as Verdi's Requiem, concerts featuring the music of Broadway's Bernstein, and engagements with guest artists such as Bobby McFerrin (OBFb, 2010).

OBF was founded in 1970 by German organist and conductor Helmuth Rilling, OBF's founding Artistic Director, and Royce Saltzman, a young professor in the University of Oregon School of Music, and OBF's founding Executive Director. In the early stage of festival was known as the "Summer Festival of Music" and only featured four concerts. Over the next ten years the festival expanded to include performances of major choral-orchestral works, instrumental and chamber concerts, solo recitals, workshops, and master classes. It was at this time that the festival was renamed the Oregon Bach Festival to more accurately describe its geographic location and the composer who inspired the festival founders (OBF, 2010c).

The festival continued to grow in programming, length of festival, and in international prominence as an elite event.

The Festival's concentration of major choral-orchestral works, its many educational programs, and the prevailing family atmosphere each season has attracted an annual audience of 35,000. For four decades, visitors from every state and dozens of foreign countries have been welcomed to the Festival's beautiful natural (and cultural) setting in the Pacific Northwest. (OBF, 2010c).

In 2008, OBF began to expand its reaches to Portland Oregon in order to align itself with the University of Oregon's unveiling of its Portland campus and the opening of the White Stag development, and to reestablish the festival as a statewide enterprise.

OBF is an outgrowth of the University of Oregon School of Music and has since emerged as an independent program of the university, with the Executive Director reporting to the office of the Senior Vice-President & Provost of the university. OBF's university mandate is, "to provide a variety of performance and educational opportunities of acknowledged quality to students, professional musicians and the public. Maintenance of fiscal solvency is part of the mandate of the Festival. The Oregon Bach Festival shall strive to make its programs accessible to all interested persons" (OBF, 2010a).

OBF currently has a fulltime staff of nine, not including festival founder Rilling who still serves as the Artistic Director (40 Years!) and who is independently contracted for his engagements with the festival. In 2008, John Evans was brought

in as Executive Director and Board President. The administrative offices of OBF, including, artistic, marketing and development, and operations, are located in Agate Hall on the university campus. The festival performances take place in Eugene's downtown Hult Center for Performing Arts and the university's Beall Concert Hall. OBF's funding structure includes resources from the university, earned income from festival activities, donations from individual giving and major gifts spearheaded by OBF's Friends of the Festival fundraising board of directors, corporate sponsorships, and a soon to be announced \$10 million Saltzman Endowment that will help fund the operations of OBF in perpetuity. The growth capital created by the endowment helps to create a more secure foundation for OBF to achieve its future objectives.

For four decades the masterworks of Bach have found enthusiastic and highly committed audiences in the Pacific Northwest through the Oregon Bach Festival. Expanding in geographic and artistic bounds under the leadership of Rilling and Evans, the Festival looks ahead to the challenge of taking its destiny — and Bach's legacy — into the future. (OBF, 2010c).

#### 3.1.2 Leadership Succession

The following information and insights on OBF's leadership succession history was collected from interviews with Executive Director John Evans and OBF internal documents.

The Oregon Bach Festival's history with succession planning starts with the transition of its founding Executive Director Royce Saltzman. This was the first major change in organizational leadership, and, unfortunately, resulted in a period

of mismanagement that greatly harmed the sustainability of the organization and its ability to achieve its mission. Evans describes that:

The rot has set in with (Former Executive Director) and his very flamboyant season that had some very good ideas in it, but wasn't actually budgeted properly. He had great ideas, but he couldn't implement them and he certainly couldn't manage them. (J. Evans, personal communication, April 15, 2010)

This led to major financial problems for OBF and an organizational culture where the staff was ready to walk out.

After Saltzman's replacement resigned, Saltzman came out of retirement and returned to the festival and formally returned to the Executive Director role, joining his fellow founder Helmuth Rilling who continued to serve as the Artistic Director. At this time OBF and Saltzman began to work more independently from the University of Oregon School of Music, and was no longer reporting to its Dean, as it had been previously required to. "The bottom line is that the Executive Director has little supervision and enormous management freedom. This is further complicated by the fact that the Executive Director's strength is artistic rather than management" (Pappas Consulting Group, 2006, p. 5). The university began "back filling" OBF's budget in order to cover their ongoing growing deficits (\$800,000 at this time).

The University of Oregon stepped in and decided at this time that in order for there to be a successful transition of the Executive Director role a complete strategic and organizational assessment of OBF was needed. The university also wanted to assess weather or not OBF should be a part of its newly launched Campaign Oregon.

