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Instructor's Manual: Single Carrot Theatre

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Abstract

Many arts organizations struggle to find long-term financial sustainability.¹ There are limited opportunities to build sustainable infrastructure and sources of long-term funding as organizations grow.² Such risks are particularly challenging for organizations beyond the early startup phase that garner excitement and novelty. Single Carrot Theatre followed a traditional path of establishing a central theatre space for their operations, but unfortunately it created financial strain on the organization that almost resulted in permanent closure. With an established culture of innovation and a focus on artistic decision making, the company decided to implement an innovative organizational and artistic pivot. The company has successfully refined their mission to focus on site-specific and community-based theatre making. Although there were problems with public relations and limiting the perceived image of failure, the company was able to successfully retain a large portion of their patrons. Their nomadic structure lessened financial burdens, created an opportunity for new partners and funding sources and reestablished the company's unique brand of innovative theatre making. Early evidence suggests a recommitment of key stakeholders and potential for growing audiences in new ways. This case is designed to highlight how innovative arts entrepreneurs can pivot from traditional models of theatre and innovate financial success while remaining relevant and impactful to their audience.

Learning Objectives

Through reading and discussing this case, students should be able to:

1. Explain the risks and rewards considered during an arts organizational pivot;

¹ "The Fundraising Report," SMU DataArts, accessed January, 14, 2021, <https://culturaldata.org/the-fundraising-report/the-fundraising-report-home/>.

² Ibid.

2. Discuss how management structures and adaptive capacity can support an organization's ability to pivot;
3. Consider how artistic vision impacts decision making in an arts organization.

To enable students to achieve these learning objectives, the case provides a detailed description of Single Carrot Theatre's pivot planning and implementation. The case explains how financial problems, combined with bold artistic choices, created solutions to stay open and lay foundations for future success. This instructor's manual provides discussion questions, including the exploration of what other decisions the company could have made, and an activity that enables students to explore why Single Carrot Theatre was forced to pivot and what process was used throughout decision making.

Implementation Guidelines and Teaching Strategy

The target audience for the case study is undergraduate-level students. Some example courses are: Arts Entrepreneurship, Arts Management and Theatre Management. The following materials can be assigned as complementary reading to support the theoretical underpinning for in class discussion or assigned homework:

Evans, Richard. "On Adaptive Capacity and Resilience." ARTSFWD. Accessed January 14, 2021. <https://www.artsfwd.org/on-adaptive-capacity-and-resilience/>.

Evans's work offers an overview of adaptive capacity as a framework for discussion.

Gangi, Jonathan. "The Synergies of Artistic and Entrepreneurial Action." *Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 45, no. 4 (October 2015): 247-254. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10632921.2015.1088912>.

This article provides context for the tensions and synchronicity between artistic endeavors and entrepreneurial mindsets.

Gould, Kelsye A. "Thesis: Beyond the Lab." Accessed January 14, 2021. <http://www.kelsyeagould.com/thesis-beyond-the-lab/>.

"Beyond the Lab" includes three case studies on adaptive capacity in the arts and additional context for how organizations adapt in changing environments.

To complete this activity, students would benefit from introductory knowledge of arts entrepreneurship, arts management and arts governance. Instructors might also help students investigate strategic planning and crisis management through activities related to Design Thinking and the Business Model Canvas.

Proposed Questions and Exemplar Answers

1. Implementing a large organizational pivot can often strain an organization, creating more risk and potential for failure. Discuss what impact risk and failure can have on a small company highlighting the evidence presented in the case of Single Carrot Theatre.

Risk and potential failure has long been a central part of entrepreneurial theory.³ Risk provides possibilities for innovative solutions, new markets and ways to distinguish an organization from competitors.⁴ How entrepreneurial theory is applied to arts organizations continues to be debated, although there is evidence to suggest that entrepreneurial action, including risk behavior, naturally aligns with artistic endeavors, with or without financial aspirations.⁵ Aesthetics continues to be central to understanding how artists and arts organizations make decisions.⁶ The very risk of failure provided Single Carrot Theatre an opportunity to reexamine their purpose and future. The organization decided to prioritize artistic vision when faced with a financial crisis. They planned a new business model based on the most exciting and innovative aspects of their past work. They followed their artistic intuition and decided that the risks of failure and closure were worth taking for pursuing an authentic artistic vision. In the case of Single Carrot, potential for failure reinvigorated their artistic vision and entrepreneurial spirit to innovate why and how they make theatre.

2. How did Single Carrot Theatre create adaptive capacity for hard conversations and potential to explore innovative solutions?

