

**A resource-oriented approach to performing arts  
organizations: An ethnographic study of dance companies**

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This article explores the organizational practices of large dance companies in Europe. To capture intangible and intrinsic aspects, a multi-sited ethnographic study at the Vienna State Ballet and Berlin State Ballet was conducted. By putting artistic processes at the core of the inquiry, the resource-oriented approach to the organization of such work comes to the fore. Following a resource-oriented understanding of organizations, the categories of reconfiguring, coordinating, co-creating, coaching, and preserving are induced. These five categories are understood as capabilities to deploy and develop resources, offering new insights about how such organizations create and sustain artistic achievement.

**Keywords:** performing arts organizations, dance, artistic achievement, organizational practices, arts management, resource-based view

## **Introduction**

In the past decades, the arts management literature has proposed numerous approaches for evaluating artistic achievement in the creative industries (Hadida 2015) and, more specifically, the nonprofit arts (Labaronne 2017). These efforts, however, have not remained uncontested (e.g., Zembylas 2017; Chiaravalloti 2014; Chiaravalloti and Piber 2011; Gstraunthaler and Piber 2012; Belfiore and Bennett 2010; Turbide and Laurin 2009). Rather than looking for measurable results and proof of impact, resources would be better spent trying to understand the arts themselves (Belfiore and Bennett 2007) and exploring ways to more responsibly represent them in the policy discourse (DeVereaux 2017). The need is for in-depth studies that, by considering the context-related uniqueness of artistic activities and the organizational settings in which they are embedded (Becker 1982), can offer greater insight into artistic achievement (Labaronne 2017). This ethnographic study explores organizational practices of large dance companies in Europe. By putting artistic processes at the core of the inquiry, the study captures intrinsic, intangible, and long-term aspects of the organization of such work. The findings, framed with a resource-based understanding of organizations, attempt to offer new insights into how such organizations deploy and develop resources to realize artistic achievement.

## **Background literature**

This section starts with a brief account of scholarly efforts to theorize arts organizations. It then offers contextual information about the empirical setting of the study, namely, stable performing arts organizations in continental Europe. Considering their resource-oriented organizational practices, the resource-based view (RBV) of organizations is introduced, which is used to frame analysis in the Findings section.

### ***Theorizing arts organizations***

The scholarly discussion on arts organizations in this journal includes the analysis of size and structure (Chang 2010), types of organizations (Kushner 2011; Rushton 2014), strategic decision-making (Cray and Inglis 2011), and organizational change (Peacock 2008), among other topics. In addition, “cultural institutions studies” (Hasitschka, Goldsleger, and Zembylas 2005) examines cultural institutions as organizational settings at the intersection of cultural, social, and economic sciences. Further, arts management scholarship has theorized arts organizations from a sociological (e.g., Baecker 2009) and systemic perspective (e.g., Tröndle 2006, 2005). At the same time, scholars from different disciplines have turned to the arts to explore organizational dynamics in creative environments (Adler 2015). Artistic work is mostly temporary, freelance, and transorganizational, giving rise to oversimplified assumptions about the production of creative outputs triggered by flexibility and freedom from constraints (Eikhof 2014).

### ***Performing arts organizations in Europe***

Whereas small arts organizations operate with smaller constituencies, allowing them to experiment with innovative and sometimes controversial works and to develop more feasible management strategies (Chang 2010), large organizations seem to be less flexible. This is particularly true of continental European performing arts, where large and long-standing organizations are highly subsidized<sup>1</sup> and employ permanent administrative and artistic staff (Eikhof 2014). If they are repertory houses, they manage parallel productions per season with a complex schedule of daily rehearsals and nightly performances, in which limited resources (e.g., tight deadlines and budgets) set the boundaries to artistic creative practices (ibid.). How is artistic achievement in this context created? How it is sustained? By studying working practices of the artistic staff of large European dance companies, this article uncovers an important aspect of such work that hitherto has not been explored: the inside-outside approach and resource-based orientation toward organizational practices.