In 2006, the Pappas Consulting Group, at the request of the University of Oregon's Senior Vice President and Provost, conducted the assessment which revealed many issues regarding leadership succession and weaknesses overall for OBF. The study's objectives were to assess:

- The organizational and governance structure of the festival
- The programming and marketing functions of the festival, with the focus on increasing the festival's audience as well as the timing and the length of the festival; and
- The capacity for expanding the Board's role in fundraising and development. (Pappas Consulting Group, 2006, p.1).

The assessment showed a commitment at the university and board level to plan intentionally at both the strategic and operational level to ensure that succession planning is carried out with, "style, integrity, and grace, and in a manner that ensures the legacy of the Founders through the long-term continuation of the festival" (Pappas Consulting Group, 2006, p.1).

The assessment also highlighted the need to clarify and redefine the role of the OBF Board with regards to governance and succession planning. The board at that time worked as though it had total governing power, which was not consistent with university policy. The by-laws of the Friends of the Oregon Bach Festival Board were re-written to establish the Board as a primary fundraising and development Board. The assessment concluded with the following primary recommendations regarding leadership succession and governance:

- Transformation of the current board to that of a fundraising/program focused rather than management focused board
- The thoughtful transition of the current Executive Director to Executive
   Director Emeritus status as well as the appointment of a new Executive
   Director with the ability to maintain the artistic quality of the Festival while improving its financial stability. (Pappas Consulting Group, 2006, p. 8).

With a much clearer picture of OBF's capacity, Pappas Consulting Group served as a search firm and a search committee, made up of board members and university officials, was formed to begin the search for Saltzman's replacement. This was not an easy task considering the lingering memory of the failed transition that occurred before and resulted in the reemergence of Saltzman as Executive Director. Prior to the search the university took the time to examine in-depth the position description for the new director making sure it accurately reflected the new role and it's relationships.

In 2008, John Evans, formerly with the BBC for 20 years, was hired as the new Executive Director and Board President and Saltzman assumed the position of Executive Director Emeritus, allowing for a period in which the two directors could work together and ensure a smooth transition. Among many other initiatives, Evans has been tasked with planning for and leading the upcoming succession of OBF's founding Artistic Director Rilling and laying a foundation for his own eventual transition.

The challenge now facing OBF is the upcoming transition of founding Artistic Director Rilling, who is, "the last of the great maestros who perform, broadcast, and

record the great choral and orchestral repertoire of J.S. Bach and his contemporaries, on modern instruments, and with leading symphony orchestras" (Evans, 2009, p.1). Evans believes that the succession planning for Rilling should have started over ten years ago, because OBF only has a short season, three weeks, to try out new conductors, since you can only have one or two guest conductors per festival (J. Evans, personal communication, April 15, 2010). Evan's says, "They should have been thinking about this ten years ago when Helmuth was in his late sixties, now he is in his late seventies, and now we are running to catch up" (J. Evans, April 15, 2010). Evans (2009) succession strategy for Rilling includes a strategic alliance with Portland Baroque Orchestra. Evans says that: "

The first and most significant strategic move in the festival's history, towards securing his great legacy and establishing the OBF on the world stage for the  $21^{\rm st}$  century, is a strategic alliance with one of the leading period performance ensembles on the West Coast, the Portland Baroque Orchestra (p. 2).

This partnership is vital is establish OBF's presence in Portland which helps OBF attract a greater caliber of candidates, having a major metropolitan location and ongoing access to OBF virtuoso players.

A search committee has been created to provide leadership for the succession planning of Rilling's transition. The search committee consists of board members, orchestral players, choral players, and community members. Evans also formed a small international advisory group of academics, performers, and administrators. Participants in this group are among the top individuals in the

industry and who will provide OBF with advice and access to key candidates. The formation of the search committee and the advisory group has been communicated to the university, the board, and the OBF staff. Evans says that he wants a process that exhibits, "transparency, best practices, and was in accordance with the compliance practices in terms of employing someone of senior level for the university or anyone on the state level" (J. Evans, personal communication, April 15, 2010).

Currently, there are six candidates on the list for the next Artistic Director and Evans believes that the list will most likely grow to ten to twelve. The search committee, advisory group, and Evans will all make recommendations and then a final group of three candidates will be vetted (J. Evans, personal communication, April 15, 2010). This includes meetings with Evans, the board, the university, and guest engagements with the festival. It has been determined that in the end Evans will have the final decision as to who the new Artistic Director will be (J. Evans, personal communication, April 15, 2010).

