Arts leadership: Case studies of Vietnamese arts managers

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Abstract Since the economic reform in Vietnam in 1986, the arts community has had more opportunity to develop, given greater artistic and financial autonomy. In this context it has become necessary for arts leaders to develop management skills to adapt to a new competitive context. This has become more important since the Vietnamese government sought to relieve the problem of inadequate state funding for arts organisations through its policy of socialisation (self-finance). In this research, a case study approach was employed, using judgmental sampling. Arts administrators involved with managing large performing arts organisations in Vietnam, were interviewed in-depth. The findings of this study indicate that formal education and training in arts management is required to provide arts managers with modern arts management skills, in order both to smooth the process of becoming more self-sustaining, and subsequently to take advantage of this new context. In addition, arts leaders in Vietnam need to adopt the role of an entrepreneur, to adapt and manage performing arts organisations, given the pressure of global economics and culture.

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Introduction

There has been a rapid change both locally and globally in the arts and entertainment industry (Rentschler 1996), including changes in culture, economy and society that have significantly influenced the operations of arts organisations. On the one hand, economic globalisation with privatisation and decentralisation has yielded adjustments in economic and cultural policy, particularly a decline of government funding (Radbourne and Fraser 1996, O'Hagan 1998, Rentschler 2002, Dewey 2004, Fillis 2004). On the other, an expansion of the service sector (UNCTAD 2004) has meant that the entertainment industry is growing rapidly, albeit in a more competitive environment in which technological changes have also become challenges for the sector.

A proliferation in arts leaders’ manifold roles has occurred, as they are forced to adapt in order to achieve these outcomes (Rentschler 2002, Byrnes 2003, Freakley and Sutton 1996). Arguably, arts leaders must change their forms of management and
Arising from these issues, there is a view that formal training for arts managers is required, to make them into highly skilled professionals (Radbourne and Fraser 1996, Rentschler 2002, Martin and Rich 1998, Dewey and Rich 2003).

Vietnamese performing arts has undergone a period of profound transition. This is in accordance with the changes in socio-economic development of doi moi [economic reform] process (Le 2004), and in response to a climate of reforms that were taking place in many countries under the spread of globalisation. Along with other sectors, cultural and artistic activities have progressively developed and restructured over the past ten years to meet the changing demands of society. Part of the reason is the influence of the global economic integration and cultural globalisation, which has encouraged and motivated Vietnam to develop its own national identity, in order to engage culturally with other parts of the world.

Indeed, programs in modern arts management training and arts leadership are scarce in many Asian countries as well as Vietnam. This is despite the fact that the arts have become a growing industry sector in a range of countries (see Reiss 1974, Vogel 2004). Vietnamese arts managers tend to follow a career path from being an artist to becoming a manager. They rely on experience gained on the job, and on their personal capability, rather than on formal training courses. Although a couple of skills such as arts marketing and finding sponsorships have been applied in arts companies, they are evident only on an ad hoc basis. This can hinder their adaptation to rapid changes in the regional and global arts market, in particular Vietnam’s greater involvement in the global economy after doi moi. This also poses a challenge to attempts by arts organisations to become self-sustaining as a result of privatisation policies of the government (Lidstone and Doling 2000).

Arising from this discussion and literature search is a research question: what are/should be the roles and responsibility of Vietnamese arts leaders in order to adapt to a more competitive context? This paper sets out to examine performing arts administration and management in the current context of economic and cultural globalisation in Vietnam, by presenting case studies of Vietnamese arts leaders. It focuses on current issues of arts management in Vietnam through interviews with key participants. It then presents some recommendations for the future direction of performing arts management, given Vietnam’s present and future economic situation, and its political position in the world. In addition it notes some implications for the future training of arts leaders in Vietnam.