### ***A resource-based perspective of organizations***

The first inward-looking view of organizations goes back to Penrose's seminal work (1959). Over time, the resource-based view (RBV) emerged as an important theoretical lens that understands organizations as bundles of

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<sup>1</sup> Subsidies are granted as direct government funding, as opposed to the US, in which the large proportion of arts funding is indirect (tax deductions for gifts to nonprofit arts organizations).

resources and capabilities (Prahalad and Hamel 1990). RBV directs attention to internal resources rather than products to analyze organizational performance (Wernerfelt 1984). *Resources* is used as a broad term to define assets that can be classified either as tangible or intangible resources, such as technology and reputation, or categorized as physical, human, or organizational resources. (Barney 1991). *Capabilities* refers to the organizational ability to deploy resources “to the greatest end possible” (Peteraf 1993, 189). More recently, the RBV has gained scholarly interest to explain an organization’s superior performance in strategic management and related fields (Lado, Boyd, Wright, and Kroll 2006).

Few studies have applied RBV to the nonprofit sector. Although nonprofits do not compete in a profit-making sense, they still need to build capabilities to attain organizational outcomes such as funding and reputation (Arya and Lin 2007). The application of RBV for the analysis of nonprofit arts organizations seems appropriate considering that its theoretical underpinning (Penrose 1959) allows the understanding of organizational growth in terms of (artistic) quality improvement, instead of size growth. In addition, RBV emphasizes that intangible resources such as talent and specialized knowledge—crucial in the arts sector—are determining assets for superior performance and organizational growth.

## **Methods**

To capture the tacit, intangible, and intrinsic aspects of working practices, the research design takes an ethnographic approach based on two in-depth cases studies. Given that the basic operating unit of performing arts organizations is the single production, for which temporal collaborations are specifically assembled (Eikhof 2014), in each organization, the creation process of a new piece was studied. During ethnographic research, key events throughout the artistic creation process (e.g., kickoffs, studio and stage rehearsals, premiere, and note-giving) were studied, focusing on aspects such as practices, feedback, interactions, and routines. To overcome the limits of the observability of artistic practices, whereby many aspects of the creation process may remain inaccessible to researchers (Zembylas 2014, 130), the study also relies on interviews of different members of the artistic staff. To enhance validity, the research design uses multiple voices from the field (Denzin and Lincoln 2011, 5) and triangulates different sorts of data (Eisenhardt 1989).

### ***Case selection and description***

The study focuses on dance companies as interesting objects of study from both an artistic and a management perspective for several reasons. Firstly, dance productions feature an interplay between various elements such as choreography, music, costumes, sets, and lighting, demanding a complex organization of work. Secondly, in comparison to other performing arts disciplines such as opera or orchestra, dance companies has been less explored

in arts management scholarship despite an emerging interest in dance in organizational studies and management research (Biehl-Missal 2017). Finally, the author was a professional ballet dancer before entering academia. This familiarity with the field facilitated otherwise unattainable access to world-renowned institutions and an understanding of unwritten rules and habitualized practices that can be difficult to grasp for outsiders.

Considering that replication enhances validity (Eisenhardt 1989), two similar repertory dance companies were chosen, following an information-oriented selection strategy, based on their richness of content information (Flyvbjerg, 2011). Both the Vienna State Ballet and Berlin State Ballet produce and present classical and contemporary pieces. In addition to size and genre, variables such as history, reputation, and institutional settings were taken into account (Chang 2010, 227). While in terms of history and reputation these houses are rather unique, concerning size, genre and institutional settings they can be regarded as a representative case (Flyvbjerg, 2011) for large, subsidized repertory dance companies in Europe.