One way to frame systems for managing a crisis is through the idea of adaptive capacity.⁷ Adaptive capacity comes from systems thinking and has been adopted by many arts organizations through ArtsFwd, an initiative of EmcArts.⁸ ArtsFwd describes adaptive capacity as "an organization's ability to initiate and implement purposeful change in response to shifts in its operating environment." Adaptive capacity as practiced by EmcArts centers resilience through intentional behaviors, like questioning norms, exploring bold ideas, communicating across the organization and remaining open to change. Single Carrot Theatre demonstrated many of these capacities through their pivot. They made space and time for intentional dialog, questioned normal ways of operating as a theatre and were open to daring solutions. The ensemble asked hard questions like "What do we want to do?" and "What kind of theatre do we want to be making?" that examined the core vision and future mission of the organization. Board and staff allowed for a more critical view of past decisions. They welcomed uncertainty through a process that included experimentation and time to explore new ways of producing work. Once a

³ Tushar Kanti Das and Bing-Sheng Teng, "Time and Entrepreneurial Risk Behavior," *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* 22, no. 2 (Winter 1997): 69-88, <https://doi.org/10.1177/104225879802200206>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Jonathan Gangi, "The Synergies of Artistic and Entrepreneurial Action," *Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 45, no. 4 (October 2015), 247-25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10632921.2015.1088912>.

⁶ T. Shepard S. Bryan and David Harris, "The Aesthetic Value Exchange: A Potential Framework for the Arts Entrepreneurship Classroom," *Journal of Arts Entrepreneurship Education* 1, no. 1 (2015): 25-54, <https://doi.org/10.46776/jaee.v1.29>.

⁷ Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Mary Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 303.

⁸ Kelsye A. Gould, "Beyond the Lab: Case Studies on Instilling Innovation in Nonprofit Arts Organizational Culture," accessed January 14, 2021, <http://www.kelsyeagould.com/thesis-beyond-the-lab/>.

bold pivot was decided (to create site-specific and community-based work), everyone fully committed to the new direction.

3. Even when an organization has strong leadership and systems for planning, a large pivot can be painful, confusing and complicated. How did Single Carrot's organizational structure impact their decision making?

Collective leadership can be effective if there are strong systems for communication and leadership that empower individuals across the organization.⁹ Collective leadership can provide potential benefits; for example, better decision making, shared responsibility, increased motivation from staff, deeper engagement among stakeholders and increased potential across the organization.¹⁰ Single Carrot Theatre maintained a strong ensemble structure, with a focus on collective and artistic decision making. This kept the artistic vision central to all major decisions, management and future planning. The ensemble was interested in making relevant and community-based theatre, even at the risk of closure. There was some internal debate about the best way forward after financial problems, but the organization continued to prioritize and trust the ensemble and artistic mission.

4. How did the artistic history of the theatre company impact their pivot and the decision-making process? What choices did they make and why? What other choices could they have made?

To understand how entrepreneurial innovation and action can be achieved, there must be a person or persons who believe innovation is achievable and are willing to work until their vision is created.¹¹ Single Carrot Theatre was founded with a character of innovation, bold decision making and strong artistic vision. Single Carrot could have decided to find a new central location to produce theatre in a traditional way. Their history of creating work in site-specific locations with community-based elements became an inspiration for how to create a new model of programming. These existing elements in the company's culture provided a concrete example of how to refine their artistic vision and reorganize for financial sustainability. Single Carrot believed in their new organizational vision, avoided safe choices and relied on artistic instinct to reinvigorate their mission. The ensemble only wanted to move forward if they could maintain artistic authenticity and a bold artistic vision. As Artistic Director Genevieve de Mahy said, "If you are playing it safe, why are you there?" The ensemble believed in their vision and were willing to work hard to make that vision a reality.

⁹ Tamara L. Friedrich, Jennifer A. Griffith, and Michael D. Mumford, "Collective Leadership Behaviors: Evaluating the Leader, Team Network, and Problem Situation Characteristics That Influence Their Use," *The Leadership Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (April 2016): 312-333, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.02.004>.

¹⁰ "Five Elements of Collective Leadership," *Nonprofit Quarterly*, accessed January 14, 2021, <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/five-elements-collective-leadership/>.

¹¹ Kelly G. Shaver and Linda R. Scott, "Person, Process, Choice: The Psychology of New Venture Creation," *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* 16, no. 2 (Winter 1991): 23-45, <https://doi.org/10.1177/104225879201600204>.

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