Arts Managers as Entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurship is an important feature of the market mechanism. Hart (2003: 5) defines entrepreneurship as “the processes of starting and continuing to expand new businesses” and an entrepreneurial venture is conceived as the fundamental engine that sets and keeps the capitalist engine in motion by creating new goods, inventing new production methods, devising new business models, and in turn opening new markets (Schumpeter 1942, Hart 2003). The level and quality of entrepreneurship are both perceived to make their mark on the economic vitality and development of communities, regions and industries as well as on the nation as a whole (Hart 2003, Audretsch 2003). At the heart of entrepreneurship is the entrepreneur who engages in the process of initiating and propagating new business ideas, new markets, and new products. Many theorists agree that the key characteristic of the entrepreneur is a risk-taking function necessary to start businesses. (The Public Forum Institute 2003, Carland et al. 1984). Chong (2002) indicates that entrepreneurial modes of behaviour are promoted as essential for all type of organisations.
Entrepreneurial behaviour and activity are vital for the arts sector. Fillis (2004: 13) underlines that "entrepreneurial businesses are best suited for the contemporary business environment since they are able to respond quickly to changes in the

The role of arts leadership is important in guiding arts organisations to adapt to local and global changes (Rentschler 2002). In response to the growth of the entertainment sector and the financial challenges of arts organisations, arts managers should identify and 'read' environmental signals to survive and ensure success for their organisations and the people who work in them (Rentschler 1996, Byrnes 2003). Similarly, arts managers of not-for-profit professional theatres are expected not only to embrace internal forces such as their organisation's mission, values and strategic orientation, but must also understand and manage external forces, including suppliers, customers and competitors (Voss and Voss 2000).

Voegeli (1975), in the *Handbook for Tour Management*, is mainly concerned with professional touring procedures. He argues that:

...a good arts manager is, in many dimensions, no different from his counterparts in profit-making businesses ... and that an arts manager should be equipped with the same administrative tools all effective managers possess, with an additional understanding of the problems of non-profit organisations in general and arts organisations in particular. (Voegeli 1975: 1)

In this paper, however, it is argued that the nature and goals of arts organisations are activities of artistic creation that make them different and special, compared with other business organisations; thus the role of arts administrator, to some extent, is distinct from other business managers. Although arts administrators might have good administrative skills, they will still not achieve success in their careers if they ignore the distinctiveness of the arts organisation as well as the needs of artists (Maddern et al. 1984). However at the same time, given the current pressure of financial viability, arts leaders cannot afford to ignore business aspects, marketing tools nor the general principles of management in securing their finance and audience. Many researchers believe that arts managers now need to possess marketing skills and knowledge about the market, skills of adaptability to change and customer-orientation, rather than product-orientation (Rentschler 2002, Colbert 2003, Radbourne and Fraser 1996). In a discussion about the role of arts managers and the business aspects of arts organisations in the context of government cutbacks in funding, and the complexity of cultural industries in Canada, one arts leader pointed out:

To become successful competitively, we are learning new management skills....We must benefit from the new information age. We must be more businesslike, oriented to customers, partnerships and collaboration. We must be more self-reliant. (Delorme et al. 1995: 12)

An investigation by Radbourne and Fraser (1996) into management of the arts in Australia has provided a reference point for both students and practitioners. Besides presenting interesting findings regarding arts marketing, public relations, media, and human resources management through case studies, the authors stress the different roles of arts managers in the rapid progress of globalisation:

*Increased international travel, trade, exchanges and agreements between governments, combined with instant communication made available through computer and satellite technology have assisted in the import and export of the arts. ... The international arts manager is an interpreter of culture policies and responds to changing trends in international arts markets, cultural tourism, community ideals and the development of places for arts participation.* (Radbourne and Fraser 1996: 233)
No doubt, given the continuous changes in the social context in most countries, arts managers need to enhance their adaptability and flexibility to guide their companies to meet the demands of audiences, and develop strategies for their survival. Radbourne and Fraser (1996: 1–2) argue that since the complexity of funding and cultural policy, arts managers must be multiskilled; and have the capacity to address and manage changes, advocate changes and to combine traditional, strategic thinking and entrepreneurship.

Bendixen’s paper (2000) provides an interesting analysis of the role and function of arts leaders in current politico-economic environments. He asserts that the main channel for a manager is talking, through which s/he can cultivate, foster and extend communication, maintaining networks among the public, and bringing the arts to interested people. Moreover, one of the core skills of the arts manager is “an ability to acquire knowledge about and be sensitive to both the internal world of his employer and the external, public world in which his employer functions” (Bendixen 2000: 9). Therefore, firmly planting an arts organisation’s reputation and distinctiveness in the minds of customers, in the media, and whoever else may be of importance, are also desirable functions of arts managers.