### *Vienna State Ballet*

The history of the Viennese ballet spans nearly 400 years, in which there are periods when its work was ground-breaking. Among the artists who worked in Vienna are legends such as Marie Taglioni and Rudolf Nureyev (Wiener Staatsoper 2018a). In 2005, the ballet ensembles of the Wiener Staatsoper and the Volksoper Wien merged, originating the Wiener Staatsballett, which



performs in both houses. Encompassing about 100 dancers (first soloists, soloists, demi-soloists, and corps de ballet), Austria's biggest ensemble performs eighty-seven shows a season to approximately 150,000 spectators (ibid. 2018b). The company showed three full-length premieres, ten revivals of repertoire pieces, and an international gala in the 2017/18 season (ibid.). Following the approval of the director and the choreographer, the author was granted access to the creation of Davide Bombana's new *Roméo et Juliette*, with premiere on December 9, 2017. The piece uses the symphony of the same name by Hector Berlioz (instead of Sergei Prokofiev's popular score).

#### *Berlin State Ballet*

The tradition of the Staatsballett Berlin dates back to 1742, when Frederick the Great founded his royal court opera. Following the reunification of the ballet ensembles of Berlin's three opera houses in 2004, the Staatsballett Berlin became Germany's largest company and Berlin's only classically trained ensemble (Staatsballett Berlin 2018a). Its performance venues are the Deutsche Oper Berlin, the Komische Oper Berlin, and the Staatsoper Unter den Linden. The ensemble of ninety dancers (first soloists, soloists, demi-soloists, corps de ballet, and character roles), usually presents four full-length premieres, eight revivals of repertoire pieces, and one international gala, totaling eighty-eight performances a season. In the 2016/17 season, approximately 112,000 spectators visited the ballet (ibid. 2018b). After a telephone interview with the deputy artistic director, the author gained access

to Victor Ullate's creation of *Don Quixote*, with premiere on February 16, 2018.

### ***Data collection***

The fieldwork took place during the 2017/18 season in Vienna and Berlin by conducting a multi-phase ethnographic participation in each organization (about 500 hours of observation in total; see Figure below). The initial phase of fieldwork corresponded to the first weeks of rehearsals for the aforementioned pieces. At the kickoffs, the author was introduced to permanent staff and guest collaborators as a former dancer and researcher in the given production. The initial focus of observation was the work of the choreographer with the ballet masters and dancers. As the inquiry evolved, the focus was varied to allow for the exploration of different patterns of activity, such as the obligatory dance training before rehearsal. Additionally, people in different situations (e.g., dancers in costume fittings or coffee breaks), relevant artifacts (e.g., changes to the rehearsal schedule), and processes (e.g., recasting decisions) were tracked. Further, managerial meetings and work conversations were opportunistically joined and notes on informal situations such as corridor interactions and backstage activities were jotted down. To facilitate reflection about the ethnographer's stance as a researcher and former dancer, the author's personal experience in the field was documented.

Figure 1

The second phase of fieldwork took place months later, parallel to the intensive weeks of studio and stage rehearsals leading up to the premieres. In a first reading of ethnographic reports (initial ethnographic phase), the importance given to the use of rehearsal time and to dancers' injuries was noticed. Mainly due to the latter, several solo roles in the studied pieces were recast, which the ethnographer learned at the outset of the second fieldwork phase. This motivated the broadening of the focus of the inquiry to parallel productions. Adjustment of data collection is an advantage of the overlap of data analysis and data gathering in case study research (Eisenhardt 1989, 539). Besides observation, about thirty informal and seventeen formal interviews<sup>2</sup> were undertaken. Some questions arose from the literature and the study aim. For example, to obtain information about events in the creation process that the researcher cannot easily participate in (e.g., programming). Others arose from ethnographic reports, and as such, the questions intended to validate previous observations (e.g., management and artistic implications of dancers' injuries).

### ***Data analysis***

To facilitate within-case analysis and allow the patterns of each case to emerge before cross-case generalization (Eisenhardt 1989), a write-up for each

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<sup>2</sup> The author conducted interviews in the interviewees' preferred languages (English, German, Spanish, or Italian).

organization was prepared. They include ethnographic reports, informal interviews, and in-process memos (i.e., analytical notes documented separately from observation) as well as the interview transcripts. All data was analyzed using the software ATLAS.ti. Analysis comprised close reading, open coding, memo writing, focused coding, and integrative memo writing (Emerson, Fertz, and Shaw 2011, 173), using both deductive and inductive procedures. The first phase of analysis involved closed reading, that is, reading the data as a complete corpus and taking in the entire written record as it evolved (ibid., 174). Afterward, the first structuring of material followed, in which the data set was coded according to non-content attributes (e.g., data source) and schemes derived from the study aim and literature (e.g., phases of creation in the performing arts: programming, production, performance).

