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## The Symphony Orchestra Institute— Precepts and Direction

by

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## EDITOR'S DIGEST

### *The Symphony Orchestra Institute – Precepts and Direction*

*The Symphony Orchestra Institute is an independent foundation formed to help orchestra musicians, staff employees, volunteers, and conductors better understand and address the complex issues and dynamics which exist within symphony orchestra organizations.*

*The mission of the Institute is to improve the effectiveness of symphony orchestra organizations, to enhance the value they provide to their communities, and to help assure their preservation as unique and valuable cultural institutions.*

#### **Guiding Assumptions**

*To implement this mission and guide the development of programs, research, and publications, the Institute has adopted a statement of precepts and direction. This statement is based upon a series of assumptions. Among them:*

- ◆ *Some of the world's best symphony orchestras make their homes in North America.*
- ◆ *Many musicians, staff employees, and volunteers are unsure of their own organizations' abilities to address a future which includes rapid societal and technological change, steady internal and external inflation, and uncertain funding.*
- ◆ *Within many symphony orchestra organizations, there are ill-informed cross-perceptions of the lives, work, and motives of the individuals and groups that make up the total organization.*
- ◆ *Constituents who provide sustained support to symphony orchestra organizations—be they ticket purchasers, charitable contributors, active volunteers, or a combination of these categories—expect information, accountability, and assurance about the use of human and financial resources by the organizations.*
- ◆ *Both commercial and not-for-profit organizations provide greater value to their customers and financial stakeholders by becoming more "effective."*
- ◆ *Practitioners and scholars can each make meaningful contributions to the dialogue which the Institute hopes to establish.*

#### **An Integrated Program**

*Over time, the Institute intends to develop an integrated program of research, publications, forums, and education, and to serve as a catalyst by bringing organizational issues into the open for review and discussion; stimulating organizational introspection, self-assessment, and resolve; and advocating for positive long-range change.*

*The Institute does not intend to provide "school" solutions for any single organization, nor does it intend to provide organizational consulting services.*

#### **Response Invited**

*The Institute invites response to and critique of its work. It welcomes readers' reactions to the stated precepts and direction, including the concepts and definitions of constituency, value, and effectiveness, and the central tenets it has adopted. To engage in the dialogue, read on!*

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# The Symphony Orchestra Institute – Precepts and Direction

**S**ome of the best symphony orchestras in the world make their homes in North America. Their artistry is supreme. They play the most challenging symphonic music confidently and beautifully under a range of conductors. They serve enthusiastic audiences in a number of major metropolitan areas. Other American and Canadian orchestras are also first class; they are excellent ensembles with extensive repertoires. Orchestras in smaller communities throughout North America are the pride of their cities and towns, providing fine music and enjoyment to their audiences.

Yet, despite the geographical breadth of this recognized artistry and general enthusiasm, many musicians, staff employees, and volunteers are anxious about the future. They are unsure of their organizations' ability to cope successfully with a range of encircling forces, including rapid societal and technological change, steady internal and external inflation, and uncertain funding.

Is there enough determination within these organizations, and are their structures and processes sufficiently flexible and responsive, to deal with these challenges?

The Symphony Orchestra Institute is an independent foundation devoted to helping participants better understand and address the complex issues and dynamics within symphony orchestra organizations. This statement outlines the precepts and direction of the Institute.

## ***PRECEPTS:***

### **Constituency, Value, and Effectiveness**

A symphony orchestra organization is a group of musicians, staff employees, and working volunteers, assembled primarily to maintain an orchestra principally performing a symphonic repertoire.

The Symphony Orchestra Institute wishes to stimulate greater insight into the human resources of symphony orchestra organizations, their structures and processes, and the associated artistic and economic implications. Through its programs, the Institute wishes to foster steady positive change in the way such organizations operate, toward the achievement of increased "effectiveness" and greater community "value" in the judgment of each organization's "constituency."

