ARTS OF ORGANIZATIONS:
A CONCEPTUAL EXPLORATION
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Abstract

This paper examines the relevance of current models in organisation theory in describing and explaining non-profit institutions. Data from arts organisations is used to refute the central assumptions of three main streams in organisation theory. A series of propositions are presented to describe arts organisations. These propositions are intended to show a need for new approaches in conceptualising diverse organisations. Finally, some consequences are derived from this new conceptualisation.

Over the past decade, interest in studying arts organisations has increased markedly. Various studies have been conducted to explore and understand different aspects of arts organisation. Most importantly, the financial difficulties of arts organisations have remained the primary focus of analysis (National Report on Arts, 1975; Ford Foundation Study, 1974). It is common knowledge that arts organisations – as non-profit institutions – are in real difficulty in terms of keeping themselves financially viable. Other kinds of analyses related to arts organisations are primarily institutional (Albrecht, 1960). Such studies have focused on the institutional role of arts in the society, its historical and social context and its relevance in human development (Johnson, 19 : Creedy, 1970; Barnett, 1959). Another trend in the study of arts has been concerned with the artist, his motivations, attitudes and beliefs, socialisation processes in the making of an artist, the norms that guide the groups of artists, and the rituals and customs that maintain their identity (Becker, 1963; Griff, 1970; Forsyth and Kolenda, 1970; Strauss, 1970). It is only recently that arts organisations have been studied at the level of organisation (Becker, 1974, Adizes, 19875; DiMaggio and Hirsch, 1976; Taubman). The focus on arts organisations as a unit of analysis has been rather fragmentary so far.

Even when attempts to study arts organisations as organisational units, the current models and theories appear inadequate. Most current models in organisation theory are primarily derived from and applicable to profit - making organisations. The not – for - profit organisations have not received much attention in organisation theory. This exploration

PROPOSITIONS DESCRIBING ARTS OGANISATIONS

1. **To the extent that the artistic activity is primarily emotional, the process of being engaged in the task is the product of arts organisations.**

Artistic activity is primarily emotional. When a musician composes music, when a painter paints, or when a dancer dances, it is the emotions of the artist which underly that music, painting or dance. The artist's emotional experience provides the primary energy for his art. The sensory receptors of the artist are "charged" with emotion when he is creating art. At the same time, the audience of arts or the recipients of arts experience affective - emotional response when they are engaged in artistic activity. When an audience listens to music, looks at a painting, or attends a dance performance, it experiences sensory enhancement and emotional arousal.

This emotional aspect of artistic activity implies that arts organisations exist to engage in the process of artistic expression. It is the process of engagement in artistic activity which is the product of arts organisations. Since the emotional experience of the art is the central aspect for the artists and the audience, the product of arts organisations is maintain that process. An orchestra, for example, exists to provide opportunities for musicians and audience to engage in the experience of music. A symphony or a particular performance is only the mechanism through which that process of engagement is sustained.

Arts organisations exhibit this primacy of the process of engagement in two central ways. Firstly, most arts organisations perceive themselves as mission - oriented as opposed to goal - oriented. When asked about their reason for existence, members of arts organisations present a broad vision of their aspirations in a missionary manner. The author learnt that the members of a fine arts school describe and comprehend the purpose of their organisation as providing opportunities for the public to appreciate and enjoy arts. Another arts organisation was established to enhance cultural harmony in the city. Such descriptions are clearly missionary and quite different from the goal - orientation of an automobile plant, for instance. This mission - orientation is derived from a commitment to engage in the process of artistic activity, and not a particular form or quantity of product.

