

THE IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES OF  
LEADERS IN THE NONPROFIT SECTOR

by

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## ABSTRACT

Leadership represents a diverse and dynamic area of study, occupying a vast area in sociological literature. However, the nonprofit sector is somewhat neglected in literature that examines leadership as a performance. Heightened demand for accountability, funding shortages and other challenges in the nonprofit sector have spurred recent trends such as coalition-building and business-like practices. Nonprofit leaders must satisfy multiple internal and external stakeholders with opposing values and expectations. This creates a rich and yet incomplete area in which to study impression management.

This thesis employs an interpretivist perspective, specifically utilizing symbolic interactionism to understand how the participants create and maintain impressions. By employing Erving Goffman's dramaturgical metaphors, this thesis addresses how the participants use symbolic representations of leadership in order to create desired impressions. It also explores the strategies used by the participants in order to present a front of competent leadership during the interviews. Lastly, the research asks the participants to reflect on their impression management activities. To address these questions, 19 leaders were interviewed at 11 different nonprofits in Canada and in Egypt for approximately one hour each, using face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Simple observation was also applied. A combination of purposive, snowball and convenience sampling was used to select the organizations.

The research offers a number of significant findings. First, the manner and appearances of the leaders and the design of their office space provides

avenues in which to convey leadership, financial and organizational messages, as well as information about the leaders' roles and statuses. For example, visual cues may be used to express their participative approach to leadership, convey organizational frugality or success and create a corporate culture.

Second, the participants commonly self-identified as benevolent and humble “servant leaders” by attempting to appear as mentors. They downplayed their authority and claimed to integrate staff feedback into the organization. They also claimed to employ a benevolent form of discipline that focuses on learning. When discussing mistakes, the participants claimed to respond in an ideal way, by apologizing and learning from their errors. However, they claimed to, at times, act authoritatively and convey “professionalism.” The leaders displayed their authority during the course of the interview and laid claim to qualifications that made them especially suited for the job. These kinds of inconsistencies suggest that impression management is not static or flawless, but rather a series of performances fraught with contradiction and tension.

Third, about half of the participants admitted to consciously changing their behaviour, language and appearances in situations in order to build trust with stakeholders. This involves at times appearing “professional” while at other times self-humbling in order to build a shared-identity with others. The participants struggle to appear sincere, but recognize that their impressions are sometimes met with suspicion.

There are limitations to the sampling technique and research design. A larger sample that interviewed a group of leaders from one region would be

preferable to this small, cross-national one. In this thesis it is impossible to know whether the participants' claims are warranted. Longitudinal participant observation would enable the researcher to see inconsistencies and also to understand how others interpret the leaders' impression management attempts. However, the research has many benefits; in addition to contributing to the literature and providing examples of Goffman's dramaturgical metaphors in the context of nonprofit leadership, this thesis may assist leaders in their goals. This thesis could lead to increased self-reflexivity or sharing of impression management techniques and could potentially assist nonprofit leaders with their tenuous missions.

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Secondly, I am grateful to my participants, who, despite busy schedules and intense demands, gave up their time to assist me. Moreover, I feel inspired by many of those who are driven by meaningful missions, who work hard to make a contribution not only to their organizations, but to the world.

Lastly, I am grateful for those whose support enabled me to continue with this difficult goal. I would like to thank my friends, especially Ossama El Batran, for exposing me to the Egyptian nonprofit sector and for sharing his passion for his country. I would also like to thank my parents, Nancy and John DePutter, and my sister, Camille DePutter, who were all incredibly supportive during this challenging time. I appreciate, most of all, their undying confidence in my ability to succeed. I would also like to thank my partner, Joshua Hull. Not only have you been my 24/7 “tech support” and my biggest motivator, you have been an inspirational source of limitless light and love.

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to AJ Fordham. His courage, strength and determination to survive has been an inspiration to me. While I endeavoured to write this thesis, AJ fought a much tougher battle. He showed me what hard work is really all about. He also taught me a great lesson: believe in the people you love. Miracles do happen.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

### 1.1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Leadership represents a diverse and dynamic area of study, occupying a vast area in sociological, psychological and management literature. Researchers have frequently attempted to identify common ways in which leaders (for example, managers, project leaders and Chief Information Officers) apply impression management techniques in order to influence others and achieve organizational goals (Enns, Huff and Golden, 2003; Enns and McFarlin, 2005; Falbe and Yukl, 1992; Shim and Lee, 2001). These researchers have sought to reveal common influence tactics and outcomes or factors that determine leaders' selection or use of influence behaviours. For example, Fable and Yukl (1992) codified influence behaviour among managers in order to discover the outcomes of their influence attempts, namely, which types of behaviours achieved commitment, compliance and resistance. Shim and Lee (2001) used empirical research in order to discover some of the factors that affect the selection of influence styles of project leaders in Korea. Enns, Huff and Golden (2003) also attempted to gain a better understanding of the factors that affect influence behaviours, as they studied the impact of technical background on CIOs' use of influence behaviours. Enns and McFarlin (2005) sought to better understand the process of how executives attempt to secure support for new ideas. In doing so, the authors attempted to discover if the executives' target assessment and preparation activities affected their selection of influence behaviours.

Applying a theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism, specifically the art of impression management, to the study of leadership in the nonprofit sector, this thesis conceptualizes nonprofit leadership as a dramaturgical performance. Rather than attempting to draw connections between leadership strategies, skills, traits and organizational outcomes, this thesis explores how a small, non-random sample of leaders of nonprofit organizations define the meaning of leadership and attempt to enact it in everyday life. By engaging previous research on impression management and conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews with 19 leaders in nonprofit organizations in Canada and Egypt, this thesis explores how the selected nonprofit leaders use impression management to portray desired images of themselves and their organizations. Thus, this exploratory study investigates how the participants modify their impressions to various stakeholders.<sup>1</sup>

## **1.2. THE NONPROFIT SECTOR**

There are a number of problems associated with defining and classifying the nonprofit sector. Often referred to as the voluntary, third, or independent sector, the nonprofit sector encompasses a wide variety of organizations, which have unique objectives and serve different populations (Anheier, 2005; Reed and Howe, 1999). The diversity that exists within the nonprofit sector makes it difficult to define. Sociologists and political scientists frequently use the term “voluntary sector,” emphasizing the participation of volunteers, who are often

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<sup>1</sup> The research was completed using a convenience sample and does not address cultural or cross-national differences between the two countries.

responsible for contributing the skills and labour necessary for the functioning of the organization (Reed and Howe, 1999). Economists and lawyers, on the other hand, tend to use the phrases, “nonprofit sector,” “third sector” or “independent sector,” drawing attention to the fact that nonprofits differ from governments and corporate entities. These phrases highlight the nonprofit sector’s unique financial and political characteristics (Reed and Howe, 1999). However, none of these terms are entirely successful in accurately capturing the essence of the nonprofit sector. For example, the term “voluntary sector,” while useful, does not take into account the fact that nonprofits employ volunteers to varying degrees. While some may rely heavily on volunteers, some merely depend on them for board governance (Corbett, 1999).

It is unclear whether the term “voluntary” can be said to accurately define organizations that financially compensate all or most of their staff. While the term “voluntary” may also refer to voluntary giving on the part of individual donors, the degree to which nonprofits depend on private donations also varies. For example, *Organization J* profiled in this thesis was entirely funded by grants from the government and multi-lateral organizations. The term “nonprofit sector” draws attention to the fact that organizations within this sector exist for a purpose that goes beyond financial objectives and that their leaders are not permitted to benefit from surplus funds (Anheier, 2005). However, this term seems to suggest that those who work in nonprofit organizations do not get paid, when in fact many highly skilled individuals who

work in the nonprofit sector do get paid quite handsomely.<sup>2</sup> For example, the median salary for CEOs in the largest nonprofit organizations in the US reached \$285,000 USD in 2002 (Schwinn and Wilhelm, 2003).

The terms “third sector” and “independent sector” recognize the fact that the nonprofit sector is considerably distinct from both the public and private sectors; however, these terms are vague, only convey information about the legal and financial make-up of the organizations and do not capture other important features that distinguish the nonprofit sector from governments and corporations, such as their fiduciary social cause. Finally, while the nonprofit sector is distinct, the degree to which it differs from public and private sectors is changing along with the roles and responsibilities of nonprofit organizations (Anheier, 2005; Kanter and Summers, 1987). For example, as nonprofits are increasingly challenged to become more business-like and private corporations adopt social responsibility initiatives, the lines differentiating the private and nonprofit sectors become blurred (Corbett, 1999; Bakke, 2005; Kotler and Lee, 2005; Vogel, 2005).

In this thesis, the terms “nonprofit sector” and “nonprofit organization” have been employed. The phrase “nonprofit” is used is for two primary reasons. One, it allows for the diversity that is used in the sample (this is explained further in the following section). While the sample is not very large, it contains a great deal of diversity and includes within it small, local and regional organizations that depend heavily on volunteers and low-paid staff, as well as

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<sup>2</sup> This was argued by one of the participants (Gene, CEO).

major health charities with big budgets, chapter organizations which are less-well funded and “voluntary associations,” which have no paid staff whatsoever. The term “nonprofit” encompasses all of these, without limiting or defining them too narrowly. More importantly however, the term is used in this thesis because it is a name that is commonly employed by the participants. While the nomenclature varied slightly, the term “nonprofit” seemed to be the phrase most commonly used by the participants.<sup>3</sup> This phrase was well understood and was valued by the participants, so the term “nonprofit sector” has been employed to reflect this.<sup>4</sup>

### **1.3. THE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION**

The nonprofit sector consists of organizations that have diverse mandates, goals and values, which means that nonprofit organizations are also difficult to define. However, all nonprofits have several features in common, including their goal of providing a public benefit, a degree of volunteer involvement and limited control over the functioning of the organization (Corbett, 1999; Hall, 2003a).

Nonprofit organizations include incorporated/unincorporated organizations, registered charities and voluntary organizations. Incorporating a nonprofit entitles the organization to legal protection similar to that of a corporation. For example, incorporating limits the liability of members of the

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<sup>3</sup> The term “not-for-profit” was also commonly used. When I asked Janis, a Senior Staff member at Organization E, if there was a strategic reason for using the term “not-for-profit” instead of “nonprofit” the answer was no.

<sup>4</sup> For more information on the current Canadian nonprofit context see the Voluntary Sector Initiative’s resources at <http://www.vsi-isbc.org/eng/knowledge/nsnvo.cfm>.

nonprofit and entitles the organization to buy and own property, borrow money and have bank accounts in the organization's name (Corporation Centre, 2005). Canadian charities however, are distinct in that they are registered under the Income Tax Act, which grants them tax-exempt status and the ability to issue tax-receipts to donors, along with certain regulatory obligations (Corbett, 1999; Department of Justice Canada, 2007). While charitable status differentiates charities from incorporated nonprofits in the above ways, all nonprofits and registered charities have several features in common. First, all of these organizations exist for some fiduciary purpose, in that they have a goal to provide some kind of "public benefit" to a particular community (Corbett (1999:119). Nonprofits exist in order to make some kind of positive social difference and improve the well being of people, animals or the environment (Anheier, 2005; Corbett, 1999; Kanter and Summers, 1987; Reed and Howe, 1999; Young, 1983). However, it is important to note that the degree to which nonprofits truly exist for a "public benefit" can be debated. For example, the public benefit of organizations that promote industry interests is open to question (United States International Grantmaking, 2007).<sup>5</sup> Determining the degree of "public benefit" may depend on the measuring stick being used. According to the Canadian Revenue Agency, the organization's activities must contribute to "the relief of poverty, the advancement of education, the advancement of religion, or other purposes that benefit the community in a way

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<sup>5</sup> AgCare, the Canadian Renewable Fuels Association and Dairy Farmers of Canada are examples of nonprofit organizations created to promote and protect industry interests. These include the fertilizer and pesticide industries, those involved in the development and promotion of non-petroleum fuels and dairy farmers. See <http://www.agcare.org/>.



that the courts have said are charitable” (Department of Justice Canada, 2007).

The second feature that all nonprofit and charitable organizations have in common is a degree of volunteer involvement. As was previously mentioned, nonprofits may vary in the degree of volunteerism they use; however, all nonprofits are governed by a voluntary board of directors. Many nonprofits also depend on the voluntary financial contributions of individual donors; these organizations can also be considered “voluntary organizations” (Corbett, 1999).

Third, nonprofit and charitable organizations may face only limited, indirect control or interference from government (Corbett, 1999). They are separate from governmental entities and interests. However, as governments influence nonprofit activity by directing funding in certain ways, this may be questioned (Scott, 2003).

The term “nonprofit” is more useful than “charity” in this thesis because it includes the widest range of organizations. In particular, it includes the nonprofit organizations in Egypt that cannot be considered “registered charities” because they are not classified as such under Egyptian law (Agati, 2007). However, while this term has been adopted in this thesis for the purposes of being inclusive, it is significant to note that all of the Canadian nonprofit organizations included in the sample are also registered charities.

Egyptian nonprofits are defined differently under Egyptian law. The Civil Associations and Institutions Law No.84, introduced in 2002, requires all groups consisting of more than 10 people, organized to pursue a goal other than

monetary interests, to register with the Ministry of Social Services (Agati, 2007). Once registered, the organization is monitored by the government, who has the right to dictate its activities, associations, style of fundraising, members and operations of the organization (Agati, 2007). However, prohibited activities fall under categories that are not defined by law, making it somewhat open to interpretation (Agati, 2007). This means that the definition of a nonprofit and its roles and responsibilities are less well-defined than their Canadian counterparts. Furthermore, there is more direct control by Egyptian governments than Canadian ones and financial responsibilities are not defined as clearly as they are by the Canadian Revenue Agency. However, the Egyptian nonprofits profiled in this thesis, although not legally defined as such, are essentially the same as Canadian ones in the three fundamental ways: they exist for a public benefit, are separate from the government (although not free from governmental monitoring and interference) and utilize volunteers, at least in their governance.

While this chapter discusses the current nonprofit context, it focuses on the Canadian experience only. This thesis includes 16 Canadian nonprofit organization and three Egyptian ones. Because of the small number of Egyptian organizations included in the study, the context of the Egyptian nonprofit environment is not explored, although it is acknowledged that the Egyptian participants may have language barriers or various cultural experiences that could affect their responses. However, it is estimated that the impact of language barriers is limited since all of the participants spoke fluent English.

One of the participants was a Scottish immigrant and another participant was an American immigrant. The other participants demonstrated their fluency in English during the interviews, where they discussed complex topics and technical issues with ease. The participants also demonstrated their proficiency with the English language by describing their interactions with English and French speaking representatives from international agencies such as CIDA. The reason for their fluency in English may be because American, British and Canadian schools proliferate in Egypt. Furthermore, I had an Arabic and English speaking companion with me at all times, who was prepared to translate or clarify should the need arise (it never did.)

Since the research focuses exclusively on impression management and not on structural features that contextualize behaviour inside the organization, the context of the nonprofit sector in Egypt is not examined in this thesis. The Egyptian participants were included as part of a convenience sample, which admittedly may make the results somewhat atypical and could give rise to a host of problems, including a misinterpretation of body language and appearances. However, because simple observation was only applied when observing the appearances of the leaders and one of their organizations (three of the participants worked at one organization; the other two were observed in locations outside their offices) and because of the nature of the study, extensive observation of body language and other symbolic gestures were not analysed. This means that the opportunity and relative impact of such misrepresentations were limited.

Based on the data acquired during the interviews, it may be speculatively stated that many differences exist between the Egyptian and Canadian organizations and leaders. Any points made about the Canadian experience should not necessarily be applied to the Egyptian context. Based on data provided from the interviews, the Egyptian participants face challenges such as the critical lack of availability of skilled, trained staff, bureaucratic mistrust from the public that curtails giving, as well as governmental monitoring and interference and a general lack of knowledge about fundraising and cause-related marketing techniques.<sup>6</sup> However, these differences are based on a limited sample size of only five Egyptian leaders and are not explored in the findings chapters because of the methodological limitations (primarily its sampling limitations) and the scope of the thesis, which does not address contextual or structural features of leadership. Clearly though, it is acknowledged that the decision to include Egyptian participants in the study is problematic.

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<sup>6</sup> Annie, Senior Staff, for example, stated that the public is reluctant to give to bureaucracies and prefers to give directly to their mosque or to the poor themselves.

## **1.4. RATIONALE FOR THE RESEARCH**

The Canadian nonprofit sector employs approximately 1.32 million people and provides much-needed services to people in Canada and around the world (Industry Canada, 2000). Without nonprofit organizations stepping in to satisfy the gaps left unfilled by the public and private sector, many people would go without the food, aid, shelter, education, healthy environments or other supports they need to socially, mentally and physically thrive. In Canada and abroad, there is no shortage of need. However, the environments in which nonprofits exist are increasingly competitive and results-oriented. More than ever before, nonprofits are challenged to become more business-like, be accountable to donors and find new and innovative ways to sustain themselves that neither pollute the reputation of their organizations nor mar promotion of their work among constituents (Community Foundations of Canada, 2002; Dart, 2004b:294).<sup>7</sup> This presents nonprofit leaders with considerable challenges, including finding ways of effectively representing themselves and their organizations to staff members, volunteers, donors, clients and other stakeholders.

### **1.4.1 Leadership Challenges**

Over 161,000 nonprofit organizations exist in Canada, a number that has increased in recent years (Statistics Canada, 2003). However, government funding has not kept up with this increase, leaving many nonprofits struggling

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<sup>7</sup> Dart (2004a:294) describes business-like activities as those characterized by a “blend of profit motivation, the use of managerial and organization design tools developed in for-profit business settings, and broadly framed business thinking to structure and organize activity.”

to stay afloat (Light, 2004; Scott, 2003). Leadership challenges, such as heightened demand for accountability and funding scarcity are a few of the problems that nonprofit leaders face everyday (Scott, 2003). Leaders must compete for funds, adapt to inconsistent donor preferences, battle red-tape and satisfy funding agencies whose goals and interests differ (Kanter and Summers, 1987; Light, 2004; Scott, 2003). For example, Hall (et al., 2003a) discovered that as government funding has decreased, governmental downloading of responsibilities to nonprofit organizations has simultaneously increased. Lack of funding presents a persistent challenge among nonprofit organizations and consequently creates competition among nonprofits. For example, 43% of nonprofit organizations in Canada report “competition with other organizations for funding or revenues,” 42% report “difficulty earning revenues” and over 70% report “difficulty obtaining funding from other organizations” (Statistics Canada, 2004). In addition, governments and funding bodies now tend to favour project-based, rather than core funding, which has also exacerbated competition and caused leaders to focus on short-term projects rather than crucial capacity-building initiatives (Hall, et al., 2003a; Hatry, 1997; Scott, 2003).<sup>8</sup> In fact, 39% of nonprofits report a “lack of internal capacity” (Statistics Canada, 2004). These strains have taken their toll; nonprofit employees often

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<sup>8</sup> Project-based funding subsidizes projects that appeal to donors with the expectation that the success of the project will be evaluated at the end of the funding contract. In contrast, core funding may be used by the director in the way he or she and the Board of Directors see fit. For example, some of the money may be spent on overhead costs to assist with capacity building. Core-funding is essential to organizational survival but is increasingly being replaced by short-term project-based funding (Scott, 2003).

lack all of the resources they require to do their jobs (King, 2004; Light, 2004).<sup>9</sup> For example, Light (2004:7) states that nonprofit employees “must tolerate high levels of stress and burnout and many face persistent shortages of information, technology, training and staff to do the job well.” Nonprofit leaders must contend with these barriers to employee satisfaction while attempting to satisfy donors’ requests for low-overhead spending.

Building relationships with internal and external stakeholders is critical to the success of the organization. King (2004:471) argues that nonprofit leaders have multi-faceted responsibilities and the leaders must “develop board members, raise philanthropic support, develop strategic partnerships, engage in advocacy, enhance community relations and create shared strategic vision and mission within the organization and its employees.” King (2004:471) suggests that nonprofit leaders achieve these goals by building “networks and relationships with others” both inside and outside the organization. Nonprofit leaders must learn how to secure commitment among staff and volunteers, in addition to funders, small and corporate donors, government officials, partners and sponsors. Leaders may adopt innovative strategies that involve seeking out new partnerships, diversifying funding sources or marketing themselves in creative ways (XVI International AIDS Conference, August 15, 2006).<sup>10</sup> In fact, funders often mandate partnerships with other organizations, but these

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<sup>9</sup> The challenges discussed here also cause a great deal of strain on leaders; in fact, the nonprofit sector sees frequent executive transition (for example, Hinden and Hull estimated in 2002 that at any given time, approximately 10-12% of nonprofits faced executive transition).

<sup>10</sup> This workshop is also available as an audio file at <http://www.aids2006.org/PAG/PSession.aspx?s=887>

collaborations, meant to encourage the sharing of resources and limit funding needs, are often challenging to establish and maintain. It is particularly difficult for organizations to employ the collaborative technique in a way that not only conserves financial resources but also makes a mutual contribution to both organizations (Hall, et al., 2004b; XVI International AIDS Conference, August 15, 2006). This thesis helps to understand how the participants attempt to secure support, commitment and compliance from staff, volunteers, donors and many critical stakeholders through their impression management activities.

### **1.4.2. Accountability**

Accountability, as defined by Corbett (1999: iii) is “the requirement to explain and accept responsibility for carrying out an assigned mandate in light of agreed upon expectations.” Because the nonprofit sector is often responsible for providing social goods to vulnerable people and is using public donors, nonprofit leaders face a great deal of accountability in their work. In fact, with heightened competition between nonprofit agencies, the advent of nonprofit watchdog groups and “negative media coverage and public perceptions” there is an increasing demand for accountability coming from funders, governments, and the public (Hall, 2003a: 3; Scott, 2003). Funders’ increasing demands for program evaluations is an example of heightened demand for accountability. Nonprofit leaders are required to empirically prove and document the impact they are having on their communities (Hall, et al., 2003b; Hatry, 1997; Scott, 2003; XVI International AIDS Conference, 2006). Evaluation requests are becoming more and more specific as funding bodies are increasingly requiring



organizations to evaluate their programs and document project outcomes (Hall, et al., 2003b; Newcomer, 1997). Leaders must develop projects that satisfy donor interests and then find ways to measure their results in accordance with their requests.

Decreased funding, a trend towards project-based funding and increased demands for evaluation and accountability can cause goal displacement in the nonprofit sector, where a legitimate goal (to produce a social good) is replaced with an unintended goal (keeping the organization afloat) (Blau, 1956; Etzioni, 1964). This may occur when nonprofit organizations become so focused on the daily activities necessary to keeping the organization afloat, such as fundraising, completing grant proposals and performing evaluations, that they lose sight of their original purpose (Anheier, 2005). For example, nonprofits may inadvertently direct more time and/or money towards completing the evaluation process than they do pursuing their original mission.

Increased demand for accountability and funding scarcity also means that nonprofit leaders face a variety of challenges that involve serving multiple stakeholders. Leaders must attempt to obtain support and commitment from a plethora of donors, clients and organizations, in addition to internal staff and volunteers. This thesis explores how nonprofit leaders use impression management when adapting to diverse needs and expectations and building trust with internal and external stakeholders.

## **1.5. CONTRIBUTING TO THE LITERATURE**

Clearly, nonprofit leaders face many challenges. The complexity of nonprofit leadership raises difficult questions, such as how nonprofit leaders use impression management to achieve organizational goals such as satisfying multiple and diverse stakeholders. As the literature review provided in this section suggests, researchers have extensively explored how leaders use impression management in a variety of contexts. While the literature reviewed below is certainly not exhaustive, it represents a small sample of the extensive body of work on leadership that exists within the social-science fields.

Researchers have studied leadership from a variety of perspectives, (Antonakis, J., Cianciolo, A. T., and Sternberg, R. J., 2004) including the trait-based, (Kenny and Zaccaro, 1983; Mann, 1959; Stogdill, 1948) behavioural, (Katz, Maccoby, Gurin and Floor, 1951) contingency, (Fieldler, 1964, 1971) relational, (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995) charismatic, (Brubaker, 2006; Conger and Rabindra, 1988; Fanelli and Misangyi, 2006; Harvey, 2001; Weber, 1947, 1968) transactional and transformational leadership schools (Bass, 1985). This thesis instead focuses on leadership from a symbolic interactionist perspective, seeking to better understand the impression management of leadership. It should be noted, however, that the research borrows two leadership concepts from management literature; these are “servant leadership” and “participative management”. Servant leadership is best described by Greenleaf (1977) as a leadership style characterized by a genuine desire to serve others. Greenleaf argues that servant leaders “make sure that other people’s highest priority needs

are being served.” They ask, “do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” (Greenleaf, 1977:13-14). This dedication to followers is characterized by “sustained intentness of listening,” (an awareness of when to be silent and listen carefully to others’ input) acceptance, (tolerance of staff imperfections) empathy, trust and respect. This style of leadership enables the “typical person” to be mentored in such a way that they can ultimately become capable of great accomplishments. Servant leaders also influence others by using the power of persuasion, gently coaxing others to voluntary acceptance and by leading by example, rather than using coercive power. Greenleaf (1977:42) argues that servant leaders are “functionally superior” because they are “closer to the ground – they hear things, see things, know things and their intuitive insight is exceptional. Because of this they are dependable and trusted.” As will be shown, the participants claim to embody many of the characteristics of servant leadership.<sup>11</sup> They also describe what is coined in management literature as “participative management,” in which bosses integrate the feedback of subordinates into the decision making process (Bakke, 2005:96).

