Can we measure the impact of arts experiences?

Audiences Norway
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To whom is your organization accountable?
Do financial statements and attendance reports adequately tell the story of your organization’s work?
What evidence do you have of the transformational impacts of your programs?
The Arts Benefits Continuum

*Instrumental benefits*

- Improved test scores
- Improved self-efficacy, learning skills, health
- Development of social capital
- Economic growth

*Private benefits with public spillover*

- Captivation
- Expanded capacity for empathy
- Creation of social bonds
- Pleasure
- Cognitive growth
- Expression of communal meaning

*Intrinsic benefits*
Intrinsic Impact

- Personal Development
  - Self-Actualization
  - Improved Social Skills
  - Creative Competency
  - Ability to Think Critically
  - Character Development
  - Emotional Maturity
  - Health & Wellness

- Economic & Social Benefits
  - Tolerance
  - Civic Pride
  - Social Capital
  - Creative Workforce
  - Economic Impact
  - Harm Avoidance
  - Community Engagement, Stewardship

- Human Interaction
  - Expanded Capacity for Empathy
  - Larger Social Network
  - More Satisfying Relationships
  - Family Cohesion
  - Teamwork Skills

- Imprint of the Arts Experience
  - Health and Wellness
  - Social Bonding
  - Aesthetic Growth
  - Intellectual Stimulation
  - Spiritual Value
  - Emotional Resonance
  - Captivation or “Flow”

- Communal Meaning
  - Community Engagement, Stewardship
  - Sustain Cultural Heritage
  - Political Dialogue
  - Create Shared Memory
  - Communal Meaning
  - Transfer Values and Ideals
  - Social Contact
  - Sense of Belonging

Value System for Arts Experience

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Heightened interest in Impact Assessment grows out of...

- A desire to understand why people attend, and how they benefit from a live arts program
- Demands by funders for better accountability
- Interest in engaging audiences and visitors in providing critical feedback on their experiences
- Frustration among arts organizations that the value of their work is not being communicated effectively
- Growing realization that impact assessment is a core element of artistic vibrancy
Hypothesis:

“Readiness to Receive” + The Performance Experience = Intrinsic Impact
Three Constructs of “Readiness to Receive”
Three Constructs of “Readiness to Receive”

- Context
- Relevance
- Anticipation
Five Constructs of Intrinsic Impact
1. Captivation and Personal Involvement

• At any point during the concert did you lose track of time and get fully absorbed?
• Overall, how much did the skill and artistry of the actors impress you?
• How involved did you feel as an audience member?
Average Captivation Scores for 104 Choral Programs

"At any point during the concert did you lose track of time and get fully absorbed?"

High value = 4.4
Low value = 3.1

Average Score (0=Not at All, 5 = Completely)
Why are some programs more captivating than others?

- Uncomfortable seating
- Excessive sound from amplified artists
- Inaudible volume from balcony seats
- Dissatisfaction with the selection of music (especially when expecting something different)
- Unable to understand music sung in foreign languages; poor diction
- Dissatisfaction with visual elements or announcements from the stage
- Lack of emotion conveyed by singers
- Depressing or disturbing subject matter
What can you do to maximize captivation?
2. Emotional Resonance

- Overall, how strong was your emotional response to the program?
- To what extent did you feel a bond or connection with one or more of the [artists or characters]?
- What words best describe how the program made you feel?
Average Emotional Resonance Scores for 104 Programs

"Overall, how strong was your emotional response to the concert?"

High value = 4.7
Low value = 3.5
“What words describe how the concert made you feel? Please answer using single words, one per line, up to six words.”

- 34,400 individual words were submitted
- 3,061 unique words, but some were similar
  - Joy, Joyful, Joyous
  - Grateful, Appreciative, Thankful
- This is the unfiltered language of “affect”
Figure 9. Top 15 Felt Emotions (entire sample)

- Happy, Festive
- Inspired, Inspiring, Spiritual
- Relaxed, Peaceful, Calm, Content, Serene
- Moved or Emotional
- Awe, Awed, Awestruck, Amazed, Enthralled
- Joyful, Joyous, Joy
- Engaged, Excited, Energized, Exhilarated
- Grateful, Appreciative, Thankful
- Uplifted or Uplifting
- Satisfied, Delighted, Pleased, Fulfilled
- Proud
- Reflective, Thoughtful, Contemplative
- Sad
- Thrilled, Elated
- Nostalgic
Carmina Burana (two productions, combined)
Arvo Pärt’s *Passio* (Toronto Mendelssohn Choir)
Duruflé’s *The Requiem* (Mendelssohn Choir of Pittsburgh)
Would You Harbor Me? (Cantus)
Youth Choruses (4, all programs)
The Feelings Wheel (G. Willox)
3. Intellectual Stimulation

- To what extent did you gain new insight or learning?
- How much were your eyes opened to an idea or point of view that you hadn’t fully considered?
- To what extent did anything about the program offend you or make you uncomfortable?
- Did you leave with questions that you would have liked to ask the [artists]?
  - If so, what were one or two of your questions?
In a large study of theatre audiences, 35% said they left with unanswered questions.
As expected, some types of productions generate more questions than others.
Overall, what types of questions do audiences have? (choral study)

