ON LEADERSHIP AND SUSTAINABILITY
IN THE VISUAL ARTS

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Abstract

It is often felt, and sometimes argued, that the arts require a different type of organization and management, that entrepreneurial and business models do not apply and can even do more harm than good. This paper considers whether this taboo against the kind of overt leadership familiar to business and politics serves or hinders efforts to achieve sustainability in the arts. Interviews with leaders in the Canadian arts scene contribute to a discussion whether increased openness about leadership would increase overall organizational effectiveness and hence the potential for sustainability. The sustainability model as developed by Throsby is also examined in relation to its potential application to the visual arts.

Keywords: governance, museum, nonprofit organizations, public enterprises, public private, sustainability, sustainable development

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Introduction

A growing body of literature argues that leadership is a key component to the development of sustainable networks and organizations in the arts, as in other sectors. The role of the entrepreneurial leader in the arts sector generally, and more specifically within non-profit arts organizations, has received too little attention. (Rentschler and Geursen 2004)

The importance of leadership in the arts is difficult to assess. There are few if any agreed upon measures. (Anderson 2004) It is often felt, and sometimes argued that the arts require a different type of organization and management, that entrepreneurial and business models do not apply and can even do more harm than good. (Caust 2004 and Cray, Inglis, Freeman 2007)

Yet there is little question that there is a need to examine the role of leadership more openly. It is predicted that by the year 2016 there may be as many as 80,000 senior management positions throughout the US nonprofit sector without
qualified individuals to fill those positions, a situation no doubt matched in Europe and other jurisdictions. (Abruzzo 2008 and Meredith 2009)

Cognizant perhaps of this looming crisis, arts communities have begun to more openly acknowledge the importance of leadership while also developing programs to promote leaders, for example from within their own already highly professionalized ranks (Kennedy 2008). In Canada there has been a consistent professionalization of the arts over the past 30 or more years, the number of arts organizations, associations and companies multiplying with the increase and elaboration of funding mechanisms. This has not only created a demand for managers but we have also seen emerge new sites where public gallery or art museum contemporary art professionals are trained, particularly the artist-run centres (Robertson, 2006). More recently, young people are coming to see arts management as a career path and are creating their own social networking organizations to support younger, emerging arts professionals.

Discussion of management in the arts, and around leadership can be seen as a natural response to growth in the arts, the increasing number of artists, arts organizations, funding agencies, etc. and a concomitant increase in the complexity of the field. Patrick O'Reilly, CEO of the new Canadian Museum for Human Rights currently under construction, has observed that museum leadership today requires skills in three areas, not just traditional management but also in the area of partnerships and fundraising, and complex project management.[1] As the field becomes more crowded, relationships become more complex, requiring more highly skilled management.

It is somewhat curious then, that the discussion of leadership in the arts is so often underlined with urgency, with assertions that the arts are in crisis. Skills shortages and a crisis of confidence in arts institutions are two reasons often given to focus discussion on management. It is beyond the scope of this

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[1] Remarks during a consultation forum on training needs for the museum sector, organized by the late Dr. Cheryl Meszaros of the Department of Museum Studies, University of Toronto during the Canadian Museums Association annual conference in 2009.

paper to explore the research on skills shortages or public confidence, but it is here that the notion of sustainability also enters the discourse. Inadequate staffing or staff with not the right skills is a "resources" issue. A lack of confidence in arts institutions may be expressed in public and private support, also a resources issue, or in attendance, which is about the relationship between institutions and their "environment." Both resources and relationships are essential components of the sustainability equation.

Arguments that the arts and culture can and should be "sustainable" are not particularly new to the arts. Artists have struggled with their patrons for as long as there have been both artists and patrons, and certainly since Dr. Johnson defined "patron" thus in his poorly patronized *Dictionary of the English Language*:

> *" One who countenances, supports or protects. Commonly a wretch who supports with indolence, and is paid with flattery."*[2]

The dependency of artists and arts institutions on the largesse of the wealthy, those who by dint of their positions in business or government the control purse strings is not always as fraught as Johnson's was with the *Dictionary*'s derelict patron, Lord Chesterfield. Nevertheless, the by now hackneyed arguments that the arts must learn to produce more "self-generated revenue" in order to become "sustainable" pivot on the less-discussed fact that the arts are at least one step removed from both consumers and taxpayers, further up the pipeline, with business and government in between controlling the flow.