## **Constituency**

The constituency of a symphony orchestra organization consists of those individuals and institutions that provide sustained support to the organization and assure its continued existence. This constituency includes:

- ◆ a listening and observing audience. Some orchestras have an important but secondary constituency which listens to and, in some cases observes, the orchestra via electronic means. Most orchestras, however, depend on a foundation audience of concert-attending “customers” who reside in a base community.
- ◆ charitable contributors, many of whom are customers, acting individually or on behalf of an institution and providing both annual and endowment funding.
- ◆ active volunteers who are usually both customers and contributors, but who also provide time and know-how in governance, fundraising, direct service, and other necessary work.

A wide range of constituents support symphony orchestra organizations for reasons other than, simply, the direct benefits received. Most are customers and do directly enjoy and benefit from performances they attend. But many constituents support their organizations (through ticket purchases, personal or institutional charitable giving, volunteer service, and goodwill propagation) because they strongly believe in the role of cultural institutions in their communities.

However, as agent and fiduciary for the community, each constituent must ask whether the local symphony orchestra organization is providing adequate “value” to the community.

## **Value**

Within most communities, overlapping and competing constituencies of a number of social, cultural, educational, and other not-for-profit organizations vie with each other. Volunteer service opportunities abound; the mail overflows with requests for charitable contributions and planned-giving support. For-profit musical, entertainment, and leisure presentations are widely available in local venues and through home electronics and attract large and growing constituencies, including customers of symphony orchestra and other performing arts organizations.

With all these choices, and with limits on time and money, constituents of not-for-profit organizations are comparing the output that various organizations deliver to the community against the input of resources they know or feel such organizations are consuming. Costs/inputs are fairly measurable. Benefits/outputs are more difficult to measure, being more qualitative, subjective, and judgmental. Even so, however imperfectly and unsentimentally, cost/benefit evaluations are being made.

Judgments are swift and simple if constituents perceive such obvious internal problems as poor artistry, staff turnover, adversarial relationships within the institution, or questionable leadership.

But even when enthusiasts describe their orchestra as “wonderful,” thoughtful critics applaud its artistry, and the organization’s budget is in balance, concerns still remain.

Throughout society, constituencies expect to be more deeply informed about the institutions they support. Constituents are less tolerant of perceived bureaucracy and inflexibility. They seek openness and a greater sense of dialogue about institutional direction. And they want greater accountability and more assurance regarding productive use of human and financial resources within these institutions.

Constituencies of symphony orchestra organizations want to increase the community value which their organizations are providing, and they want this value to grow over time.

### **Effectiveness**

Both commercial and not-for-profit organizations provide greater value to their customers and financial stakeholders by becoming more “effective.”

The Institute believes a symphony orchestra organization is effective if it:

- ◆ achieves, in all significant respects and on a sustained basis, the organizational performance expectations of an involved and well informed constituency; and,
- ◆ engages and challenges its musicians, staff, and working volunteers with opportunities for personal and professional growth.

The Institute proposes that certain conditions particularly contribute to the effectiveness of a symphony orchestra organization. These include:

- ◆ A clearly stated mission and goals with supporting objectives and main strategies which are:
  - generally understood and agreed upon by most employees and key volunteers, but particularly leadership musicians as well as professional management, key volunteers, and the music director;
  - shared by key individuals and institutional representatives who make up the core of the orchestra’s financial support and reflect the sense of the community; and,
  - inspirational, taking into account the organization’s and community’s artistic, cultural, economic, and philanthropic potentials, but which are also solidly rooted in the organization’s and community’s human and financial resources.

- ◆ Organizational processes and systems which:
  - emphasize teamwork throughout the organization and use team structures wherever possible;
  - enhance personal and professional growth and learning of all employees and key volunteers;
  - include reward and recognition systems and practices that support excellent team and total organizational performance;
  - expand the involvement, knowledge, and contribution of all staff, musicians, and key volunteers through information sharing, extensive interpersonal communication, creative suggestion stimulation, and other such practices, to the maximum reasonable extent; and
  - encourage regular innovation and improvement in the organization's processes and systems.
- ◆ Leadership throughout the organization that maintains direction, fosters attitudes of interdependence and trust, establishes structure and conditions for excellent team and total organizational performance, and assembles necessary supporting resources.