Similarly, Byrnes (2003) emphasises the responsibility of arts managers not only for quickly responding to internal and external changes, but also for investigating the demographic environment of the audience, all of which influence organisations. These assist in the arts manager’s better understandings of the surrounding region and community, and in turn better meet the audiences’ needs. Many strategies for arts organisations and managers in adapting to changes are outlined, such as collaborating with other arts groups, ongoing input via staff meetings, using the media and continually evaluating input.

Entrepreneurial behaviour and activity are attracting growing attention from arts leaders as ways of maintaining the organisation’s financial stability (Rentschler 2002, Chong 2002). Although there is a lack of literature in this area, the trend is highlighted in Freakley and Sutton’s work (1996: 1): “People working in the industry have to be flexible, multiple-skilled and entrepreneurial to survive”. The need for more entrepreneurial thinking by arts leaders is thoroughly discussed in The Entrepreneurial Arts Leader by Rentschler (2002). Her theory on entrepreneurialism is a synthesis of theories on arts leadership models and has been tested by a rich body of data gathered from interviews and case studies. Rentschler identifies a theoretical framework that provides arts leaders with a crucial focus that will enhance their capability to efficiently fulfil their mission, and assist in shaping organisations in responding to changes in policy in the present competitive arts environment. She has made the point that the framework for entrepreneurship in arts organisations includes three parts, namely roles of variance, viability and vitality that will achieve a balanced leadership approach. Role variance (person) is an aspect of the people-centred viewpoint. Viability (place) is a combination of both the people-centred and the object-centred viewpoints. Vitality (product), however, relates to the creative output of arts organisations such as competitiveness, accessibility, external relations, identity and distinctiveness (Rentschler 2002: 55).

Rentschler (2002: 55) also theorises that there are four roles for arts leaders: entrepreneur, manager, custodian and impresario. She argues that an entrepreneurial arts leader needs to have creative ideas and be willing to change directions to establish new programs and risk-taking ventures. In Rentschler’s view the entrepreneurial arts leader creates value through innovation.

Methodology

A case study methodology was chosen as one of the research approaches appropriate for the systematic study of a phenomenon (Merriam 1988). Yin defines a case study as an empirical inquiry that is utilised to investigate “a contemporary phenomenon within
Itts real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin 1994: 13). Miles and Huberman (1994: 25–27) specify a case as a “phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” - that is, the case may be an individual, an organisation, a community or a nation. Purposive sampling and snowball sampling methods (Babbie 2001, Merriam 1998, Neuman 2000) were utilised to identify and sample cases. The selected cases were leaders of the Vietnamese National Symphony Orchestra (VNSO) and the Hanoi Youth Theatre (HYT) who were invited to participate in the study. The participating performing arts organisations were large in size, and popular in Vietnam. From this context it was assumed that their arts leaders had extensive management experience.

Several Vietnamese arts managers agreed to participate in this study. They were in upper or middle management positions. Participants were chosen to meet these criteria: they needed to be current or former managers, or marketing/finance administrators of the performing arts organisation, and be knowledgeable and experienced in the arts field, so that they could provide various angles in their narratives about experiences and perspectives on managing performing arts organisations. The process carefully followed professional codes and protocols of ethical research interviewing. Names of organisations were retained, while names of all participants were changed to pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

Unstructured and semi-structured interviews were used in this study, as these types of interview were likely to give more varied responses than structured interviews (Minichiello et al. 1995, Arksey and Knight 1999). Beyond that was the advantage that these allowed greater flexibility, which in turn made the researcher adaptive and sensitive in controlling the interview process. Based on the researcher’s deep understanding of the Vietnamese culture and people, it was decided that the more unstructured interview was the most suitable approach for arts leaders. In order to maximise the result of interviews through proper interactions, the interviewer maintained eye contact with participants and concentrated on responses, with either limited or no note-taking during the interviews.

Discussion of results

Arts Managers: Who are they?