In a second and deeper analysis of material, recurrent themes emerged, such as the resource contingencies restraining the creation process and the resource orientation in the organization of work. Hence, coding schemes in relation to the mobilization of resources were inductively developed from the data material. In the last phase of focused coding and integrative memo writing, five analytic themes were developed attending to both similarities and variations by means of within-case analysis (e.g., by dividing the data according to source) and cross-site comparison of similar cases (Eisenhardt 1989).

## **Findings**

Initially the inquiry focused on the working practices involved in the creation of a new piece. As the study evolved, the analytical and empirical scope was broadened. By reflecting on the resource contingencies and limitations constantly restraining the creation process (e.g., dancers' injuries, recasting), interdependencies with parallel productions were considered. This allows linking analysis from the daily performance schedule and the production-specific rehearsal plan (short-run situation) to the season's program (long-run perspective). The following section frames key findings applying a resource-oriented logic as an attempt to integrate the short-run and longer views under a common analytical lens that acknowledges their interdependencies in the organization of work. Five categories are induced that elaborate on organizational practices aimed at reconfiguring, coordinating, co-creating, coaching, and preserving existing and new resources.

### ***Reconfiguring***

A season's program involves the selection of premieres (new pieces) and revivals of repertoire (existing pieces). In both cases, the artistic directors selected the pieces unilaterally. The staff is seldom consulted. Nonetheless, there seem to be many resource considerations involved in programming. A director explains how they consider performance venues (physical resources), also taking into account capacity utilization levels stipulated by funding bodies:

The classics are a unique selling point for us. ... And one would be silly not to use that. ... But now, one can say that this is not my aesthetic approach. ... Then I have to say yes [as a director you might not like the classical repertoire], but then maybe you are not in the right place. ... With so many seats we need to fill, 2,000 here, 1,200 there, and 1,000 there. ... That is not easy! And you cannot do that with the contemporary pieces. Not at all. But you can do that with the classical blockbusters. (Interview February 2018, Id4:174)

In addition to size, performance venues have a particular ambience and regular audience. Thus, *Roméo et Juliette*, as a modern ballet, was programmed for the Volksoper, a less ostentatious venue than the Vienna Opera House. Furthermore, the selection of new pieces is related to the company's repertoire (intangible resource). As one ballet master comments, *Roméo et Juliette* was a programmatic "counterpoint" (Interview September 2018, Id25:044) to Prokofiev's classical version, which the company has been playing for years at the Vienna Opera House. At the Staatsballett Berlin, *Don Quixote*, a canonical work of the classical repertoire, has not been presented for more than a decade. The new version was programmed to "complete the classical repertoire", as the director comments (Interview February 2018, Id4:174). Lastly, new pieces are selected with consideration for the ensemble (human resources). Both *Roméo et Juliette* and *Don Quixote* were

programmed on the grounds that the main roles suit the companys' soloists and that the pieces in general are enjoyable for the dancers. As one group dancer explains, "*Don Quixote* is a great choice because everyone gets to dance" (Fieldnotes October 2017, Id1:555).

### ***Coordinating***

The studied organizations show parallel contemporary and classical pieces, resulting in a complex web of collaborations at different stages of development. As the following quotation illustrates, the programming strategies are put into action by means of the monthly performance plan and corresponding rehearsal schedule. One director shares thoughts about audience recognition (intangible resource) for the monthly schedule:

I've always designed the program thinking I have to offer something to the public every month if possible. ... So that we lose none. The classic fans get something classic, the contemporary or experimental have to get something different. And this way we have it all. And that's just what I always diversify over these three stages, which makes the program extremely colorful but requires the highest flexibility from the dancers. (Interview February 2018, Id4:114)