Although existing research on leadership is extensive, this thesis intends to make a contribution to this body of literature by exploring further ways in which nonprofit leaders may use impression management in their daily routines

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<sup>11</sup> Where applicable, the term “benevolence” is also employed in this thesis in order to simplify and capture the essence of servant leadership, that being the servant leader’s intent to share kindness and goodwill with others. Benevolence thereby refers to the charitable quality of servant leadership, in which leaders prioritize the genuine needs and interests of their staff and volunteers.

at work. For example, this thesis contributes new findings on the topic by exploring how the nonprofit leaders project images of “the mentor” and “the boss,” emphasizing benevolence and humility, authority and specialness. The thesis also contributes some examples of how Goffman’s dramaturgical concepts may be applied to leadership in the nonprofit sector.

## **1.6. CONTENTS OF THE THESIS**

The theoretical literature review in Chapter II provides a comprehensive understanding of leadership through the Interpretivist lens. It is explained why Interpretivism (specifically, Symbolic Interactionism) is most appropriate in the study of leadership as a performance. Literature on leadership from this theoretical perspective is discussed. This chapter gives way to the research questions guiding this thesis. In Chapter III, the methodology is described, including the data collection and analysis techniques employed. It also discusses the relative merits and limitations of qualitative methodology, specifically semi-structured interviews, when used in impression management research. In Chapter IV, the physical appearances of the executives and their offices are described, along with other symbolic representations of leadership. This chapter explores the possible symbolic meanings of appearances and manner, based primarily on Goffman’s dramaturgical concepts. In Chapter V, the interview data is analysed and common leadership impression management strategies used among the participants are discussed. The findings identify two common leadership images: “the mentor,” which includes the display of traits such as benevolence and humility that are characteristic of servant leadership

and “the boss” which includes the performance of authority, professionalism, and specialness. The differences between these two approaches are considered. Chapter VI describes how the participants reflected on their impression management strategies. This chapter explores how these strategies are consciously adopted to build trust and communicate a shared identity with stakeholders in order to cultivate mutually satisfying relationships that fulfil organizational goals. Finally, the conclusions provided in Chapter VII summarize the common impression management strategies while providing some explanation for the findings and their inconsistencies. Chapter VII also comments on the limitations of the study and provides several suggestions for future research. An outline of an alternative methodology that could be used in future research is also provided. Lastly, the contributions of this thesis to social science literature and to the nonprofit sector are discussed.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **THEORETICAL LITERATURE REVIEW: PERSPECTIVES ON LEADERSHIP**

Previous literature has laid the groundwork for this thesis by exploring leadership from a variety of perspectives. The following theoretical and empirical literature review discusses the contributions made by leadership and impression management literature to reveal some of pertinent issues that are further explored in this thesis.

#### **2.1. SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM**

While previous researchers such as Enns, Huff and Golden (2003), Enns and McFarlin, (2005) Falbe and Yukl, (1992) and Shim and Lee (2001) have used a positivist approach in the study of leadership, this thesis is based on interpretivist theory, specifically, symbolic interactionism.<sup>12</sup> This theoretical orientation emphasizes social activity from an interpretivist perspective by identifying the actions, interpretations and meanings that individuals assign as they interact with others. Rather than examining the influence that reified social

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<sup>12</sup> Positivism is a theoretical perspective that is based on the assumption that a single reality exists within social phenomena that can be captured by rigorous, empirical social research. Theorists who adopt this perspective often aim to reveal the social structures and causal laws that govern social action. Rather than exploring unique human experiences or interpretations, the positivist theorist assumes that, using objective research techniques, the social scientist's responsibility is to reveal truth about human life, arguing that there is only one truth available to discover (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994; Hammersley, 2004; Guba and Lincoln, 1994). In positivist research, authors often seek to identify what traits or experiences make leaders great. Leadership is usually studied as if it was a concrete, unchanging and objective achievement that can be empirically captured, copied and repeated (Bennis and Thomas, 2002; Kotter, 1990; Light, 1998; Nanus and Dobbs, 1999; Zaccaro and Klimoski, 2001).

institutions may have on individuals, interactionists study how individuals create and interpret their social worlds. Through social interaction, individuals define and interpret their surroundings, identities, obligations and relationships. As they consider these meanings and interpretations, people creatively and actively shape and construct their realities. This ongoing process shapes social life (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994; Blumer, 1969; Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Hall, 1972; Prus, 1996). As Prus (1996:9) states, “human experience is rooted in people’s meanings, interpretations, activities and interactions.”

Some interpretivists study social structure from a symbolic interactionist perspective, while arguing that organizational context helps to influence the way social interaction takes place. For example, Hall (1972), Hall and McGinty (1997), and Hall and Spencer-Hall (1982) and Strauss (1978, 1982) studied leadership from a symbolic interactionist perspective, while showing how leadership is bound to organizational and temporal contexts. These authors argue that social structure is not a determining agent, in that it does not control or necessarily shape individuals’ actions; rather structural elements of social organization may give rise to situations within which social action, interpretation and negotiation take place (Hall, 1972; Hall and McGinty, 1997; Hall and Spencer-Hall, 1982; Strauss, 1978; 1982). Social structure, from this perspective, influences social action without determining outcomes; it provides the context within which human agency is expressed.

This thesis takes a similar position on social structure, acknowledging that structural elements such as governmental legislation, subsidies, policies and

trends in giving and grant-making that are influenced by media or other organizations, have a significant impact on shaping the context within which leaders act and make decisions. The implications of social structure are not explored in this thesis because of its narrow scope and intention to focus on how leaders perform impression management, rather than why they make the decisions they do. A discussion of social structure is absent from this thesis, not because it is deemed unimportant, but for the purpose of maintaining a clear direction. The relative impact of various social structures on leadership impression management may, however, be explored in future research.

Herbert Blumer defines symbolic interactionism as “activity in which human beings interpret each other’s gestures and act on the basis of the meaning yielded by that interpretation” (Blumer, as cited in Hall, 1972: 39). Blumer identifies three premises that are the cornerstone of symbolic interactionist theory. The first is that human beings “act toward things on the basis of the meanings that things have for them” (Blumer, 1969: 2). Individuals interpret the meanings of objects, words, actions and situations; these interpretations help to guide their actions and behaviour. Secondly, symbolic interactionists do not take meanings for granted, but rather show how meanings and symbols develop through interaction (Blumer, 1969: 2). In this way, meanings are considered “social products” that are constructed by humans (Hall, 1972: 5). Finally, meanings change and are interpreted in different ways by different individuals in different contexts; they are not static but are revised through an interpretive process. Blumer also argued that the social world must be studied



systematically, empirically, using naturalistic observation or “exploration and investigation” (Blumer, 1969:40-47). As Blumer (1969:33) argued,

Adhering to scientific protocol, engaging in replication, testing hypotheses and using operational procedure do not provide empirical validation that genuine empirical social science requires. They [the positivists] gave no assurance that premises, problems, data, relations, concepts and interpretations are empirically valid. Very simply put, the only way to get this assurance is to go directly to the empirical social world.

Blumer therefore argued that symbolic interactionism lends itself to rigorous empirical methodology that is based on the principles outlined above. This includes seeking to understand the meanings that individuals assign to objects, “seeing the situation as it is seen by the actor,” observing his or her choices, interpretations, decisions and doing so through careful observation (Blumer, 1969:56). Thus, symbolic interactionism is considered by Blumer (1969:21) to be a “perspective in empirical social science – as an approach designed to yield verifiable knowledge of human group life and human conduct,” performed primarily through naturalistic inquiry.

Erving Goffman (1959) argued that individuals act towards others with the intention of eliciting a desired impression from the audience. Individuals, or “strategic, symbolic actors,” (Gumer, 1989: 121) present themselves in ways that correspond with the impression they wish to make and simultaneously attempt to conceal any inconsistencies in performances that may cast doubt on the validity of their impressions (Goffman, 1959). In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* Goffman (1959:15) defined “face-to-face interaction” as “the reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another’s actions when in one

another's physical presence." By the "influence of individuals upon one another's actions" Goffman meant that individuals act in ways they believe to be appropriate in the eyes of others. Through what Goffman (1959:208) referred to as "the arts of impression management," individuals act, speak, dress and "perform" in particular ways in order to reflect their social values. The performance is continually "socialized, moulded and modified to fulfil society's expectations" and is "an expressive rejuvenation and reaffirmation of the moral values of the community" (Goffman, 1959:15).

The actors continually adjust their impressions in order to provide their audiences with idealized images, striving for consistency within a given performance. While the presentations may change from situation to situation, actors attempt to provide consistent performances within an event in order to secure believability from the audience. Thus, the "performer" strives to provide a believable presentation of a given "character" (Goffman, 1959:252).

Goffman invoked theatrical language while providing the theoretical basis for understanding leadership as a dramaturgical performance. By creating a setting, utilizing props and adjusting manners and appearances, leaders become "characters;" they set a stage, speak from a script and utilize the symbolic resources at their disposal to perform the role of a competent leader (Goffman, 1959). Goffman (1959:14) defined a performance as "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants." Individuals are said to be on the front stage when they are engaged in a performance and on the back stage when they are alone

and able to “act natural” and relax (Messinger, Sampson and Towne, 1990:74). It is on the front stage that they present impressions of themselves to others; these impressions are also called “fronts” (Goffman, 1959:22). Goffman (1959: 22) identified a “front” as the “part of the individual’s performance which regularly functions in the general and fixed fashion for those who observe the performance.” There are several components of the performance, including the setting and personal front. The setting includes the furniture, décor, physical layout and background items as supplying “the scenery and stage props for the spate of human action played out before it, within it, or upon it” (Goffman, 1959:22). The “personal front” includes the individual’s “insignia of office or rank; clothing; sex, age and racial characteristics; size and looks; posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gestures” and other elements of appearance and manner (Goffman, 1959:24).

While some of these characteristics cannot be modified, performers attempt to engage the symbolic resources at their disposal in order to project a believable impression that is as coherent as possible (Goffman, 1959). These include “stage props,” or the objects an individual uses to help convey meaning consistent with his or her desired image (Goffman, 1959:22). In this way, props are similar to other “vehicles for conveying signs” such as facial expressions, body language, posture and other physical appearances (Goffman, 1959:24).

By applying Goffman’s dramaturgical metaphors to nonprofit leadership, this thesis provides insight into how leaders attempt to present and perform idealized impressions of competent leadership in such a complex and

relationship-driven environment. Individuals engage in impression management by modifying their behaviour, appearance and manner; they also give symbolic meaning to the setting and the props that surround them. They utilize these resources to help project desired images of themselves and obtain trust from followers inside the organization and stakeholders outside the organization. By engaging in impression management, individuals attempt to portray desired impressions of themselves, by hiding, contextualizing or justifying the parts of themselves that would call into question the validity of the presentations that they wish to make.

Goffman identified engaging in this process of ongoing prevention and maintenance as “face work” (Goffman, 1967:12). “Face” is defined as the image of the self that one holds; it consists of socially-approved attributes which the individual aims to present to others. However, individuals have to “maintain face” by continually making adjustments to the performance in order to present an impression that is consistent within a given situation or theatrical event and can therefore be interpreted as believable by the audience. While performances may shift and change according to performance contexts, actors must attempt to act in ways that are consistent within a “given occasion” (Goffman, 1959:26). Goffman (1959:12) pointed out that, despite actors’ efforts to prevent any contradictions in performances from being revealed, “events may occur which may contradict, discredit or otherwise throw doubt upon this projection.” For example, when “unmeant gestures, inopportune interruptions, or faux pas” occur and cause visible displays of embarrassment, the performance may

become discredited, since, as Goffman (1959:212) explained, signs of nervousness are “an aspect of the individual who presents a character and not an aspect of the character he projects.” When incidents occur which threaten “face,” the individual may attempt to “save face” and rectify the situation by demonstrating to the audience that his or her image has not been damaged and should not be questioned; this is the process of attempting to show that performances are accurate and consistent (Goffman, 1967:12). One mechanism of “saving face” can be accomplished by apologizing. Apologies are “designed to convince others that an undesirable event associated with a person is not a fair representation of one’s overall abilities” (Gumer, 1989:118). The apology is therefore used to convince the audience that he or she is still credible.

By applying Goffman’s theory and dramaturgical metaphors, this thesis explores how a small sample of nonprofit leaders use impression management to convey desired leadership performances within given situations, such as motivating staff and volunteers, soliciting donors, making presentations and meeting with beneficiaries.

## **2.1.1. Impression Management Research**

### **2.1.1.1. The performance of leadership**

Many researchers have studied leadership as a dramaturgical performance (Anderson, 2005; Brown, 2005; Gumer, 1989; Gagliardi, 1992; Harvey, 2001; Pacanowsky and O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983) or as a social-construction (Meindl, Ehrlich and Dukerich, 1985; Nicolson and Anderson,

2005).<sup>13</sup> Leaders often desire to be perceived as “competent professionals” who embody the desired “personal characteristics, such as knowledge, skills, abilities, experiences and values” and reflect the “cultural standards of professional behaviour” (Roberts, 2005:688).<sup>14</sup> Leaders may attempt to appear professional or display “desirable qualities that elicit approval and recognition from key constituents” in a variety of ways (Leary, Robertson, Barnes and Miller, 1986; Roberts, 2005:687). For example, in social-psychological literature, researchers often point out trends in impression management strategies that include exemplification, self-promotion and organizational promotion (see for example, Bolino and Turnley, 2003; Gardner and Avolio, 1998; Harris, Kacmar, Zivnuska and Shaw, 2007; Harvey, 2001; Turnley and Bolino, 2001). Exemplification may be used in order to appear “trustworthy or morally worthy” in the eyes of others (Gardner and Avolio, 1998:44). Leaders using this strategy may “stress their similarity to followers with regard to their background and experiences in order to establish themselves as trusted representatives of their followers' interests” while simultaneously attempting to paint themselves as exceptional and morally-responsible. Self-promotion involves exaggerating or drawing attention to one’s own strengths and

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<sup>13</sup> These authors have explored the social construction of leadership, showing that popular conceptions of leadership or entrepreneurship are not inherent but idealized, romanticized and created, in part, through stereotypes and myths perpetuated through media such as newspapers.

<sup>14</sup> Roberts (2005:687) describes “professionalism” as “an individual’s ability to meet normative expectations by effectively providing a given service to clients and colleagues.” The participants in my research also appear to infer competency, reliability and respectability when they use the term “professional” and “professionalism” to describe themselves or others. In this thesis, the term “professional” describes an individual or organization who is respected by colleagues and is known to be reliable and competent in their ability to provide services to clients and colleagues.

achievements and hiding details that may discredit the “myths” they perpetuate about their own excellence (Gardner and Avolio, 1998:45). Organizational-promotion refers to exaggerating or highlighting the achievements or credibility of the organization, while inferring one’s hand in its success through the “construction of a collective identity” (Harvey, 2001:259). As Gardner and Avolio (1998:44) stated, self-promotion can be used “to appear credible, innovative, esteemed and powerful.” Leaders may “project themselves as skilled, influential and effective leaders whose exploits greatly benefit followers” (Gardner and Avolio, 1998:45). Leaders may engage in this impression management technique in order to “bolster their images of competence and power and thereby heighten their esteem with followers” (Gardner and Avolio, 1998).

In addition to this, leaders may use what Harvey (2001:260) identified as “other-demotion,” which involves “constructing a ‘common enemy’ and piling negative attributions onto this opponent.” For example, Harvey (2001) noted that, in the television documentary, “Triumph of the Nerds,” Steve Jobs, founder of Apple, sets himself apart both from competitors by discussing their negative attributes. By engaging in these tactics, leaders may attempt to gain approval and admiration from followers, solidifying their special status. Harvey (2001) also described the complexity in engaging in impression management, noting how leaders must attempt to juggle and balance multiple impressions. For example, leaders such as Jobs attempt to separate themselves from others by demonstrating their specialness and unique qualifications while simultaneously

aligning themselves and building a shared identity with followers (Harvey, 2001). Leaders often attempt to balance such contradictory impressions and use facework when attempting to justify or deny mistakes, accidents, or potentially embarrassing and discrediting moments (Gardner and Avolio, 1998; Harvey, 2001).

In addition to using the above techniques, leaders may attempt to display their “desirable qualities,” such as their professionalism, by modifying appearances or employing other symbolic representations of their leadership. These include modifying their physical appearance, using the office setting to communicate cultural messages and adjusting personal mannerisms. Leaders may adopt particular clothing styles to influence the perceptions of colleagues and achieve certain organizational objectives, such as building trust among stakeholders (Elsbach, 2004; Peluchette, Karl and Rust, 2006). Clothing may be used to convey characteristics that include competence, power, professionalism, knowledge and trustworthiness (Peluchette, Karl and Rust, 2006; Riordan, 1989). Riordan (1989) also pointed out that popular literature provides aspiring-executives with tips on how to dress to emulate and achieve success in the corporate world. For example, the right attire can ostensibly help executives achieve power and respect by appearing “tough, aggressive, somewhat impulsive, [and] strategic” (Riordan, 1989:88).

The setting of the office can also be an arena in which impressions are managed and sustained. The private office of the leader may function as a back stage, in which executives can rest, resolve mistakes and repair their images.



For example, the office prevents others from witnessing things that might discredit performances; this helps to maintain consistency, and therefore believability, of impressions (Goffman, 1959). However, the office also operates as a front stage, where impressions to staff and visitors are projected. Goffman (1959:126) wrote about the symbolic use of the office, providing both a front and back stage:

The private office of the executive is certainly the front region where his status in the organization is intensively expressed by means of the quality of his office furnishings. And yet it is here that he can take his jacket off, loosen his tie, keep a bottle of liquor handy, and act in a chummy and even boisterous way with fellow executives of his own rank.

Much has been written on the symbolic importance of organizational appearances, including the office's exterior and interior design and visual displays of organizational materials, such as logos, uniforms or paint colours (Berg and Kreiner, 1992; Doxtater, 1992; Hatch, 1992). In fact, the design of office space may affect staff behaviour, deliver organizational messages about values, products and organizational philosophies to both internal staff and visitors and reflect differences in authority and status (Alvesson and Berg, 1992; Berg and Kreiner, 1992; Doxtater, 1992; Hatch, 1992). Meaningful elements of organizational appearances include the building's "corporate architecture" (the architectural aspect of the building in which the office resides) the interior design of the office and the organization's "visual identity" (organizational visual materials such as logos) (Berg and Kreiner, 1992:41-42). Berg and Kreiner (1992) argued that these features could affect organizational behaviour by, for example, spawning creativity or other desired responses among staff. As

such, many leaders opt to modify their organizational architecture, interior design or visual displays in order to manage impressions and influence and internal or external stakeholders (Alvesson and Berg, 1992; Berg and Kreiner, 1992).

Previous studies across numerous sub-cultural contexts help to explain how professionals in health care, law and other fields use impression management by structuring their appearances, speech and mannerisms in order to achieve desired images. While this literature does not focus on leaders, it is still highly useful, as nonprofit leaders may adopt similar tactics. For example, Sanders (1989:132) revealed how the décor of the tattoo shop is created in order to foster the impression of professionalism:

Diplomas, expertly rendered design sheets, technical objects... signs that overtly present shop regulations... represent the ways in which the tattooist structures the setting in order to indicate his or her expertise and the seriousness of the activity. The physical display of professionalism helps to reinforce the tattooists' right to manage the tattooing event.<sup>15</sup>

Other researchers have revealed the ways in which professionals attempt to portray themselves as individuals who embody trustworthiness and moral competence (Harvey, 2001) or who demonstrate “expertise, esteem, power and effectiveness” (Gardner and Avolio, 1998: 45).<sup>16</sup> Their strategies are not limited

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<sup>15</sup> In his ethnography of tattoo culture, Sanders (1989) found that tattoo artists attempt to demonstrate their competence by manipulating their language and behaviour in front of clients. In order to build trust, tattooists attempt to display competence and confidence in their actions, through “unhesitating responses to the clients’ questions, routine ease in handling and adjusting the tattooing equipment, and the matter-of-fact, almost ritualized, activities surrounding the preparation of the body area.” These behaviours “attest to the tattooists’ skill and his or her consequent rights to control the interaction” (Sanders, 1989: 132).

<sup>16</sup> Other research shows how individuals besides professionals and leaders portray trustworthiness with various groups, including friends, landlords, police officers and social

to the modification of physical appearances but also include adjustments to speech, mannerisms and other elements of behaviour (Elsbach, 2004; Hobbs, 2003; Jones, 2006.) For example, the use of language in impression management in a variety of fields has been well researched. Lawyers structure their language style to “construct a shared identity” with the jury (Hobbs, 2003:276). Lawyers accomplish this by adjusting their style of speech:

Speech styles [of the lawyers] vary along a continuum from formal oratory to informal ‘street talk’, and conduct varies accordingly. Given the broad range of available styles, the lawyer will take into consideration both story and audience in choosing the argument style appropriate to a specific case (Hobbs, 2003: 278).

According to Hobbs’ (2003:287) research, the lawyers adopt an accent, a drawl or slang, depending on the make up of the jury. The result is a “shared identity with the jurors,” leading to enhanced credibility and trust. In addition, intonation, pitch and style of speech has important implications and may be modified for impression management purposes in court (O’Barr, 1982). As O’Barr (1982:11) argued, “form is communication; variations in form communicate different messages and speakers manipulate form, but not always consciously, to achieve beneficial results.” Elsbach (2004:279) found that managers attempt to improve trustworthiness by modifying their speech in several ways, including making references to their titles and modifying their choice of language – in particular, selecting language that is either “formal or informal, specific, technical, easy or hard to understand.” Research presented

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workers. Wiseman (1970) showed how skid-row alcoholics used impression management when interacting with these different groups; for example, the men pretend to be spiritually moved in order to stay the night at religious-affiliated shelters.

by this author suggests that language that is “easy-to-understand, colloquial language used by an expert communicating a decision explanation” can be used to increase trustworthiness, whereas technical and convoluted language can have the opposite effect (Elsbach, 2004: 280). Using appropriate language can build trustworthiness by building common identities, while using language that is not commonly used or understood by audiences can lead to “disidentifications” with an undesirable or untrustworthy group (Elsbach, 2004:283; Hobbs, 2003).

The literature above suggests that impression management strategies are adopted by many different kinds of individuals and groups in order to obtain trust from clients, patients, jurors and colleagues. An important part of developing trust is the display of competence. One of the most effective studies in identifying and demonstrating the performance of competence is the work by Haas and Shaffir (1987), *Becoming Doctors*. These researchers showed how individuals display competency in medical student roles. Competency is shown not to be an inherent quality, but rather a presentation that is enacted in ways that are necessary to gain the trust and cooperation of professors and patients. In this study, the authors showed how young medical students learn to project their “cloak of competence” by symbolically separating themselves from the rest of society, especially their patients, and by identifying themselves with an elite professional group. Haas and Shaffir (1987: 4) described this progression, identified as professionalization, the following way:

Professionalization is a process where the “chosen” convince society, through what is actually the enactment of a moral drama of the myth of

their specialness, of their legitimacy to profess and to claim an honorific status... Thus they obscure the basis of their authority, providing the ideological justification for unequal status, closure of access, manipulation of knowledge and control over definitions of the situation.

Similarly, Hilgartner (2000) showed how scientific advisors gain credibility and authority by employing persuasive rhetoric through the production of advisory literature, utilizing stage management, identifying with identity norms and values such as objectivity and disinterestedness, using information control with written documents and working to present images of methodological rigour and specialized knowledge. While nonprofit leaders were not the focus of the research by Hilgartner (2000) nor Haas and Shaffir, (1987) their literature is still highly useful in this thesis because they called into question the inherent nature of competency and professional appearances. They revealed that moral and intellectual competency and trust between the public and professionals are, in fact, of a dramaturgical nature.

Though not an exhaustive review, the literature sampled and described above shows how leaders and other professionals may be studied as performers. This thesis builds on this literature by examining how nonprofit leaders attempt to display the qualities they deem necessary to their leadership roles. It reveals how the participants display traits that warrant them the special status required to obtain obedience from followers and trust from critical stakeholders. In order to achieve public and donor support, nonprofit leaders may use a variety of impression management techniques in attempts to elicit particular responses from staff, volunteers, government officials, beneficiaries, corporate sponsors, partners and donors. By studying leadership as a performance, this thesis builds

on existing impression management literature to reveal some of the specific impression management goals and strategies employed by the participants.