An arts organisation normally has two main management areas: artistic and administrative. There are three levels of management in an arts organisation: upper, middle and lower management. The upper management includes Artistic Director, and Managing Director, or other senior levels (Byrnes 2003: 8) (terminology differs between organisations). All selected arts leaders in this study were in upper or middle-level management. The larger the organisation, the higher the degree of specialisation apparent in the management structure. In smaller organisations, managers tend to cover several areas to reduce the cost of administration. The latter is often seen in Vietnamese performing arts organisations.

The arts leaders selected were from performing arts organisations located in Hanoi, which is the capital city of Vietnam. The Vietnam National Symphony Orchestra (VNSO), founded in 1959, is the largest symphony orchestra in Vietnam while the Hanoi Youth Theatre (HYT) was founded in April 1978 to meet the entertainment demands of youth and children. The informants for the study ranged in age from forty to sixty years and had many years’ experience in management positions in arts-based organisations. To identify current management methods in arts organisations and in which ways managers obtained their management skills, participants were asked about their educational background, and employment history.

Upper-level managers in the case studies, as well as in the wider arts sphere in Vietnam, traditionally are expected to have an arts background. For example, a manager at the VNSO explained:
I got an arts qualification in the Vietnamese theatre acting, and another music qualification in Vietnamese traditional music in the College of Theatre before starting to work... in an arts group. After that I studied conducting for five years. Therefore, I obtained knowledge in Western classical music.

(Dao, 25 October 2002)

This indicates that Mr Dao (pseudonym) obtained a good arts background and qualifications that provided him with understandings in both Vietnamese and Western music and assisted him in his position. This manager emphasised:

Obtaining an understanding of symphonic music is very important. If I didn’t have it, it would be very difficult for me to manage a symphony orchestra like the VNSO.

(Dao, 25 October 2002)

Again, as indicated, the reason Mr Dao stressed his background in the arts is that upper-level managers are expected to have at least a bachelor’s degree in the arts, in the artform area that his/her organisation focuses. For example, a senior manager at the VNSO should have sound knowledge and qualification(s) as well as working experience in symphonic music (rather than knowledge in ballet, say, or other types of arts), in order to make decisions related to professional matters. Although holding a specific arts degree is not compulsory, it seems to be a priority for the arts leaders if they wish to be successful in managing their organisations, or simply just to get the management position. The qualities expected of an arts leader in Vietnam include qualifications, age, management or work experience in arts organisations. These are clearly mentioned in the resolutions of the Ministry of Cultural and Information (MOCI 1982). Although the most updated version of a similar document was not available at the data collection stage of this research, the findings are consistent with the reality of the situation of Vietnamese arts managers.

It should be further explained that the trend in Vietnam is that outstanding musicians or artists who have been working long-term in those organisations, normally move into management positions (Bui and MOCI 1997). This move was formalised by the Ministry of Cultural and Information. The process of transition from performer to senior manager is thus determined by the criteria set by the MOCI for the position of arts leader. Alternatively, potential administrators, middle-level managers or deputy directors also often move up to higher management positions if they have strong experience working in the same arts organisation.

Responses about the training background of a HYT’s senior manager yielded unexpected results. While most of the top level of Vietnamese arts leaders in national organisations has strong arts backgrounds, a HYT’s manager has a qualification in economics.

I may be the only theatre director in the MOCI who has background, qualification and experience in economics instead of the arts. I was not an artist or a stage manager/director like two previous directors of the HYT. I always worked in the finance and economics field.

(Bui, 6 November 2002)

Mr Bui (pseudonym) revealed that his knowledge in economics helped him to be fully aware of the role of business aspects for the survival of the theatre during a period of limited state funding. He argued that arts leaders do not need to hold qualifications in the arts, required by the MOCI, but should understand the arts and be able to work with artists and work in performing arts companies. He explained that arts managers who have qualifications in a certain type of arts are not necessarily knowledgeable about other art types, and there may be several types in one performing arts organisation.
The view of Mr Bui appears to coincide with recent literature (Rentschler 2002, Byrnes 2003, Delorme et al. 1995).