## ***DIRECTION:***

### **Mission**

Through programs of research, publications, forums, and education, the mission of the Symphony Orchestra Institute is to:

- ◆ improve the effectiveness of symphony orchestra organizations;
- ◆ enhance the value they provide to their communities; and
- ◆ help assure the preservation of such organizations as unique and valuable cultural institutions.

### **Central Tenets and Basic Objectives**

A central tenet of the Institute is that there are generic patterns in the structure and processes of symphony orchestra organizations, especially when grouped by size and complexity. The Institute wishes to foster detached evaluation of these patterns: how they have developed, how they impact effectiveness, and how they might be positively changed.

At the same time, each symphony orchestra organization has its own unique history, community, human resources, and existing level of effectiveness. Change and improvement programs must be suited to the size, scope, dynamics, traditions, present status, and resources of each organization, and to the character

of its primary community. The Institute does not expect that its efforts will result in school solutions for any one organization, nor does the Institute intend to provide organizational consulting services.

The Institute aims to be catalytic by:

- ◆ bringing organizational issues out in the open for review and discussion;
- ◆ stimulating organizational introspection, self-assessment, and resolve; and
- ◆ presenting views as to possible directions for positive longer range change.

The Institute holds that leadership in most contemporary symphony orchestra organizations—until other models are developed and tested—must be provided by a combination of individuals in professional management, the board of trustees, direct service support groups, and the orchestra, together with the music director. Team commitment is vital. The organization’s effectiveness—indeed its very life in many cases—depends on the coalescence and success of this leadership alliance.

Within many symphony orchestra organizations, there are ill-informed cross-perceptions of the lives, work, and motives of the individuals and groups that make up the total organization. Narrowly based cross-perceptions between musicians and trustees are particularly stereotypic. Other misperceptions, such as between staff and volunteers, are common and unhealthy. Too often such attitudes contribute to misunderstandings and mistrust and reduce organizational effectiveness. One of the Institute’s objectives is to foster more informed and authentic interpersonal relations and communications within symphony orchestra organizations.

Data relating to a symphony orchestra organization’s operations, basic economics, financial condition and support, and plans and expectations are, too often, not shared broadly and in a timely fashion within the organization or with the community. Another Institute objective is to address this situation.

Finally, through its various programs, the Institute wants to help symphony orchestra organizations become more open and accept greater scrutiny by thoughtful people within and outside the organizations, becoming thereby less insular. In this way, the Institute would hope more symphony organization participants will speak up, raise questions, express and discuss views, and learn.

The Institute hopes to stimulate inquiry into symphony orchestra organizations from the academic community, especially by organizational scientists familiar with advanced human resource practices in industry. Innovations and “best practices” within industrial organizations merit exposure and evaluation.

## **Operational Programs**

Over time, the Institute intends to develop an integrated program of research, publications, forums, and education related to the human resources of symphony orchestra organizations. Some main lines of inquiry follow.

- ◆ What are the key roles in the typical symphony orchestra organization, and how might these roles—the work involved, abilities required, performance expected, and related issues—be better understood?
- ◆ How are human resources typically organized and structured? How might they be?
- ◆ Through what processes are these human resources integrated to carry out the work of the organization? What other processes might be considered?
- ◆ What are the artistic and economic implications of these arrangements and their alternatives?
- ◆ What changes, innovations, and experimental approaches are being tried, with what success?
- ◆ What are the primary organizational issues facing most symphony orchestra organizations, especially those of medium and larger scale?
- ◆ How might advanced human resource practices in industry be fitted to symphony orchestra organizations?

## **Research**

The Institute intends to organize and sponsor, directly or in conjunction with others, research into critical generic issues facing symphony orchestra organizations. It is hoped that practitioners as well as academics will become involved. A listing of topics of particular research focus will be published from time to time. The Institute's objective is to launch at least two research projects in its first year of operation.

## **Publications**

The Institute intends to publish a range of material relating to human resource issues within symphony orchestra organizations, with the goal that these publications become a forum for the exchange of knowledge and ideas among practitioners, scholars, and other observers.

A journal-type publication will be issued two to three times per year which will combine new writings about orchestral organizations with previously published material, the latter in reprint, extract, or abstracted form. The Institute also intends to republish selected writings on general organizational topics.