How the season's diversity is reflected on the monthly performance schedule has a direct impact on the ensemble, in particular on dancers' bodies as "aesthetic sense-making resources" (Biehl-Missal 2017, 20). Faced with an intense rehearsal and performance schedule, dancers often need to "take it easy" during rehearsals (i.e., to only mark the steps instead of doing them full out) in order to be fit for the evening performances. As one dancer told a ballet master during rehearsal, "we have a lot of new and different pieces to learn. ... it is the beginning of the season and I already do not know how to manage" (Fieldnotes October 2017, Id24:238). Because an upcoming performance has priority over daily rehearsals for a new piece, overworked or injured dancers, and subsequently recasting, cause inefficient use or even cancellation of rehearsal time that seldom can be made up.

Further, the number and diversity of performances determines how much rehearsal time is allocated to create new pieces and rehearse existing ones. Studio and particularly stage rehearsal time is limited. Working hours are strictly regulated by different syndicates to which dancers, musicians, and technical personnel are affiliated. Choreographers, aware of time constraints, understand rehearsal time as a "luxury situation" (Interview September 2018, Id25:088). A choreographer comments during an informal interview that he gets too little rehearsal time for the main roles: "My solo rehearsals are packed between many other rehearsals, so I need to use my time for rehearsal very wisely" (Fieldnotes October 2017, Id24:126).



### ***Co-creating***

For the creation of new pieces, artistic directors often engage guest choreographers. In the studied cases, the guest choreographers experienced different degrees of creative freedom. In one case, the artistic director supervised arrangements to shorten the piece as well as costume design to align the aesthetics with the company's profile. In the other case, in which the guest choreographer had worked with the director before and therefore there was a relation of "trust", more freedom was granted. When the researcher asked the choreographer about it, he replied that the director gave him "carte blanche". He then added: I explained to [the director] of course what I had in mind, you know; it's not that he didn't know at all, but he started to come in the studio at a very late state, when the ballet was practically running". (Interview September 2018, Id25:032).

Another aspect in the creation process is (re-)casting roles. Classical pieces such as *Don Quixote* exhibit a smaller degree of co-creation with the dancers than modern pieces. Still, a certain degree of freedom was observed, as soloists create their own interpretations of the roles by deciding particular choreographic steps and the tempo of the variations as well as aesthetic and functional aspects of the costumes (e.g., the length of the skirt). This is captured by an ethnographic report:

The choreographer knows exactly what he wants—the steps, the musicality, and the character of Kitri's role [the leading female role in

*Don Quixote*]. Yet, for extremely technical steps in the variation, like a fast jump or a pirouette, he suggests to both the first and second cast different possibilities, so they create their own Kitri. “This beautiful variation is a great opportunity for you to show your technique. The orchestra can adapt to your tempo.” (Fieldnotes October 2017, Id01:096)

Modern pieces offer a greater degree of co-creation with the dancers because the choreography and the roles often unfold throughout the rehearsal process. Thus, guest choreographers watch ballet classes, rehearsals, and in particular performances (“you can see another quality onstage”) to choose the dancers with whom they want to develop their vision (Fieldnotes October 2017, Id24:080). However, dancers often get injured or are cast in too many pieces, and thus original casts are recasted. As one dancer notes, “sometimes choreographers do not even get half the people they chose” (Interview February 2018, Id11:227). On that, one choreographer comments:

I think that if you don’t have exactly [the cast] you were wishing for, sometimes it can also open new horizons for you. ... once you have somebody in front of you, it’s very nice not to do the role the way you were thinking about, but to do it together with that person. (Interview September 2018, Id25:068-084)

The above quotation illustrates a situation in which there was enough time to work with the new cast and the outcome was positive. However, this is not always the case. In addition to being highly time consuming, if recasting happens on short notice, understudies might have to take on roles for which they have little time to technically or artistically prepare.