### **2.1.2. Critiques of Impression Management**

Impression management and dramaturgy have faced a number of critiques. For example, positivists have criticized the interpretive approach (on which impression management is based) by arguing that it is “subjective and unscientific” because interpretivist research emphasizes meanings which are difficult to measure and operationalize (Prus, 1996:9). Positivists have argued that, in contrast, the standardized measurements and statistical procedures used in positivist research are highly conducive to revealing scientific “truth” (Altheide and Johnson, 1998; Prus, 1996). Prus (1996:9) argued that interpretivists may respond to this criticism by arguing that “the study of human behaviour is the study of human lived experience and that human experience is rooted in people’s meanings, interpretations, activities and interactions.” Thus, positivists “overlook the fundamental social essences of human behaviour” (Prus, 1996:9).

Impression management and Goffman’s concepts of dramaturgy represent the theoretical underpinnings for this thesis. However, Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis is sometimes criticized. One of the problems with Goffman’s work is that he did not provide a methodological framework for studying impression management. As Cicourel, (1970, as cited in Dreitzel, 1970:445) stated, “descriptive statements are prematurely coded, that is, interpreted by the observer... and subsumed under abstract categories without

telling the reader how all of this was recognized and accomplished.” Such critics saw the methodological framework for studying impression management as limited; they also disliked the fact that dramaturgical analysis may not lead to generalizable findings or “produce testable hypotheses” (Brissett and Edgley, 1990:23).

Furthermore, critiques of Goffman’s work have included the failure to recognize broader social structures and institutions that serve to enforce social stratification (Brissett and Edgley, 1990:27; Reynolds, 1987:148-149). Critics have argued that his theory tends to reduce society to “episodic” interactions rather than addressing broader phenomena that serve to maintain social inequality (Reynolds, 1987:148). Goffman’s position on the role social structures in society is somewhat unclear. Goffman criticized functionalism while still maintaining many of its major principles (Chris, 2003). He also acknowledged that there is a “loose coupling” between social interaction and social structures, but does not explore, how, why, or to what capacity. Chris (2003:181) argued that Goffman was “unwilling to trace out linkages between the microlevel interaction order and meso-and macrolevels social structures.”

Critics also identified Goffman’s work as a hopelessly cynical and limited assessment of human beings. According to Cuzzort (1969, as cited in Reynolds, 1987:98) Goffman described humans as “an incorrigible pack of ‘con’ artists engaged in a lifelong process of deceiving both self and others.” Critics have argued that this represents a “disenchanted and somewhat amoral view of society” which is actually glorified and encouraged by Goffman

(Pacanowksy and O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983:130). Critics have complained that Goffman encourages people to “put on the kind of performance that deceives both self and others; and accommodate ourselves to the status quo of the contemporary bureaucratic society” (Reynolds, 1987:150). These critiques presented Goffman as apathetic to human suffering and neglecting human capacity to challenge current forms of institutions and bureaucracies. While the ethics of impression management are not broached in this thesis, exploring the implications of impression management can be studied in further research.

Despite criticism, the use of Goffman’s theory on impression management is an imperative part of understanding leadership from an interpretivist point of view. It lays the groundwork for understanding how leadership is actually defined, interpreted and accomplished by leaders, providing a greater understanding of how leadership is actually presented and performed.

### **2.1.3. Gaps and limitations in impression management literature**

Despite the important contributions made from the impression management literature reviewed above, some gaps and limitations remain. None of the research discussed in the above literature review sufficiently captures how leaders in the nonprofit sector, in particular, use impression management. My research addresses this gap and simultaneously problematizes previous research that assumes that definitions of leadership and success can either be taken for granted or else studied and broken down into replicable traits or characteristics. Instead, the concept of leadership in the context of the nonprofit



sector is analyzed in this thesis as a symbolic performance that is individually defined and enacted.

## **2.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The literature review presented above informs the research questions that guided my research. This thesis reveals answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the current challenges and responses in the nonprofit sector? This question gives some context to the study.
2. How are the symbolic representations of leadership, such as the physical appearances of the participants and their office spaces, modified to create impressions?
3. What strategies do the participants apply in their daily work activities in order to present a front of competent leadership?
4. How do the participants reflect on their impression management activities? Do they consider how they alter their physical appearances, speech and behaviour to fit the expectations of different audiences?

The following chapter describes how these research questions are pursued, through a qualitative methodology.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The previous chapter discussed why symbolic interactionism is the theoretical perspective employed in this thesis. It also shows that literature written from this perspective has made a substantial contribution to understanding leadership. The following chapter compares quantitative and qualitative methodologies and explains why qualitative methods were selected for this thesis. Below, the details of the methodology employed in this thesis are described.

#### **3.1. A NOTE ON QUANTITATIVE METHODS IN LEADERSHIP STUDIES**

Researchers who adopt a positivist theoretical approach are most likely to employ quantitative methods in their efforts to conduct reliable, valid and scientifically sound research. The goals of the quantitative researcher are to reveal the “objective” reality and causal laws that exist beyond the presence of the researcher. This kind of ontology goes hand in hand with a dualist and objectivist epistemology in which a researcher maintains a professional distance from his or her subjects (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994; Neuman, 2000). The researcher’s goal is to unveil the “truth” that exists within the social phenomena.

Common forms of quantitative research methods include the administration of surveys or structured interviews within the research designs of experiments with pre-tests, post-tests and control groups or longitudinal studies.

Sampling is often random and experiments and other methods are meant to be constructed with maximum validity and reliability (Neuman, 2000).

### **3.1.1. Quantitative methods**

Quantitative methods are frequently touted as being the most effective choice when attempting to establish cause-and-effect relationships and identifying generalizable findings. Quantitative methods are commonly used in the study of leadership and have yielded significant findings in leadership impression management research. For example, they are commonly employed when attempting to identify widely and commonly used impression management techniques (Falbe and Yukl, 1992; Harris, et al., 2007; Leary, et al., 1986; Shim and Lee, 2001).

There are, in fact, several issues with quantitative methods in leadership research that include the following. Cause-and-effect relationships may be complicated by internal validity problems such as maturation, history, test effects, participant mortality or other similar problems, particularly when the research is experimental or longitudinal (Kalton and Citro, 2000; Menard, 1991). In other words, observed changes in experiments might not be caused by the independent variable, but by aging, larger societal trends or significant historical occurrences. The results may also exclude those who pass away before or during the experiment and participants may respond to questions differently once they have already been tested. Of course, it is important to note that there are also a number of methodological solutions that can help to overcome these weaknesses (Maxim, 1999).

Quantitative researchers that employ a realist ontology and dualist, objectivist epistemology also attempt to perform bias-free, value-neutral research. However, some qualitative researchers argued that research is never value-free, nor can it ever be truly objective (Anastas, 2004; Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994; Berg, 2004; Feyerabend, 2004; Greene, 1994; Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Hammersley, 2004).

When applied to the study of leadership, quantitative research methods are useful, but qualitative research methods may include more of the important experiences, individualized ideas, beliefs and feelings of the participants than quantitative research methods. Qualitative methods may also bring out more of the holistic and complex context of the organizational environment (Obermeyer, 1997; Shaw, 2003). For example, the richness and complexity of relationships and displays of trust may be more easily captured by qualitative methodological techniques, such as participant observation, life-histories, or in-depth interviews.

### **3.2. SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM AND QUALITATIVE METHODS**

Symbolic interactionist theory is fundamentally tied to the use of qualitative methods.<sup>17</sup> Symbolic interactionists contest the existence of an objective reality with universal and causal laws (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994;

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<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that not all qualitative research is written using a symbolic interactionist perspective. Authors including Frieburg and Freiburg, (2004) Light (1998) and Kotter (1990) used qualitative methods but only in an attempt to reveal the common characteristics of successful leaders, an aim that is backed by a positivist ontology. Therefore while qualitative research compliments symbolic interactionism, it is not used exclusively by researchers with such a theoretical orientation.

Prus, 1996; Searle, 2004). Interactionists adopt qualitative methods to unearth the unique, contextualized interpretations and inter-subjective realities that exist within social situations (Greene, 1994). Qualitative methodologies include in-depth, open-ended and semi-structured interviews, naturalistic field research and focus-groups (Berg, 2004; Patton, 1987; Shadish Jr., Cook and Leviton, 1991; Spradley, 1979). Ethnographic research is of fundamental importance in symbolic interactionist research because it assists in satisfying these objectives (Prus, 1996). By engaging in participant observation, researchers may immerse themselves in the day-to-day realities of participants and witness how meaning is created in these situations. In order to fully capture the implications or consequences of the impression management techniques used by the participants or to determine whether or not they are successful, ethnographic research should be employed. However, while participant observation would be ideal in the study of impression management in the context of nonprofit leadership, it is not used in this thesis because of time constraints and lack of sustainable access to the settings. Instead, semi-structured interviews and simple observation are employed, which may lay the groundwork for further research in this area.

### **3.2.1. Limitations of qualitative methods**

In contrast to quantitative methodologies, qualitative methods may arguably provide more holistic, complex and in-depth accounts of a given situation (Patton, 1987). However, the weaknesses of qualitative research are also well known. First of all, it is argued that qualitative research is limited in

its ability to produce generalizable findings (Neuman, 2000). Secondly, qualitative methods may be biased with subjectivity. Researchers may unintentionally influence and pressure participants to respond in certain ways; their presence may skew responses and participants may respond in order to elicit a certain response from the researcher (Neuman, 2000). If the research is deductive, the researcher also has the ability to select only those comments that support his or her hypothesis and highlight these quotations in the research report (Neuman, 2000). They may also select certain participants or samples that are likely to respond in the anticipated and preferred way (Neuman, 2000). Data may be framed in a way that supports the researcher's hypothesis. My research, however, is inductive and is used to explore and gain a better understanding of the use of impression management in nonprofit leadership, rather than to support a hypothesis.

Qualitative researchers can take precautions to produce methodologically sound research (Altheide and Johnson, 1998; Berg, 2004; Neuman, 2000; Spradley, 1979). For example, while some positivists have criticized interpretivist research as being prone to subjectivity and bias, researchers may take steps to either remain neutral or make their bias explicit. For example, researchers may take steps to employ reflexivity (making the perspective of the researcher clear) by offering a "reflexive account" of their research processes. This "reflexive account" may include reflections on their researchers' own background, culture, ideology, gender, life experiences and perspectives that may potentially bias the results (Altheide and Johnson,

1998:292; Greenhalgh, 1997). Prus (1996:20) argued that in participant observation research, the researcher should “develop a thorough appreciation of where and in what ways one’s own experiences may approximate and differ from those of others in the setting.” It is also important for the researcher to report a variety of perspectives, acknowledging the diversity that is encountered in the research (Altheide and Johnson, 1998; Prus, 1996).

There are ways to ensure that the research is ethically sound as well<sup>18</sup>. For example, the researcher may use informed consent or implied consent in order to reduce the risk to participants (Berg, 2004).<sup>19</sup> Researchers should also provide their participants with confidentiality and avoid keeping identifying records or lists of names and identifying features of participants for longer than necessary (Berg, 2004).<sup>20</sup> Precautions to securing confidentiality may also include a statement of confidentiality that reflects an agreement between the participants and researcher (Berg, 2004).

The strengths of qualitative methodologies far outweigh their weaknesses, especially within the domain of leadership research. Conger (1998) argued that qualitative research is much more revealing in leadership studies and is more useful, because quantitative methods neglect how leadership activities are played out, experienced or perceived. Qualitative studies, on the other hand, offered the opportunity to explore the “symbolic dimensions” of

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<sup>18</sup> The proposed research presented here was reviewed and approved by the Office of Human and Animal Research at the University of Waterloo. See **Appendix B** for the Information and Consent Letters.

<sup>19</sup> Informed consent was used in this thesis.

<sup>20</sup> All names have been changed in this thesis.

impression management and symbolic discourse in leadership (Conger, 1998:111). Using qualitative methodologies, leadership may be examined in a way that allows individual interpretations of leadership to arise.

### **3.3. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

In this thesis, I interviewed 19 participants from 11 different nonprofit organizations. A total of 14 of these participants were in Canada and five of them were in Egypt. The cultural differences are not explored, as the purpose of the research was to examine impression management activities performed by leaders, not to determine how culture or structure influences leadership behaviour or impression management. Thus, the interviews were conducted in Egypt as part of a convenience sample, not to make any cross-cultural discoveries. In Canada I interviewed five CEOs (one CEO was also a Co-Founder), four Executive Directors, three Senior Staff members, one Chapter President and one Regional Director. In Egypt I interviewed two CEOs, (one a Founder and another a Co-Founder) two Senior Staff members and one Chapter President. The difference between the CEO and the Executive Director is that, most commonly, the Executive Director is usually in charge of running a local organization or a chapter organization.<sup>21</sup> All but one of the CEOs interviewed in this thesis were responsible for the national office as well as the chapter

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<sup>21</sup> Job titles can be used to reflect professionalism and give meaning to the position. For example, brief email correspondence with an Executive Assistant at a nonprofit organization (conducted when attempting to secure an interview with the Executive Director) revealed to me that the Executive Director recently changed her titled to CEO in order to “give a sense of professionalism and legitimacy within the business community, especially before we embark on our [large fundraising campaign.]”



organizations; therefore the CEOs generally also have similar responsibilities to Executive Directors, but with greater accountability.

A description of the organizations exists in Appendix E. It is important to note that the activities of these organizations, as well as their size and other identifying features, are broadly defined. This is done in order to protect the confidentiality of the leaders, who may otherwise be identified. Furthermore, this thesis does not explore how context serves to shape or influence impression management activities and instead focuses on individual interpretations of meaning. Thus, the profiles found in Appendix E are not provided in order to make any contextual inferences.

The length of the interview depended upon how much time the participant was willing to commit. The interviews averaged one hour in length. Semi-structured interviews were useful in this thesis because of their ability to elicit unanticipated findings (Berg, 2004). The open nature of the semi-structured interview allowed me to use probing to encourage the participants to elaborate on personal experiences. However, my interviews were still guided by the research questions; the similarity between the interviews ensured that the participants' responses could be compared.

Where possible, the interviews took place in person. However, there were four incidents where this was not possible. First, attempts were made to arrange for an in-person interview with Jann, the CEO and Co-Founder of a National Health Charity in Egypt (Organization I). However, because the participant was unavailable during the time that I was in Egypt, she made

arrangements for me to interview two of her senior staff members. I conducted a telephone interview with her from Canada at a later date.

Secondly, an interview took place on the telephone at the National Headquarters of *Organization F* with Jimmy. Due to a miscommunication, the CEO did not show up for the interview; when contacted by his secretary, he agreed to spontaneously participate in a telephone interview instead. This interview lasted for 35 minutes and was not taped. A brief meeting was eventually made with this CEO in person when conducting another interview with a senior staff member in National Headquarters. I had also witnessed a live lecture at the University of Waterloo and had the opportunity to ask the CEO questions on leadership during that time; a publicly accessible video of the CEO's presentation at the World Bank recently was also observed. This offered me an opportunity to conduct some non-obtrusive observation, which aided in observing the participants' physical appearances in a similar fashion to how the other leaders' physical appearances were observed.

Two other telephone interviews took place where the participant was beyond travelling distance; one with Patty in British Columbia and one with Chuck in Quebec. Patty, the participant in British Columbia, is a Chapter President of *Organization F* and was identified by its Co-Founder and Co-CEO as being a leader. Chuck, the participant in Quebec, is the leader of one Canada's largest and most wealthy international development agencies (*Organization D*) and was also observed at the AIDS Conference in Toronto, where he spoke during a skills-building workshop and seminar; this allowed me

to conduct further simple observation. Therefore, although four interviews were not conducted in person, two participants – Jimmy and Chuck - were observed at other times and notes were made regarding their physical appearances.

Two of the participants – Jann and Patty - were never observed, which is a limitation to the study because it resulted in a loss of data that could have otherwise contributed to the findings on physical appearances. However, interviews were conducted at the office where Jann works. This allowed me to observe the physical appearances of her office and staff members.

Despite the fact that physical appearances were not always observed in a desired fashion, (Chuck was observed at a conference and not in his office; Patty and Jann were never observed) there were no other perceived losses to conducting the interviews via telephone. The perceived quality, depth and length of the interviews were approximately the same as those conducted in person. Taping the interviews allowed for transcription and careful analysis and extensive notes were made during and after the interview with Jimmy.

In simple observation, the “first-hand collection of data,” may be used to provide important visual cues about the population of study (Webb, 1966:138). Simple observation may be used in cases where the researcher is visible or is unobserved by the subjects (Webb, 1966). In this thesis, simple observation was performed as observations were made prior, during and after the interview. Prior to the interview, I observed the outside of the office space, the immediate surroundings upon entering, noting for example, the entrance way, the waiting

area, the appearance of the secretary or Executive Assistant and other staff in the office. During the interview I observed the appearance of the leader and his or her office space and where and when possible, I requested a tour of the office following the interview. Notes were made while waiting for the interview to begin and immediately following the interview. Observations included the size of the offices and organizational facilities, literature displayed in waiting areas, the materials used inside and outside the offices (wood, metal, marble, glass,) the furniture, paint colours, the view from windows and awards, posters, paintings and decorations on the walls and shelves. The physical appearances of the leaders, Executive Assistants and other individuals in the office were also carefully observed (aspects of appearances included clothing, jewellery and accessories, make-up and hairstyles were noticed). Notes were made when not in the presence of the participants (prior to the meeting, while waiting for the interview to begin and immediately following the interviews.)

Webb (1966) argued that the presence of the researcher may affect the behaviour of the subjects being studied. While the general appearance of the office may not have been affected by my presence, the appearance of the participant could have been modified in anticipation of the interview. The participants may have selected clothes that were purposefully more modest or more “professional” looking, depending on their interpretations of the situation. To examine clothing choices and other elements of the leaders’ physical appearances in a more realistic way would require participant-observation research.

### 3.4. SAMPLING

A combination of snowball, purposive and convenience sampling was applied (Berg, 2004; Neuman, 2000). Six of the organizations were selected using “arms length” connections through three colleagues. The connections to Canadian leaders were made through a previous employer at *Organization C*, through a colleague from the University of Waterloo who volunteered with *Organization H*, and through a family friend who is currently employed at *Organization E*. The connections to the Egyptian nonprofits were established through a colleague from Oxford Brookes University, where I previously attended school. These colleagues provided a gateway to the CEO or other employees. I knew two of the participants at *Organization C* prior to beginning the research, having worked at *Organization C* for three months in 2002. This means that the extent of “insider” knowledge of the various organizations I encountered was uneven and could give way to possible bias. However, this thesis explores the leadership styles and strategies that the leaders claim to have and does not explore or observe whether these claims match with the leaders behaviour. Thus, my insider knowledge of the leadership styles that were shown by my colleagues at *Organization C* in 2002 was not included in the analysis of the data or apparent in the findings. Furthermore, while colleagues directed me to Organizations E, H, I, J and K, I had minimal knowledge of the organizations prior to conducting the interviews (previous knowledge consisted of the organization’s activities and in the case of *Organization H*, its bureaucratic structure). No knowledge about the leadership styles was obtained

prior to the interview. Thus, the degree of insider knowledge that I had prior to the interviews was limited in all but one case.

Snowball sampling was used in two ways. First, my former employer at *Organization C* referred me to three other leaders at the organization. The CEO at *Organization F* also referred me to two other leaders inside his organization. The CEO at *Organization I* also connected me with two other staff members in the organization. The family friend who worked at *Organization E*, who agreed to be interviewed herself, also led me to the Executive Director. In addition, the participants at Organizations B, C, E and I all mentioned *Organization A*, which gave me the idea to include *Organization A* in the sample.

The Egyptian organizations were selected for convenience purposes, as I was in Egypt in December and January, 2006-2007. The remaining organizations were also selected in order to add some diversity to the sample, although the diversity was somewhat limited. The selection of these organizations was informed by my own knowledge of the nonprofit sector. International development agencies and an HIV/AIDS service organization were selected since there were no such organizations included in the convenience sample. Despite similarity between the organizations (the sample contains four National Health Charities, for example) the organizations sampled tend to vary in terms of goals, size, mission, religious orientation, population served, service, budget and location. Participants of these organizations were contacted by e-mail (**Appendix C**).

This small sample includes a significant amount of diversity. The

organizations profiled in this thesis have different missions, budgets, marketing strategies and staff sizes. The age and years of experience of the participants also varies widely. The approximate age of the participants ranged from 30 to 60 years old. Most of the participants had worked in other areas outside of the nonprofit sector. Some had worked in the private sector while others had worked in the public sector. See **Appendix D** for a description of the approximate size and budget of each organization.

Only formal leaders of the nonprofit organizations were interviewed. Formal leaders of nonprofit organizations are the CEOs, Presidents, Executive Directors and others who have formal and legal obligations to run and manage the organization effectively. However, leadership may take other forms; for example some staff members may take on an informal leadership role by motivating colleagues or encouraging change within the organization (Birchard, 2005). In some cases, informal leaders may wield a great deal of power within the organization or may be responsible for a hefty amount of important work. These leaders may not always be easily identified if they do not have the job title that represents the significance of their work or power. Extensive involvement in the organization through participant observation research could help to identify these informal leaders. Due to time constraints however, this thesis only focuses on formal leaders; these include CEOs and Presidents, Executive Directors, Chapter Presidents/Regional Directors and Senior Staff members with leadership responsibilities.

### 3.5. GATHERING DATA

The research questions were drafted to guide a discussion of how leaders perform impression management activities to achieve their leadership objectives. The nature of the questions was informed by Spradley (1979) who argued that ethnographic questions may be selected from three categories. These include descriptive, structural and contrast questions.<sup>22</sup> The majority of the questions employed in these interviews fell into the first category, especially example questions and experience questions, in which the participants were asked to describe specific examples or incidents that occurred in their daily leadership activities.

When asking descriptive questions, it was important to focus on asking the participants “how” they accomplished their daily tasks and goals, rather than asking questions about “why” they did so. However, structural questions and contrast questions were also used, especially as probes. For example, participants were asked if the strategy or approach used differed depending on the context or person involved. Probing was important to allow personal context and other unexpected themes to emerge. Most of the interviews were taped, with permission, except for those in Egypt, where field notes were taken and then transcribed. Two telephone interviews were taped with permission and

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<sup>22</sup> Descriptive questions are targeted to elicit a sample of the language the participant uses, typically by asking the participant to describe events, activities or objects. Structural questions are designed to elicit information about how the participants organize their knowledge. These questions require the participant to categorize information or make verbal lists of different types of meaningful activities, objects or events. Contrast questions are used to find out what the participants mean by using certain words or phrases. Implicit meaning embedded in language may be extracted using contrast questions. This is done by asking the participant to contrast or explain the differences between objects or events (Spradley, 1979).



transcribed as well. Two others were not recorded because of technical limitations. In these two cases, extensive notes were made during the telephone interviews.

Data was collected until the point of saturation, which is defined by Strauss and Corbin (1998: 212) as the following:

A category is considered *saturated* when no new information seems to emerge during coding, that is, when no new properties, dimensions, conditions, actions/interactions, or consequences are seen in the data... Saturation is more a matter of reaching the point in the research where collecting additional data seems counterproductive.

In this thesis, data was collected until the material began to repeat itself and no new information was being revealed by the interviews. Once this state of repetition emerged, where common themes were clearly identified and no new contributions were being made, it was determined that saturation had been reached. This point was reached after 19 interviews had been conducted.

Following the interviews, data were transcribed verbatim and then categorized by the themes that emerged in my preliminary analysis of the data. The research questions were designed to reveal leaders' definitions of leadership success, their roles, and the strategies they use to manage their daily challenges. The data were not coded by key words or phrases because, as anticipated, the participants used a variety of words, phrases, explanations and personal stories to answer the questions. Open coding was employed as common themes were extracted from the transcripts, which were then categorized thematically and compared. Open coding, or "unrestricted coding of the data" is described by Berg (2004: 281) as entailing a detailed and careful

analysis of the “concepts and categories” embedded in transcripts. Berg (2004: 281) explained that while the initial concepts and categories that are discovered are “entirely tentative,” further questions and answers begin to emerge with the greater analysis of the data, which leads the researcher to “other issues and further questions concerning various conditions, strategies, interactions and consequences of the data.” In this way, the open coding technique was able to reveal significant common themes and trends within the transcripts.

### **3.6. CONCLUSION**

There is plenty of research available on impression management, leadership, the nonprofit sector, or some combination of the above, but there is much less literature available on nonprofit leadership impression management that has been written using a symbolic interactionist perspective. Many authors have written about leadership impression management in for-profit work environments (Anderson, 2005; Elsbach, 2004; Gumer, 1989; Harvey, 2001; Leary, Robertson, Barnes and Miller, 1986; Pacanowsky and Donnell-Trujillo, 1983; Peluchette, Karl and Rust, 2006; Riordan, 1989; Roberts, 2005; Xin, 2004). Some impression management literature has focused on education (Bolino and Turnley, 2003; Haas and Shaffir, 1987); deviant sub-cultures (Sanders, 1989; Wiseman, 1970), law (Hobbs, 2003), athletics (Jones, 2006), crime, (Goodrum and Stafford, 2003) political activity (Brown, 2005; Gillespie, 1990; Klapp, 1964; Sullivan and Masters, 1988), service work (Hochschild, 1983), sales (Schweingruber and Berns, 2003) and health (Greener, 2007). Some of these studies may indirectly apply to the study of nonprofit leadership,

but opportunities to study nonprofit leadership have not been exhausted.