The findings of the study would lead us to believe that a background in the arts or being artist-manager (as required by the MOCI’s regulations), may be of little relevance in the present competitive contemporary society, where arts organisations are often confronted with funding constraints, struggle with audience development, and where there is pressure for arts leaders to respond quickly to the changing environment to ensure their organisation’s viability (Byrnes 2003, Dewey and Rich 2003, Allmendinger and Hackman 1996, Radbourne and Fraser 1996). Arguably, again, in smaller arts organisations, a specific qualification in arts management with the skills needed for arts leaders would be desirable. They may need to be multi-skilled, perhaps covering marketing, finding sponsorship, or book-keeping. Less specialisation is required say compared with a large arts company. This is particularly pertinent to Vietnamese arts companies which are smaller than many major performing arts organisations elsewhere.

In the present research, while all arts leaders have formal educational qualifications and have obtained basic sets of skills from this training, they all emphasised that on-the-job training or practical working experience played an important role in building their management skills. The kinds of skills they learned depended on the nature of their previous jobs. In general, the longer they worked in arts organisations, the greater management experiences they obtained. Learning on the job is also highlighted in the literature (Rentschler 2002, Jackson and Oliver 2003, Martin and Rich 1998, Cheney 1998, Byrnes 2003). For example, a VNSO manager, emphasised his thirty-year hands-on experience in a wide range of arts organisations:

*I was in the management position of an arts group when I was 27 years old (he was now 60 years old) and I managed a musical group for ten years in a province of Vietnam. I then taught in the College of Stage and Theatre in Hanoi, and became a Head of Department at this college, and the Director of Vietnamese Stage Theatre, and Deputy Director of the VNSO in 1988 and finally moved up to Director of the VNSO.*

*My management skills were mainly acquired from my working experience, by myself. Since I worked as a leader of the Youth Union and worked for a long time in different types of arts organisations, I learned through communicating with people, understanding public relation, artists’ emotions and know how to work with them well. I also know to appoint people in the jobs relevant to their capability, and to build good teamwork in our organisation.*

*(Dao, 25 October 2002)*

In the above quote, Mr Dao indicated the importance of people-skills through building good relationships with artists in an organisation. It can be explained that since arts products are based on artistic creativity and artists are an ‘invaluable property/asset’ of organisations (Radbourne and Fraser 1996), understanding artists’ emotions is an important factor for good organisational performances. Radbourne and Fraser (1996) agree that arts managers must display a high level of people-skills through communication.

Despite their formal education and experience, all the Vietnamese arts leaders interviewed in the study tended to emphasise personal capacity as essential to be a successful arts manager. They thought that although education and training provided a foundation for their management, it depended very much on each person’s own capacity to create new ideas. An HYT manager believed that each leader has his/her own capacity to perform the work, something that cannot be learned from a training course. They indicated that training merely provides learners with theoretical knowledge and background to be able to look at and deal with a particular phenomenon, rather
than applying what they learn on the job. They all agreed that successful arts managers do need to have strong interests in the artform they manage.

From the arts leaders’ perspectives, good managers need to understand relevant government regulations, law and policies to accommodate the government expectations. The relationship between artists, staff and leaders are also a focal point. This was reflected in the viewpoint of the VNSO manager when he answered the question as to what provides a person with a good enough background to become a successful arts leader:

Err … I think you need to get some practical experience to work in arts organisations for a certain time. Being a good leader, you need to work by heart, you need to understand, care about and respect musicians, think about other people rather than yourself and not be autocratic. You need to communicate with them and encourage them, guide them to maximise their performance. You also need to go ahead to become a good model for your staff, and of course understand regulations, laws etc., and also your own capability in management to make use of your knowledge. Establishing good relationships in your organisation is very crucial.

(Dao, 25 October 2002)

Perspectives of a VNSO manager indicate that managing, understanding and developing staff, and comprehending the legal system are important skills through which good relationships with people are developed, and ultimately the success of the organisation is sustained. However, while customer-orientation is emphasised in Western arts organisations, product-focus may be outdated in the current context.

By contrast, a manager at the HYT highlighted entrepreneurial skills in becoming a successful arts leader:

“To be successful in their job, arts leaders should be aware of the entrepreneurial skills rather than just focus on the artistic aspect. A strong background in the arts may not help them to increase revenues” (6 November 2002).