#### **Oregon Shakespeare Festival**

#### Ashland, OR

The methodology for the Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF) case study includes interviews with the Executive Director Paul Nicholson, as well as analysis of internal and external organizational documents including OSF Bylaws, OSF 2009-2013 Long Range Plan, and the succession plans for both the Executive Director and Artistic Director. Nicholson provides a wealth of information having played a key role in the recent 2006-2008 five year transition of former Artistic Director Libby Appel and new Artistic Director Bill Rauch and his ongoing planning for the eventual transitions of senior managers, including himself.

### 3.2.1 Organizational Profile

The Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF) is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) theatre company that produces an eight-month season of Shakespeare's plays as well as works from many other playwrights, in Ashland, OR.

OSF's mission is stated as, "Inspired by Shakespeare's work and the cultural richness of the United States, we reveal our collective humanity through illuminating interpretations of new and classic plays, deepened by the kaleidoscope of rotating repertory" (OSF, 2010a). OSF achieves its mission through a variety of programs, including an annual production season, play development and readings, educational programs involving classes and workshops for teachers and students,

fieldtrips, outreach to schools, a lecture series and classes for patrons attending performances, and many other special events that connect OSF to their patrons and the community.

OSF fosters a work environment that values a "team" effort, which is why it has maintained its "company" structure throughout its entire history and is included in all OSF departments, not just artistic. OSF's vision, and the center of everything they do reveal an organizational culture that values:

- Excellence
- Inclusion
- Learning
- Financial Health
- Heritage
- Environmental Responsibility
- Company (OSF, 2010a).

OSF was founded in 1937 as a three-day festival with two shows, *Twelfth Night* and *The Merchant of Venice*. For the next thirty years the festival continued to grow and in 1960 it decided to take a major risk and produced its first non-Shakespearean play. Growth in attendance and programming led to OSF acquiring additional theatre spaces, including a resident theatre company in Portland, OR, in 1988. This expansion to the Portland Center for Performing Arts in Portland, at that time, made OSF the largest nonprofit theatre in the country.

OSF has received numerous awards on the local, national, and international stage, including being named one of the top five theatres in America by Time

Magazine in 2003, premiering Pulitzer Prize winning plays, numerous Oregon Governor's Awards for the Arts, and several submissions to the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln's Center's Theatre on Film and Tape Archives, and many other acknowledgements (OSF, 2010b).

OSF currently has over 300 fulltime and 175 part time employees, and utilizes over 600 volunteers yearly. Paul Nicholson has served as the Executive Director at OSF since 1995, having previously served as the company's General Manager. In 2008 Bill Rauch became only the fourth Artistic Director in OSF's 70-year history. 2009's festival attendance reached over 410,000 for it's 766 performances. OSF's 2010 operating budget is estimated at almost \$27 million, most of which is realized through earned income (OSF, 2010c). Other financial resources include, individual and major gift giving, corporate sponsorships, foundational support, and the OSF Endowment Fund, which is its own separate 501(c)(3), and currently sits at over \$24 million.

OSF's plans for the near future involve growing and creating new artistic programs to achieve its mission, upgrading and acquiring new theatre spaces and facilities, devoting significant resources to reducing OSF's impact on the planet, and engaging with diverse communities to develop festival audience.

#### 3.2.2 Leadership Succession

The following information and insights on OSF's leadership succession history was collected from interviews with Executive Director Paul Nicholson and OSF internal documents.

In 2004, Libby Appel, the artistic director for the Oregon Shakespeare Festival since 1995, signed a new three-year contract with the organization. After signing this contract, she announced that, after the appointed three years, her time with the organization would come to an end. Since they had received this news so far in advance, the board implemented a three-year succession plan to ensure that the organization would remain stable through the leadership transition. Their plan included three phases. The search for the new director was begun in 2006. 2007 served as an overlap year between Appel and her successor. In 2008, the new artistic director Bill Rauch, formerly of the Los Angeles Cornerstone Theatre Company, took the lead. Executive Director Nicholson says that the board started with the date that the 2008 OSF Season would need to be announced and then began working backward to determine the timeframe for all its major decisions and communications regarding the transition process (P.Nicholson, personal communication, April 12, 2010). Bent (2008) describes the primary reason behind the success of this plan was this three-year span. During this time, Rauch had the opportunity to fully understand all of the various managerial aspects of his new organization before officially taking over. The overlap contributed to workflow that remained seamless and moving in the proper direction.