In this light, the concept of "sustainability" can been seen to be less about "ecology" in the scientific sense and more about the desire to find new ways of thinking about and discussing the arts that might give them more independence from both the state and the private sector. Using the environmental analogy is attractive: environmental terminology is "friendly," imbued with an irreproachable sense of legitimacy, necessity and urgency.

This paper is broken into two sections, the first on leadership, the second on sustainability. I will look at some of the literature to assess what we know about leadership and put that into a practical perspective by referring to interviews I conducted with several well-known and respected leaders in the Canadian visual arts. Then I will examine how the concept of sustainability is being applied to the visual arts. Finally I will attempt to synthesize the two, to see if the concept of leadership has a place within an eco-system view of the visual arts, and offer some final thoughts on what it might mean if it does.

<center>I   On Leadership</center>

1. Who is leading?

In preparing this paper, I thought it would be useful to speak directly with people who are leaders within the visual arts in Canada. The first question I asked Robert Sirman, Director of the Canada Council for the Arts, was who our leaders in the arts are. His immediate response caught me off guard: artists are the true leaders in the arts, he said.

Certainly there is a line of management studies that looks for analogies in other disciplines to try to capture what the term "leadership" really means, by, for example, comparing leaders to artists: "someone who in some aspect of his or her professional or personal life exemplifies the power and qualities of an artist: the ability to work on an edge, in an interdependent relationship with the medium, with a capacity for creative improvisation. (Parks, 2005)

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[2] Quoted in Garber, M. 2008. p. 6.

For sure, the qualities of good leaders are hard to capture. Hatch et al. see multiple aptitudes at work, embodying creativity, virtue and faith, analogized as artist, manager and priest. (Hatch et al, 2005) But I don't think this is what Sirman meant.

Sirman was getting at something else, perhaps how the act of creation is inherently a kind of leadership, requiring creativity, decisiveness and confidence, all important attributes of leaders. Artists, by virtue of their single-minded devotion carve out new and unique aesthetic formulations, some of which become icons of their age, influencing artists for generations to come and shaping the culture generally. But while this line of enquiry is interesting, it is something short of practical; it is not about literally leading organizations.

One cannot take the idea that "artists are our real leaders" at face value unless you consider how many senior positions in the visual arts have been occupied by artists. Artists don't just march paint and clay into artistic formations that direct culture as a whole, they often play literal leadership roles among groups of artists, or as educators and scholars, or as arts administrators, curating exhibitions, organizing projects and also managing organizations. Sirman himself is a librettist, was head of the National Theatre School before being appointed to the directorship of the Canada Council.

Many other artists have become leaders not just within their own communities of artists but of our leading arts organizations. Of the thirteen people who have headed the National Gallery of Canada, for example, two have been architects and two artists.[3] And we of course know some of our most recognized artists to speak out on social and political issues from time to time, exercising leadership in the public domain. Vaclav Havel comes to mind as one among the very few artists who have chosen to embrace politics, becoming the President of the Czechoslovakia in 1989 and leading it through its transition to independence as the Czech Republic in 1993.

Yet, to consider artists in terms of their leadership/management qualities is often seen to be part of a larger trend to look at economies in terms of culture and creativity, the "knowledge economy" and met with skepticism. Critics of this trend express concern that pushing executive status onto artists only further professionalizes the arts, promoting the importation of business management styles, sidestepping the progressive and critical attentions artists and others working in the arts want to pay to social and political issues such as social justice, poverty and discrimination, while conservatively reinforcing the ethos of individualism and genius in the service of a neo-liberal political and economic agenda. (Forkert, 2009)

If there is a prevailing anxiety about who is leading the arts, it does not arise from the fact that artists are not engaged in leadership roles. They are both metaphorically, for want of a better term, leading the culture, and literally. Moreover, it must also be noted that the vast majority of leaders of art institutions come from academic backgrounds; in the visual arts, from art history. By and large, the visual arts grooms its own leaders from within, from the ranks of art museum professionals, curators in particular. All of the directors of the National Gallery of Canada since its inception in 1880 had curatorial experience prior to becoming directors and continued to curate exhibitions as part of their responsibilities. And since 1966, four of six directors of the National Gallery of Canada have held PhDs in art history.

The importance of academic qualifications and curatorial experience to leadership in art museums is itself an interesting topic, but is again, something outside the scope of this paper. For my purposes, I hope it will suffice to point out that the vast majority of those who rise to leadership positions in visual art institutions are deeply connected to art. They are not like business or government executives whose

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[3] John William Hurrell Watts (1880-1897) and L. Fennings Taylor (1897-1912) were architects. Alan Hepburn Jarvis (1955-1960) and Charles Fraser Comfort (1960–1965) were artists.

managerial skills are seen as distinct, separate from the business they are in, whose skills are, in the jargon of the human resources industry, "transferable."