He pointed out that the arts leaders should understand their organisations, and need to identify changes in audiences’ demands, and subsequently guide their organisations to adapt to the new market environment. This manager thought that a person who wants to become a successful manager must combine knowledge from training courses with on-the-job learning, and learn from mistakes.

However, contemporary competencies in arts management were not emphasised much, as it is a new area for Vietnamese arts leaders. Also, since arts leaders often move from lower levels to middle and upper levels of management, an experience base is still highly valued. Western perceptions of sets of skills are not very familiar to older generation Vietnamese arts leaders. Perhaps, for these reasons, arts leaders did not indicate clearly which skills are needed. The findings suggest that since relevant skills-based vocational training has not yet developed in Vietnam, more emphasis needs to be given to this field. Overall, the view of the Vietnamese arts managers (especially VNSO’s leaders) seems to reflect remnants of the subsidised period in which there was no need to be concerned about organisational financial viability. Thus, arts leaders are required to have modern management skills to adapt to changes in national and global markets, and in particular become more entrepreneurial and more business-oriented to maximise incomes. Specific training and skills in arts management could help facilitate this process, as pointed out by Dewey and Rich (2003). The need for formal management training (rather than just learning on the job) has therefore become critical for arts managers.
**Roles and responsibilities of arts managers**

In order to identify which role arts leaders should play to succeed in the face of global competitiveness, the interviewees were asked about their roles and responsibilities in the organisations. Rentschler (2002) argues that for arts leaders to find new ways to lead their organisations in line with global changes, entrepreneurial activities are highly encouraged (Burns and Pichilingi 2000, Dewey 2004, Jackson and Oliver 2003, Delorme et al. 1995, Fillis 2004, Thompson 2003, Chong 2002). Rentschler (2002) outlined that in contrast to custodians and managers, entrepreneurs and impresarios prefer to introduce new programs and break new ground, although it may involve risks. However, unlike impresarios and custodians, entrepreneurs and managers are more active in their efforts to diversify their funding base.

For example, a senior manager at the VNSO bore the main responsibility for every aspect of the orchestra, especially in decision-making, in artistic matters and in understanding artists’ emotion, to achieve the best artistic performance. He was also assigned to working, negotiating with sponsors, government ministry, and artistic conductors. This division of responsibility was common in organisations in Vietnam, especially during the period of the subsidised economy and even now. The VNSO has implemented innovations in terms of creative performances and funding diversity (although only the first steps) to adapt to the new market context, which, according to Rentschler (2002), reflects entrepreneurial behaviour. Descriptions of the management tasks of VNSO leaders lead us to believe that they could be considered as fulfilling the mixed role of manager and entrepreneur, although the role of manager tends to be more important.

Understandably, the role of arts leaders in Vietnam has been affected by the management styles introduced in the old centrally planned economy, when they simply followed the government’s annual performance plans and stayed within the available subsidy. Furthermore, cultural policies of the government previously regarded the cultural sector as non-commercial (Do 1994, Hoang 1993). To some extent, the arts sector has still been seen as principally serving to entertain Vietnamese people and fulfilling other social and governmental functions. Therefore leaders’ perspectives are more product-oriented than business-oriented. Also, the VNSO is in the first stage of its development, so seeking audiences and funding are first priorities, while introducing more new programs and taking risks to widen audiences may be less significant. Since entrepreneurship is a product of capitalism, Vietnam has no longstanding experience of a market-oriented economy, For instants VNSO’s arts leaders may not yet be strong entrepreneurs in the arts field. Moreover arts management training is a new area in Vietnam. In the absence of suitable training, VNSO’s arts leaders are probably unable to maximise entrepreneurial behaviours to diversify organisational income.

In contrast, a manager at the HYT seemed to fill the role of entrepreneur rather more. This leader repeatedly emphasised how important the economic aspect was for viability of the arts organisation. Mr Bui asserted that:

> … current arts leaders need to know how to apply economic principles to arts management, and they also need to be concerned about revenues of their theatre.

(Bui, 6 November 2002)

He revealed that he was interested in taking risks to create opportunities and in trialling new programs to attract bigger audiences:

> To achieve success in management arts leaders should be entrepreneurs because the latter tend to be more sensitive and responsive to the marketplace, while artist-managers seem to focus more on the artistic side than on financial aspects.