OSF Executive Director Paul Nicholson says that a motivation for OSF to participate in succession planning stems from the potential for an emergency situation. "What happens if you suddenly lose your Executive Director or Artistic Director? The under-the-bus syndrome," (P. Nicholson, personal communication, April 12, 2010). Recently, OSF was forced to implement an emergency succession plan when its Director of Development suddenly became incapacitated. The plan called for the Director of Institutional Giving to step into this role, as if the Director of Development were on vacation for a couple of weeks. Unfortunately, it soon became clear that the Director of Development would not be able to return to work and eventually passed away. The situation then became not about an emergency succession plan, but now about a plan in the long-term sense where the Director of Institutional Giving is not the primary candidate for this role.

Nicholson also feels that there is a need for planning for an orderly succession even if the situation is not an emergency, and perhaps the organization has a significant amount of time before the transition will occur, as in the case of Appel's retirement (P. Nicholson, personal communication, April 12, 2010). OSF has found itself in both the emergency and long-term situations.

"In terms of what motivates us, we are an organization that believes in planning, believes in thinking out ahead, because if that happens there are fewer surprises and we don't like surprises" (P. Nicholson, personal communication, April 12, 2010). However, Nicholson also pointed out that not all created succession plans turn out to be the right plan in the end. Situations change and organizations

need to be able to be flexible with their plans in order to achieve what is best for the organization.

Nicholson revealed that OSF has never been in a granting situation where the funder required OSF to present a succession plan in order to be considered for the grant (P. Nicholson, personal communication, April 12, 2010).

Currently, OSF has a succession plan in place for both the Executive Director and the Artistic Director. Succession planning has also been communicated to senior management that all managers need to think about succession and begin the process of creating individual plans. Senior management responded favorably, knowing that the Executive Director was creating his own plan. "The challenge is that we get into a situation where these succession plans are almost always emergency plans, rather than truly determining what the succession is going to be, because the organization just doesn't know what its going to need at the time that they leave" (P. Nicholson, personal communication, April 12, 2010). Nicholson acknowledges another challenge in succession planning:

Things get tricky with succession planning . . . because we operate with a very lean or shallow management structure and when you read all of the books they all say that a part of the management's responsibility, for the leader's responsibility, is to set up the person who is going to take over, but the reality of this just doesn't work out that way, because we don't have a large enough manager structure who can be trained enough in the pretty significant differences in terms of responsibilities. (P. Nicholson, personal communication, April 12, 2010).

This is evident in the case of the transition of the Director of Development. The Director of Institutional Giving filled the role in the emergency stage, but when it became clear that it would be a permanent vacancy OSF knew that the Director of Organizational Giving would not be the best option considering that she was only familiar with and trained in about 25% of the entire development arena and did not have the background to run the entire department, and whose transition would have created additional havoc.

Nicholson feels that at OSF he is the primary champion and governance for the succession planning process and initiative:

As an Executive Director you need to lead by example, you have to do your own succession plan and have that approved by the board, and that gives you the basis to say to the people that report to you that it is time for you guys to do a succession plan as well. (P. Nicholson, personal communication, April 12, 2010).

Nicholson believes that the board has the right to expect a succession plan and the Board President needs to take a primary role. The board needs to take the time to talk about succession in depth so that they can fully understand what the succession plan entails. Having gone through a major transition, like Appel and Rauch's, helps OSF educate their board on the importance of succession planning.

During the recent transition of the Artistic Directors, OSF utilized both a search committee and a search-consulting firm to provide additional leadership and to handle all primary search tasks including recruitment, creating profiles, solidifying OSF criteria, scheduling, and many other activities that OSF would have

had to handle had they decided not to bring in the firm. This was the first time OSF had used a third-party consulting firm in a search, previously they had managed everything in-house.

During the search process, Appel worked with the board and the search committee to establish the criteria for what they were looking for in a new Artistic Director. Appel wanted to participate in the interviewing process, but they felt that this would inhibit the candidates to be able to speak freely in their interviews. Post-transition, Appel was available to Rauch in a consultant and advisory capacity.

OSF includes succession planning as part of their overall strategic planning, as reflected in their 2009-2013 Long Range Plan. The plan references the artistic programming changes implemented by Rauch and also acknowledges Nicholson's upcoming transition in the next 2-3 years. OSF does not allocate transition costs or contingency costs in their annual operating budget. Instead, after a search process is approved and a timeframe is set, the board will draw from the reserves to fund the transition process and not inhibit the operating budget with those costs. This was the practice for the recent Artistic Director transition.

Over the next couple of years Nicholson will be preparing the organization for his departure. This will include revisiting and clarifying board procedures and policy and how this information is being downloaded and prepared for transfer to the next Executive Director. Another transition activity that Nicholson will be engaged with is meeting with a transition coach, someone from outside the organization who will work with him to make sure he is covering all aspects of the job in preparation for knowledge transfer.