And, as Robert Sirman pointed out in our interview, the arts further diverges from business insofar as there is a fundamental tension in the arts over who is leading, artists or art institutions. To broach the subject, he warned, is to provoke debate about who *should* be leading. The arts, he noted, is not like banking, which is not divided between institutions and individual practitioners; there are no individuals constantly exploring what banking is about and inventing new ways of banking; there is only the banking system. In the arts, on the other hand, institutions have at their core the work of individual artists and there is a strongly held belief that it is the individual artist who is the real leader, who needs support before everything else.

I hope not to open that debate let alone resolve it in favour of one, the artists, or the other, art institutions. Rather I wish only to point out here why leadership in the arts is so difficult to discuss. Leaders in the visual arts, whether they are artists, art historians, curators or the directors of art museums share a deep connection to the materials they work with. As such they are vulnerable in a very practical way; what they are so capable of achieving within their discipline may not be understood or appreciated beyond the walls of the art museum.

2. A certain antipathy towards leadership

Attitudes among arts organizations towards conventional organizational structures vary depending on the scale of the organization. For larger organizations, there is an unmistakable trend towards more diversified funding, less government support and more private sector or "self-generated" revenues, meaning a combination of increased attendance and admission fees, sponsorship and donations. For smaller arts organizations, however, wading into the zones of marketing, audience development, partnerships and sponsorship continues to be fraught. Among smaller organizations, many of which are run by artists themselves, dissatisfactions with the conventions of power derive in part from a historical legacy of general cultural activism among artists, and artistic practice itself, beginning with conceptualism and developing into the genre commonly referred to as institutional critique (Robertson, 2006).

We might observe that small arts organizations have, to put it rather too starkly, neither the inclination, the means nor the need to adopt conventional management structures, indeed the principles of opposition are sometimes taken so seriously and literally that criticism of each other, organizations operating at basically the same level, threatens the possibility of constructive discourse even where common interests are obvious. (Tuer, 2007)

Leadership, within any community, has a competitive aspect. For leaders there must be followers and leaders will be challenged and have to fight to maintain their dominance. Thus, even within small organizations who decry conventional management hierarchies, we find competition and a certain unwritten, un-discussed valorization of strength, though it is more often the extremes of commitment rather than brute strength that attract respect.

Notwithstanding and not to diminish the importance of the theoretical and ideological debates around the nature of power and the place of the artist and the arts organization in relation to it, there are a few more or less obvious practical reasons underlying this antipathy: small organizations employ few people who typically are well-educated and handle multiple responsibilities. They are self-motivated and self-managing. They exhibit what Tidwell calls "prosocial" behaviors;[4] they are there because they want to be,

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[4] Tidwell, 2005. "...When volunteers identified with their nonprofit, they had higher levels of prosocial

often at some personal expense, forgoing more conventional, and lucrative, career options, and they learn new skills quickly and eagerly assume new responsibilities. Within this environment, there is little need for strict management or leadership.

Simon Brault, CEO of the National Theatre School of Canada, Vice-Chair of the Canada Council for the Arts, president of Culture Montréal, and a member of the Canada Prizes' advisory panel, is a good example of the kind of self-starter that typifies people working in the arts. Brault started out at the theatre school doing whatever needed to be done. Then there was a need for a bookkeeper so he went back to school to study economics, eventually emerging with a degree. He then modernized the Theatre School's entire accounting systems. Over time, he earned the respect of everyone working there and demonstrated his abilities. Eventually he was offered the directorship.

Moreover, small arts organizations can subsist on less, indeed, theirs is a culture that valorizes doing more with less, stretching government dollars by, for example, working with younger, emerging artists and arts professionals and offering programs that emphasize critical experimentation, local talent, etc. They are less subject to the pressures to attract larger audiences or more and more diverse funding that would allow them to build more ambitious programs.