This thesis provides further insight into how nonprofit leaders construct notions of leadership and strive to fulfil their goals by acting, speaking and dressing in ways that possibly elicit desired reactions from staff, donors, volunteers and other stakeholders. This thesis conceptualizes leadership success as a highly symbolic exercise in which leaders modify their behaviour, speech and physical appearances in order to fulfil the expectations of others. In this way, leadership is not an objective achievement but rather an interpretive, intersubjective experience. While this thesis seeks to understand leaders' impression management strategies as many positivist researchers have already done, this approach attempts to elaborate on the dramaturgical character of leadership. This thesis not only contributes to impression management, leadership and organizational theory; it can also potentially assist nonprofit leaders in practical ways. The increased transparency of leaders' impression management strategies yielded by the research findings can potentially help nonprofit leaders with their own impression management skills. While this thesis does not attempt to offer a series of generalizable, successful impression management strategies for leaders to replicate, the findings may increase self-reflexivity on behalf of the reader. Leaders will likely not be able to copy the impression management strategies they read about, but may become more aware of their own impression management strategies and self-presentations. This may allow them to improve on their own impression management. Thus, this thesis may encourage nonprofit leaders to reflect on, build on and try out others'

impression management strategies while uniquely crafting and improving their own.

## **CHAPTER IV:**

### **SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATIONS OF LEADERSHIP**

#### **4.1. INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, a number of important findings are discussed that outline how the symbolic representations of leadership, such as the physical appearances and manner of selected leaders convey important organizational and leadership messages. This chapter responds to the second research question stated in section 2.3, which asks, “how are the symbolic representations of leadership, such as the physical appearances of the participants and their office spaces, modified to make impressions?” The findings presented below are organized into three areas. First, relevant features of the participants’ appearances are discussed, including their choice of clothing, pace and style of speech, facial expressions and body language. Secondly, this chapter looks at the setting and props adopted in the organizations and examines any important organizational messages that are apparent, including messages relating to the role and status of the leader, messages about the organization’s financial wellbeing, mission, values and goals, and the executive’s approach to leadership. Finally, a brief discussion of the symbolic relevance of the Executive Assistant is provided, noting how Executive Assistants may be employed as part of a physical display in order to help distinguish the leader as a special and important individual.

## **4.2. THE FRONT OF THE NONPROFIT LEADER**

Appearances are an important part of impression management and function as meaningful symbols used in the development of a “personal front” (Goffman, 1959:24). The personal front includes the office insignia or rank, clothing, gender, age and racial characteristics, size and looks, posture, speech patterns, facial expressions and other elements of appearance and manner (Goffman, 1959). Elements of the personal front may be modified in order to accomplish three possible goals: 1) to build a shared identity with followers, 2) to separate the leader from the less special, less qualified “other,” thereby drawing attention to the leader’s unique competence and 3) to build trust among stakeholders by creating a professional image.

Even ritualistic greetings, farewells and formalities used during the interviews may be identified as “ceremonial messages,” which are not just engaged in thoughtlessly but rather employed as “sign-vehicles” that are used to convey important meanings and messages about the relationship (Goffman, Goffman, 1967:55; also see Goffman, 1967:41-42 and Goffman, 1971). For example, greetings may denote status, depending on the vocal pitch, tone, body language and mannerisms employed by the actors (Goffman, 1971). Below, the physical appearances of the leader and their office are examined to identify possible impression management strategies.

### **4.2.1. Attire**

There are three different kinds of attire that the participants wore: business-casual, formal and casual. Tina (senior staff) identified the most

common attire worn by the participants as “business-causal.” This outfit typically consists of dress slacks and a sweater or shirt. Although the outfit was similar for both men and women, the women tended to wear sweaters that were either brightly coloured or more muted, taupe coloured, while the men tended to wear darker coloured buttoned down dress-shirts<sup>23</sup>. During the interviews, all of the senior staff, the Executive Directors, the female CEO and the male CEOs of local or regional organizations wore this type of outfit.<sup>24</sup> However, the two male CEOs and one male chapter President wore clothes that were more formal.<sup>25</sup> The male CEOs wore dark-coloured suit jackets, button-down shirts and slacks, and one wore a tie; the male Chapter President wore a full suit. This attire can be interpreted as presenting a professional image that is distinct from other staff members who do not dress in such a formal way. For example, their outfits differed from the receptionists who were dressed in business-casual attire.<sup>26</sup>

One Co-CEO of a local organization (Jimmy) wore business-casual attire at the office and while giving a presentation on leadership at a university;

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<sup>23</sup> Women’s attire differed from men’s in that they used more accessories such as scarves, jewellery and various kinds of footwear. These accessories appeared to be more important to women than to men, although gender differences are not explored in this thesis. However, gender differences in appearances in impression management are explored in previous research (Peluchette, Karl and Rust, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> In Egypt, Annie, a Scottish immigrant, and Liz, an Egyptian woman, wore hijabs. Jann, the CEO and Co-Founder of Organization I, who does not wear a hijab, spoke of the significance of this issue, noting that the decision to wear or not to wear a hijab may convey symbolic meaning about the individual’s social status. Jann noted that all but one woman in the office wore hijabs. While this was not explored in this thesis because of the small sample of female Egyptian participants, the social significance and implicit meanings of the hijab could be explored in future research.

<sup>25</sup> Chuck (CEO) was interviewed by telephone and his appearance was not observed. However, during his attendance at the AIDS conference, he wore a full suit.

<sup>26</sup> Two of the receptionists were male; the others were female. All of these receptionists wore a business-casual outfit.

however, he wore a full suit during his presentation at the World Bank in April, 2007. Since Jimmy is in his early 30s, this is likely to build trust with both groups by demonstrating shared identity with students at the one event and providing a professional and therefore more legitimate image with colleagues at the other event. As Jimmy himself noted, he chooses his clothing depending on his audience. He argued that corporate donors and other professionals expect him to present a professional image, while such an image can cause mistrust among students.

The third type of attire – the casual outfit – was worn by only two of the participants (Debbie, Regional Director, and Joe, Executive Director). For example, when Debbie entered the office, she was wearing a concert t-shirt of a pop artist and jeans. Upon complimenting Debbie on her t-shirt, she explained that she attended his concert the night before, but made no explanation or apologies for her appearance. Contributing to her casual appearance was Debbie's unkept hairstyle. Debbie's hair looked as though it had not been washed in several days. She also had dark roots showing underneath her dyed red hair, which suggested she had not visited a salon in quite some time. Joe donned a similarly casual appearance. He had a shaved head and wore slightly torn jeans and a cotton t-shirt, layered over top of a long-sleeved shirt with an AIDS-related message. When I complimented Joe on his t-shirt, he explained that because he was not feeling well and he wanted to wear comfortable clothes. This statement may have been made in order to excuse or deflect his less-than-professional appearance.



It is not apparent whether or not the participants chose their clothing and hairstyles with the intention to create a desired image. However, both Debbie and Joe wore clothing that matched the appearance of their offices (cluttered, messy) and their approach to leadership, which they explained involves team-building, shared authority, humility and humour. Seen in this context, the outfits they selected seem to affirm these attributes by cultivating a shared-identity with followers, by declining to differentiate themselves as members of authority by wearing power-suits or other forms of professional or expensive attire.

#### **4.2.2. Speech patterns**

There was very little consistency found between the participants' speech patterns. For example, while many of the leaders were very articulate and used technical or professional terminology, not all of them spoke with articulacy and fluidity.<sup>27</sup> Joe (Executive Director) in particular stumbled over his words in a clumsy fashion. He stuttered, used simple language and non-technical (lay) terminology, paused before answering and interrupted himself by making "umm" and "hmm" sounds and often confused his words. He often backtracked, changed his mind mid-sentence and spoke in incomplete sentences. For example, Joe attempted to name some of the important qualities of a leader in the following convoluted way:

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<sup>27</sup> This includes words and phrases commonly used and accepted in the sectors where the participants work. Patty described this as "using the language of the organization." Using the proper technical or professional language in interviews seemed very important to several of the leaders, including Gene, Fred, Chuck, Diana and Melissa, who corrected my terminology on at least one occasion. The importance of using specialized, technical language to gain authority and respect is explored by Hilgartner (2000).

I think that one of the things a great leader does – you have to have a knowledge about a lot of – a little but a lotta – a lotta knowledge about – ah, no, a little bit of knowledge about lot of things maybe. And I shouldn't deflate that I don't have a lot of knowledge about particular things, but I think the ability to have you know, various exper - human experiences that help you be a leader.

This differed from most of the participants who expressed themselves succinctly and with clarity, avoided “word whiskers” such as “hmm, um, er, uh, like, mmhmm” and used technical language. There were also differences among the participants in terms of the decibel level of speaking, but this was not consistent with the participants’ job titles, gender or other features. For example, Joan, the CEO of the wealthiest and most prominent organization included in the sample, was particularly quiet and shy. She gave short, concise answers and took lengthy pauses before answering. In contrast, Diana, the Executive Director of a much smaller chapter organization, was loud and vocal. The participants’ pace of speaking also appeared to vary randomly; while some of the participants (most noticeably Diana, Executive Director; Chuck, CEO; and Robert, CEO and Founder) appeared somewhat impatient by speaking with a fast pace, smiling infrequently and ending the interview abruptly or motioning to end the interview with a glance to a watch or abbreviated answers, most of the participants were happy to talk leisurely. They asked questions about the study, gave lengthy answers to the questions, provided me with their full attention and made comments such as, “does that answer your question?” and then continuing to add to the answer.

Some of the participants demonstrated their sense of humour by

laughing. While some participants smiled and laughed more than others, laughter was usually contained and displayed at socially-acceptable moments, for example, after making a joke. Laughter also appeared to be used strategically, as the participants would sometimes laugh immediately after stating that they have a sense of humour. These participants may have been attempting to demonstrate that they have a sense of humour after claiming that a sense of humour is very important to leadership. For example, Gene (CEO) laughed as he stated, “I think you need to have a sense of humour in what you do.”

A significant trend noted was the participants’ tendency to interrupt me. For example, when I asked questions or asked for further clarification, many of the participants did not wait until I finished the question or comment was finished before they proceeded to reply. Although some did this more than others, there were no apparent distinguishable characteristics between those who did this versus those who did not. Women and men, CEOs and Executive Directors all interrupted me. While the senior staff members seemed less likely to do so, the small sample size makes it impossible to distinguish whether this is a significant trend or not, as only five senior staff members were interviewed. The interruption, however, can be interpreted as a symbolic action, through which the participants attempted to convey their importance and value as leaders by interrupting me. As Schimid Mast (2001) argued, time talked in group settings is a valid indicator of dominance that is frequently used by researchers.

### 4.2.3. Body language

Goffman (1971:74-76) commented on the symbolic and dramaturgical nature of greetings, or “supportive interchanges,” as they provide a gateway to displaying respect and opening channels for further communication and contact.

Goffman (1971:79) discussed the meaning of greetings:

[They] involve a set of behavioural displays: Their glances look for a moment in communion, eyes glisten, smiling expressions of social recognition are conveyed, and a note of pleasure is briefly sustained... A verbal salutation is likely to be provided along with a term of address. When possible, embracing hand shaking, and other bodily contracting may occur.

These interchanges and rituals characterize my interactions with all of the participants. More important however, is that greetings “affirm a differential allocation of status, specifically attesting that the subordinate is willing to keep his place” (Goffman, 1971). The differential allocation of status is recognized as the leaders typically (although not always) sat behind their office desk. Those who did not sit directly behind their desk sat at a round-table next to me (in one case, this round-table was situated within the participant’s office; in the other cases, the round-table was situated in a board room where the door was closed). In one other case, we met on a weekend at a public space that was convenient for both myself and the participant (on a boat on the Nile River in Cairo). Their choice to sit behind their desk could be interpreted in a variety of ways. It is possible, for example that sitting behind the desk may infer a statement of power (Macionis and Gerber, 1999:45). However, this is not necessarily the case. For example, Fred (CEO) chose to sit behind his desk while I sat at a much smaller round-table across from his

desk in the office. His choice to sit behind his desk may have been made strategically to convey his power, or simply to give me more personal space and avoid making me feel uncomfortable by sitting too close. It may also have been to provide me with more space in which to spread out my papers and tape recorder. Alternatively, it may simply have been a choice borne out of his routine.

The participants took the lead in offering greetings and good-byes. For example, I frequently waited in a reception area before the participants were ready to see me. When the participants made their first appearance, they sometimes interrupted existing conversations I was having with other staff members in the office. They would then lead me to their office and suggest I sit down. When wrapping up the conversation, they typically made statements such as, “Was that helpful?” or “Okay, was that good?” These statements helped to signify that they were finished speaking and that the meeting was coming to a close. They also often stood up, led me to the door, or led me out of the office.

Apart from the tendency to interrupt me and take the lead in offering greetings, there were few consistent findings among the participants' speech patterns and body language. All of the participants used different forms of body posture, (for example, some of the participants leaned forward to speak to me while others remained more stiff and reserved; some of the participants stretched their arms over their heads while others mostly kept their hands on their laps or on their desks). The participants also engaged in varying levels of

eye contact (Robert, CEO and Founder in particular used much less eye contact than the other Canadian and Egyptian participants) and provided me with different degrees of personal space (for example, it was earlier stated that Fred, CEO, chose to seat me at a separate table while he sat behind his desk, while Gene (CEO) sat beside me at a small-roundtable that was situated in his office, adjacent from his desk). However, no significant trends were noticed among participants and no distinguishing characteristics were noticed between the participants who used particular types of body language. The meanings of uses of body language are also unclear due to the small sample size. As will be shown, a great deal more consistency was found in the interview responses.

### **4.3. THE APPEARANCE OF THE OFFICE**

The office may function as a front and back stage, offering leaders a private space in which to protect and maintain their images. It may also be used to denote role and status or deliver important organizational and leadership messages.

#### **4.3.1. Role and status**

Employees other than the CEO, Executive Director, or in some cases, senior staff members, were almost always situated in cubicles, created by wall-dividers. This was true for all organizations that were observed, both small and large, except for the one Egyptian organization that was observed. The cubicle does not yield total privacy for back stage behaviour in most instances. Instead, cubicle wall-dividers function as “boundary markers” or perhaps more accurately, “spacers,” symbolically designating private space and control over

this space (Goffman, 1971: 42). In situations where cubicles were used, the leader of the organization always had walls that could speculatively yield him or her the privacy he or she needed to maintain the myth of competence. The extra privacy that is provided to leaders may also help to designate their special role and status in the organization (Hatch, 1992).

The location of the office of the Executive Director or CEO may physically as well as symbolically separate him or her from the rest of the staff, thereby expressing his or her distinctness from others. Because the leader's position hinges on his or her ability to demonstrate ways in which he or she is uniquely suited to the position, occupational space can be used to signify a special position. The physical and symbolic separation of the staff and leader may, in this way, play a symbolic role in maintaining authority.

Goffman (1971) explained that, as individuals increase in rank and power, so do their bodily territories and boundaries; their need, expectation and deservedness of privacy and control over their bodies increases. Thus, the office can be used to separate and connote difference, specialness, as well as simultaneously protecting the sanctity of the competent image. Similarly, the function of the office and the executive assistant can help to build a "status shield," both by creating the illusion of importance and by protecting and maintaining this cloak from becoming transparent (Goodrum and Stafford, 2003:188).

This is most clearly identified by the designation of space; consistently, the top leaders were awarded the largest offices with windows and the best

views afforded by the building (for example, revealing city landmarks or greenery). While employees who worked in the chapter organizations sat in cubicles divided by room-separators, which provided them with symbolic privacy and a division of space and property, the Executive Directors and CEOs were always provided with walls.<sup>28</sup> This can be used to signify importance and rank, while simultaneously providing a shield to the cloak of competence.

Props can be used to signify the leader's importance; for example, Steven (Chapter President) used a bell to signify to the other members when a meeting is about to commence and that he requires silence before he speaks. When he rang the bell, a hush fell over the conference room, and he introduced the topics for discussion. The CEOs used props that were located in their private offices. Objects that were held exclusively by the CEOs included a mini-fridge and a personal round-table. For example, when I interviewed Gene (CEO), he led me into his office and suggested we sit down at the "round table." His office had an impressive view, large glass windows and a small round table in addition to his large desk, which is extremely neat and organized. He offered me coffee, tea or water – a very common thing to do, as many of the participants I visited engaged me in this custom. However, the quality of the beverages varied depending on the organization. For example, when meeting with Courtney in a chapter office of *Organization C*, I was offered coffee, but the machine was not properly working, and neither fresh cream nor milk was

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<sup>28</sup> One interview was performed outside of the office, in a coffee shop (on a boat) on the Nile river in Cairo, Egypt. Another was conducted in a conference room in a hotel, prior to the meeting, which was also observed. In two other instances, the only contact I had with the participants was through the telephone. Thus, in a total of four circumstances, I was not witness to the observation of office settings.



available, only whitener. Instead of bottled water, they had water from the tap. In contrast, when I met with Gene, he offered me a drink and then went to his mini-fridge that sat beside his desk and pulled out two bottles of water. This CEO had access to props that others did not have.

### **4.3.2. Organizational messages**

Office space can deliver organizational messages that have to do with the organization's values and goals. It can provide information about the organization's financial status, mission and corporate culture. There are two styles of office settings that are revealed in this data: *the humble office* (typically the office of the chapter or local or regional organization<sup>29</sup>) and *the professional office* (typically the national office).

#### **4.3.2.1. The humble office**

As is stated in the Profile of Participants (**Appendix D**), *Organization I* is situated in Cairo, Egypt. When I entered the building, I had a reaction that I commonly experienced in Cairo: fear and discomfort. In this case, this is mostly because the decrepit building looked like a place where illegal activity might occur; buildings like this in Canada only exist in the very worst parts of cities. I felt hesitant to enter, but my male Egyptian companion ushered me along. The entrance to the building resembled a cave, with a dark tunnel-like entrance that leads to the elevator. The entrance was not properly lit, and consisted of bare cement walls that were dark grey, chipping and falling apart.

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<sup>29</sup> The "local or regional organizations" include organizations that are based in a specific local or regional area and do not have chapters.

Of course, my companion was perfectly comfortable with these surroundings, because they are not unusual for Cairo. He volunteered an excuse for the surroundings, that, either honest or dishonest, is frequently provided by both him and a tour guide to excuse the poor conditions of places in Egypt: “They are renovating here.” When we got off the elevator, we entered into a modest office building that is much more typical of a nonprofit in Canada; it was clean and had many of the typical components to a setting in a Canadian nonprofit, including a reception area with a desk for a secretary and some chairs that formed a waiting area, posters containing the organizations messages on the walls and a boardroom that contained a round-table, an easel with markers and a display of brochures (mostly in Arabic but a few in English). Some women, all wearing western clothing (business-casual attire consisting of dress pants and sweaters) and hijabs, were eating in a small lunchroom. Senior staff member (Annie) approached us and led us to a boardroom with a large table. The boardroom looked the same as most boardrooms in Canada. In fact, apart from the decrepit appearance of the outside of the building, the inside of the organization appeared very similar to the other “humble office” settings that are described below.

The space at *Organization F*, a local organization, looked very modest and cost-conserving. The couch I sat on appeared to be second hand. The ceiling and some of the walls were unfinished. The ceiling was made of wood panelling, and visible wires were attached. The walls were unfinished and consisted of naked bricks. The lights were fairly dim and the office felt quite

chilly – this might have been an effort to keep costs down on both heat and electricity. There were a few pieces of African art hanging on the wall and a wood giraffe that sat on the front desk; this was probably from Africa, picked up during a staff member’s fieldwork and reflected the mission of the international development organization, which focuses on African poverty. Most of the office space was divided by cubicles or room-separators. A female staff member who was very casually dressed in jeans and sneakers led me to a private room where Jimmy (Co-CEO) was on the phone. The private room resembled a typical boardroom in that it contained a round-table, enough chairs for approximately ten people and a telephone. It was unclear if the organization’s décor was intended to project an image of frugality.

*Organization G* was set up in a slightly different fashion than others, but many elements were very similar. In the entrance there stood a small desk where a male secretary was seated. There was a display with a number of brochures and information about HIV/AIDS near the entrance; the display of organizational literature near the entrance was common to the setting of Canadian nonprofits.<sup>30</sup> Past the entranceway, into the centre of the building, there were a number of couches, with a coffee maker and kitchenette; it appeared to be a makeshift lounge. When Joe (Executive Director) greeted me and we walked into his office, I noticed immediately that his space was cluttered while numerous empty, dirty coffee mugs sat on the desk.

It is important to note that the meanings of the settings may differ,

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<sup>30</sup> The secretary for this organization is male, which is unique to all but one of the other organizations.

depending on the organization. For example, I asked Jann, the Executive Director and founder of Organization I, “Do you feel that a professional appearance is very important?” She responded by arguing that appearances and the presentation of professionalism are very important; it is possible then that the outside presentation of the building is due to lack of funds and available space in Cairo. It may also be less important in Cairo, since buildings that look decrepit are not necessarily stigmatized, as most parts of Cairo are old and appear unclean. However, the other two organizations mentioned above are much more representative of the other chapter and local organizations. The executives may purposefully create settings that convey humility and frugality while simultaneously attempting to convey their professionalism and organizational missions.

#### **4.3.2.2. The professional office**

Many of the participants discussed the importance of looking “professional.” Roberts (2005: 687) defined a professional image as the summation of “key constituents’ perceptions of one’s competence and character.” Roberts defined “professionalism” as “the extent to which one identifies with his or her internal or external clients” and “can be evidenced by an individual’s ability to meet normative expectations by effectively providing a given service to clients and colleagues” (Roberts, 2005: 687). Some of the participants appeared to use their settings in order to demonstrate their professionalism, or their ability to meet normative expectations and satisfy expectations about their organization. This goal is pursued by displaying

symbols that convey the organization's longevity, previous success and financial security. How this is done is explained in the following paragraphs; as will be seen, the décor of the office (which includes plaques, expensive materials, awards and certificates, paint colours and product displays) can be used to demonstrate these qualities. The three national offices I visited were much more professional looking and appeared to demonstrate financial wellbeing. The look of these offices was in sharp contrast to the humble appearances of the chapter and local and regional organizations. *Organization B*, for example, is situated in a large building that houses many other offices, including many government offices. Outside the building, the organization's name and emblem was carved in marble on a large plaque. The heavy giant glass doors at the front of the building were difficult to open. Marble and glass dominated the inside of the building as well. In the front of the building there was a giant marble desk, where there was a concierge. Even the outsides of the escalators were made of marble. Behind the concierge and in between the two narrow sets of escalators were large rows of exotic plants, which were real, not fake. This setting, emulated by the other two national offices, provided a much more professional look by demonstrating financial security.

*The professional offices* were accessed through large glass or heavy wooden doors. These offices were much larger than the chapter offices. In fact, I lost my way twice when visiting *Organization A* and had to ask for assistance to find my way out of the maze-like office.

While it is common among all of the organizations to have a display of

organizational literature near the front entrance, the national offices were characterized by more professional displays of promotional materials and symbols that were used to convey the organization's mission. For example, *Organization B* had an elaborate display of various products that are used in the organization's cause-related marketing campaigns. The products sat on glass shelves in an alcove in the wall. This conveyed the organization's connection to powerful corporate partnerships and its emphasis on branded products. *Organization C* had various framed awards and certificates hanging in the entrance and along the hall, celebrating the success of the organization. The walls of *Organization A* were painted in the organization's two-tone branded colour scheme, and *Organization C* had one large wall painted in the organization's signature colour. *Organization A* also had promotional literature displayed on a glass table in a waiting room that was decorated by framed awards and posters, similar to *Organization C*. The promotional literature, which included glossy, coloured booklets, was provided in French and English, illustrating that this was a national organization that must translate its documents into both of the official languages (and can afford to do so). These decorative elements consistently presented a display of organizational symbols that far surpassed the meek displays of cheap, photocopied paper brochures that the smaller organizations depended on to deliver organizational messages.

### **4.3.3. Financial and leadership messages**

The observations described above suggest that organizational spaces can be used to convey various organizational messages. Office space can be used as

a form of organizational impression management, delivering ideal messages about the organization's finances, approach to corporate culture, identity, professionalism and leadership strategies. *The humble offices* may appear modest because the organization does not have the funds available for more opulent or comfortable surroundings or because they wish to demonstrate frugality and sound spending practices. For example, two of the participants at *Organization C* discussed, during the interviews, the importance of the appearance of the office and how it can affect donors' perceptions of the organization's spending activities, thereby demonstrating the need to display professionalism and thriftiness or financial trustworthiness simultaneously:

That's been one of my big concerns with this new office. You want people to feel confident that we're not spending too much money on administration and housing, that money's going towards the programs they want to support. You never want to look like a bank or a mutual fund company with their fancy offices and tons of things. When we had this space we had a big plaque made up, "this space was made possible by the generous donation of..." And I always make a point of saying, if [visitors] notice something, "we had a donor that was able to help us out with that." You want people to feel positive about the experience, and that's through making sure the money's going to the proper place, and that they feel good about giving (Tina, Senior Staff).