Nicholson feels that the most important aspect of a successful leadership transition is communication. He says:

I feel that in this area you cannot over communicate. It is a period of instability; it is a period of uncertainty, and the only way that you can counter that is to be continuously communicating what is happening.

OSF communicates to its staff about the transition process and its various steps at their company calls held throughout the year as well as through emails providing them with a clear picture of what is happening. A transition team of senior staff is formed to help provide leadership in communicating the transition process to the rest of the staff. Nicholson says that the transition team was one of the most important things that they did during the Artistic Director transition in terms of ensuring that information was disseminated (P. Nicholson, personal communication, April 12, 2010).

#### 3.3 Findings and Comparison

Based on interviews with the Executive Directors at both organizations and a review of organizational documents the following findings and comparisons were derived. At both organizations, it is evident that succession planning is considered a valuable practice. Both organizations are concerned with making sure they have smooth leadership transitions for their Executive and Artistic Directors. The organizational champion of succession planning and ensuring that the organization in prepared to undergo a leadership transition is the Executive Director.

#### **Motivations**

OSF is motivated to engage with succession planning and having a succession plan in place for their Executive Director, Artistic Director, and other senior management level positions in case an emergency situation should arise. OBF does not have emergency succession plans for it's Executive Director or Artistic Directors.

Both organizations are motivated to participate in succession planning to ensure that the organization is able to secure the best candidate for the job. OBF and OSF desire successful leadership transitions for continuing the success of the organization and to maintain its legacy and artistic vision. Both Executive Directors indicated a sense of engaging in succession planning as "doing the right thing" for their organization and having a "greater purpose".

OBF is primarily motivated to engage in succession planning to ensure that it can attract the highest quality of candidates for their positions. Evans (2010) described how many of the succession activities that he has implemented are linked to creating a strong foundation for which it can attract the best in the industry.

OSF is also motivated to engage in succession planning due to its successful history with past leadership transitions; whereas, OBF is motivated to engage in succession planning because of it's past problems with leadership transition.

Neither organization indicated that they are motivated by an upcoming generational shift, talent competition, or are being asked to supply succession plans as part of application requirements by funders.

#### Governance

The organizational structures of OBF and OSF are different and therefore effect who is responsible for succession planning and managing leadership transitions at each organization. At OSF, the Executive Director leads and manages the succession planning and leadership transition process, but it is the responsibility of the governing board to make the final decision. Since OBF is a program of the University of Oregon and its board is a fundraising board with no governing authority, the Executive Director is responsible for all succession planning and leadership transition duties and ultimately, in consultation with the university Senior Vice President and Provost, makes the final decision as to the new director.

Both organizations formed search committees to provide additional governance to the leadership transition process. OBF also formed an international advisory group to gain additional guidance on potential candidates. OSF created a transition team that was tasked with assisting with the process and communicating leadership transition information to staff.

Both organizations also utilized third party consulting firms who provided services on candidate recruitment, interviewing, organizational assessment, and other additional support.

### Succession Planning

Both organizations have succession planning as part of their overall strategic plan, and include upcoming leadership transitions in their five-year business plans.

Neither OSF nor OBF include expenses associated with succession planning and leadership transitions as line items in their annual budget. OSF allocates reserve funds to cover leadership transitions when the process begins, in order to avoid burdening the annual budget with transition costs.

OSF has both emergency and long-term succession plans for both its

Executive and Artistic Directors. OBF does not have emergency succession plans
and has a strategic plan for the succession of its Artistic Director. Both
organizations utilize written job descriptions as a tool in succession planning.

Both directors indicated that they communicate to their boards about succession planning and promote ongoing dialogue.

#### Leadership Succession Process

Evans (2010) and Nichols (2010) both cited having significant advanced notice of an upcoming leadership transition was an important characteristic to a successful leadership transition. Both directors also indicated that ongoing communication with various constituencies on all organizational levels is also an important part of ensuring a successful transition.

In the pre-transition phase both organizations formed search committee's who meet with potential candidates. The search committees, in collaboration with

their consulting firms, created specific criteria to help guide the recruitment process.

At OSF the incoming and outgoing Artistic Directors overlapped for a period of two years, ensuring that the new director had sufficient time to learn the new process and responsibilities, and had access to the former director. OSF views the transition phase as a long-term multi-year phase. OBF's incoming and outgoing Executive Director did not overlap in the transition phase. However, the outgoing director was given the title of Executive Director Emeritus and remained active in the organization providing the new director advice when it is solicited. The outgoing director has recently joined OBF's board.