However, small arts organizations also find themselves in a critical cul-de-sac, standing outside an "establishment" they are loath to emulate, but therefore more or less stuck at the same level, with the same program, falling apart then putting themselves back together again, unlike Humpty Dumpty but quite like Sisyphus. Not surprisingly, some writers encourage arts organizations to turn out of the cul-de-sac by adopting more "positive" approaches.[5] (Bolton, 1992)

But the antipathy for "leadership" in the business sense cannot be laid at the feet of the arts sector solely. Business too is guilty of a certain fuzzy-headedness when it comes to management in the arts. As Marjorie Garber points out, well-intentioned business leaders while endeavouring to encourage support for the arts have too often ended up insulting the arts, or at least underestimating their seriousness by, for example, comparing themselves to artists, pointing out how many executives play instruments or paint in their spare time, or when their generally "genial latent paternalism" becomes not so latent, as when they compare their relationship to the arts to that of parents whose attention is turned, however justifiably, by insistent children.[6]

It is not hard to see then how both sides view themselves as having expertise and authority that merits respect and justifies control. Leaders in the arts have an exceptional connection to their materials and view management as outsiders who cannot fully appreciate their passion, while leaders outside the arts view the principles of good management as self-evident truths to which there should be no exceptions. It is a divide that is hard to bridge.

It's not as simple as one adopting the language of the other. As Dr. Shirley Thomson, former director of the National Gallery of Canada and of the Canada Council for the Arts pointed out when I interviewed her for this paper, directors of art museums are motivated by passion. For them, it's all about the content. "You have to know what you are directing. You have to convince potential donors of the value of your

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behaviors, commitment, and satisfaction."

[5] "The pessimism of critical theory, the limitations of the "politically correct," the relationship between mainstream and alternative art spaces—together these issues provide a context for rethinking the function of the museum, and of art institutions generally. It seems time for a change in strategy, time for artists to cast off their role as despairing critics, and instead forge a connection between critical thinking, hope, and political imagination."

[6] Garber, op cit. 102-03.

collection. You can't spin out a lot of management speak. A knowledgeable business person wouldn't stand for that."

3. What is leadership?

A considerable amount of thought has gone into defining leadership. Ralston (1990) discusses how our view of leadership has changed over the years. Prior to the 70s, leaders are described by Schumpeter (1951) as individuals who 'do things not generally done in the ordinary course of business' while Zaleznik (1977) describes leaders in terms of capability to 'shape ideas, alter mood, and evoke images' leading to physical action. These "visionary" qualities of leadership are distinct from those of managers. For Schumpeter, managers 'repeat combinations that had been carried out before.' Zaleznik adds that managers 'respond to [others'] ideas, need to co-ordinate and balance, and act to limit choices'. However, Kets de Vries (1977) redefines leadership by including 'co-ordinating & management functions' into the existing definition. Ralston in conclusion takes the view that leaders are people who "get new things done' (Ralston, 1990).

Gronn (2000) crystalizes the differences into two types: transformational leadership and managerial leadership. He suggests that the former emphasizes agency and the latter, structure.[7]

However, for Dr. Shirley Thomson, former director of the National Gallery of Canada and of the Canada Council for the Arts, the distinction is moot, "Your definition of managerial leaders would drive me bonkers. What's the point? You have to be always trying new things, pushing things forward. I don't see a division between them [the two styles of leadership]."

In light of Thomson's decisive reaction, it is not so surprising if discussion of leadership in the arts increasingly focuses on the entrepreneurial aspect. Rentschler and Geursen (2004) define entrepreneurship in performing arts organizations this way:

> *The process of creating value for the community by bringing together unique combinations of public and private resources to exploit social and cultural opportunities in an environment of change and to increase the quality of the PAO [performing arts organization] audience experience.*

Rentschler and Guerson found that, as museum revenues have diversified, they need, as organizations, to be managed more entrepreneurially. They see entrepreneurship as an increasingly important concept for understanding non-profit development. This focus on entrepreneurship flows from the need for organizations to recognize opportunities across a broader range of revenue sources. Managers need be aware of and work with opportunities across a broader range of initiatives and activities. They conclude that the entrepreneurship definition appropriate to the arts must cover all aspects of the interplay between the tripartite funding sources (government, audience and sponsors), warning that failure to do so will have consequences: artistic innovation is less possible when funding is too low; organizations become more reluctant to program experimental works and cannot afford to commission new works. They are less able to program quality artists, may shorten the length of programs and have less balanced programs, favouring the "tried and true" over the "new and bold." These threats have been identified by others as well, for example Baumol & Baumol and DiMaggio & Stenberg (both 1985).

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[7] I am indebted to Anthony Mok for his thorough and insightful review of much of the literature on leadership in his essay, self-published in 2007.