Secondly, arts organisations tend to allocate their resources to facilitate the process of engagement in artistic activity. The allocation of social resources in the form of rewards and punishments, power and authority, channels of communication and responsibility and accountability (Srivastava et.al., 1976) in arts organisations is to the process of engagement in artistic activity and not to a particular product. For example, a theatre rewards engagement by its artists in producing a play, allocates authority and responsibility to the producer and director of the play, and the producer - director is the centre of communication in making demands and sending commands. Even the non - artistic personnel in the theatre are expected to facilitate this process of artistic activity by contributing their expertise and resources. Similarly, physical and financial resources are geared to support the process of engagement in artistic activity. In the theatre, monies are made available for designing of costumes and sets, and the physical

space is designed to facilitate the theatrical expression. More importantly, the largest portion of financial resources goes in sustaining the artists, so that they can continue to engage in the artistic activity.

2. **Since the process is the product, the criteria for "success" are primarily internal in arts organisations.**

In the preceeding preposition, it was argued that the process of engagement in artistic activity is the product for arts organisations. To the extent, the criteria for "success" are primarily internally defined. "Success" in arts organisations, therefore, has meaning different from other organisations. Success of an arts organisation is meant to symbolise their continuity over time. In recent years, the "death" and "birth" of arts organisations has been so dramatic, that continuity in time is seen to reflect the ability of the organisation to engage in the process. The author found that such definitions of "success" were prevalent among most arts organisations and they resisted to accept the usual economic notions of success.

Moreover, the yardsticks to measure success tend to be defined within the organisation, without much reference to the environment. A successful orchestra for example, is one where the musicians are skilled and committed to artistic creations, where the conductor is inspiring and capable, where the engagement in creating and playing music is profound and challenging. Similarly, a 'successful' school of fine arts is one which maintains motivated artists, provides them with freedom to be creative and which is continuously engaged in novel expressions and ideas. All these yardsticks are process-oriented and internally defined.

To reinforce this internal definition of criteria for success, the artists themselves resist any effort by the environment to evaluate them. As discussed earlier, the artists maintain that others cannot judge the artistic worth of any creation. The arts organisations, therefore, develop similar orientations. Since the engagement in the artistic activity is the product, the criteria for success have to be related to that process of engagement. To the extent that this process of engagement is performed inside the organisation, most criteria for success have to be internally defined. Moreover, these criteria will tend to be unique for each arts organisation because the process of engagement is unique in each of them.

3. __The dilemma between aesthetics and economics leads to a dual relationship between arts organisation and its environment.__

Lest the previous proposition indicate that an arts organisation has nothing to do with its environment, it is posited here that it has a dual relationship with its environment. On the one hand, an arts organization attempts to define its criteria for success internally and, therefore, does not want to be interrupted by its environment during its process of engagement in artistic activity. On the other hand, an arts organisation is dependent on its environment to obtain resources for sustaining its process and to interact with its audience in propagating its mission. The dilemma between aesthetics and economics faced by its mission. The dilemma between aesthetics and economics faced by arts organisations is described earlier. This dilemma makes an art organisation to avoid the environmental intrusions in its aesthetic endeavours, and at the same time to attract patronage and audience to provide economic resources. The organisation - environment relationship is characterised by love – hate orientation. While the organisation wants to involve the environment in its mission on the one hand, it also attempts to reduce environmental influence on its missionary activities. This duality in organisation – environment relationaship is exhibited in a number of ways in the case of an arts organization.

Firstly, an arts organisation provides opportunities for the public to engage in the experience of the arts. The school of fine arts, for example, involves the public by conducting classes in various art forms, by producing plays which are staffed by the members of the public and by promoting musical programmes to be attended by an audience. The audience is needed to provide finances for the school, to provide applause to the artists and appreciation of the art, and to participate in the activities of the school to help it fulfil its mission. At the same time, the school expects non - interference by the public in designing its artistic activities, in evaluating its quality, in determining how the monies will be spent and in selecting what activities contribute to its mission. To that extent, an arts organisation demands that the public does not question its decisions, approaches and the rationale behind them.