## **Chapter 4 | Conclusions & Recommendations**

In this final chapter I will synthesize data collected from the case study sites and the literature review to best answer the research questions. Since the research questions guiding this study were open-ended, definitive answers were not the goal. The goal was to better understand leadership succession in nonprofit performing arts organizations. I will also offer recommendations for further research on succession planning and leadership transitions in nonprofit performing arts organizations. Since the scope of this study was limited, further research is needed to further understand succession practices in performing arts organizations nationwide.

### 4.1 Restating the Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this research project was to explore and describe leadership succession practices taking place in nonprofit performing arts organizations in Oregon. The study was guided by the primary research question:

 How are nonprofit performing arts organizations in Oregon addressing leadership succession?

Additional questions surfaced that provide background information and supplement the primary research question:

- What are the motivations for an organization to engage with succession planning?
- Who is responsible for leading the succession planning and leadership transition process in a performing arts organization?

- Should the leadership succession plan be part of the organizations ongoing strategic plan and annual budget?
- What can an organization do to prepare for a leadership transition before the transition is needed?
- What does the leadership transition process look like for a performing arts organization?

#### 4.2 Synthesis

The primary research question is informed by the information and insights that emerged from answering the supporting research questions. These answers are formed from the literature review and case study analysis, combined to answer the question as completely as possible.

What are the motivations for an organization to engage with succession planning?

The literature review and case study analysis revealed several different motivations for why nonprofit performing arts organizations engage in succession planning. The case study sites and the literature highlighted the overall primary motivation being the general sustainability of the organization. Beyond this principle motivation, each organization had its own individual motivations to engage in succession planning.

The literature expressed an increased engagement in succession planning due to an upcoming generational shift (Adams, 2008), and as a requirement by funders in the granting process (Bonavoglia and Mackinnon, 2006). Neither OBF nor OSF expressed that the generational shift or funding requirements as a

motivation. The upcoming generational shift motivation may not be as relevant today given the recent economic recession with current senior management holding off on retirement until they have a chance to recover their investments.

Both OSF and OBF agreed with Mandersheid and Ardichvili (2008) that their motivation included shielding their organization from the potential for organizational risk, and maintaining artistic vision (Ravanas, 2006). In addition to these motivations, OSF and OBF were motivated by their past history with succession planning and leadership transitions, whether they were successful or not.

In the end, I think that an organization will have a combination of motivations for engaging with succession planning, with each motivation addressing the overall sustainability of the organization.

Who is responsible for leading the succession planning and leadership transition process in a performing arts organization?

Ultimately, the performing arts organization's board is responsible for replacing its Executive and Artistic Directors. However, the case study sites revealed that the Executive Directors at both organizations were the driving force in succession planning and leadership transitions for their organization. The OBF Executive Director has the final decision as to the new Artistic Director.

Responsibility may change based on the organization's structure, as is the case at OBF. Since the focus of OBF's board is fundraising, it is not a governing

board and does not have the authority to make the final decision regarding a new Executive or Artistic Director.

The literature and case study analysis both also indicate the need for a search committee and a search firm to provide additional guidance and services during the leadership transition process.

Should the leadership succession plan be part of the organizations ongoing strategic plan and annual budget?

The literature review reveals that including succession planning as part of the organization's strategic plan and having allocated funds in their annual budgets are considered smart practices.

Both case study sites included succession planning in their five-year business plans, but neither site included leadership transition costs in their annual budget.

OSF indicated that it did not want to burden the organization's annual budget with the costs associated with a leadership transition and, instead, would secure funds from the organization's reserve to cover costs.

What can an organization do to prepare for a leadership transition before the transition is needed?

The literature review and case study analysis reveal several actions a nonprofit performing arts organization can take to prepare itself for a leadership transition. Both the OSF case study site and Liteman (2003b) emphasize the importance of an organization having an emergency succession plan in place for

each of it's senior management positions, in case they should suddenly become incapacitated.

Liteman (2003b) says that organizations should have updated job descriptions for all positions, as well as an updated strategic plan. Both case study sites use job descriptions and a strategic plan as tools in the succession planning process. This creates a strong foundation from which to begin the leadership transition process.

Beidler (2005) and both case study sites indicate that boards do not like to talk about succession planning for fear of change. Beidler and both case study sites express that communication and creating an ongoing dialogue about leadership succession with their board and staff is vital to the success of succession planning and leadership transitions.

What does the leadership transition process look like for a performing arts organization?

The literature review describes the leadership transition process in three common phases, pre-transition, transition, and post-transition. Each phase has it own recommended steps or activities to be completed.