*Organization C* had frequent visitors, since it offered ongoing support to volunteer fundraisers, onsite medical services and a drop-in library. The participant above recognized that the appearance of the office could deliver important financial messages to visiting donors, clients and volunteers. Since moving into a new, more "professional" office, the participant worried that the

office may cause visitors to question how well the money is being spent.<sup>31</sup> It was important for the organization to provide a “positive” experience to donors and volunteers and to convince them that the organization has reputable management and spending practices. While these participants identified professionalism as being important, an elaborate display of wealth can elicit undesired effects; Tina in particular noted that striking the right balance between professionalism and frugality is a “fine line.” However, Tina attempted to mediate this potential problem herself by “casually” reminding visitors that the new office space, the computers and other expensive items are provided by corporate or private donors.

What kind of financial information is displayed may depend on whether the office is home to a national, chapter, or local or regional organization. For example, while it may be important for the national office to present an image of professionalism, since they host meetings with powerful and wealthy private and corporate donors, the chapter offices may be more inclined to give off the impression to an audience of financial need to smaller donors and clients. Goffman (1959:38) argued that individuals sometimes present themselves as more needy, weak, or helpless than they really are in order to achieve desired ends (for example to avoid completing an unpleasant task). Becker and Martin (1995:190) documented this, finding that employees sometimes intentionally “look bad” in front of their peers, supervisors, or occasionally, subordinates at work. Similarly, some organizations may purposefully select modest

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<sup>31</sup> Tina (senior staff) used word, “professional” to describe the new office.



surroundings in order to give the impression that the organization is more in need of funds than they actually are, or to demonstrate frugality in an effort to gain trust and approval from visiting donors or volunteers.

The appearance of the office can also deliver messages about the organization's mission, goals and values. These can be conveyed through brochures, artwork, paint colours and displays. Key elements of the organization's brand, such as logos and colour schemes, may be reflected throughout the offices. For example, it was earlier mentioned that the office walls of *Organization A* and *B* were painted in the organizations' signature colours. *Organization B*'s commitment to cause-related marketing and their interest in developing targeted relationships with corporations were also portrayed in an elaborate display of branded products. Such decorative elements illustrated the organizations' approaches to building internal brand awareness and internal corporate culture; executives may strive to create a brand that employees buy into and reiterate this message throughout the office (Freiburg and Freiburg, 1996). This may be intended in order to increase staff commitment, stimulate creativity or vitality or influence employee behaviour in a variety of ways (Alvesson and Berg, 1992; Berg and Kreiner, 1992; Freiburg and Freiburg, 1996). As Berg and Kreiner (1992:46) stated, "behaviour in organizations may be symbolically conditioned by certain cues in the physical settings." For example, staff commitment "seems to be linked to the identification with... professional or corporate values and norms" which can be displayed and communicated through visual displays, such as those found in the

lobby at *Organization B* (Alvesson and Berg, 1992:141).

The presentation of branded products and relationships with corporate partners also reveals messages about the organization's values and position towards charitable giving and consumerism. Gene, the CEO of *Organization B*, made a decision to pursue what he calls "cause-related marketing." The use of cause-related marketing has been heavily criticized, since there are many potentially negative implications to attaching the organization's name and cause to a corporate entity (Berglind and Nakata, 2005; Dart, 2004b). For example, nonprofits that engage in cause-related marketing may provide support to corporations that have unethical business practices or provide products that are harmful to humans, animals or the environment (Berglind and Nakata, 2005; Dart, 2004b). Furthermore, the effects of cause-related marketing may have a negative long-term effect on philanthropy by tying charitable giving to a consumer interest. Berglind and Nakata (2005: 452) wrote:

Cause-related marketing may diminish the compunction of individuals to act magnanimously toward others without expectation of return. CRM may work counter to self-sacrificing sentiments by substituting consumption for morality.

Gene admitted that he receives criticism about his choice to pursue cause-related marketing but defends himself in the interview:

We have dollars that are created as a result of the assiduity of the organization or the cause – [corporate] partners make a commitment and it either comes [in the form of] products or some kind of sponsorship. We do well with that. That's often criticized, by people thinking, well gee, there's a commercial string attached to it. But you know what, if we get a percentage of the sales of the product, and the sponsor gets out some [health] message, all of that is great, as long as they don't tie us up with requirements about the revenue, [and the funds] can be taken and used where it's needed.

By proudly displaying the corporate partners' logos and products in the foyer, so that is immediately visible to all visitors, Gene made a statement about the values of the organization and its attitude towards corporate partnerships. The organization's relationships with corporate sponsors are evident in the displays that show off the products. However, the tension in Gene's decision was clear in that he paused and spoke more slowly when I asked him to discuss his decision to use social-marketing.<sup>32</sup> He also explained, after some probing, that the organization obtains criticism from various groups regarding this (and other decisions that are made) and that he attempts to counter this by issuing public statements or responding to newspaper editorials by delivering the "facts."<sup>33</sup>

While the smaller, chapter organizations made attempts to convey branded images through simple posters and brochures, they lacked the more professional branding initiatives that are demonstrated in the larger national offices. For example, the décor in the chapter organizations only delivered the most basic and pertinent information about the organization in a minimalist fashion. Posters and brochures stated, in essence, "This is who we are and what we do." In comparison, the national offices provided a much more professional image than the other organizations; they were not just communicating information about the organization to visitors, they were conveying a brand.

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<sup>32</sup> Gene corrected my terminology by stating that the proper word was "cause-related marketing."

<sup>33</sup> Claiming to refute criticism by providing the public with "the facts" was popular among the participants; four other participants also claimed to do so. This may reinforce the importance of using "scientific" and "technical" language in order to gain authority and respect (Hilgartner, 2000).

The appearance of the office may also convey leadership messages. Organizational appearances that portray humility or professionalism may reflect the executive's approach to leadership. For example, the "makeshift lounge" and humble office of *Organization G* reflected the Executive Director's claim to cultivate an environment where staff is encouraged to share their personal feelings and experiences. This participant described a leadership style in which he encourages personal growth and allows the "whole person" to flourish at work:

I think one of the things we do here, that has built a great team, is ensuring people have a place to talk about how they are at work. And that's not about group therapy or anything like that, but that's about talking about the things that are affecting us. There's an understanding that we're people. You're a person here (Joe, Executive Director).

This participant's emphasis on shared understanding, mutual listening, and discussing personal issues and feelings is reflected in his organizational setting. Although the participant argued that it's "not about group therapy," the "makeshift lounge" resembled a setting in which group therapy sessions might take place. Thus, while props like the mini-fridge and the round-table can be used to convey an image of specialness and props can also be used to convey quite different types of messages, such as a commitment to servant and/or participative leadership. The physical layout of the organization can be used to display the executive's commitment to team-building, a flat hierarchical structure, shared-responsibility and other elements of a servant leadership style that is commonly described by the participants.

One participant who integrated a description of the physical lay-out of

the organization into his discussion of leadership strategies made this point clear:

We did a cultural revolution within [our organization] in the mid-90s, where we did away with four-layers of organization, did away with departmental divisions, the standard divisions between personnel and finance. We did away with titles, we did away with offices. Everybody worked in an open area where they got natural sunlight and could overhear everyone. We constructed the whole organization in units rather than departments – a unit being from 6 – 14 people. We weren't entirely flat. Each unit had a leader. But, it was not a command and control position. It was supposed to be a position where they led by example. There was kind of a peer style of leadership (Chuck, CEO).

The participant above described his “peer-style of leadership” (characteristic of participative management, whose principles are also found in the servant leadership approach as described by Greenleaf, 1977) as being interchangeable with the office setting. When describing his leadership style, he simultaneously communicated the importance of modifying the setting to make it more conducive to sharing and team-building. The participants desired to design their office space in ways that reflected or reinforced their leadership style and organizational goals.<sup>34</sup>

The appearance of the office can therefore be a powerful vehicle for communicating organizational messages to both internal staff and visitors; this includes information on financial wellbeing, mission statements, values and goals. These messages may impact donors' perceptions of the organization's spending habits and may influence donors' willingness to give. The appearance of the office may also be used to motivate and integrate staff into a

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<sup>34</sup> This reinforced the finding that open office spaces (captured well in Chuck's description) can increase teamwork, interpersonal communication and interaction among staff (Hatch, 1992).

cohesive corporate culture. Lastly, the organizational space may be used to reflect or reinforce a particular style of leadership, namely a participative approach that includes team-building, open-communication, and flat hierarchical structures.

#### **4.4. THE EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT**

In *Symbolic Leaders*, Klapp (1964) described an occasion when Albert Einstein was witnessed to be quietly enjoying an ice cream cone. Klapp (1964: 205) wrote about this incident:

An important executive could not afford to be caught in that kind of pose. The executive must guard his role by avoiding small tasks; he must always seem to be preoccupied by major problems, leaving the little ones to subordinates... this is the dramatic side of “delegation of responsibility” and “span of control:” the more important a man, the greater the issues he should seem to have on his mind.

While in many small organizations leaders may be contacted directly, Executive Assistants are an essential part of making contact with the CEOs of the national organizations. In this thesis, the Executive Assistants were either contacted directly, or they responded to the emails sent to the CEOs. The Executive Assistants played a very particular role in helping to manage the appearance of importance in the leader.

The Executive Assistant participated in dramatizing the importance of the nonprofit leader, and his or her degree of responsibility and importance. In this way, the Executive Assistant helped to present the leader as too important and busy to take on more minute tasks, such as personally responding to emails or setting up meetings. Furthermore, the Executive Assistant helped to cultivate

the “specialness” of the leader, as the executives appeared to be the only people, within the nonprofits I visited, to be granted their own special assistants. For example, all of the CEOs and Presidents of the national health charities in Canada had Executive Assistants, while the senior staff members and Executive Directors of chapter or local or regional organizations did not.

The Executive Assistant is described here as a kind of prop. As Messinger, Sampson and Towne (1990:77) state, “other persons may be regarded as ‘props’ to be maneuvered in the interests of the ‘show’ at hand.” Previous research explored this concept by considering the symbolic role that individuals such as patients and their visitors, wives, presidents, mothers and children play in impression management activities. For example, some mothers have used their well-groomed children to help manage impressions of successful motherhood (Collett, 2005). Similarly, the Executive Assistants were integrated, along with non-human props, into a physical display of leadership.

#### **4.5. CONCLUSION**

Appearances are a critical part of impression management. This chapter answered the second research question by discussing how the participants modify their physical appearances to make impressions. The research explored how the participants select clothing to present themselves as professional or humble leaders, in order to create a shared identity with followers or other audiences. By attempting to appear professional, the leaders may select clothes such as power suits or other formal attire that symbolize their capability, dependability and skill in leadership roles and attempt to build trust with

stakeholders such as corporate sponsors while displaying their position as authority-figures. By wearing more casual outfits, the leaders may attempt to display their humility and benevolence and affinity for servant leadership as they attempt to build trust with stakeholders such as staff, volunteers, or students. Equally important, however, is the appearance of the office space. The office can function as both “back” and “front stage”, where the presentation of leadership is portrayed and protected. The office is not just a space in which to work, but provides an avenue for executives to impart important messages to actors inside and outside the organization. The observations presented here suggest that organizational settings may be used to communicate messages to clients or stakeholders about spending and management practices, conveying financial frugality, professionalism, good management or financial need. They may also be used to create a sense of internal corporate culture by reiterating mission statements or conveying messages about preferred leadership styles or organizational values. Settings and props may be used to convey the leaders’ unique role and status as one of special importance; alternatively, office spaces may be designed to display leadership strategies. Finally, the Executive Assistant may play a symbolic role in by designating the leader as one who is unique, special and important. Thus, the analysis here suggested that the setting of the organization and the appearance of the leader may be critical to impression management by yielding symbolically important messages.



# **CHAPTER V**

## **IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES OF NONPROFIT LEADERS**

### **5.1. INTRODUCTION**

Chapter IV responded to research question #2 by demonstrating the symbolic importance of physical appearances, which appear to be crafted and modified in order to provide the leaders and their organizations with desired images, including images of professionalism and humility. While physical appearances are an important part of impression management, the participants used many other strategies to display competence during the interview. This chapter answers the third research question in section 2.3, which asks, “what strategies do the participants apply in their daily work activities in order to present a front of competent leadership?” The strategies involve laying claim to special knowledge, experience, skills and traits that they feel are important for effective leaders to embody. The leaders did this by describing leadership practices and behaving during the interview in ways that reflect these idealized traits.

By describing their exemplary attributes and approach to leadership, the leaders commonly displayed two leadership images. The first image of leadership includes attempts to give the impression of benevolence and humility, characteristic of servant leadership. The participants claimed to act like “mentors”, rather than figures of authority, by listening, offering opportunities for two-way communication and involving staff feedback into the

functioning of the organization.<sup>35</sup> The participants also attempted to paint themselves as modest and humble during the interviews. The second leadership image, “the boss,” includes impression management tactics that are used to portray professionalism, authority, and specialness. Finally, leaders engaged in face-work when discussing weaknesses, limitations, mistakes and embarrassing moments in ways that help to maintain consistency in the actor’s presentation of self before disparate audiences (Goffman, 1967). While the participants seemed to oscillate between the two leadership images, they attempt to justify or downplay any inconsistencies. The following chapter explores how the participants used impression management during the interview in order to present these two leadership types and compensate for their inconsistencies.

## **5.2. SERVANT LEADERSHIP**

### **5.2.1. “The mentor:” Displaying benevolence and humility**

The participants employed impression management during the interviews to present their leadership strategies and abilities in an ideal way. The participants used impression management by describing a servant leadership style, which entails benevolence, a commitment to open communication, honesty, shared-responsibility and decision-making, mentorship and team-building (Citrin and Smith, 2003). They downplayed their authority and hesitated to take credit for the organization’s success during the

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<sup>35</sup> The participants used the term “mentor” repeatedly. This term captures one of the primary goals of the servant leader, which is to see the potential for growth in followers and to encourage, guide, teach and inspire them. This allows the average person to ultimately achieve great things and even become servant leaders themselves (Greenleaf, 1977).

interview. The participants who appeared to favour servant leadership claimed to prioritize the wellbeing of staff and volunteers by respecting their need for personal fulfilment and integrating their feedback into the organization's daily activities. They claimed to focus on building leaders inside the organization, by encouraging individual learning and using "open-door policies" that facilitated two-way communication. One participant summed up this attitude towards leadership in the following way:

I would say [the essential qualities of a good leader are] humility, being encouraging, instilling leadership qualities in others, putting others first, motivating, promoting team work to have everyone work together and working towards a common vision (Patty, Chapter President).

This quotation exemplifies the typical way in which the participants attempted to paint themselves in self-flattering ways that emphasize their benevolent qualities. The participants often spoke about their role in developing vision, but more importantly, developing vision in a context that emphasizes teams and shared ownership and "authorship" in the organization's vision and goals. The participants frequently spoke of the importance of having staff "buy-in" to the vision, which they develop through mutual goal setting. This commonly has to do with involving staff feedback in projects, group consultation, and teamwork. As the quotations below show, the participants usually used the interviews as an opportunity to emphasize the contributions of others, while simultaneously denying the ability of a single leader to have a significant impact on the organization's success. The following quotation provides an example of how the participants downplayed their authority and emphasized the importance of recognizing the need for shared-responsibility in

the organization:

As long as you've got someone in a leadership position who is going to accept the fact that they're not the boss and can't just make things happen, the success or failure depends on having the right people in all of the surrounding areas. And in our case, part of being the right person is not just about having skills and expertise, it's also about having the personal style that recognizes the need to consult and to work with people and build little teams (Joan, CEO).

In the above quotations, the participants seemed to present themselves as humble and benevolent servant leaders, who modestly downplayed their own role in directing the organization. Instead, they emphasized the need to build teams and gently guide those who need help.

As the participants frequently discussed the importance of sharing authority and decision-making, they simultaneously demonstrated their dislike for "being the boss." The participants commonly made statements such as, "I'm a reluctant leader" and "I don't want to be a leader" and "I really don't want to be the boss." When I made inquiries about job titles, the participants also downplayed the meaning of their elaborate titles by saying things such as, "it sounds better than it is!" or, "it's just a fancy word for fundraising." Instead of identifying themselves as authority figures or even as critical to the success of the organization, the participants most frequently identified their role as being a mentor to others; this is a key characteristic of servant leadership and involves recognizing the potential in others and building on these strengths. For example, Jimmy (Co-CEO) argued that the leader plays a role in the overall success of the organization, but mainly by mentoring, motivating and strengthening leadership qualities in others. Thus, he stated that his main job in

the organization is acting as a role model, providing the context for leadership qualities to emerge in other individuals in the organization. This CEO claimed to act as a “thought partner to help them learn and grow,” instead of being someone who delivers orders, or even advice. He claimed that he does not always “push ideas on staff” because “they need to learn in their own way.” Rather than always trying to move someone in the right direction, he lets staff proceed with their own ideas in order to make mistakes and have an opportunity to learn from them.

Other participants reiterated these ideas. They argued that they do not have all the know-how necessary to successfully run an organization on their own; instead, they believed their main responsibilities are to inspire, train, empower and motivate others. As such, the participants described their leadership role as one that entails modelling and mentoring:

Where I'm at now, is trying to empower the other Directors. So, helping them to step into an understanding of the role of leadership. So, modelling by my example. A great leader is always training other great leaders (Joe, Executive Director).

Mentoring typically involves seeing hidden potential in employees and finding ways to encourage staff, support them through challenges, and provide them with avenues to learn and grow. By downplaying autocratic behaviour and emphasizing their abilities as a “coach,” the participants attempted to present themselves as humble, competent and benevolent servant leaders who give their employees’ needs priority. One leader (Patty, Chapter President) recognized this style as being called “servant leadership.”

The leaders described their commitment to open-communication,

listening and caring attitudes towards employees with reference made to “open-door policies.” The “open door,” discussed below, serves as a powerful metaphor in the attempt to demonstrate a servant leadership style, in which the leader is committed to the needs, concerns and interests of the staff and volunteers:

I book one on one time with them and they can talk about whatever they want. We do that on a fairly regular basis. It’s just giving them that hour of time to be able to chat about anything they want, outside of formally planned meetings. You know even though occasionally my door is closed, it’s really open to them (Gene, CEO).

I have an open door policy. [The staff] can come in at any moment and I can get constantly interrupted. But they know they are very much supported. And I will deal with the issue right away. So that’s one of the things they can count on (Melissa, Executive Director).

The leaders consistently stressed the importance of two-way communication and effective listening strategies, both of which are characteristic of servant leadership. The “open-door policy” is not only a literal act, it is also a symbolic one expressing the leader’s dedication to the interests of staff and a commitment to sharing responsibility, enabling a team-based and participative leadership style to emerge. Those who did not mention the “open-door” still attempt to present themselves as good listeners, genuinely interested in the wellbeing of the staff and other stakeholders:

I think you gotta be a good listener. I think you gotta listen to what they’re saying and understand what they’re saying. Understand where they need your help – sometimes with my staff, it’s just listening. (Fred, CEO).

Above, the participant described himself as an excellent listener who is dedicated to mentoring his staff. By discussing “open-door policies” and

dedication to listening to employees' concerns, the participants described their commitment to a servant leadership approach. Whether the leaders actually engaged in such behaviour or just wished to appear benevolent during the interview is not addressed in this thesis. However, it is important to note that rather than acting out of the "kindness of their hearts" leaders may actually engage in such behaviour for organizational purposes; as substantial literature has suggested, servant leadership may lead to enhanced organizational effectiveness (Bakke, 2005; Gumer, 1989; Hollander and Offermann, 1990; Kotler and Lee, 2005.) If employees perceive their employer to be benevolent and trustworthy, they may be more willing to cooperate with him or her. Thus, leaders may perform the role of the servant leader in order to build trust and obedience.

Corresponding with and listening to staff and involving their feedback into the organization represents one possible avenue for attempting to influence and secure commitment from staff and other internal stakeholders. The reasons for why the participants decide to display a servant leadership style during the interview may be found in the context of the nonprofit sector itself. Blumer (1969) argued that individuals act based on the meaning a situation has for them; their definition of the situation informs their decisions on how to act and behave. Based on the data acquired during the interview, the participants seemed to define good leadership as activities that entail benevolence and humility. This could be due to the nature of the nonprofit sector, which depends heavily on volunteers, who come to work for personal satisfaction and non-

financial rewards. Volunteers are not bound by legal or financial consequences and their commitment hinges upon their ability to enjoy their volunteer experiences and the company of those in the organization. Similarly, employees working in the nonprofit sector may be paid less than in the corporate sector. This may help to explain why the participants emphasize servant leadership in their interviews; staff and volunteer commitment may be contingent upon positive affiliation with the leader and with the organizational experience in general. This may also be why the nonprofit sector is much more likely than the for-profit sector to include the input of its non-managerial staff into the daily and weekly planning of the organization and incorporate their feedback into decision-making processes (Saunders, 2004).

Leaders may feel compelled to engage in such impression management strategies in order to maintain the dedication of staff or volunteers whose commitment depends on a rewarding work environment. This point is suggested by the quotations below:

Volunteers come to us for a reason [to gain skills, enjoy a social experience and make a difference]. And that's why I always think that support for people [is crucial.] Volunteers are giving up their time, their energy. And it's not just about what we need. You want them to have a good experience (Tina, Senior Staff).

When you work in the for-profit sector, the people who do the things for you are your employees, and when you want to motivate them you have a list of rewards and punishments. Volunteers are motivated by totally different things (Diana, Senior Staff.)

The commitment of volunteers is won by providing them with non-



financial rewards, such as a fulfilling work experience.<sup>36</sup> However, the participants also explained that, because employees may take a pay-cut to work in the nonprofit sector, they too must be motivated by non-financial rewards. This pushed the leaders to motivate employees by offering a form of servant leadership that supports personal development:

It's not just, you [needing] to be here nine to five. It's about finding your own place here as well, and a sense of fulfilment – not just the monetary stuff. And I think that's why people come to nonprofit organizations and why they stay in nonprofit organizations, because of how we attempt to include people (Joe, Executive Director).

This helps to explain how the participants might lay emphasis upon humility, benevolence and an inclusive, participative approach to leadership; these traits and strategies seemed to be valued in the nonprofit sector, where the personal satisfaction of its volunteers, donors and employees are essential to maintaining commitment.

### **5.2.2. Servant leadership and discipline**

Face-work can be defined as maintaining the ongoing presentation of self by actively working to prevent and recover from mistakes. As Goffman explained, “face-work serves to counteract ‘incidents’ – that is, events whose effective symbolic implications threaten face” (Goffman, 1967:12). Goffman (1967:10) suggested that the actor is “expected to go to certain lengths to save the feelings and the face of others present, and is expected to do this willingly and spontaneously because of emotional identification with the others and with

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<sup>36</sup> For an ethnographic account examining the impact of monetary and nonmonetary meanings of work on organizational performance, please see Schweingruber and Berns, 2003.

their feelings.” Goffman noted that individuals commonly adopt face-work when delivering criticism:

He [sic] employs courtesies, making slight modifications of his demands on or appraisals of the others so that they will be able to define the situation as one in which their self-respect is not threatened. In making a belittling demand upon the others, or in imputing uncomplimentary attributes to them, he [sic] may employ a joking manner, allowing them to take the line that they are good sports, able to relax from their ordinary standards of pride and honour” (Goffman, 1967:17).

The participants appeared to engage in similar types of face-work as they claimed to preserve the face of their staff members when mistakes are made. They claimed to do so by handling the matters privately; as one participant said, “you can’t shoot anybody down in front of a group.” Similarly, the participants stated that they attempt to deliver criticism in a sensitive fashion. Using the servant leadership approach, the participants often claimed to exhibit benevolence when deploying discipline. This included speaking to staff members privately when they made mistakes to avoid embarrassment as well as softening negative criticism with positive feedback. By claiming to do so, they seemed to emphasize their benevolence and sensitivity by abiding by the common social norms and courtesies identified by Goffman (1967). For example, the participants quoted below purportedly attempted to avoid embarrassing staff when delivering criticism:

My management team all have their strengths and you have to try to pull their strengths out. Try to work with them on the places where they’re less strong. Do your best to try not to embarrass anybody when they say something stupid. But make them understand later on in private that maybe it was stupid. (Fred, CEO).

[When someone is doing something wrong] I speak to them one on one.

First, I encourage them, I tell them what they've done well, and then what they need to work on – in a gentle, friendly manner. I tell them what I think they can improve on and how – and give them examples, suggestions. And I finish with encouragement. Offer ways and methods to improve and ask if they want to talk about it and consult together to change (Patty, Chapter President).

The participants frequently claimed to avoid using “punishment” and heavy-handed discipline, opting to emphasize the learning experience offered from the mistake. The participant cited below claimed that he avoids chastising the individual in front of others and discusses these issues privately instead. He also used the example as a success story, which offers proof that his staff trusts him and takes advantage of his “open-door policy.” It is therefore an opportunity for him to describe his servant leadership style during the interview:

So, somebody didn't think that they necessarily represented themselves in that meeting as well as they could have. We chatted about it briefly among the team, and then I just said to them, “well let's move on team, we'll come back to it”. And they came in [to my office] and said, ‘oh I realize I did this or that, and here's why.’ And I said, ‘okay, now what are we going to do to have a different behaviour next time’ and we talked about it, and it was fine. It worked out well. They took the initiative [to speak to me]. Which is great! Which meant that they trust me (Gene, CEO).