### *Coaching*

Ballet masters have been in the companies for decades. During their early years as active dancers, they performed numerous roles and worked with different directors and choreographers. Typically, they teach ballet class in the morning and participate in rehearsals in the afternoon (either as choreographers' assistants or, when the choreographer is not around, as rehearsal directors). Ballet masters try to find ways to bring dancers to the next level: "Some dancers are not so secure, so they have to be pushed. Some others are too sure of themselves, and you don't want to be negative, but you have to still find a way to say what can be better" (Interview February 2018, Id05:047). Although normally not involved in the season's programming, they discuss casting decisions with the director, as they are well aware of the dancers' potential and are quite familiar with the company's repertoire. As one ballet master explains:

If there is a production where there are first and second roles that you know, and we've not done it for long time and there are new people in

the company that maybe deserve a chance ... then ... we suggest, of course. The director makes the decisions, but we suggest giving them a chance ... and seeing how they evolve. (Interview February 2018, Id05:110)

That being said, the relation between ballet masters and dancers is affected to some degree by personal aspects. As one dancer comments, “It depends whether they get along with the dancer and have a good connection” (Interview February 2018, Id11:298). Ballet masters not only coach dancers, they also can take a coaching role with the guest choreographers, particularly if they work with the company for the first time, are not used to working with large companies, or do not bring personal assistants. As choreographers’ assistants, their work goes beyond questions of choreography and may involve arranging the music tempo with the orchestra director or supervising requests related to costumes and props. They can also give feedback on the creation process. While some guest choreographers take full advantage of these in-house resources, acknowledging that ballet masters “are extremely experienced people with lots of repertoire pieces in their hands” (Interview September 2018, Id25:120), other guest choreographers do not want their help or feedback. Such choreographers only need ballet masters to “learn the choreography besides their own and then rehearse and correct the dancers after each performance”, as one ballet master comments (Interview September 2018, Id36:170).

As the rehearsal process advances and pieces are (co-)created, an *a priori* aspect of the dynamics of collaboration with guest choreographers that is less obvious comes to the fore: the contribution to the artistic development of the dancers. As a press release states: “the company invites internationally established choreographs to personally work with the dancers and develop the style of the company” (Staatsballett Berlin 2017). For *Don Quixote*, it was relevant that the choreographer (Ullate) is Spanish. Ullate, well known as an “outstanding teacher” who has developed “fantastic dancers throughout the years”, coached the ensemble in the flamenco style that influences the classical steps of the choreography and taught dancers how to use the Spanish props, such as fans and torero capes, while pursuing a highly technical choreography. On the other hand, working with choreographers who have a more modern style constitutes an “essential development for a classically trained ensemble”, comments a ballet master (Fieldnotes December 2017, Id24:520). The choreographic style of *Roméo et Juliette* is modern and expressive, emphasizing dancers’ movements and artistic interpretation. The following excerpt illustrates his personal work with dancers:

The choreographer asks one of the soloists to go over the steps slowly, with no music, and to think about putting more “weight” into the movements. As she finished the solo, the choreographer said encouragingly, “It is already much better. I am happy that you incorporated the ideas we talked about yesterday. Still you can make it

more real. You can feel more free ... I only tell you this because I know you have lots of potential. Because I know you can give more. (Fieldnotes December 2017, Id24:433)

Further, guest choreographers also coach ballet masters to be able to take charge of the piece after they leave the company, normally after the premiere. Guest choreographers see ballet masters as a “sort of guardian of the choreographer’s work”. For example, *Don Quixote* has a specific choreographic style, with particular lines on the positions of the head and the arms. The choreographer and his team worked directly with the dancers on the style, but there was not enough time for the ensemble to assimilate it completely, so they instructed the ballet masters to keep working on the style after the premiere (Interview February 2018, Id2:165–186).

Whereas the above elaborates on rather formal shared practices, coaching and learning also takes place informally, at home and in between and during official rehearsals. Dancers correct themselves in the mirror, watch rehearsal videos they make of themselves (or of colleagues, if they need to learn a new role), and ask peers for feedback. As one dancer explains, “it might have been a long time since the ballet masters were onstage, so we also rely on feedback from trusted colleagues who are facing similar artistic or technical challenges” (Interview February 2018, Id11:370).