In the pre-transition phase the literature suggests that the organization take the time to develop criteria for which the candidates will be evaluated. The literature also recommends the formation of a search committee to provide guidance and additional governance to the leadership transition process. Both case study sites developed criteria and created search committee's for its leadership

transitions. Both case study sites also hired a consulting search firm in the pretransition phase.

During the transition phase of the process both the literature and the case study sites say that it is important for the incoming and outgoing directors to overlap, so that a more complete knowledge transfer can occur. During the overlap period it is important that responsibilities be clearly defined and communicated to all constituencies.

The literature says that the post-transition phase should be a period of continued support for the new director. Communication with the board and clearly defined expectations should be established. If possible, the outgoing director should be made available to the new director in a consultant and advisory role.

The timeframe for completing each phase and the leadership transition overall changes based on the individual performing arts organization's timeframe and available resources. This process can be extended or condensed to fit the needs of the organization.

#### 4.3 Recommendations

Based on my findings and the literature review, I offer the following recommendations for performing arts organizations interested in engaging with succession planning. I feel that they can be implemented regardless of the size of the organization.

- 1. Train your board on succession planning and their role in the leadership transition process. Replacing the Executive Director and Artistic Director is a significant function of the board and should be treated as such. Board member orientations and retreats are great opportunities to educate and train your board on the need for succession planning and the activities involved in the transition process.
- 2. Emphasize communication throughout the succession planning and leadership transition process. Many people fear change. Do not let a lack of communication add to the stress of a leadership change. In the pre-transition phase take the time to establish a communication plan and objectives on how and what to communicate with your organization's various constituencies. Find a process and format that works best for your organizations and its available resources.
- 3. Create emergency and long-term succession plans for all key organizational leadership. An emergency plan will help your organization navigate a sudden departure, and a time of instability. Long-term plans prepare your organization for the inevitable departure of a leader. Take comfort in knowing that your organization is ready and able to handle a leadership change.
- 4. Include succession planning as part of overall strategic planning and budgeting. Since you already have a built-in process for your strategic plan and budgeting, simply include succession planning as a component. This ensures that it is being continually addressed and that you have resources available.

5. If possible, utilize a third-party search firm to assist in handling the leadership transition process. Although many organizations may not have the resources to hire a search firm, the services and support they provide an organization are considerably valuable. They are a significant resource in a time with potential organizational constraints.

#### 4.4 Further Research

The performing arts community and the nonprofit sector would benefit from further study on leadership succession:

- An examination of succession practices in small and medium-sized nonprofit performing arts organizations in Oregon would provide a more thorough overview.
- An examination of other national and international flagship performing arts institutions would offer additional comparisons and insights.
- Research that includes perspectives from organizations that have not yet experienced major leadership transitions and succession planning engagements would be beneficial.
- An exploration of leadership succession in for-profit and government run performing arts institutions would provide a multi-sector comparison.
- Research that details the financial impact a leadership transition has on a nonprofit performing arts organization.

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## Appendix A | Sample Recruitment Letter

Date

Name Address City/State/Zip

Dear < POTENTIAL INTERVIEWEE>:

You are invited to participate in a research project titled *Passing the Torch: An Exploration of Leadership Succession in Nonprofit Performing Arts Organizations in Oregon* conducted by Michael Fisher from the University of Oregon's Arts and Administration Program. The purpose of this study is to explore how nonprofit performing arts organizations in Oregon are addressing the issue of leadership succession and how the practice of succession planning contributes to organizational sustainability. Challenges, such as an upcoming generational shift, talent competition, and changing funding requirements are demanding that nonprofit organizations prepare themselves for such transitions or open themselves up to many associated risks. This study aims to better inform performing arts organizations on how to handle leadership transitions and "paint a picture" of current succession practices.

You were selected to participate in this study because of your leadership position with <NAME OF RELEVANT CASE STUDY ORGANIZATION> and your experiences with and expertise pertinent to leadership transition. If you decide to take part in this research project, you will be asked to provide relevant organizational materials and participate in an in-person interview, lasting approximately one hour, during spring 2010. If you wish, interview questions will be provided beforehand for your consideration. Interviews will take place at <NAME OF ORGANIZATION>, or at a more conveniently located site. Interviews will be scheduled at your convenience. In addition to taking handwritten notes, with your permission, I will use an audio tape recorder for transcription and validation purposes. You may also be asked to provide follow-up information through email.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at  Any questions regarding your rights as a research p	
the Office for the Protection of Human Subjects, University of Oregon 2510.	•

Thank you in advance for your interest and consideration. I will contact you shortly to speak about your potential involvement in this study.