Second critical relationship is exhibited by the boards of arts organisations. As a non-profit institution, an arts organisation is legally constrained to have a board of trustees. Over and above the legal requirements, arts organisations develop multiple boards to enhance their ability to obtain resources. For example, the author investigated a theatre which had four different boards. These multiple boards made

available to the theatre volunteers to augment its employed personnel, long - term patronage monies to sustain it, professional expertise to supplement its non-artistic professional staff, and prestige in the community to attract audience and funds. At the same time, the theatre membership and leadership wanted the board members not to interfere with their artistic judgements, and not to influence or seek rational bases in the spending of resources. Most arts organisations manifest this duality in their relationships with their boards.

Other segments of the environment like the funding agencies and the art critics also show this dual relationship with arts organisations. An arts organization attempts to acquire funds without stipulating the exact manner in which it will spend them. An arts organization needs art critics to provide exposure and publicity to its mission and activities; but, it attempts to minimize the aesthetic evaluations made by them. In short, this dual nature or organization – environment relationship in the case of arts organizations is an important and pervasive aspect of their existence.

4. **Due to their dependence on charismatic authority, variations in the leadership of arts organisations diffuse differences due to task.**

Arts organisations can be roughly classified into performance - oriented and display - oriented on the basis of their task. Thus an orchestra is a performance - oriented arts organisations, and so is a theatre. A museum, on the other hand, is a display - oriented arts organisation. Depending upon this differentiation on the basis of their task, arts organisations vary in the centrality of their focus. For a performance - oriented arts organisation, coordination is a central function. In an orchestra, for example, the musicians are coordinated through the conductor to create a symphony. A director coordinates the artists and technicians to produce a play. Coordination between artists, and non-artists is the main effort in managing a performance oriented arts organisation.

In the display - oriented arts organisations, acquisition is the central function. In order to display art products, the organisation needs to acquire them by interacting with individual artists and agents. A museum, for example, has to acquire paintings and sculptures in order to exhibit them. Once it has acquired the products, displaying them is a matter of time and space. Acquisition of popular, famous and valuable products requires the primary effort in display-oriented arts organizations.

However, these differences due to task classification are generally diffused in arts organisations because of the variations in leadership. One of the main issues raised earlier in this paper highlights the charismatic basis of authority in arts organisations. Leadership in arts organisations is primarily charismatic. The conductor in an orchestra and the artistic leader in a museum are charismatic leaders. The basis for their authority and influence is their personal charisma. Based on this personal charisma of their leadership, arts organisations tend to be similar in spite of task variations.

If an orchestra, for example, has a charismatic conductor, the function of coordination becomes less problematic. The musicians show a sense of personal obligation to the conductor and he manages to coordinate their activities rather easily. But to ensure this charismatic leadership in the orchestra, the organisation has to make tremendous effort in acquiring and keeping a charismatic conductor. Similarly, once a museum has a charismatic artistic leader, acquisition of art products for display becomes rather easy. The artist, through his personal charisma, attracts and acquires popular and famous art products to his organisation. But to ensure an attractive display of these rather easily acquired art products, coordination within the organisation may become an important effort, especially since the artistic leader spends most of his effort in acquisition.

Charismatic leadership in arts organisations diffuses the differences among them at yet another level. The variations in the leadership of an orchestra, for instance, accounts for most of the variation in its audience and patronage support. Same phenomenon occurs for a museum. It is the personal charisma, or a lack of it, of the artistic leader of an arts organisation which influences its environment most significantly. Therefore, both performance - oriented and display - oriented arts organisations can do equally well in the same environment if they both have charismatic leadership.

One can then argue that it is the variation in the leadership of an arts organisation which accounts for its "success" or lack of it. If an arts organisation has charismatic leadership, it will be internally and externally successful; if it lacks charismatic leadership, it will face difficulties both within and without.

CONSEQUENCES:

To the extent that arts organisations exhibit the characteristics described above in those propositions, some consequences can be derived from them. The major theme in these propositions was the centrality of the emotional, the irrational and the aesthetic in arts organisations. The consequences of these central aspects on organisational tasks, structure, members and growth will be briefly described here.