### ***Preserving***

Each choreographer has a specific style, so part of the work of the ballet master during the rehearsals is to capture the “nuances” of the choreographer’s work, so they can rehearse the piece in the absence of the choreographer. This is particularly true when it comes to guest choreographers, who normally leave the company after the premiere. Even if ballet masters do not like a choreographer’s work, they believe it is their job “to respect and keep what the choreographer wants to have” (Interview February 2018, Id5:110). In pieces with many roles and group scenes, like *Don Quixote*, different ballet masters take charge of different roles or scenes. Ballet masters are responsible for “keeping the level and the piece alive” after the premiere and “refining” dancers’ work “like sculptures”. This involves watching performances every night and exerting a kind of “aesthetic control”. As one ballet master explains, “We are careful of the look of the company in general” (Interview February 2018, Id5:150). This also involves preparing second and third casts for solo roles, following the intention of the choreographer. As one guest choreographer told the dancers on his last day, emphasizing the role of ballet master to upkeep his work: “My alter ego is here (pointing to the ballet master) and will rehearse further with you. ... Please believe anything she says. She is my bible” (Fieldnotes December 2017, Id24:528-536).

## **Discussion**

Framing analysis with a resource-based perspective, the previous section elaborated on five induced categories outlining working practices of artistic

staff in the studied cases. They shed light on the capabilities of the organizations to deploy and develop different types of internal and external resources. The following discussion relates the five capabilities to each other, clustering them along the dimensions of resource disposition and resource development and linking both dimensions to artistic achievement.

### *Disposition and development of resources*

Both “reconfiguring” and “coordinating” are clustered under the dimension of resource disposition because they reveal how crucial resources (i.e., the company’s repertoire and ensemble) are deployed. “Reconfiguring” explains how internal and temporal external resources are bundled by programming seasons that “resources can support” (Peteraf 1993, 189). Looking at programming strategies using a resource logic offers a different take on arts management research that relates programming to the artistic director’s repertoire, taste, and leadership style (Chiaravalloti 2016) or the source of funding (Assassi 2007). “Coordinating” implements programming strategies in response to evolving conditions and constraints, that is, in response to vulnerable resources, particularly the body as an aesthetic sense-making resource. Resource-based scholarship has drawn on the field of curatorship to analyze the sources of resource vulnerability (Le Breton-Miller and Miller 2015). A focus on dance manifests that the body is both a resource and a source of vulnerability.



The dimension of resource development elaborates how artistic resources, particularly the ensemble and the repertoire, are coached, preserved, and newly co-created in collaboration with external resources such as guest choreographers and in-house resources such as ballet masters. “Co-creating” elaborates on how new resources are collaboratively produced. Engaging guest choreographers can be understood as a strategy to temporarily access external knowledge and creative resources and bundle them with internal resources for value-creation. This strategy is overlooked by directors and ballet masters. However, working with guest collaborators implies a certain degree of risk. Artistic directors mitigate this risk by operating on trust, normally gained through previous collaborations, or by supervising the creation process. Further, ballet masters as gatekeepers to crucial embodied, aesthetic, and tacit knowledge oversee the long-term sustainability of external collaborations. They ensure, on one side, that choreographers can best make use of internal resources (“coaching”) and, on the other, that external knowledge is transferred and maintained in the organization (“preserving”). At the same time, guest choreographers contribute to the development of the ensemble and prepare ballet masters to take charge of the piece after the premiere (“coaching”). Thus, “coaching” in its various formal and informal manifestations implies ongoing and mutual learning. “Preserving” goes beyond the archival documentation of repertoire. It encompasses the permanent intention and ongoing practice of rehearsing the pieces *alive*. Hence, addressing resource erosion in the performing arts requires embodied

knowledge, much different to issues of environmental controls and security systems such as in the case of museum artifacts (Le Breton-Miller and Miller 2015).