As to newly written material, the Institute plans to publish a range of points of view in the form of essays, commentary, critiques, reviews, surveys, and reader responses. Authors will include active, prospective, or former employees

and volunteers in symphony orchestra organizations, conductors and artists, and external organizational observers. Other forms of original expression may include interviews and transcripts of group discussion.

From time to time, the Institute will publish a list of topics and questions of special interest to stimulate creative expression.

The Institute will also publish findings of research it has sponsored. Special writings of larger scope may also be separately published.

### **Forums**

The Institute plans to convene forums involving leaders from all sectors of symphony orchestra organizations, along with scholars, to discuss topical writings, issues, and ideas of central interest. These meetings will be held in venues and under conditions which support the most creative and authentic exchange of views. As a matter of course, these discussions will be transcribed and the proceedings published. Some meetings might be organized on an off-the-record basis.

### **Education**

In due course, the Institute hopes to sponsor educational programs serving leadership trustees, other volunteers, staff, and musicians, along with conductors and music directors. Central to such programs will be discussions of existing and innovative leadership practices within symphony orchestra organizations and comparative practices in other nonprofit and for-profit organizations. Educational programs might use the case method, drawing on a strong and regularly maintained foundation of cases describing specific issues within actual symphony orchestra organizations. (Such cases would need development since very few exist.) It is expected that participants will come from diverse backgrounds, locales, and organizational roles. Various, programs might also target persons in homogeneous roles in different organizations, or the leadership teams of a few organizations.

### **The Institute's Audience**

The Institute wants to reflect the hopes and concerns and champion the interests of all persons who have supported, are supporting, or will support symphony orchestra organizations, as listeners, viewers, volunteers, and sustaining givers and endowers, whether personally or through an institution.

On behalf of these clients, the Institute hopes to influence present and future leadership teams in symphony orchestra organizations, because it is through leadership that improvements in organizational effectiveness will take place.

More broadly, the Institute wants its programs—particularly its publications—to reach and inform a larger audience interested in the operation of symphony orchestra organizations. A broad base of informed and interested parties will buttress organizational leadership teams with the support so necessary to effect change. Such persons include:

- ◆ musicians and staff employees;
- ◆ governance, fund raising, and direct service volunteers in symphony orchestra organizations;
- ◆ individual and family charitable givers who contribute annual and endowment funding;
- ◆ representatives of philanthropic institutions and government agencies supporting performing arts organizations;
- ◆ participants in various trade and union organization activities in symphony orchestra and related fields;
- ◆ faculty and graduate students in various academic disciplines relating to the organizational sciences;
- ◆ administrators, faculty, and students of music schools and conservatories;
- ◆ attorneys, accountants, consultants, and other professionals whose clientele includes symphony orchestra organizations; and
- ◆ music critics and others in the media who wish to better understand the challenges and struggles of symphony orchestra organizations.

## **Future Directions**

In time, the Institute envisions two possible extensions of its activities.

### **International**

Initially, the Institute will focus on the situation, needs, and opportunities of symphony orchestra organizations in the U.S. and Canada. However, there is much to learn from a study of the structure and operation of symphony orchestra organizations outside North America. Over time, the Institute hopes to encourage an international exchange of views and information about symphony orchestra organizations.

### **Technology**

In industry, advances in electronic information technology are substantially impacting organizational structures and processes. As yet, the internal operations of symphony orchestra organizations do not appear much affected by these developments. How continued advances will influence the internal arrangements and functioning of symphony orchestra organizations, and how these changes will vary according to size, character, location, and other factors, is only beginning to be imagined. As the Institute moves forward, the organizational effects and opportunities of such technological change will be of increasing interest.

## **Cooperation, Critique, and Review**

The Institute looks forward to cooperating with all individuals, organizations, and associations that wish to foster positive change in the effectiveness of symphony orchestra organizations.

As is the case for all its published material, the Institute welcomes a critique of its precepts and direction, including the concepts and definitions of constituency, value, and effectiveness, and the central tenets it has adopted, all as previously described.

This statement communicates initial objectives and plans, and will guide the Institute's early development. After a suitable period of operation and response, the Institute will revisit this statement, confirming or changing it, as a guide to further Institute development.