The irrational and the aesthetic aspects or arts organisations have impact upon their membership. While irrationality and aesthetics lead to satisfaction and creativity for the artists, they inhibit the satisfaction and performance of the non-artistic personnel in arts organizations. The non-artistic members (business persons, engineers, technicians, administrative staff etc.) of an arts organization are trained to expect rationality and economics in organizations. They are guided by rational and economic considerations in their task - performance. Their experience with the irrational and the aesthetic in arts organisations creates a sense of administrative chaos and disorganisation in them. So the same aspects — the irrational and the aesthetic – are the sources of satisfaction and creativity for the artists, and dissatisfaction and confusion in the non-artists. To that extent, satisfaction of one group of members is associated with the dissatisfaction of the other group of members.

Another consequence of the coexistence of the irrational and the aesthetic with the rational and the economic is a schism in the structure of the arts organisations. An arts organisation tends to create separate structures for their artistic and administrative personnel. The structure of the administrative unit is bureaucratic, with a hierarchy of authority based on rational - legal offices and roles. The artistic wing is unstructured, dispersed and diffused. Artists do not have role - specifications or rules and procedures for guiding their behaviour. To put it another way, the activity space, as defined by Srivastava et. Al. (1976), is distributed differently to the artists and administrative groups. The artist group has relatively unspecified task and learning spaces; the administrative personnel will have greater freedom in reactivity space (so that they can respond to the environment quickly). However, the task and learning spaces of administrative groups is more clearly defined. This structural schism in arts organisations will create a potential for conflict and confusion.

Similarly, the tasks performed by the artists and non-artists are individually independent by organisationally correlated. A musician, for example, engages in the process of creating music and does not need an accountant to facilitate that. Yet, the orchestra needs both the musician and the accountant in order to continue creating music. At the level of individual task, the musician and the accountant are independent. Their tasks are also non - interchangeable. However, at the level of the organisation, the two tasks are related to each other and need to be performed for organisational survival. An arts organisation then has to develop mechanisms for such correlation of independent tasks. One of the most common mechanisms to achieve this correlation is the role of the executive director. Thus, individual tasks performed within the administrative and artistic units are correlated at the top of the organisational hierarchy.

Finally, growth in arts organizations occurs through acquisition of charismatic artists and obtaining of resources (primarily financial). When an arts organisation acquires a charismatic artist, it grows in size, popularity and audience. When an arts organisation obtains funds, it grows through the acquisition of artists and non-artists, and the expansion of its activities. However, both these processes – acquisition of artists and obtaining of funds --- are interrelated. An arts organisation can acquire charismatic artists if it has resources to attract and sustain them. At the same time, a charismatic artist can attract resources – audience and patronage support – for the organisation. Thus, an orchestra, for example, can grow if it acquires a charismatic conductor; but in order to acquire such a conductor, the organisation has to possess resources (funds, other musicians, non-artist personnel, concert hall etc.) to make it attractive for the conductor to join the orchestra. This creates a viscious cycle in arts organisations. And they need to break this cycle in order to grow.

<u>CONCLUSION</u>

Three dominant approaches in current organisation theory were examined in this paper. It was shown that the central assumptions of these approaches are not valid in the case of an arts organisation. It was argued that the arts epitomise the aesthetic, the emotional and the irrational. Hence, arts organisations exist to engage in artistic activity and not to produce anything. The central dilemma of aesthetics versus economics leads to a love - hate relationship between an arts organisation and its environment. Moreover, variation in leadership primarily determines the "success" of these arts organisations. The conceptual exploration in this paper was presented through a series of propositions. The initial data for these propositions came from arts organisations. In the last section, some consequences for arts organizations were derived from the propositions. These consequences can form a basis for future research in arts organisations. It is hoped that this paper can trigger new approaches to conceptualising diverse organisations.

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