This quotation is representative of the other participants who purportedly “save the feelings and face” of staff by delivering criticism in a benevolent way (Goffman,1967:10). Their presents the participants as sensitive and compassionate leaders. The participants also commonly claimed to acknowledge their own mistakes and learn from their errors, setting a good example for their staff. For example, the participants below described the importance of acknowledging mistakes and apologizing:

You'll always make mistakes. There is nobody in this world who

won't make a mistake from time to time. The critical thing is that you recognize there's a problem and figure out what you need to do to fix it and just get on with it. If something has gone wrong, you need to be able to acknowledge it. But at the same time, you need to understand what you're going to do to make it better.  
(Joan, CEO).

We mess up. And [others] will point that out. You know, you apologize and say sorry and try to fix it and not be defensive. Sometimes you just have to say, "I'm really sorry you feel this way and I wish there was something I could do, or something more I could do in the future."  
(Tina, Senior Staff).

Although the participants tried to present themselves as compassionate mentors rather than as figures of authority, they also described moments when they felt they must display authority, responsibility and specialness. The participants often described moments in which they felt they must act more professionally. Some examples of such occasions, described below, would seem to contradict the participants' claims to benevolence, humility and servant leadership. The participants then can be seen to struggle with this ambiguity between facets of the role of the leader.

### **5.3. PROFESSIONALISM**

#### **5.3.1. "The boss:" Displaying authority and specialness**

##### **5.3.1.1. Displaying authority**

The "boss" is a phrase used in this thesis to capture the image of authority and specialness that is sometimes displayed by the participants. Despite frequently downplaying their own authority and making references to team-building, mentoring and shared decision-making, the participants

occasionally admitted that sometimes they have to step in and “be the boss.” They also, from time to time, pointed out the importance of their own leadership, which contradicts some of their earlier claims. However, when participants spoke of such occasions, they often attempted to justify the reasons for their authority or contextualized their descriptions in ways that emphasized or directed attention to ostensibly preferred traits such as humility. They simultaneously highlighted their prominent roles as leaders in the organizations, even while discussing their efforts to build teams and flatten hierarchies. The comments below suggest that the participants attempted to justify the fact that they must occasionally act in an authoritarian way:

You have to be a team player, but you have to realize that you have to be the one sometimes to give direction. I think sometimes you have to do that, because your company, or you yourself have placed yourself in a position of authority (Courtney, Executive Director).

I think that the ability to make tough decisions is critical. Sometimes it's more important that they respect you than that they like you. Part of the difference between being a leader and a manager to me, is at times, you just have to step forward in front of the army. And when you're stepping forward, if you don't have their respect, they're not following you. And they can think you're the nicest person in the world, but that doesn't necessarily mean they think you're making the right decision. They may not actually want to have you over for dinner. But boy, they respect you enough that they're going to follow you (Diana, Executive Director).

The above two examples revealed moments when the participants acknowledged that they are not always consistent in their presentations. They realized that there may be moments when their claims to servant leadership may not be carried out, when autocratic or “boss-like” behaviour must be employed. Perhaps in an attempt to reconcile the tension between these two

facets of their roles, the participants attempted to either justify or contextualize such incidents. By concluding that they adopt authoritarian behaviour for the benefit of the organization, the participants were able to maintain their core image of benevolence and reconcile any potential inconsistencies. At other times, the participants argued that they must behave more like “the boss” when it is “expected” or “demanded” from particular stakeholders. For example, the participant below reported that she presents herself differently to the Board than she does before her staff:

When I present to the Board, I’m going to present differently than what I present to the people I know really well. Because they’re really hoping that this organization’s being professionally run. At a staff meeting, I’m probably not going to be taking the same approach. Because I don’t want them to feel that I’m at the top, I’m in control! That’s not what I want. But when I’m at the board, I’m their only employee. And they really hope that everybody else is okay because they only have me (Diana, Executive Director).

Diana claimed to act more authoritatively in order to gain the trust and confidence of her board members. However, she justified this change in behaviour by claiming that the Board needs to see such behaviour coming from their “only employee.” In this context, Diana maintained her image of a servant leader by acting in the best interests of the Board and the organization. She also claimed to act this way out of necessity, pursuing a more inclusive leadership style whenever possible. However, despite attempts to justify or contextualize their expressions of authority, there are several examples where leaders contradicted their humble presentations by displaying pride in their leadership capabilities, if not arrogance, while perhaps exaggerating the value they added to the organization:

Now that I am in charge, the staff feels that the good old days are not here [sic]. I have a history with the agency and I know they weren't the good old days. But I demand people to work. If you come to work you better [work]. Because I come here and I don't leave unless my work is done. If I can do it, why can't you? I have high standards. That's why I will always have a job. Because people can recognize these things in you. See, I told you, I know everything! (Melissa, Executive Director).

Sometimes you know you have to be assertive about dealing with things. While working for the Ontario government [sic] I dealt with a bunch of right wing guys that were very aggressive, smart and they respected people who were confident, who knew what they were doing. I remember one minister who I worked with, whose relationship with my predecessor was very poor. They couldn't work together. And the first time we met, I said, "we are going to have a better relationship [sic]. I know what I'm doing. I've got a lot of experience. We're going to make it work." And we did. And he sensed right away that I knew what I was talking about, that I was confident (Fred, CEO).

In the examples illustrated above, the participants described themselves in ways that are somewhat inconsistent with "the mentor" leadership image. Instead of conveying humility, these participants used examples to illustrate the importance of their strong leadership qualities. Melissa boasted about her high standards, while Fred described an incident where his reportedly superior leadership and interpersonal skills enabled him to cooperate with challenging personalities and find success where others had failed. One participant (Chuck, CEO) even credited himself and another NGO leader as stimulating "tremendous spurts of growth and creativity" in international development in the 1990s, drastically changing the way international development is delivered from Canada. This kind of bragging made the participants' claims to humility appear dubious and their presentations inconsistent. This suggests that presentations are not always static and that impression management is not

always a flawless display, but rather a series of performances fraught with contradiction and tension.

#### **5.3.1.2. Displaying specialness**

In addition to conveying an image of professionalism and competence, the participants occasionally attempt to display specialness. The literature review in this thesis revealed that it is important for individuals in the medical or legal professions to provide the illusion of specialness, to separate the qualified from the non-qualified. While performing the “mentor” role during the interview, the participants attempted to downplay their specialness and appear humble instead. However, in other moments, they made attempts to draw clear distinctions between themselves and less-qualified “others.” In such instances, the participants contradicted their presentation of humility and shared-identity with followers by describing the ways in which they are uniquely suited for the job. They accomplished this by engaging in the technique that was earlier identified as “self-promotion”, discussing the special knowledge and experience that qualifies them as leaders, and by utilizing “other-demotion” or comparing themselves to less-qualified individuals (Bolino and Turnley, 2003; Harvey, 2001; Harris, Kacmar, Zivnuska and Shaw, 2007; Turnley and Bolino, 2001).

The participants self-promoted and displayed knowledge in several ways. First, they agreed to participate in an interview about leadership where they self-identified as leaders with valuable knowledge to share. Secondly, the leaders professed their knowledge on leadership, the nonprofit sector and other topics. For example, one Egyptian participant (Robert, CEO) proudly



proclaimed his knowledge of CIDA, evaluation systems, and international development. When I mentioned CIDA, he interrupted me to provide a very long and detailed description of what CIDA does and the proposal and evaluation process they require. The lecture was not prompted by any question in the interview (the participant was not being quizzed on his knowledge of CIDA). His remarks appeared to be somewhat extraneous, unrelated to the context of the interview and were overly-detailed. It appeared as though this participant proclaimed this vast knowledge of CIDA in order to appear smart and well informed. In fact, this same participant also professed to have more knowledge and capability than the combined multi-lateral aid agencies and NGOs currently involved in Darfur, including the United Nations and USAID.<sup>37</sup>

At times, the participants professed to have knowledge on a wide array of areas outside their designated area of expertise; for example, one participant asks me what discipline I am studying and then, when I said “Sociology,” quickly interrupted me to tell me what she knows and thinks about the discipline; another participant asked about my trip to the Middle East and then interrupted me to offer her conclusions on my preliminary thoughts and findings on this thesis. She also commented on the current environment and context of nonprofit organizations in the Middle East, a part of the world that she has never visited or researched herself. This participant also identified and analysed my own strengths as a leader. Another participant used the last 15 minutes of our interview to provide me with unsolicited career advice.

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<sup>37</sup> US Agency for International Development.

By making claims to possess special knowledge, whether in their own field of specialization or other topics, the participants attempted to display competency and justify their revered position as leader by distinguishing themselves from others who may not have access to such knowledge or awareness. To avoid any breach in this display of competency, the participants made a distinction between their level of knowledge and my own and did so by correcting my terminology, providing me with advice or commenting on my field of study.

Self-awareness is another professed form of knowledge. In fact, more often than not, the leaders credited their success with their ability to learn and grow from experiences and mistakes, rather than on-the-job training or formal education:

A leader cannot be someone who doesn't integrate lessons of their own life into their own experience. In fact, if you haven't done your personal work, or met challenges, or figured out what your own coping skills are, where your own resiliency is, then you're probably not going to have an ability to see that and comprehend that and bring out the best in others (Joe, Executive Director).

Most participants did not refer to specific training or education, but instead referred to “learning by doing” and making mistakes. However, past work experience was repeatedly mentioned when discussing success. For example, one CEO (Fred) discussed his previous work experiences in government at length, pointing out that he had about 31 years experience working in the government. In addition to pointing out this information, as a basis for his role credibility, he discussed how his earlier work experience had made him right for his current job. For example, he argued that his knowledge

of the provincial system gives him a great deal of useful knowledge that is incredibly beneficial in his role as CEO. Other participants made references to their past work experiences as well:

I didn't come here without some knowledge. I had worked in a nonprofit organization for 15 years and I understood how funders and how nonprofits operate. I have worked at nonprofits and I understand how the nonprofit industry works, its reputations and struggles, insecurities (Melissa, Executive Director).

I tend to be in leadership positions whenever opportunities arise. I've always been involved in student organizations, like planning stuff. In junior high school, in university, I've had major leadership roles in residence. I was a residence advisor, for a year (Pete, Senior Staff).

In the examples provided above, descriptions of past experiences appear to draw attention to the fact that the participants have “unique” qualifications that make them right for the job. These qualifications and previous experiences helped to defend their title as “leader.” By describing their special experience, knowledge and traits that make them “uniquely” right for the job, the participants attempted to set themselves apart from other, “less-qualified,” staff. Declaring their unique specialness is not unlike the activities that young medical students engage in when they make their transformation to an elevated status (Haas and Shaffir, 1987).

In addition to using self-promotion to highlight their special abilities and achievements, the participants occasionally used other-demotion in order to differentiate themselves from others. They used other-demotion by discussing the weaknesses of competitors.<sup>38</sup> For example, one Egyptian participant claimed

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<sup>38</sup> In all cases but one, the competitor was the same. The CEO of this competitor organization (Organization A) was interviewed.

that most female clients are quite comfortable at her organization, as opposed to [Competitor 1], which she identifies as “unpleasant” for clients. When I asked her to elaborate, she said that the organization is “poor, dirty and embarrassing.” She described the staff at [Competitor 1] as being “quiet about the issues and don't spend enough time with their patients,” and asserted that, for this reason, the patients are pleasantly surprised when they arrive at her organization. This participant also pointed to [another Competitor] who does not partner with the government. She called this competitor “anti-government” and suggested that because of their decision to resist governmental regulations, they face many more challenges in running their organization. In contrast, the participant argued that her organization is more successful because they recognize the importance of developing partnerships with the government and abiding by their rules, no matter how restrictive or difficult. Another participant from this organization echoed these sentiments:

There's a lot of women that come to us because there was someone that they know that came to us first – and got treated well. Government hospitals are sometimes very unpleasant places to go. The staff in the hospital, because they're tremendously overworked and have a huge number of patients – and have patients that are difficult to be with – some aren't clean, some are ignorant, some are impatient – they're not always nice to the patient. And this is one thing that I've gotten feedback on – when we sent patients to the [Competitor 1] for additional care, the feedback came that at our office they were treated so nicely and that our office was clean, and a nice place to go. So that's very important when you're dealing with this particular level of society [the poor]. Because they're not used to being treated nice (Jann, CEO).

The above participant argued that her organization is much cleaner and offers the clients better services than the competitor organizations and institutions. This participant used other-demotion to highlight the strengths of

her leadership and her organization's success, while making comparisons to other less-successful organizations. Some of the Canadian participants used other-demotion as well, complaining about the Canadian version of [Competitor 1] – a national nonprofit organization that enjoys a great deal of financial success and longevity. For example, one participant complained about [Competitor 1], calling them “hogs.” She argued that, “it is well known” that each of the charities gets their own “month” to fundraise, but that [Competitor 1] did not respect these rules and instead will do “whatever they want.” As a consequence, her own organization suffered that month because the competitor's major fundraising event occurs at the same time. She then stated, “but if everyone else tries to do something during the month that is designated for [Competitor 1], they will react.”

By criticizing other organizations and institutions, the participants drew attention to their own good judgement, leadership skills and organizational success, thus resulting in varying forms of self and organizational-promotion. It appeared that by laying claim to special knowledge and experience, including self-knowledge, drawing attention to past success and simultaneously criticizing other organizations or leaders, the participants sought to identify themselves as special and “uniquely” qualified for their position as leader in the organization. In these instances, participants contradicted earlier presentations of humility by emphasizing their competence and personal abilities. Instead of cultivating a shared-identity with followers, participants used self-promotion to draw attention to their differences.

## 5.4. MANAGING MISTAKES

The participants strove to produce a seamless display of unflinching competency in their leadership roles, but this is not always possible. They took measures to conceal or prevent themselves from making mistakes but errors are still sometimes made. When mishaps do occur, actors must engage in face work to repair the situation. Through this process, actors cope with embarrassment by pretending that the incidents have not really occurred or by taking other measures to neutralize the impact of such situations (Goffman, 1959).

Leaders might be expected to deny their mistakes during the interview; by participating in defensive measures such as “avoidance” (Goffman, 1967:16) or “information control” (Goffman, 1959:141) the leaders could simply avoid answering questions or deny that such incidents occur at all. However, with the exception of one leader who refused to describe his personal weaknesses or limitations, all of the other leaders readily addressed questions about their mistakes, weaknesses, limitations and embarrassing moments. Perhaps because of the risk of causing scepticism through exaggerated self-promotion, leaders often admitted to making mistakes.

The participants’ discussion of mistakes followed an interesting pattern that involved 1) admitting that they make mistakes and exaggerating the frequency of their mistakes with self-deprecating humour, 2) describing a memorable event in which they made a mistake, and 3) justifying the incident or using it to illuminate their positive qualities. The participants therefore used the opportunity to discuss previous mistakes as a chance to prove or reiterate the

positive characteristics they claimed to have. For example, the participants displayed their humility and benevolence, especially their ability to listen, react kindly when others make mistakes, (including making efforts to “save face,”) apologize and learn from their errors. Thus, the participants used the discussion of mistakes to emphasize positive traits and/or point out others’ flaws, drawing attention to their own competence. This pattern is seen in the following responses to questions about mistakes.

[Laughs!] How much time do you have? Let’s see – I can use the example of not seeing the need for me to be more present to a new staff person and in my rush to accomplish things, not realize that this person needs a little bit more guidance. And, in my urgency and desire to change the world, sometimes I forget I need to listen to this person. [Laughs!] You need to concentrate on the big things, like leading an organization in profound way, because that’s what you’re supposed to do [sic]. But it’s also about hearing, what is it that they need from me, and how can I provide that? And what is mine to provide, and how can I direct them in other ways? You’re not the one that can provide everything to that person either. So, what is it that I can have them seek out in other peers? (Joe, Executive Director).

Above, this participant first laughed about the fact that he has made many mistakes, but his approach changed when he described a mistake in greater detail. His tone changed as he emphasized how he became preoccupied with the “important” goals and responsibilities of leading the organization in a “profound way” and trying to “change the world.” He also argued that at times, it is not his responsibility to be the main source of support to the staff; instead, it is important for them to seek outside help. This helped to direct attention to the leader’s larger, more “important” goals and to establish him as a very important, busy man, which justified why he was not able to help this staff member. Other

participants provided similar examples:

Oh God yeah, I make mistakes all the time. [Laughs] You wanna know the biggest mistake I've made? Our numbers were hugely down last year. And I was more on top of the staff people than I would normally be. I was taking my boss' lead on how he stays on top of people. I had been on this staff person's back. And for a few days I was really busy and wasn't in touch with them. And even in just that few days the numbers started picking up. And I sent [the staff member] an email saying, "doesn't that just kind of go to show that if I stay off your back, you actually get your job done." So, had I followed my initial instincts, I think I would have been better off. And now, the numbers are double what they were at this time last year. (Debbie, Regional Director).

At first, the participant above laughed about her mistakes, but then argued that her biggest mistake occurred because she did not listen to her instincts and instead, followed her boss' lead. This invites the reader to suppose that Debbie has excellent leadership qualities and achieves a great deal of success when she is allowed to be true to herself. From Debbie's statements, one would be encouraged to believe that the leadership skills of her boss are inferior to Debbie's. Thus, after displaying humility in her opening statement, she then showed off her competency by using self-promotion and other-demotion. Below, a final example serves to illustrate this pattern:

I can probably give you about 35 examples! [Laughs!] There's lots of them. I made a mistake in hiring. We hired the wrong person. And that really impacted the team, so the next time around, the team members were involved in the hiring process. The [staff] came to me [and complained.] And I said, "okay, what do you want to do, what are your suggestions for me? That [decision I made] was wrong, so now you're going to help me get it right, so would you like to serve on the hiring committee for this next move?" And it worked out well. (Gene, CEO).

The above example also illustrates the aforementioned pattern. The participant displayed humility in admitting he makes mistakes. Following that,



he used the example of a poor hiring decision to demonstrate that his team trusts him and takes advantage of his “open-door policy” by approaching him with their problems. This example could also have been used to show that he was able to problem-solve by involving other staff in future decisions in hiring, consistent with his servant leadership approach. By using the word, “we” and telling the staff that they must help him “get it right” he also spreads the blame around to show that it is not just his fault, but probably a decision that involved more than one person.

The participants also commonly argued that they use mistakes as opportunities for growth. Mistakes were therefore framed in the interview as incidents that give way to positive outcomes. For example, Steven (Chapter President) said that his most embarrassing moment was when he finally managed to have a government minister give a guest lecture and only four people from his organization attended. He then put a positive spin on this incident by telling me that 40 or more older people from organization’s sister organization showed up, so the absence was not so noticeable. He also claimed that he has tried to learn from this, for example, by offering the members greater opportunity to communicate their own ideas. That way, he argued, they can provide feedback on what their interests are and they will be more likely to participate in future events. By responding to my question in this fashion, the participant presented a solution to the embarrassing moment, attempting to demonstrate that he has learned from the mistake, and simultaneously downplay the negative impact of the error. This may serve to remove some of the stigma

from the incident and simultaneously highlight the participants' humility, flexibility, adaptability and ability to problem-solve.

#### **5.4.1. Managing Emotions**

Goffman (1959:56) discussed the fact that, being human, we must contend with constantly varying and changing moods, emotions and impulses that change from moment to moment. However, in order for actors to maintain face, they must restrict and control these impulses, communicating emotion in socially acceptable ways (Goffman, 1959; 1967). The term, "emotion work" is relevant in this discussion. "Emotion work" is defined by Hochschild (1983:7) as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display." For example, human emotions such as anger, sadness, sympathy, empathy and sexual attraction must often be concealed or exaggerated in order to maintain order and control in the work environment (Hochschild, 1983). Thus, actors must manage their feelings and present them in socially desirable ways that fit and help to maintain their desired fronts. The participants in this thesis normally attempted to control their emotions in order to give a "perfectly homogeneous performance at every appointed time" (Goffman, 1959:56). However, the leaders admitted that sometimes their moods and emotional impulses get the better of them as they experience emotional outbursts. Failure to manage emotions in ways that are consistent with desired impressions were a frequent source of the participants' embarrassing moments. The participants defined losing control over their emotions as particularly embarrassing:

The other mistake I made was, I did piss off our Executive Director. I really went head to head with her on a personnel issue that really

angered her. And in hindsight, I probably should have taken a different approach. I wish that I hadn't acted angrily. I still think that I had a message that I had to convey, and I still believe in the actions that I took, but I should have handled it better. Not raised my voice. And it was my anger in my voice more than anything. And she felt I was being very disrespectful. And unprofessional. Which, you know when you respond in anger, it probably is unprofessional (Debbie, *Organization C*).

The participant above identified losing control of her emotions and responding in anger as an embarrassing and regretful moment. Another participant (Joan, CEO) described her "major embarrassing moment" as one that was broadcasted on national TV; this entailed an incident in which a popular TV host interviewed her for "90 minutes in a very hostile way" and only showed her for "30 seconds of airtime" which did not feature flattering clips. In trying to understand exactly how and why this participant found the situation embarrassing, I asked her, "were you displaying anger at the time?" Her response to this question is quite telling:

No! No, no, no, no. I was just trying to say - I don't know what I was trying to say. I was thinking, in my mind, 'she isn't rational.' That was probably showing. And I was just trying to give [the interviewer] something that she wanted (Joan, Executive Director).

This participant insisted that she was not displaying anger and she denied the negative implications from this incident. Instead, she defended her behaviour by arguing that the host was interviewing her in an "irrational" and "confusing" manner. She also attempted to put a positive spin on the incident by arguing that everyone makes mistakes and that learning from the experience is crucial:

You know one of my philosophies is that you'll always make mistakes. There is nobody in this world who won't make a mistake from time to

time. And there are no organizations that won't make a mistake from time to time. The critical thing is that you recognize it and what do you do about it. Figuring out what you need to do to fix it, and, just getting on with it (Joan, CEO).

Above, the participant attempted to neutralize the embarrassment that could arise from the fact that she temporarily lost control over her emotions and facial displays. However, it is clear, when viewing the embarrassing incident (available as a video file on the internet) that this participant struggled with her answers while attempting to project an image of confidence in front of the interviewer. This participant's embarrassing moment is easy to identify as an experience in "losing face" as she was unable to control her body and engage in enough "face-saving" behaviour to prevent physical signs of embarrassment from showing. Several of the physical displays of embarrassment as identified by Goffman (1967) were visible in the video. These included, "blushing, fumbling, stuttering, quavering speech or breaking of voice, sweating, blanching, and hesitating" (Goffman 1967:97). Goffman (1967:100) described the physical display of embarrassment as someone who is temporarily unable to "mobilize his muscular and intellectual resources for the task at hand" and "cannot volunteer a response to those around him that will allow them to sustain the conversation smoothly."<sup>39</sup> Despite Joan's attempts to give satisfactory answers to the tough questions, she was unable to provide responses to sustain her desired impressions; she hesitated, blushed, stammered, and found herself unable to give quick, smart, concise answers that would make her and the organization look competent in the television interview. As such, this

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<sup>39</sup> Also see Jones (2006) for an example of losing and saving face.

participant failed to present an image of a competent leader running an effective, professional organization. Goffman (1967:101-2) wrote about the meaning of such a failure: “to appear flustered, in our society at least, is considered evidence of weakness, inferiority, low status, moral guilt, defeat and other unenviable attributes.” Of course, this has serious implications for a leader who depends on his or her competent and trustworthy image to run an organization. Maintaining composure is of the essence and it is no surprise that this participant named this particular incident as one that caused her great embarrassment.

Clearly, leaders sometimes make mistakes or find themselves in embarrassing situations. However, the leaders cope with potentially discrediting or embarrassing situations by defining previous mistakes and embarrassing moments as learning experiences rather than incidents that discredit existing presentations. They claimed to handle mistakes with grace by acknowledging their errors and making apologies. Perhaps in an attempt to demonstrate this ability, they readily admitted their capacity to make mistakes. However, when describing mistakes, the participants consistently justified their errors by explaining why the mistakes were not really their fault. Using these strategies, the participants attempted to neutralize potentially risky and discrediting discussions; in this way, they attempted to maintain consistency in their leadership performances.

## 5.5. CONCLUSION

This thesis helped to reveal how leadership in the nonprofit sector is defined and performed by the participants. This chapter provided a response to research question #3, which asked what strategies the participants apply in order to display competent leadership. The leaders interviewed in this thesis attempted to display competence in their leadership roles by emphasizing their benevolence and humility during the interviews. However, they also sometimes shifted from their “mentor” image by describing moments where they step in to “be the boss” and convey authority. The participants also contradicted their humble images by using self-promotion and exaggerating or highlighting their strong leadership capabilities, valuable experience and unique knowledge. Pragmatic performances became especially clear in the discussions about mistakes and embarrassing moments. While the participants attempted to appear humble by admitting and laughing about their mistakes, they also justified their mistakes and used the discussion as an opportunity to reiterate positive traits. Thus, the participants often exhibited slightly contradictory behaviour, illustrating the point that impression management is not always effective and can sometimes elicit undesired interpretations.