22% Questions about program choices and overall design
   - Questions about the theme or selection of pieces

19% Questions about the singers/choir members
   - Questions about the singers’ feelings, or how they learned the pieces

18% Questions about the repertory/pieces on the program
   - Questions about the history/origin of the pieces on the program

16% Questions about the texts/lyrics
   - Questions about singing in foreign languages, foreign texts

8% Questions about the ensemble/company
   - Questions about how singers are selected; how collaborations happen
4. Aesthetic Enrichment

- To what extent were you exposed to a style or type of [art] or an [artist] that you didn’t know about previously?
- Did the program remind you how much you love [the featured work on the program]?
- As a result of attending this program, do you feel any better able to appreciate [the art form]?
Overall results for Aesthetic Enrichment (choral study)

16%  Exposed to a new ensemble/chorus
34%  Exposed to a new type or style of music
68%  Exposed to the work of a composer you’d not heard before
85%  Exposed to at least one unfamiliar musical work
72%  Exposed to a different interpretation of a familiar work
5. Social Bridging and Bonding

- How much did you feel a sense of connection to others in the audience?
- To what extent did the program celebrate your cultural heritage or express a part of your identity? [social bonding]
- To what extent did you gain a new appreciation for a culture other than your own? [social bridging]
Average "Social Bridging" Scores for 30 Choral Programs

"Did you gain a new appreciation for people who are different from you, or for a culture other than your own?"

High value = 3.9
Low value = 1.7
A deeper look at Social Bonding: Five culturally-focused concerts

• 12th Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Tribute Concert and 13th Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Tribute Concert (Boston Children’s Chorus)
• WITNESS: Let Freedom Ring (VocalEssence)
• WITNESS: Morehouse College Glee Club (VocalEssence)
• Living the Dream (The Choral Arts Society of Washington)
• The Heart of Darkness (Pittsburgh Camerata)
A deeper look at Social Bonding: Five culturally-focused concerts

• African American respondents reported Social Bonding scores at 3.5 times the rate of other respondents (4.5 vs. 1.4, respectively)
  - A highly significant relationship
The interplay between bridging and bonding outcomes is highly dynamic

• Indicators of Social Bridging and Social Bonding have a positive and statistically significant relationship.
  - Social Bridging and Social Bonding are, in fact, opposite sides of the same coin.
  - Programs that trigger one tend to trigger the other.

• Social Bridging and Social Bonding both have a positive and highly predictive relationship with overall impact.
  - In other words, audience members who experience both outcomes are more likely to have memorable, satisfying experiences.
Good data collection is hard work. Why bother? What are the uses of impact assessment?
Audience Engagement & Retention

• Because the act of providing feedback is a form of aesthetic development (i.e., critical reflection) amongst audience members

• Because the act of providing feedback can be an important milestone in the customer relationship, if it is done well, and can increase loyalty and retention
  - If it is not done well, it can stress the relationship
Strengthening Internal Decision Process

• Create a diagnostic and evaluation capacity
  - Are your engagement programs having an impact?
• Develop a more sophisticated understanding of how your work is received - a commitment to continuous improvement
• Develop a capacity to curate impacts, not just programs
Improve Communication with Stakeholders

• Build sensitivity to, and support for, the intrinsic value of your programs (i.e., focus on artistic, not financial, outcomes)
  - Assess impact against brand promise
  - Report impacts in annual reports, donor communications

• Fine line between assessment uses (transparency, accountability) and advocacy uses (selling your story)
Take a Strategic Approach to Impact Assessment

• Make an institutional commitment, or don’t do it
  - Stop asking your audience for feedback if you don’t plan to use it
• If getting audience feedback is a strategic priority, build it into your strategic plan
• Communicate with your audience about why their feedback is important to you
• Educate them as to how to provide feedback
• Thank them by reflecting results back to them
• Show them how you are using their feedback
Limitations of Impact Assessment

- Different works of art have different impacts, by nature
  - Avoid making value judgments about what impacts are “good” or “bad”
- Impact is inherently situational and contextual
  - Impact is shaped as much by the participant as by the art itself
- Results across organizations, venues, and art forms are not directly comparable
- This is not a contest to see who can get the highest scores
  - Potential for mis-use by funders
- Answers to survey questions are subject to respondent’s interpretations of key words and phrases
Readiness and Impact: Progression of Key Associations

Captivation
("How absorbed were you...?")

Correlation = .70;
R Square = .48

Post-Performance Engagement

Correlation = .39;
R Square = .15

Summative Impact
("Future Impression" Indicator)

Correlation = .40;
R Square = .16

Loyalty
(Likelihood to Recommend)

Correlation = .52;
R Square = .28

Repeate Attendance?

Anticipation
("How much were you looking forward to this performance?")

Correlation = .34;
R Square = .16

Familiarity, Preparation, and Feeling Welcome

R Square = .13

Start Here
Q&A