### ***Balancing resources for artistic achievement***

Considering both dimensions together, this study suggests that artistic achievement is realized by constantly balancing resource disposition and resource development. “Balance” is not seen as a static equilibrium but rather as a balanced iterative alignment that reflects the dynamic of resources and allows for their transformation. Thinking about the interdependencies within and across productions facilitates explanation. Interdependencies reflect the real-life complexity of both managerial and artistic practices in the pursuit of artistic achievement, because resource constraints affecting a given single production (e.g., fall out of solo roles) influence the working dynamics of parallel (e.g., less rehearsal time) or subsequent productions (e.g., change of original cast). This interdependence suggests that poor disposition in terms of reconfiguration and coordination of resources—high quantity of performances, high diversification, inflexible casting policies—manifests itself as the season advances, constraining the dimension of resource development. For instance, indisposed dancers affect both the quality of the repertoire pieces being performed and the new pieces being created. At the same time, insufficient resource development such as poor coaching and preservation results in diminished resources to be deployed and restricted access to external

resources. For instance, the quality of the ensemble deteriorates and guest choreographers might be hard to acquire if their work is not accurately preserved.

Having said that, to a certain degree, the interplay between resource disposition and resource development can be temporarily off-balance, because informal individual and shared practices will act as counterbalances. Peer feedback compensates for a lack of proper coaching. Intrinsic motivation compensates for a lack of rehearsal time, as dancers will work extra time if given the chance to perform interesting roles. Further, a temporal unbalance balance might paradoxically be associated with what in this paper is termed “value-creating casualties”. These are situations in which contingencies do not constrain, but rather enhance, the resource profile of the organization. For instance, when a short-notice recasting generates the opportunity to “discover” new or hitherto unidentified talent within the ensemble.

### **Impact, limitations, and outlook**

Looking at the working practices of artistic staff in large dance companies from a resource perspective reveals the iterative and interdependent nature of the creation process within and across productions. This casts a different light than the linear understanding of the creation process in the performing arts in terms of programming, production, and performance (Chiaravalloti 2016). This might be attributed to the fact that dance companies, as opposed to opera or theater (Eikhof 2014, 237), mostly cast roles with their ensemble. The focus

on repertoire companies with permanent ensembles manifests the vulnerability and dynamics of human and intangible resources, which are addressed through ongoing coordination, coaching, and preservation. These organizational capabilities involve intrinsic, intangible, and longer-term value-creating activities not captured by traditional measures of creative outputs.

The contribution to practice resides in facilitating understanding of trade-offs between the short-run situation and the long-term viability of dance companies. The findings can also offer points of reference to balance individual aspirations with collective needs. For instance, by assisting policymakers, funding bodies, and board trustees to reflect on potential principal agent conflicts that may arise from a short-term view on programming that maximize value for artistic directors but over time may diminish the organization's resource base. For artistic directors of dance companies, particularly those with vast experience as choreographers but little as managers, the findings might offer guidance to articulate a sustainable artistic vision or reflect on their work.

This study has limitations and suggests avenues for further research. The empirical work is based on two cases. However, considering that the cases can be regarded as typical for European dance companies, the findings can offer interesting insights for similar organizations. Particularly if considered that the studied cases exhibit a high degree of internationalization (e.g., the guest choreographers work also with other renowned companies such as the Paris Ballet Opera and National Ballet of Canada). However, given the

differences in government funding between North America and Europe, US or Canadian organizations would not exhibit such an internal orientation for the mobilization of resources (Cray and Inglis 2011). Rather, as a recent study of Canadian performing arts organizations suggests, they creatively manage their external resource dependencies for internal autonomy (Sherer, Suddaby, and Rozsa de Coquet 2019).

In terms of the limitations of the applied resource-based analysis, it is argued that RBV is underspecified, its terminology is vague, and it assumes a static environment with little emphasis on the development of new resources (Madhani 2010). Further research can combine RVB with other approaches to link an inward-looking view of performing arts organizations to their external environment. Finally, a promising venue for further research is the development of an alternative to mainstream evaluation models, which often rely on tangible measures and a limited understanding of creation processes in large performing arts organizations. The presented findings can offer insights into a conceptualization of the artistic dimension of organizational performance in the performing arts that is embedded in the field and thus considers the intrinsic, intangible, and long-term activities involved in creating and sustaining artistic achievement.

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