Turnley and Bolino (2001:351) explained that “for every desired image that is sought... there is a corresponding undesired image that is risked... A person engaging in self-promotion hopes to come across as competent; however, he or she risks coming across as conceited instead.” By overstating one’s competence, others can become sceptical of the believability in the

performance, thus as Harvey (2004:257) explained, leaders find themselves in a “self-promoter’s paradox.” Therefore, to avoid the potential negative consequences of appearing overly confident, the participants admitted to making mistakes and having weaknesses. However, the participants also attempted to justify their mistakes in order to avoid contradicting earlier claims to competency. The performances are not always seamless but reveal complexity, and at times, contradictory behaviour. Thus, the complexities and inconsistencies found in these displays of leadership affirm Goffman’s (1959:75) conclusions on impression management:

A status, a position, a social place is not a material thing, to be possessed and then displayed; it is a pattern of appropriate conduct, coherent, embellished and well articulated. Performed with ease or clumsiness, awareness or not, guile or good faith, it is none the less something that must be enacted and portrayed, something that must be realized.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **SELF REFLEXIVITY OF THE NONPROFIT LEADER**

#### **6.1. INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter addressed how the participants engaged in impression management during the interviews in order to appear, at times, as competent servant leaders and “boss-like” at other times. While discussing their personal leadership styles, the participants used self- and organizational-promotion and other-demotion to highlight their positive traits and discuss previous mistakes in ways that help to confirm and maintain their impressions of competency. The following chapter is distinct from the last in that it describes the participants’ own accounts of when and how they use impression management in their leadership activities. This chapter shows how the participants considered and described their impression management activities using self-reflexivity (Goffman, 1959). This chapter responds to the fourth research question of the thesis: “how do the participants reflect on their impression management activities to consider how they alter their space, speech, behaviour and dress according to the needs and expectations of different audiences?”

The participants responded to questions about how they adjust their behaviour to fit the expectations of various audiences. While not every leader stated that they engage in impression management – indeed nearly half of them denied that they ever use impression management – the others openly admitted that they consciously structure their language, dress and behaviour to fit the



audience.<sup>40</sup> These individuals argued that their presentations of self change on a daily basis, depending on the audience and the task at hand. By describing the ways they adjust their appearances or behaviour (modifying their clothing, speech, language, pace of speaking, and other features of their presentations), the participants revealed their strategies to build trust with staff and key stakeholders by using impression management. At times this entails building shared-identities and fostering the impression of intimacy. However, they also discussed moments where they feel it necessary to convey professionalism and authority. Thus, the participants mediate between images of mentorship and images of professionalism, all the while attempting to foster trust among stakeholders.

## **6.2. IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT TOOLS: LANGUAGE AND APPEARANCE**

### **6.2.1. Language**

Although each participant develops their own strategies for building trust with stakeholders, language and physical appearance were reported to be the most valued tools used by the participants in their impression management activities. The participants often claimed to adjust their speech in ways that are thought to be conducive to building trust and building a shared-identity with stakeholders. For example, Jimmy (Co-CEO) identified middle-aged business owners as valuing succinctness, unambiguous sentences and clearly-defined, measurable results. He recognized the need to use what previous researchers

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<sup>40</sup> Those who denied doing so sometimes described incidents that contradict their claims.

have described as “report talk” that involves “exhibiting knowledge and skill” (Tannen, 1990:77). Jimmy responds to their expectations of “capability and responsibility” by attempting to display professionalism through his choice of words. He quickens his pace when speaking to these stakeholders and uses words like “impact,” “results” and “effectiveness.” He avoids using “word whiskers,” specifically avoiding the word “like,” which he argues is commonly employed by youth. However, the participant also believes that a younger crowd mistrusts people who exude this kind of stylized vocabulary. In order to respond to this difference, he modifies his speech when communicating with younger crowds. When visiting universities, for instance, he speaks more casually and uses more common language.<sup>41</sup> Below it is shown how other participants also adjust their speech in order to build trust and common identities with audiences:

Yeah for sure, I do [modify my appearances depending on the audience.] With a dean or professor, I have to be more professional, use the language of [the organization.] Be more formal, less like I’m speaking to a friend. I’m always looking into people’s eyes and I speak differently. My voice tends to deepen, so it sounds more authoritative. I change my tone (Patty, Chapter President).

Greeting a farmer in the local language automatically puts the farmer a lot more at ease. Greeting a minister in the local language [sic] shows them that you have respect for their culture. (Pete, Senior Staff).

How much you display of yourself and how you display yourself I think

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<sup>41</sup> Some of Jimmy’s claims were substantiated when comparing his lecture at a university in 2006 to a presentation given to the World Bank (available as a video online) in 2007. At the university lecture, Jimmy dressed more casually; he wore slacks and short-sleeved shirt at the university lecture and a full suit and tie to the World Bank. While still eloquent, he did not speak from a script at the university, as he did at the World Bank. He used much more formal language and diagrams when presenting to the World Bank. The lecture at the university was more spontaneous, included more humour, colloquialisms and involved participation from the audience. Although not drastically different, the university lecture was less formal or “professional” than the lecture given to the World Bank.

can really vary. I don't often call people "Mr. or Mrs". But I'm smart enough to know that there are times when it's something they would like to be called. And then I'm going to [address them differently] (Diana, Executive Director).

The above quotations show how the participants modify their speech in order to satisfy their audiences' expectations and preferences. The strategies change according to the stakeholders' perceived values and expectations. The first participant modifies the tone of her voice, her level of eye contact and her body language in order to appear professional in front of professors. The second participant modifies his word choice in front of ministers and beneficiaries (such as farmers). Finally, the third participant calls some stakeholders by their proper titles and not others, in response to their perceived preference. While each case is different, these participants all admitted to modifying certain aspects of their speech and communication styles to different audiences in order to manufacture positive relationships and build trust.

The participants also commonly stated that "time-consciousness" is important in gaining trust and building a shared-identity with audiences. Jimmy (Co-CEO) described becoming more "time-conscious" in front of the professional crowd and noticeably less so when speaking to students or young people. In addition, other participants discussed the importance of pacing themselves with certain groups of people, while also learning to monitor other forms of speech and mannerisms:

The biggest thing I've learned is, [when approaching elderly potential donors] not only are you respectful, but you don't go in there all in a flurry. You go at their speed. So sometimes it's really quick and other times you're very quiet and they want to make you a cup of tea and some cookies. So you just try to go at their speed and not rush through

it (Tina, Senior Staff).

The above examples provide some insight into how the participants modify their speech, paying attention to details such as their word choice and pace of speaking, in order to make donors or other stakeholders more comfortable. Leaders may also strategically select a topic of conversation in order to build a shared-identity with individuals and enhance trust and rapport. While selecting an appropriate topic of conversation to match the interests and rank of the individual may seem obvious and necessary, it can also be used as a mechanism to build trust by revealing common ground, humanness and similarity or association with a trustworthy group; alternatively, it can be used to display professionalism and authority (Elsbach, 2004; Goodrum and Stafford, 2003; Sanders, 1989). Based on the self-reflective contributions of the participants in this thesis, the topic and concepts used in conversation can be strategically selected with the desire and intent to give off impressions that are conducive to building trust. When meeting with planned givers who have different lives, experiences and interests, the participant changes her approach to casual conversation:

Sometimes you get people who are really well educated, some people who are not. So one day you talk about something in the arts, or something happening in the community, or other times you could talk about how many head of cattle they have (Tina, Senior Staff).

This participant openly admitted to selecting the topic of conversation in order to make the donor feel comfortable and communicate a shared-identity with him or her. This strategy is commonly identified by other participants, who described the importance of turning “small-talk” into meaningful

components of building trusting relationships.

### **6.2.2. Physical Appearance**

The participants also frequently spoke about the meaning and impact of their selection of clothing. They acknowledged that their appearances could be used to convey an image that is conducive to building shared-identity and trust among different stakeholder groups:

I think the way that you dress makes a big impact. Donors dress differently than a farmer in the field would, so you would have to dress appropriately depending on the situation [sic]. (Pete, Senior Staff).

The above quotation captures the importance of dressing “appropriately” when meeting donors and beneficiaries. While the above participant believes that dressing professionally can cause mistrust among poor beneficiaries, he argues that the professional look is essential when approaching prospective donors with ideas. In this case, the right attire is an important part of managing impressions and is imperative in achieving the goals of the organization. Other participants reiterated the importance of adjusting appearances according to the stakeholders’ expectations and values:

I would always wear dress pants or a sweater [when visiting donors]. I don’t have to wear power suits. But sometimes if I know there is a conference or a meeting coming up, I’ll dress a little bit more appropriately. If the [wealthy and powerful private donor family] are going to be around, they expect the professional look. Whereas, if I’m [meeting with smaller donors] I don’t have to have a suit; a blazer and a sweater or something is [fine for me to wear] (Tina, Senior Staff).

The participant above admitted to selecting clothing that is more “appropriate,” or in the case of meeting with wealthy private donors or executives from donor associations, more “professional.” Another participant

recognized the symbolic importance and potential implications of her appearance and worried that it could hinder her efforts to demonstrate a shared-identity with clients:

I am a woman immigrant. A blond. And that can work against me. Because if somebody was a visible minority who comes here for a program they will look at me [and think,] ‘what do you think you understand about my struggle?’ So it will take time for them to understand that I am a minority and that I struggle with the same issues (Melissa, Executive Director).

This participant recognized that her hair and skin colour have the potential to differentiate her from her clients, instead of building a shared-identity with them. In this statement it is clear that the participant recognized physical appearance as being a critical factor in establishing successful relationships with various types of stakeholders. Because beneficiaries and donors often have different expectations and values, the leaders attempt to make distinctions between these groups and identify their varying expectations and values. They then accordingly alter their speech, mannerisms, pace of speaking, language and dress to match these expectations and values<sup>42</sup>. Successful impression management is therefore critical to satisfying diverse stakeholders and accomplishing the goals of the organization.

### **6.3 BUILDING TRUST**

Elsbach (2004: 275) wrote that “to possess an image of interpersonal trustworthiness is to be perceived by others as displaying competence, benevolence and integrity in one’s behaviours and beliefs” and that

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<sup>42</sup> How the participants identify these expectations and values and make distinctions between groups is not clear. The processes involved in these attempts could be explored in further research.

trustworthiness is really “a perception.” Rather than assuming that trustworthiness is an inherently held quality, this thesis explores how leaders project images of trustworthiness by attempting to display traits that win them trust and obedience from staff and stakeholders. Trustworthiness in this context may be best explained as a series of dramaturgical activities that leaders perform in order to give off the impression of being benevolent, competent and dependable.<sup>43</sup> Of course, trust is contextual and dependent upon the audience and setting; the successful display of benevolence and competency do not guarantee that trust will be gained. However, the participants appeared to identify such traits as necessary or at least helpful qualities in their efforts to build trust. This thesis helps to reveal the impression management strategies that the leaders *actively* adopt in order to display trustworthiness and other important leadership qualities necessary to obtain support from various stakeholders.

Building trust is an imperative part of a nonprofit organization’s success. As one Executive Director (Diana) stated, “in the not for profit sector, trust is critical.” For example, building trusting relationships is seen as imperative if a nonprofit leader is to reach the organization’s financial goals. To this end, leaders must actively develop relationships with stakeholders before attempting to build trust:

In one case, [I received a grant for] \$150,000, the individual had known me from my previous not for-profit sector work and we had something of a relationship. He wasn’t investing in the program, he was investing

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<sup>43</sup> For ethnographic and symbolic interactionist studies of trust see Henslin (1968). Henslin adopts Goffman (1959) to formulate a definition of trust. For another account of Goffman and trust see Misztal (2001).

in me. No one here who asked could have got that money. Eventually they could have, but they would have had to have built a relationship. We already had a relationship (Diana, Executive Director).

If the [donor] doesn't trust [the nonprofit organization], and if you [the leader] doesn't continue to be honest and forthright about who you are, what you can do and what you can't do, then that relationship isn't going to work. And that doesn't happen over night. Good solid relationships take years to build. And given we're in a long term business, you better build those (Gene, CEO).

Jimmy (Co-CEO) described his sudden awareness of his need for impression management when negotiating with stakeholders (particularly corporate sponsors, government officials and other “professionals”) as a “wow” moment. He explained that since this awareness, he has learned how to build trust and communicate more effectively with young people and with professionals. As is discussed below, other participants emphasized the importance of building trust with stakeholders. This process often involves creating a shared-identity, establishing rapport, giving impressions of intimacy and friendships. The participants claimed to adjust their speech, dress and other aspects of their presentations in order to cultivate desired images to this end. These strategies are explored below.

A shared-identity with stakeholders is important in the development of trust. Many participants spoke of their strategies for creating a shared-identity, sometimes involving self-humbling or status-levelling. For example, Peter (Senior Staff), who works with beneficiaries in small, rural communities in South-East Africa, attempts to build trust with community members who are crucial to the success of the program by deliberately status-levelling. By showing that he is a “human being,” who is not invincible and must rely on the



help of his neighbours to survive, the participant was welcomed into a community in a rural village in South-East Africa.<sup>44</sup> The activities described below are meant to build a shared-identity among beneficiaries, which can help to build trust and foster successful relationships. The individuals who lived in this community could relate to his needs, his struggles and feel empowered to assist him and build an interdependent relationship. Instead of displaying authority or competence, this participant has found that displaying humility yields better results. Poor beneficiaries may be suspicious of ex-patriots such as Pete; these techniques help to bridge the obvious differences between them. Pete described his strategies in the following way:

One way of [building trust] is putting yourself in a position to make a fool out of yourself so that people will see that you have faults too. And a great way to do this is, I hand wash my laundry. You'll have women that'll come up to you and be like, "that's not how you wash laundry," and they'll show me how to do it. Put yourself in a situation where the people know how to do something that you don't. So that could be washing your own clothes, or going to fetch water from the well. All of these things are a sign that you are a human being, that you need to do these things to stay alive, and once people start to see that, then they think, 'that is a person just like I'm a person, and that person doesn't know how to do something, just like I don't know how to do some things sometimes' (Pete, Senior Staff).

Another important component of building trust involves creating impressions of friendship, especially towards small donors. The participants have different strategies for accomplishing this, however this often entails exhibiting personal or intimate knowledge of a donor's life or business. For example, Tina spoke at length on the importance of building trust with planned

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<sup>44</sup> Elsbach (2004:279) mentions this point in relation to practitioner-client relationships.

givers.<sup>45</sup> This participant described her efforts to build relationships with the potential donors she visits by demonstrating an interest in things that are important to them:

One lady I go and meet, she has two cats. So, you remember the pets' names. So when you address the Christmas card or letter, you write, "Merry Christmas Irene and Muffy and Buffy, or "how are the pets?" Something that feels important to them. Sometimes if the fridge is full of pictures of children, then "oh, is that your grandchildren?" You can usually tell what means the most to people (Tina, Senior Staff).

The participant above creates a shared-identity, builds trust and establishes rapport with potential donors by conveying images of friendliness and intimacy in her efforts to receive donations. By remembering the names of pets or grandchildren and mailing out Christmas cards, the participant appears to be more like a friend than a solicitor who hopes to extract money from the potential donors. Activities such as recognizing birthdays and anniversaries are of particular importance in fabricated impressions of intimacy, connection, and friendship:

I definitely make notes and we put notes in our system. If I can find out what their birthday is, or something important. One woman I was with, her and her husband's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary was coming up. So I wanted to make sure that I sent them an anniversary card. (Tina, Senior Staff).

The above participant also discussed at length the importance of listening and visiting – even “hand-holding” during times of sorrow - in order to get to know the donor and understand his or her unique interests. This participant even makes notes after a visit so that she can recall this information at a later date. Individuals who work with corporate donors reiterated the

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<sup>45</sup> Planned givers are donors who plan to leave money in their wills for the designated organization.

importance of communicating images of intimacy and friendship. For example, six other participants emphasized that it is necessary to build relationships with corporate sponsors before and after asking for money. Relationships are cultivated on an ongoing basis, therefore the participants stated that they do not only contact donors for money, but also contact them to congratulate them when they have had recent business success. They keep them posted with interesting news items that are related to their company, or make comments on relevant news items. By engaging in these activities, the participants build relationships that are more conducive to obtaining donations from planned givers and corporate donors.

Conveying intimacy and friendship through ongoing communication, listening to personal troubles and demonstrating inside knowledge of the person's life or organization are all tools employed by the participants in their quests to build relationships. The participants also argued that building strategic relationships requires face-to-face communication, the semblance of friendship, rather than impersonal contact that is "strictly business." The participants therefore stated that it is important to maximize face-to-face visits and send hand-written notes instead of strictly organizational-literature, seeking to convey the impression of more personal contact. These are important examples of strategies that the participants claimed to use to build relationships with donors.

## 6.4. CONSISTENCY

Consistency in impressions is an important component to building and maintaining trust. Reliability and predictability within routine creates a stable working environment in which the development of trust can occur (Gawley, 2007). When leadership activities occur in a routine way, leaders provide a “stable context” that allows followers to easily observe and understand leadership activities and to anticipate leaders’ future behaviour (Gawley, 2007:55). It is important that leaders meet followers’ expectations in a consistent fashion. However, just as routine behaviour is important in the completion of work tasks, consistency in self-presentations is just as critical. As Gawley (2007) wrote, “by developing and continuing routine presentations of self, the state of normality reinforces the legitimacy of trust.” Thus, consistent presentations are required in the development of trust.

However, impression management strategies are not always consistent or flawless and they may not always elicit the desired response from others. While the participants attempt to “appear genuine” in their appearances, there are times when their performances come under suspicion. Impressions of staged or feigned expressions of friendship are sometimes (rightfully) interpreted as dishonest or phoney. Thus, the participants described the challenge of having to prove their “sincerity” to donors, and slowly build relationships to avoid this negative label. For example, the participant below described her attempts to appear “genuine” in front of donors:

I never [ask for money] at a first visit. The main reason to go there on a first visit is to thank them and discuss how their support is helping [the

organization]. How we can help people. And leave it at that. Let them feel that you're being genuine, and then move forward and see if there's an opportunity to see if there's, you know [ask for a gift] (Tina, Senior Staff).

The participant quoted above does not want to reveal her true interest in the donor (the donor's potential to give financially) and instead focuses on building a relationship. She wishes to appear genuine and grateful and downplays the fact that she had a vested interest in the relationship and hopes that the donor will give more in the future. Other participants also attempt to build relationships prior to "making an ask." However, their motives are sometimes questioned:

We did a \$200,000 gift [ask from a corporation]. My first meeting with them was two years before that, where I said I'm not asking for anything, I just want to show you where we're at, and ask you about your impressions. And [the corporate representative] seemed stiff. And then I met her, shopping downtown, and she said "if we seemed weird, it's because we kept waiting for you to ask for something". And I said, "but I said I wasn't going to ask for anything!" And she said, "but I never believe that" (Diana, Executive Director).

I think there are so many charities, and so many people are being asked to give, and so many charities are getting into the planned giving, so that people are suspicious, so that when you do say "thank you" then [they think] "what's your ulterior motive?" And even I have them, but not at that visit; maybe aware, or not aware that I'm kind of assessing things and finding out what's important to them, and learning more about them. Some people are a little bit more attuned to that (Tina, Senior Staff).

The participants above articulated the challenge in appearing "genuine" and building personal relationships with donors. While impressions of friendship and intimacy usually aid in building trust, they can sometimes have the opposite effect and cause suspicion among donors. Clearly, impression management is a series of reflexive activities that can elicit both desired and

undesired responses. As is discussed below, this is evident when leaders attempt to oscillate between images of friendship and images of professionalism.

## **6.5. INCONSISTENCIES IN SERVANT LEADER AND PROFESSIONAL IMPRESSIONS**

As was previously stated, the participants attempted to appear consistent in their displays in order to build trust. However, the participants who admitted to adopting impression management strategies appear to struggle with inconsistent impressions. Depending on their audience, the participants claimed to adjust their appearances and behaviour to either demonstrate shared-identity, humility and friendship, or specialness and professionalism. While the participants claimed to embody a servant leadership style and downplayed their own authority, there are clearly moments where they feel they are required to act professional and embody a “sophisticated” style. This image, frequently displayed to wealthy private donors or corporate representatives, differs considerably from the one projected to beneficiaries, such as poor farmers, or small donors living in small towns. Despite the participants’ efforts to display themselves as servant leaders, they also at times discussed the importance of “being the boss” and make efforts to demonstrate their professionalism. For example, several participants discussed the need to appear professional in the eyes of certain stakeholders, especially wealthy corporate donors:

[A professional appearance] is tremendously important. I think the three most important people [that need to] have an image of sophistication would be your fundraiser, your Executive Director and the Chairman of the Board. Your fundraiser has to be able to talk to people who are

heads of companies or who are very wealthy. So for example, if I want 100,000 or 200,000 [Egyptian] pounds, then somebody from their social class that's on the board has to be the person who initiates that. If you have somebody on your board who is a CEO of a company, or a head of a hospital, or something like that, that you would send them out. That's very important (Jann, CEO).<sup>46</sup>

The above quotation suggests that leaders may demonstrate “sophistication” (or membership with a particular social class) in order to present a shared-identity with potential donors, especially those who are particularly wealthy, such as corporate sponsors.

The participants who were willing to reflect on their own impression management techniques admitted that they juggle various presentations and that they sometimes make mistakes. As was shown here, impressions are not always successfully delivered, as audiences do not always believe the performances to be genuine.

## **6.6. CONCLUSION**

This chapter answers research question #4 in section 2.3 by showing how the participants reflect on their impression management activities. Not all of the participants stated that they overtly use impression management techniques; these individuals downplayed, denied or justified any forms of impression management that they engage in. The responses from those who admitted to impression management, however, reveal the possibility that leaders actively attempt to display humility, intimacy, professionalism and other attributes that are conducive to building trust in relationships. Of course, these

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<sup>46</sup> Approximately \$37,000 CDN

responses cannot be taken at face value and using the limited methodology applied in this thesis, it is impossible to determine whether or not the participants actually engage in the impression management strategies they claim to use. However, the reflexive components of the interview suggest that impression management may sometimes be an active, conscious activity undertaken by the participants. The findings presented above also serve to illustrate the complexity and risks in impression management; the participants are not always successful in achieving desired impressions. The impression management of leadership can therefore be characterized as a tenuous balancing act, in which leaders juggle impressions such as benevolence and humility with professionalism and authority.



## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSIONS

#### 7.1. INTRODUCTION

As Bennis (1959:259) aptly noted in Yukl, (1981:2)

Always, it seems, the concept of leadership eludes us or turns up in another form to taunt us again with its slipperiness and complexity. So we have invented an endless proliferation of terms to deal with it... and still the concept is not sufficiently defined.

Leadership, a popular topic in sociological and management studies, has yet to be fully understood or even universally defined; instead, as Bennis, quoted above, points out, leadership is a highly complex concept that can be studied from a variety of perspectives with a variety of methodological approaches (Antonakis, Cianciolo, and Sternberg, 2004; Yukl, 1981). The purpose of this thesis is to understand how a selection of nonprofit leaders attempt to perform their self-identified leadership roles by engaging in impression management activities. It also explores how they reflect on these performances. Using symbolic interactionism, this thesis offers an understanding of how leaders in the nonprofit sector use impression management to accomplish their goals. Some researchers have attempted to identify the most successful impression management techniques or determine why various impression management strategies succeed or fail (Ammeter, et al., 2002; Bolino and Turnley, 2003; Harris, et al., 2007; Higgins, Judge and Ferris, 2003; Turnley and Bolino, 2001). While this vast array of literature makes a substantial contribution to understanding leadership, studying the impression

management of leadership from the perspective of symbolic interactionism is a value-adding exercise. This thesis diverges from positivist literature by presenting leadership as a dramaturgical enactment, in which leaders attempt to display the leadership qualities they believe to be most valued and most effective. Rather than focusing on how impression management causes leadership outcomes, this thesis takes the position that leadership is performed and displayed wherein leaders are active, reflective and multi-perspectival agents who navigate their impressions in accordance with the variation they observe in settings and audiences. The common themes, inconsistencies and complexities associated with impression management are summarized below. In addition, the limitations of the study and opportunities for future research are discussed.

## **7.2. FINDINGS**

### **7.2.1. Symbolic Representations of Leadership**

The second research question, stated in section 2.3, asks how the symbolic representations of leadership, such as the physical appearances of the participants and their office spaces, are modified to make impressions. Office spaces can be used as both back stages and front stages. Functioning as a back stage, a place where the actor can temporarily abstain from the meticulous actions involved in the performance and relax, an office can operate as a protective shield, limiting contact with less-special, more ‘ordinary’ individuals and preventing others from observing the maintenance work that goes in to the ongoing performance of leadership (Goffman, 1959). In this way, occupational

space may be used to protect fragile images of competency by maintaining mysticism and concealing mistakes. The office can act as a place where errors can be privately remedied (Goffman, 1959). This could be why the only participants to have their own offices with doors (as opposed to cubicles that only offered symbolic privacy) were the CEOs, Presidents and Executive Directors.