Simon Brault's, Shirley Thomson's and Robert Sirman's achievements all confirm the view that the ability to "get new things done" is essential to leadership in the arts. Brault was not only responsible for bringing the National Theatre School's accounting systems into the 20th C, but he was the driving force behind a major capital project, the restoration of the Monument-National in Montreal in 1993. Sirman, during his 15 years as Administrative Director of Canada's National Ballet School spearheaded an award-winning $100-million capital expansion program. Among her many accomplishments as Director of the National Gallery of Canada, Dr. Thomson was responsible for the acquisition of Barnett Newman's painting Voice of Fire, a "new thing" or "push" that generated enough controversy to fuel countless articles and two books. All three demonstrated that they were aware of and could work with opportunities across a broader range of initiatives and activities, such as major building campaigns and internationally important acquisitions, all involving a highly complex interplay funding sources and political forces.

I would propose that leadership in the arts be considered more expansively than Rentschler and Guerson's view of entrepreneurship insofar as there is more than the needs of diversified funding to address. Entrepreneurship is overly identified with finance when in fact the skills of the entrepreneur are more varied and subtle.

When I asked Dr. Thomson what she felt to be the most important qualities for successful leaders she quickly listed; the capacity for hard work, to always be exceptionally well-prepared, the ability to listen to others and respect their opinions, and flexibility, the ability, as she put it, "to tap dance," to deal with politics, fundraising *and* content.[8] Towards the end of our interview, she returned to the latter. When I asked her about that certain ambivalence one finds in the arts towards leadership, she reiterated the importance of flexibility, to listening and respecting others' viewpoints.

Sirman too believes in listening. "Leading creative organizations means making room for other people's input. It means having as a starting point a willingness to accept many different points of view." He further speculates that the ability to pay attention to others derives from an increased capacity to tolerate ambiguity, something that has been shown to be characteristic of university students enrolled in the arts and humanities when compared to those enrolled in science and engineering.

II   On Sustainability

1. What is sustainability?

The term "sustainability" has gained currency as a way of discussing concerns about the environment by linking environmental impacts to economic ones. Following the UN World Commission on Environment and Development ("the Brundtland Commission) in 1987, the Canadian government formed a national consultative group, the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy (NRTEE) to "*provide leadership in the new way we must think of the relationship between the environment and the economy and the new way we must act.*"[9] Over the next decade, the NRTEE group developed a set of "sustainability indicators" to show the state of and trends in a key set of stocks or capitals — human,

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[8] Here, Thomson alludes to the ongoing debate about the scholarly vs. business roles of director/curators. See, for example, Kennedy, R. 2008. "[C]andidates for the top jobs need not only the skills of an art historian, but also those of a chief executive, investment banker, motivational speaker, political infighter and veteran diplomat."

[9] Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, October 1988, quoted on the NRTEE website: http://www.nrtee-trnee.com/eng/about-us/who-we-are.php

environmental and economic.[10] Sustainability thinking has, since the Brundtland Commission, been usefully expanded to capture a spectrum of values and criteria for measuring organizational (and societal) success: economic, ecological and social.

When I asked Simon Brault about the application of sustainability thinking in the arts, he expressed concern that the term is coming to euphemistically mean without, or with a lessened role for government. Brault considers the term more useful if it incorporates ongoing roles not just for government, but also for public policy more generally, and democracy as a whole. "I like the idea of sustainability because it refers to middle and long-term vision. Sustainability suggests that you have survived for a certain length of time, and that there is room for growth."

2. The sustainability principles and their application to cultural capital

David Throsby has perhaps done the most work to advance the concept of sustainability into the cultural field. The concept of "natural capital," he observes in his paper On the Sustainability of Cultural Capital, is at the root of thinking about sustainability, defined as

> *"the management of natural resources in a way that provides for the needs of the present generation without compromising the capacity of future generations to meet their own needs."*[11]

Natural capital and cultural capital are comparable, he says, because both are "given," by nature in the case of natural capital and by history in the case of cultural capital, both require caring for, both contribute to human economic activity, and both are strengthened by diversity. (Throsby, 2005)

The key concepts embedded in the definition of sustainability are; *inter*generational equity, *intra*generational equity, diversity and the precautionary principle.

Intergenerational equity means that we have a responsibility to conserve the environment for the benefit of future generations. Throsby argues that this concept can be applied to culture insofar as we have a responsibility to conserve cultural capital, the culture we have inherited from our forebears, both tangible and intangible, so it can be handed on to future generations.

*Intra*generational equity means fairness in the distribution of environmental assets within the present generation. Throsby argues that in the cultural arena this concept would imply fairness in access to cultural participation across social classes, income groups, regions, etc.