(Bui, 6 November 2002)
In order to maintain organisational viability, he added that arts leaders should be active in diversifying funding, and should exhibit an entrepreneurial mindset, while pursuing the aesthetic quality of their companies. Indeed, the board of the HYT frequently investigated audiences’ demands and responded to the changes. Although all Vietnamese arts managers emphasised the importance of funding diversity, none of them claimed that the main part of their roles and responsibilities was to ensure organisational viability. This may be explained by the fact that major Vietnamese performing arts organisations still receive significant funding from the government, hence their viability is assured. However complex, those organisations which have advantages in audience development could receive less government funding, as a result of a self-financing policy (Lidstone and Doling, 2000). This is evident through the case of the HYT (see Le, 2005). One may argue that this means there is little incentive for arts managers to apply entrepreneurial skills to their management.

Conclusion

The above findings suggest that, firstly, the new economic sphere with rapid changes in society and the increased range of artistic activities in Vietnam requires arts administrators to obtain flexible, appropriate skills to respond in accordance with the current Vietnamese market. Secondly, formal training in arts management is required to provide arts managers with modern arts management skills, in order to both smooth the process of becoming more self-sustaining, and subsequently to take advantage of this new context. The findings also confirm that, in order to adapt to and manage performing arts organisations under the pressure of global economics and culture, arts leaders need to adopt the role of entrepreneurs.

However, the concept of the entrepreneurial arts leader means that arts leaders are required to focus on not only funding diversity and new ideas to maximise incomes, but also on internal forces such as people relationships and understanding artists, and a balance between artistic outcomes and commercialisation.

Under the combined impact of global culture and global economics, the performing arts sector has been operating in a more diverse and competitive environment. These all create more complex conditions for management of the performing arts sector, which means education and training could play a key role in facilitating this adapting process. Confronted with growing competitiveness, and greater diversity of forms of entertainment, the demands for being more entrepreneurial and more business-oriented managers has increased, for Vietnamese organisations. The confirmation in the findings of the importance of entrepreneurship for organisational survival implies that, first, Vietnamese performing arts organisations should become more entrepreneurial to maximise their incomes. Second, further training is needed for Vietnamese arts managers to provide them with such specific skills. Third, arts management curricula should be developed to address these skills (e.g., arts marketing, audience development, entrepreneurship and financial management), including how to maximise them in practice. Fourth, arts leaders should adopt a more entrepreneurial mindset in order to lead their organisations effectively in the changing context. Finally entrepreneurialism and marketing plans need to be practical and realistic within the Vietnamese context, taking account of such factors as smaller available funding, less computerisation, less linguistic advantages (in comparison with many Western countries), an ongoing transition to a more mixed economy, and less knowledge in the area.

However, while entrepreneurialism emphasises a business orientation and how active arts leaders should be in risk-taking to implement new ideas and diversifying funding sources, the research findings also indicate the need for preserving the balance between commercial ends and artistic quality. For instance, all leaders and managers emphasised understanding artists and personnel management. Thus, if arts organisations focus too strongly on commercialisation and entrepreneurship, they may
neglect artistic standards and artists’ emotional needs. Although financial viability concerns any organisation, arts companies, concerned with aesthetic/artistic creativity outcomes, cannot have the same goals and mission statements as purely business bodies (Maddern et al. 1984). They cannot focus only on profits. Thus, to successfully manage the arts, entrepreneurial arts leaders should also embrace the need to understand artists/musicians, to achieve a balance between artistic creativity and commercial/business purposes. Artists are obviously the most important assets of performing arts organisations, and artistic creation and the success of the organisation are highly dependent on artist performances, as well as the relationship among arts administrators, artists and other staff. A successful balance of artistic standards, people management and entrepreneurship is likely to ensure the success of performing arts organisations and arts managers.

The results also indicate the importance of having a good understanding of the Vietnamese context when designing training courses. Therefore, the findings highlight the need for highly trained staff working in the field. It follows that sending students to overseas institutions (e.g. Australia) also offers them opportunities to learn from contemporary arts management practices, and subsequently the possibility of contributing to designing appropriate arts management curricula for the Vietnamese context.

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