Sincerely,

Michael Fisher

# Appendix B | Sample Consent Form

Research Protocol Number:
Passing the Torch: An Exploration of Leadership Succession in Nonprofit Performing Arts Organizations in Oregon
Michael Fisher, Principal Investigator
University of Oregon Arts and Administration Program
You are invited to participate in a research project titled <i>Passing the Torch: An Exploration of Leadership Succession in Nonprofit Performing Arts Organizations in Oregon</i> conducted by Michael Fisher from the University of Oregon's Arts and Administration Program. The purpose of this study is to explore how nonprofit performing arts organizations in Oregon are addressing the issue of leadership succession and how the practice of succession planning contributes to organizational sustainability. Challenges, such as an upcoming generational shift, talent competition, and changing funding requirements are demanding that nonprofit organizations prepare themselves for such transitions or open themselves up to many associated risks. This study aims to better inform performing arts organizations on how to handle leadership transitions and "paint a picture" of current succession practices.
You were selected to participate in this study because of your leadership position with the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and your experiences with and expertise pertinent to leadership transitions. If you decide to take part in this research project, you will be asked to provide relevant organizational materials and participate in an in-person interview, lasting approximately one hour, during the Spring of 2010. If you wish, interview questions will be provided beforehand for your consideration. Interviews will take place at Oregon Shakespeare Festival, or at a more conveniently located site. Interviews will be scheduled at your convenience. In addition to taking handwritten notes, with your permission, I will use an audio tape recorder for transcription and validation purposes. You may also be asked to provide follow-up information through phone calls or email. There are minimal risks associated with participating in this study, particularly since this phase of research is exploratory in nature.
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will be carefully and securely maintained. Please note that email security cannot be guaranteed. Your consent to participate in this interview, as indicated below, demonstrates your willingness to have your name used in any resulting documents and publications and to relinquish confidentiality. It may be advisable to obtain permission to participate in this interview to avoid potential social or economic risks related to speaking as a representative of your institution. Your participation is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.
I anticipate that the results of this research project will be of value to the performing arts community as a whole, especially in the Pacific Northwest region. However, I cannot guarantee that you personally will receive any benefits from this research.
If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at, or Dr. Doug Blandy at Any questions regarding your rights as a research participant should be directed to the Office for the Protection of Human Subjects, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403, (541) 346-

2510.

Please read and initial each of the following statements to indicate how you would prefer to be			
identified:			
I consent to my identification as a participant in this study.			
I wish to maintain my confidentiality in this study through the use of a pseudonym.			
Please read and initial the following statements to note your agreement:			
I consent to the use of audiotapes and note taking during my interview.			
I consent to the potential use of quotations from the interview.			
I consent to the use of information I provide regarding the organization with which I am associated.			
I wish to have the opportunity to review and possibly revise my comments and the information that I provide prior to these data appearing in the final version of any publications that may result from this study.			
Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty, that you have received a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies. You have been given a copy of this letter to keep.			
Print Name:			
Signature:Date:			
Thank you for your interest and participation in this study.			
Sincerely,			
Michael Fisher			

# Appendix C | Interview Protocol Form

Casa Study		Data ID:		
Case Study:		Data ID:		
Key Descriptor.	:			
Date:	Interview Location:			
Interviewee Details:				
Consent: Oral Written (form) Audio Recording OK to Quote Member Checks				
Notes on Interview Context:				
Key Points:	NAMES DATA MANAGEMENT OF THE PROPERTY OF THE P	Nomes of		
CODING	INFORMATION	NOTES		

## **Appendix D | Semi Structured Interview Questions**

What are some of your organization's motivations for engaging in succession planning?

How is your organization addressing the upcoming generational transition in leadership?

Have you had to address succession planning as a requirement for a funding process?

Who at your organization is responsible for succession planning and managing leadership transitions?

What do you feel is the responsibility of the board in succession planning?

Have you used a search firm as part of the leadership transition process?

Does your organization have any internal policies or a formal process for leadership transitions?

What do you feel are important components to a successful leadership transition?

Is succession planning part of your overall strategic plan?

Do you allocate a line item for succession planning in your yearly budget?

Do you feel that succession planning is important to the overall sustainability of your organization?

# **Appendix E | Data Collection Form for Document Analysis**

Case Study:		Data ID:
Key Descriptor:		
Date:	Document Location:	
Document Type:	Arts Organizations' Written Materials Notes Other:	Online Information
Reference Citation	ı:	
CODING	INFORMATION	NOTES