Biodiversity, the multitudes of interdependent species, is known to be essential to sustainable environments. Throsby would find its equivalent in cultural diversity, the multiple ideas, beliefs, traditions and other artistic and cultural manifestations that yield a sense of culture as a whole greater than the sum of its parts.

Finally, the precautionary principle embedded in the definition of sustainability means minimizing risk when faced with decisions that may cause irreversible change. Throsby gives, as examples of situations in which this principle would apply to the cultural sector, where a historic building is being threatened with demolition or when indigenous languages are in danger of extinction.

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[10] Released in 2003, the indicators are intended to encourage government, business and individuals to integrate environmental considerations into economic decision-making. The indicators are gradually making their way into the operations of other levels of government, notably at Statistics Canada and Environment Canada.

[11] Paraphrasing the definition of "sustainability" in Brundtland Commission, 1987. Throsby, 2005, p. 2.

Having drawn out the principles of sustainability and shown how they apply to cultural capital, Throsby turns to the daunting task of applying the kind of economic analysis that is used in relation to natural capital. He experiments with complex formulae that, as I understand them, place the values of cultural assets, tangible and intangible, into economic relationships that can then be evaluated in terms of sustainability. This project falters, however, because it is so difficult to determine cultural value: "while the theoretical concept of a culturally sustainable development path defined according to explicit criteria may be an appealing one, it remains operationally constrained until robust value-assessment methods can be devised."[12] Throsby concludes by indicating the need for clearer cultural indicators that could then be quantitatively studied, producing more concrete values.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to delve deeply into the challenges of defining cultural indicators. However, I hope that a qualitative approach to the problem, the reflections of arts leaders on the question of sustainability and my own thoughts on how the above principles of sustainability apply in the visual arts, might help move this project forward.

3. Initial perceptions of sustainability

I asked Robert Sirman about the application of the term sustainability to the arts. He first expressed concern that the territory is too vast and complex to navigate successfully, particularly in the context of a discussion focused on leadership, but then immediately slipped into a discussion of cultural diversity, using language loss as an example. "If we don't intervene," he said, "we lose ways of thinking, world views, different approaches to problem solving." He then added another idea. "Culture is not seen as resource intensive." It is therefore difficult to link culture to economics in the same way that nature has been. That is changing however, he said, with new technology, which *is* resource intensive. There are real capital costs to technology-intensive art, a definite ecological footprint. To demonstrate his point he gave the example of poetry. "A poem is not resource intensive, you need only a pencil and paper. Today, we may be moving away from one of the cultural practices that served us best, that had a relatively small footprint."

For Simon Brault, as noted above, any discussion of sustainability must include roles for the state, public policy and democracy. Throsby's observations about the inputs necessary to sustain cultural capital would be reassuring:

> "[I]n any given period society would need to allocate a sufficient level of resources to utilising its cultural capital stock rather than to other (non-cultural) purposes, and would need to re-invest a sufficient level of the financial income stream so generated in the conservation and maintenance of the stock, in order to ensure no deterioration in the cultural value of the stock in the next period.[13]

But it is Throsby's elucidation of the concept of intragenerational equity that would be especially relevant for Brault, who has just published a book, Le Facteur C, in which he forcefully argues that the arts will survive and thrive only if public participation increases, a clarion call for increased access: more equitable distribution of cultural resources.

Both Sirman and Brault intuitively grasp Throsby's sustainability definition, corroborating his conclusion, "Given the parallels between natural and cultural capital, it is intuitively plausible to extend the analysis of sustainability in ecological terms to embrace the phenomenon of cultural sustainability, a concept that

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[12] Throsby, 2005, p. 13
[13] Throsby, 2005, p. 11.

to date has tended to have rather more rhetorical than analytical substance."

4. Leading the arts from the perspective of sustainability

Today's leaders are well-informed about the environment. While no Canadian art museum that I know of has yet claimed to be a "sustainable art gallery," it goes without saying that they are actively looking at ways to minimize their environmental footprint. But more than this, I would propose that sustainability as a way of looking at the arts is something arts leaders are naturally inclined toward and that better "fits" the nature of their organizations than other management models.

To the latter point, consider how the discourse around the environment and sustainability has changed how we all think about the world. Our increased awareness is a natural consequence of having grown up in a period of more and better information about our impact and dependence on the natural world. We all feel this, but there are good reasons to think people working in the arts may be more receptive than most to sustainability thinking and more adept at applying its principles.

For example, Robert Sirman was profoundly influenced by the 1972 report, Limits to Growth.[14] With that report, the Club of Rome introduced the concept of sustainability to the world. It was the first time many people heard there might be a limit to the world's natural resources.

At the time the report came out, Sirman observed how the Club of Rome made a distinction between problems and circumstances. Problems can be solved and when solved, disappear, whereas circumstances are not so finite. We don't "solve" circumstances, we "respond" to them, hoping to mitigate negative outcomes and, if we are right or lucky, circumstances improve. What distinguishes circumstances from problems is that circumstances are never fully resolved; they do not go away like solved problems do. For Sirman, this was a revelation, planting seeds of doubt that for every problem there is a "right answer" solution, instilling in him an openness about looking at problems and alternative solutions. One might observe that for all of us who took the Limits to Growth seriously, a certain tolerance for ambiguity was necessary. What they were saying was not black and white, oil today, no oil tomorrow. You had to embrace the idea that course corrections were possible, but that many factors were involved and that outcomes could not be predicted with certainty.

The literature on leadership tends to be quite uniform in what it considers part of the leadership equation: leadership style, organizational culture, organizational context or environment, and impacts of the leader's performance on the organization (Inglis, Cray and Freeman, 2006).

This is a somewhat contained view of leadership. Leadership does not operate in a vacuum but leaders are not only part of the organization but also mediators of the relationship between the organization and its external environment. They influence (direct) everything going on within an institution but also manage the complex relationships the institution has with its surrounding environment, not only with its funders, other institutions, the field of scholarship, etc. but also with its local audiences and local communities. As Dr. Thomson pointed out, "You have to deal very much with the local condition. I don't think that has changed. It's *la condition humaine*."

Leadership shares with the environmental or ecological way of looking at things aspects of both macro and micro systems. At the macro level, in relation to an overall ecology of cultural institutions, art museums participate in world culture, contributing to the historical weave of national, regional, ethnic and other identity patterns. They also are, at the micro level organic in their co-dependency with their immediate, surrounding environment of local institutions, businesses, residential communities, etc.

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[14] Sirman, 2009, p. 2.

So it may also be useful to look briefly at the principle concepts embedded in sustainability to see how they operate in terms of leadership in the arts.

Intergenerational equity

This principle says we have a responsibility to ensure cultural capital survives beyond our particular tenure and will be in the same condition or better for future generations. For leaders of visual art institutions, there are several facets to this concept but the most obvious ones are the state of its physical assets, its building and collections. Managing these in light of intergenerational equity means caring for them so they survive from generation to generation; maintenance of the building, ensuring its capacity to sustain the exhibition and other programs, and conservation of the collection.

Intragenerational equity

This principle is about present conditions: the well-being, skill levels and productivity of staff; the relevance of exhibition and other programs, in terms of both scholarship and audience; and the position of the institution in the community, its relationships and status locally, nationally and internationally.

Programming is a primary issue here. Just as people should be entitled to equal access to the world's natural resources, air and water in particular, so too, if the principle is to be applied to cultural capital, should all aspects of cultural production engage audiences equally.

Within institutions and in relation to leadership in particular, fairness has a particular importance. Studies of leadership across sectors suggest that leaders who are responsive, promoting interactions between employees within the organization and between the organization and their supporting environment have better performing organizations. (Coleman, 1996)

Many authors have noted the importance of flexibility to leadership, as did Dr. Thomson in our interview. Flexibility is another aspect of fairness. Research has shown that the ability of leaders to change perspectives and interact productively with, and support, those they are managing leads to positive organizational performance among teachers, (Coleman, 1996) in the military, (Engels, 2001) and in business. (Rosener, 1990) It has been shown that to be successful, leaders must have a certain amount of freedom from organizational constraints so they don't get bogged down with managerial functions. (Hambrick & Finkelstein, 1987 and Ralston, 1990) It has also been shown that "social welfare maximizers" enhance organizational performance when they are sensitive to the needs of both the market and their political masters. (Ramamurti, 1987)

Robert Sirman speaks eloquently about the importance of his staff, many of whom are leaders in their own right of the various departments of the Canada Council for the Arts. "[E]mpower your staff to play an active role in determining how to respond to the challenges you face. Let them have a real say in charting their own course, and hold them accountable, as peers, for their performance. I am convinced that this approach is a major contributor to the exceptional performance of staff within my own organization..." (Sirman, 2009)

Diversity

Diversity is a concern for senior arts management for obvious reasons. As the general population has become more diverse through immigration primarily, audiences have become more diverse but institutions have not necessarily kept up. If programs are to reflect the interests of, and appeal to, their audiences, it is helpful to have staff and leaders doing and managing the programs who are part of the communities from which those audiences come.

The question of how to achieve greater diversity within organizations has been on the agenda since at least the late 1980s. Research has consistently called for change, including better opportunities for women: Rosener (1990), Coleman (1996) and Oplatka (2001) Change at the most senior levels is naturally slower to come as the supply of experienced directors is limited and generally of a similar background to those currently holding directorships. Nevertheless, today few people are not aware of systemic biases within organizations and that so long as there is a perceived barrier to senior management the concern is that women will "plateau or interrupt their careers in ways that limit their growth and development." (Schwartz, 1989)

Within Canada, a majority of art museum directors are women and they would seem to be evenly distributed among large and small organizations, university-affiliated, municipal and provincial institutions.

Dr. Shirley Thomson shared with me her optimism about the future of art museums. Diversity, she said, has two positive implications for the future. Young people from more diverse backgrounds will bring fresh perspectives to the art museums, and will eventually replace the less flexibly-minded men who have for so long dominated the rank of museum directors.

Precaution
This principle recommends we proceed with caution when faced with situations where decisions will have permanent consequences for cultural capital. In general, many cities have instituted precautionary apparatus with respect to things like historic buildings. Designation as an historic building for example can bring re-development projects that require demolition, to a grinding halt.

In terms of leadership, a good leader needs to be cognizant of the tendency of organizations to do as they always have done. This can have both positive and negative effects in terms of the precautionary principle. Within the management literature, there is the well-known phenomenon of dysfunctional organization culture. Kets de Vries (1989) discusses the inability of, or resistance within, some organizations to change in terms of "alexithymia;" organizations in which the culture becomes so focused on conformity, supporting "system persons" and maintaining rigidly hierarchical social relationships that they can make the lives of leaders intent on "getting new things done" difficult if not impossible.

As we have seen, people working in the arts tend to have a higher tolerance for ambiguity. Exercising caution engages that tolerance. It means avoiding snap judgments and hasty decisions, pausing for careful consideration, being able to tolerate that there may be no "right" answer and that the consequences of delaying a decision may be unpredictable.

Conclusions

Leadership in the arts is difficult to discuss. This is in part because artists play leadership roles themselves, figuratively and often literally. Arts organizations, on the other hand, play leadership roles in relationship to audiences and their local communities and require leaders to manage those increasingly complex relationships. Notwithstanding these apparent differences, leaders in the visual arts, whether they are artists, art historians, curators or directors, share much more in common that they may think, and that is a deep understanding of, and commitment to, the materials they work with.

The antipathy we find in the arts towards business-style management, though legendary, is not merely based on myth. It arises from the close, "passionate," relationship those working in the arts have to the materials they work with, the fact that they are expert and highly self-motivated and therefore less needing to be led, and the fact that there are "tried and true" historical processes for training and promotion from within.

It is hardly necessary to argue which model of leadership will work best in the arts; within the arts, leaders have always been people who "get new things done." It is built into the DNA of curators who are driven by a desire to bring artworks into three dimensions. Indeed, three-dimensionality is an interesting way of thinking about the arts, and could perhaps be usefully introduced into the way we think about leadership in the arts. In particular, the emphasis leaders I spoke with gave to things like tolerance for ambiguity, listening and flexibility suggests there are more dimensions to leadership in the arts than conventional management thinking imagines.

To put leadership into the same context as sustainability is challenging. Sustainability as a term of art is vulnerable to dilution if it is overused and distortion if it is shorn from its roots in the environment. However, sustainability as a way of thinking and a method of analysis is valuable because it necessitates, as Simon Brault pointed out, middle and long-term visioning, a vital leadership responsibility. And, as David Throsby has demonstrated, once the concepts embedded in the definition of sustainability are unpacked, they can be applied neatly, concept by concept, to the cultural sector. Leaders in the visual arts intuitively grasp the parallels between natural capital and cultural capital, particularly with respect to the concepts of intragenerational equity and biodiversity.

However, as Throsby points out, there are limits to what can be done with sustainability in the cultural field; the full application of the sustainability model falters over the difficulty of defining culture's chief assets and attaching firm economic values to them. Sustainability priniciples of inter- and intragenerational equity, diversity and precaution can be applied with specificity to tell us more qualitatively about how arts organizations operate in their environments. As our qualitative understanding of the complexity of relationships improves, perhaps it will become more possible to fix economic values to them.

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