The office can also act as a front stage, the area in which other actors witness and have the opportunity to judge or make moral assessments of others' performances (Goffman, 1959). The location and appearance of the office space carries symbolic meaning. The physical layout of the office and the designation of space can be used to convey specialness and authority on behalf of the leader, by separating him or her from other staff, providing him or her with the "best" space and adorning the office with special props. As Doxtater (1992:109) pointed out, "in human territorial spaces, such as many work settings, the authority of the space comes from communication that the occupying individual or group has and may exercise real social, economic or political power." Some of the "status markers" that are identified as designating increased status include "more office space, privileged location, more or higher quality office furnishings, and controlled access" and privacy, all of which were enjoyed by the participants with the highest status in my research (Hatch, 1992:132).

Previous research has explored the ways in which organizational spaces, including exterior architecture, visual displays of organizational materials, interior design and arrangement of office space, can be used to communicate

organizational messages about a company's philosophy, values and products and may also be used to influence the internal values and behaviour of staff (Alvesson and Berg, 1992; Berg and Kreiner, 1992; Freiburg and Freiburg, 1996). The physical appearance of the organization can be immensely important in relaying symbolic organizational and leadership messages to internal staff and external stakeholders (Berg and Kreiner, 1992). The appearance of the office and its corporate building can also be designed to reflect the essence of the organization, its purpose, or philosophy (Berg and Kreiner, 1992). The physical appearance of the office may also be used to connote authority, role and status (Alvesson and Berg, 1992; Berg and Kreiner, 1992; Doxtater, 1992; Hatch, 1992).

Other symbolic representations of leadership, such as other elements included in the leaders' personal fronts and manner (including language, body language and posture and demeanour) are all important parts of impression management (Goffman, 1959). For example, Futrell, (1999:503) noted that during city commission meetings, formality and authority is conveyed through a variety of elements relating to physical appearances, demeanour and the arrangement of space:

A degree of formality is conveyed by markers such as clothing, spatial arrangements of the physical environment, demeanour of the principle participants, their physical proximity to the audience within the setting and the degree to which the sequences of acts and the range of activities permitted during the occasion are codified in advance. Each of these elements is associated, in part, with broad social regulations governing involvement in settings and displays of respect and regard for occasions.

These elements of physical appearances and symbolic representations of

leadership help to symbolically designate certain commission members with authority and communicate this authority to those in the audience. This obligates audience members to engage in protocols of politeness and respect that simultaneously curtail their own voices and limit their impact on the proceedings.

Likewise, in this thesis, I observed the physical appearances of the nonprofit leaders and their organizations and observed their self-presentations in the context of the interview. Based on these observations, it appears that physical appearances and symbolic representations of leadership can be important to impression management in the nonprofit sector. First, participants use their physical appearance to establish an air of professionalism with stakeholders. This is accomplished by dressing to appear humble or professional, depending on the audience. This finding is similar to those findings made by Futrell (1999) who found that commissioners and administrators commonly wore suits to distinguish themselves from audience members, but felt comfortable dressing more casually when the size of the audience was expected to be negligible. The participants interviewed for this thesis appeared to be similarly aware of the impact of their physical appearance and its ability to either connote professionalism or humility and shared-identity with others. The physical appearance of the organization can also be used to accomplish similar goals; adorned with various props and prime office space, the leaders were provided with symbols of specialness and authority. Even Executive Assistants, who were employed only in the national organizations,

seemed to symbolize the importance and specialness of the leaders' roles.

There were various organizational and leadership messages expressed through the appearance of the office as well. Humble-looking offices, most commonly seen in chapter, local or regional organizations, conveyed the organization's financial need and its good, solid management practices to small donors. This may be done to encourage loyalty among donors. In contrast, the professional-looking offices, inhabited by the national organizations, conveyed professionalism and financial success, which is more likely to elicit trust and support from corporate donors and other major donors and stakeholders.

The physical appearance of the organization's office also provides the participants with opportunities to make statements about their organization's culture, mission, values, or their own personal leadership strategy. For example, lobby displays in professional offices can be used to display a commitment to cause-related marketing and identity strategies. In contrast, humble offices in chapter organizations may mimic the participants' commitment to servant leadership by creating spaces conducive to sharing thoughts and feelings. Far from being just a place to work, the office provides opportunities to convey important organizational and leadership messages, while simultaneously functioning as a front and back stage for leaders to carry out and continually modify their presentations of self.

### **7.2.2. Impression Management Strategies of Nonprofit Leaders**

The third research question asks what strategies the participants apply in order to present a front of competent leadership. During the interview, it was

clear that the participants displayed competence by describing their favourable attributes while mediating risks of eliciting undesired and conflicting impressions. Typically, the participants displayed or claimed to embody traits that resemble two leadership images – “the mentor” and “the boss.” “The mentor” displayed qualities of a servant leader, while “the boss” displayed the qualities characteristic of a professional, authoritative leader, conveying specialness. The servant leadership approach of the “mentor” is one that entails shared-responsibility, team-building, flattened hierarchies and a commitment to group authorship in the vision and functioning of the organization. In this way, the participants described themselves more as mentors to staff and volunteers than as figures of authority.

In fact, the participants often downplayed their authority in order to display their humility and shared-identity with others. This is not unlike “self-humbling” described by Klapp (1964:245) in which leaders attempt to become “a man of the people” (Klapp, 1964:243.) A leader may attempt to prove that he or she is “of common stuff” by using slang or vulgarity or being “easily accessible” to the people (Klapp, 1964:244-245). As Klapp suggested, a leader “should talk on equal footing with everyone, joke to show that he is not stuffy or aloof, call people by their first names, and encourage them to use his own first name.” An example provided by Platow, Haslam and Reicher (2007) recently illustrated how United States President George Bush uses “everyday language” and wears casual clothing that helped establish him as a “regular guy,” a “typical American able to speak for Americans” during the 9/11 crisis.

The participants in this thesis appeared to embody similar “self-humbling gestures,” such as admitting their mistakes, using humour, claiming to use lay language in front of certain audiences and playing up their inclusive and participatory approach to leadership. However, the participants also described their unique skills, knowledge and experience that makes them special, in order to define themselves as more deserving or better qualified for the job than any other person. They used self and organizational-promotion and other-demotion in order to exaggerate or highlight their competence and specialness, which contradicts their earlier claims of humility.

They also described moments where they felt they had to express their authority, but the participants tended to contextualize such events in order to downplay or justify their authoritarian behaviour to prevent their performances from appearing inconsistent. Thus, despite their efforts to give off consistent impressions, the participants coped with multiple impressions of benevolence and humility, authority and specialness, resulting in sometimes conflicting and inconsistent images. This is especially seen when participants discussed making mistakes; in such instances, they simultaneously displayed humility, humour and benevolence, yet they used self-promotion and other-demotion to appear as though they have unique competence. This thesis does not attempt to determine whether or not the participants actually behave in the ways they claim. It is impossible in this thesis to determine which claims accurately reflect the participants’ approach to leadership and which claims may be exaggerated. This thesis instead focuses on understanding how the participants attempted to



define successful leadership and how they display it in the context of the interview.

This thesis reveals the complexity of impression management in nonprofit leadership. Goffman (1959:106) noted in his discussion of region and region behaviour that many performances involve “separate knots or clusters of verbal interaction.” This reference hints to the complexities involved in nonprofit leaders’ fronts when required to juggle multiple expectations. When Goffman (1959: 35) argued that actions are intended to satisfy the “moral values of the community” it is important to note that the “community” is not static. The stakeholders that nonprofit leaders face on a daily basis represent many moral communities whose values are quite different from one another. Even within staff and volunteer interactions, the leaders deal with conflicting needs, expectations and diverse interpretations. Thus, the participants engage in a juggling act of deciding how and when to control emotional impulses and outbursts while engaging in ongoing impression management activities.

### **7.2.3. Self-Reflexivity of the Nonprofit Leader**

The fourth and final research question asks how the participants reflect on their impression management activities to consider how they alter their space, speech, behaviour and dress, according to the needs and expectations of different audiences. One of the key principles employed in interpretivist research is that humans are reflexive beings. Just as Mead (1934) argued that individuals respond to the “generalized other” through the process of “role taking,” people have the capacity to reflect on their own behaviour and on the

responses of others. As Prus (1996:15) stated, “human group life is reflexive. Through interaction with others and by taking the viewpoint of the other with respect to oneself, people develop capacities to the viewpoint of the other.” Human beings have the ability to think critically about their behaviour and actively, consciously modify it.

The participants responded to questions about their impression management activities in one of two ways. Some argued that they do not engage in impression management. However, approximately half of the participants willingly admitted that they engage in impression management and they openly discussed their impression management strategies. These participants stated that they adjust their speech, select different attire and structure other elements of their actions to satisfy the expectations and preferences of various stakeholders. They employ impression management strategies to gratify the diverse demands coming from corporate donors, board members, planned givers, staff and volunteers, all whose satisfaction is crucial to the success of the organization. These strategies typically involve appearing professional in front of corporate or wealthy private donors, or by giving impressions of friendship and intimacy with other donors.

Without conducting ethnographic observation, it is impossible to know whether the participants actually engage in the impression management strategies they claim to use. However, there are reasons to believe that the descriptions of impression management strategies are valid. First of all, the impression management strategies mentioned by the leaders correspond with

existing research, which shows that individuals in workplaces commonly modify their dress, speech and behaviour in order to create desired impressions and achieve organizational objectives (Elsbach, 2004; Goodrum and Stafford, 2003; Harvey, 2001; Haas and Shaffir, 1987; Hochschild, 1983; Sanders, 1989). Furthermore, in an occupational sector that has multiple stakeholders with diverse expectations, it is likely that leaders do in fact modify their behaviour while presenting themselves to different stakeholders (Ammeter, Douglas, Gardner, Hochwarter and Ferris, 2002).

Goffman (1959) argued that one must select the personal front that is appropriate to the audience and situation. Thus it would make sense that nonprofit leaders must modify their fronts on an ongoing basis, appearing as the “professional” in front of the major donors, and then the “friend” towards an aged planned giver. Furthermore, in the ethnography on tattooists by Sanders (1989) a certain degree of self-reflexivity on impression management is observed among participants. This suggests that my research participants possess the ability to think critically about their own impression management strategies and, where they appropriately fit into the images they attempt to portray in the interview, are willing to admit and discuss them. Of course, this is not without some tension, as the leaders attempted to cope with their realizations that they do engage in impression management. Conscious impression management is not without ethical implications (Pacanowksy and O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983; Reynolds, 1987).

### **7.3. LIMITATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

This thesis has made a contribution to existing literature on the impression management of leadership in the nonprofit sector, revealing ways in which the participants attempt to present themselves as competent and develop trust in relationships with diverse internal and external stakeholders. It has explored the complexity as well as the reflexive nature inherent in impression management activities. In addition to making a contribution to the literature, which has not fully explored the dramaturgical nature of nonprofit leadership, this thesis possibly presents potential benefits to those who work within the nonprofit sector; these benefits are described in the following section. However, despite its contributions, a number of limitations to this thesis must first be recognized.

A critical limitation in the methodology is its sample size. The sample size is too small to be representative of a larger population or to make a claim of typicality. Other nonprofit leaders in other organizations may not necessarily use the impression management strategies presented here. Furthermore, the sample includes participants from both Canada and Egypt, but does not explore the differences between the countries, (language or cultural traditions, for example) which may have had considerable impact on how the leaders responded to the research questions.

Due to the small, cross-cultural nature of the study, the sample may have in fact yielded some atypical results. In future research, a larger sample that limited its focus to one country or region may yield findings that are more

representative of its population. Alternatively, a future study could address two cultures or countries, paying attention to the differences between them and providing the reader with an in-depth comparison between the two. However, because the intention was not to yield generalizable findings, nor was it to explore contextual or cultural differences, the study is still useful in providing insight into the participants' impression management activities.

Secondly, as was stated earlier, the leadership traits and strategies identified in this thesis reflect “idealized” versions of competent leaders. It is not known whether or not these methods of being and acting are actually exemplified by the participants during their work routines, or whether they are merely forms of impression management adopted during the interview. A study that involves participant observation would allow the researcher to observe how participants really engage and respond to their employees. Interviews conducted with junior staff members, volunteers, donors and other stakeholders would also aid in this process. This could be performed in one intensive case study or across several organizations. Such studies could also offer the opportunity to recognize inconsistencies or dynamics in performances and could possibly help to reveal how the leadership activities, such as the development of trust, are cultivated over time.

Because of the small sample size and the limited observation involved, some aspects of this thesis warrant future research. Several opportunities for future research have also been identified. These include discovering important differences between Egyptian and Canadian-based nonprofit organizations,

particularly in the types of challenges they face and their responses to these challenges, exploring how context and social structures impact impression management activities, seeking to understand how followers or stakeholders impact leadership behaviour, considering the implications of impression management and making further contributions to impression management methodology.<sup>47</sup>

This thesis could be used as a springboard to research that explores the nonprofit context in Canada and/or Egypt. In this thesis, the Canadian nonprofit leaders appeared to cope with a different set of challenges than the Egyptian nonprofits, such as the lack of availability of skilled, trained staff, bureaucratic mistrust from the public, as well as governmental red tape, bureaucratic hurdles, monitoring and interference and a general lack of knowledge about fundraising and cause-related marketing techniques. These differences were not explored in this thesis for reasons that were suggested earlier. However, these preliminary findings could be addressed in future research that explores these challenges and attempts to assist Egyptian nonprofits with their unique struggles. The Canadian context could also be studied in future research, to reveal current trends and challenges in the nonprofit sector. The Canadian participants in this thesis discussed problems that were consistent with research presented in the introduction (for example, the participants made arguments that were consistent

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<sup>47</sup> For example, professionals may be expected to possess and display technical, expert knowledge and specialized skill, demonstrate a commitment to values such as altruism and service and may be expected to abide by existing codes of ethical conduct (Pavalko, 1971). Such expectations and demands represent some of the ways in which activities by formal professionals are structured in nonprofit environments, which are not taken into account in this study but could be explored in further research.

with findings from Hall, et al., 2003a; Hatry, 1997; Kanter and Summers, 1987; Scott, 2003 and Statistics Canada 2004). These include problems associated with limited funding, complex accountability, increased scrutiny, complex and heightened demands for evaluation, shortages in qualified staff and lack of funds. These common problems were not addressed in the findings chapters of the research because the thesis was not targeted to exploring common contexts or challenges in the nonprofit sector; rather the point was to address impression management strategies of nonprofit leaders. However, exploring the structural factors that may have influenced their behaviours is certainly a significant opportunity. It could also be interesting to examine how the nonprofit context has changed in the last five years since the findings by Hall (2003) and Scott (2003) were presented.

If the sample size is increased and organizational comparisons made, the contextual aspects to impression management and office dynamics can also be revealed. As was earlier stated, trust development is contextual but is not explored in this thesis. To do so would require not only field research that takes note of organizational differences, but also research that examines the historical context of the organization. Other researchers have argued that organizational and leadership outcomes are affected by political, economic and social contexts (McGregor, 1976; Osborn, Hunt and Jauch, 2002). Dym and Hutson (2005) for example, argued that organizational success is the product of not just one great leader, but complex histories, changes in goals, missions, staff and past and present challenges that either weaken or strengthen the organization. The work

of Hall and Spencer-Hall (1982) also provides an excellent example of how to study organizations in context. For example, through their research with superintendents and school boards, Hall and Spencer-Hall (1982:332) concluded that the differences in leadership outcomes are not simply differences in personality or leadership styles, but are rather “a result of the past history, structure, and problems of the organization, the nature of their managerial succession, the responses by other participants, the new superintendent’s needs to accumulate resources for power, and their strategic decisions about how to do that.” These conclusions can easily be applied to the study of leadership.

Previous research has suggested ways in which leadership may be contextual and dependent upon human interaction and interpretation.<sup>48</sup> Because leaders act in ways they imagine to be desired or valued by certain groups, leadership success is a concept that is fundamentally dependent upon the meanings or expectations of “the other.” Leadership is therefore an interpretive activity that is dependent upon meanings and values created through face-to-face interaction; this occurs as individuals respond to the “generalized other,” as described by Mead (1934). Based on this assumption, effective leadership depends not only on the leaders’ characteristics, but on the followers’ as well (Deluga, 1991; Schrujjer and Vansina, 2002).<sup>49</sup> Other research illustrates that

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<sup>48</sup> Some researchers have explored leadership in the context of social class, ethnicity or gender, attempting to discover who becomes a successful leader and whether leadership styles or impression management strategies and outcomes change according to these differences (See for example, Carli and Eagly, 2001; Collard, 2003; Dym and Hutson, 2005; Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly and Karau, 2002; Gillespie, 1990; Hoyt, 2005; Parker, 2005; Tannen, 1990; Xin, 2004).

<sup>49</sup> The role of the follower has been explored in leadership literature by authors such as



leadership is a product of interaction between multiple actors (Birchard, 2005; Bortolotti, 2004; Clarke, 1991; Hall and Spencer-Hall, 1982; Strauss, 1978,1982). This thesis does not address the point of view, characteristics or impression management strategies of other stakeholders involved in the organizations. The thesis did not study the followers that may have a critical impact on leadership behaviour and organizational outcomes. Future research could certainly include the multiple interpretations and responses of other key stakeholders.

Furthermore, the findings in this thesis suggest that impression management is a risky activity, involving multiple interpretations; future research could examine how leaders attempt to manage such risks while juggling multiple, and sometimes contradictory, impressions. Inconsistent or contradictory impression management displays may have a number of implications on workplace relationships that are not addressed in this thesis but could be explored with further research. Bolton and Boyd (2003:295) noted that although airline cabin crews do not always succeed in seamless displays of emotion, the actors are also able to draw on “different sets of feeling ‘rules’ in order to match feeling with situation” and manage to project “polished performances” while juggling “conflicting demands.”

While the participants in this thesis made attempts to contextualize or justify moments where they were inconsistent, it is expected that this juggling act may actually cause more conflict in the workplace than the participants

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Giacalone (1998) and Giacalone and Rosenfeld (1984).

acknowledge. For example, a leader who consistently oscillates between “the mentor” and “the boss,” projecting benevolence at one moment and authority the next, may confuse staff or cause friction or resentment if treatment differs from person to person. Witnessing different performances may cause the staff to interpret the behaviours as phoney or deceitful. It may be expected that performances are not always as seamless as anticipated and that this has implications for work-related relationships. The possible implications of juggling and applying various impression management techniques, including the consequences for staff and volunteers who may witness inconsistent behaviour on the part of the leader could be addressed with further study.

Finally, as was stated in the literature review, Goffman, who provided the theoretical groundwork for this thesis, did not provide a methodology for studying impression management; this means that the study of impression management and the dramaturgical performances instituted therein, is an area that leaves open a great deal of interpretation on the part of the researcher. Further analysis of the methodologies for studying impression management would assist researchers in studying this phenomenon. However, a more ideal study of the impression management of nonprofit leadership would combine participant observation with multiple in-depth interviews with some of the key stakeholders. For instance, in Darrah’s (1994) study of skill requirements in the workplace, Darrah used a combination of participant observation and multiple open-ended unstructured interviews with participants. This technique, used in four case studies, expands on current understandings of skills requirements in

the workplace, which neglect the richness and complexity of workplace dynamics. For example, Darrah discovered that planning and multi-tasking are skills that are often forgotten by employers, but are crucial the successful completion of workplace tasks. Darrah also found that workers use impression management, internalizing workplace values. Job skills, skill requirements and responses to tasks may be impacted by context, including “technology and [the] organization,” (Darrah, 1994: 72) personal factors and “the social nature of work” and other contextual features that shape the demands on the worker. Thus, the methodology used in Darrah’s study permitted him to reveal factors previously unexplored in current definitions and understandings of skill requirements in the workplace. Research that pursues a greater and more well-rounded study of impression management in nonprofit leadership may take a similar approach, using participant-observation and multiple, in-depth interviews with various stakeholders to provide a more complete picture, one that could also include greater contextual factors.

A number of challenges would be involved in this type of research, including issues surrounding access and ethics. First of all, nonprofit leaders may not be keen to participate in multiple interviews because of their busy schedules. However, a substantial amount of data may be acquired by conducting multiple interviews with lower level staff and volunteers and by participating in or observing some of the nonprofit leader’s activities, especially where stakeholders are present. For example, the researcher could possibly accompany the leader to Board meetings, conferences, staff meetings or other

events. During these events, the researcher could observe the leader's behaviour towards stakeholders.

Of course, the strategy laid out above presents some obstacles, including the ability to have leaders agree to such close-up observation of their leadership techniques. A possible opportunity lies in entering the organization as both a researcher and a volunteer. Since nonprofit organizations usually rely on volunteers, who represent a somewhat intermittent and transitory workforce, nonprofit leaders may be used to "outsiders" visiting and temporarily working within the organization. Therefore, it may not seem unusual to have a researcher present within the organization, especially if the researcher were to simultaneously complete volunteer work. This presents an avenue in which the researcher could enter and appear in the organization in a somewhat normalized way, while offering several benefits to the organization.

Participating in voluntary activities within the organization could yield a significant amount of data. Even activities that may appear to be mundane or insignificant, such as working with volunteers to prepare mail-outs, lick stamps or take coffee breaks, may provide valuable opportunities to observe and participate in casual conversations with volunteers. These kinds of activities would simultaneously allow the researcher to identify with volunteers and appear non-threatening.

While it is expected that a certain amount of impression management would occur with a researcher present, over time it is expected that the researcher would be forgotten and the staff and leaders would return to their

normal routines. Alternatively, the researcher could conduct covert research, but several obvious ethical problems exist within this type of research. Instead, participant observation research, combined with multiple interviews with lower-level staff members and volunteers and possibly one or two interviews with the leader would likely reveal a sufficient amount of data.

Overall, this strategy reveal 1) inconsistencies between what leaders *claim to do* and what they *actually* do, 2) how impression management strategies change depending on the time, context and audience and 3) the interpretive process involved in impression management, in particular revealing if the impression management strategies have been interpreted in desired or undesired ways by others. These possibilities for future research present alternative methodologically sound ways for studying impression management of leadership in the nonprofit sector.

#### **7.4. BENEFITS**

Despite the gaps and limitations that exist, this thesis has made a contribution to existing social science literature on leadership and impression management. It has offered some examples of ways that Goffman's dramaturgical concepts are played out in the nonprofit sector. For example, this thesis shows how nonprofit leaders use the office as both a "front" and "back stage," in which they create and maintain their impressions. The leaders used organizational "settings" and "props," as well as various symbolic representations of themselves to communicate messages about the organization, its financial state, their leadership style and their personal role and status. The

leaders also appeared to “maintain face,” “save face” and engage in “face work” when embarrassing moments occurred by denying or justifying their mistakes, blaming others or by apologizing. These findings provide further examples of how Goffman’s dramaturgical concepts are applicable to nonprofit leadership behaviour. This thesis also contributes to the literature on impression management and leadership as it suggests some commonly-used impression management techniques, namely the leaders’ attempts to convey their benevolence, specialness, authority and professionalism. These findings contribute to the literature in a dual way; one, by providing further examples of Goffman’s concepts, and two, by providing these examples in a sector which is somewhat neglected in leadership impression management literature.

The study also offers several benefits to the nonprofit sector itself. The nonprofit sector plays an important role in the functioning of Canadian society by enriching lives or helping individuals whose needs are not fulfilled by private or public institutions. This thesis can help empower nonprofit leaders to better understand their roles and challenges, recognize common problems and solutions, gain greater self-awareness of their own presentations, and consider possible solutions to leadership obstacles, especially those that involve impression management. Nonprofit leaders may feel empowered to reflect on their own impression management tactics and find ways to improve on them. By assisting nonprofit leaders in this way, this thesis may make a considerable contribution to those who work in this sector and to those who depend on their success.

Despite its limitations, the findings can also assist nonprofit leaders by increasing transparency and sharing of success strategies. While the primary intention of this thesis is not to produce generalizable findings, it is important to note that the participants demonstrate a significant degree of consistency in their responses. The participants report similar challenges, success strategies and approaches to leadership. Therefore, nonprofit leaders may find the responses of other leaders applicable to their own work environments. Lastly, as was already reported, there is a gap in the literature on leadership as a performance in the nonprofit sector. This thesis helps to narrow this gap on an important subject, and by doing so makes a contribution to the social science literature on leadership, impression management, and the nonprofit sector.

## **Appendix A: Interview Questions**

1. What qualities do you think are essential in a leader?
2. What, in your opinion, are the defining qualities of a successful organization?
3. How much of the success – or failure – of an organization would you say depends on the person at the helm?
4. What are your most important duties in the organization?
5. Who are some of the people that have been important to the success of the organization?
6. Can you provide me with some examples of notable challenges that you have faced as a leader?
7. Do you have any personal weaknesses or limitations that you wish you could improve on that would make you a better leader?
8. Can you provide me with an example from your daily activities of how you deal with these weaknesses or limitations?
9. How do you deal with embarrassing moments or mistakes?
10. How do you handle conflicts in your job?
11. Do your staff ever get discouraged when there are problems? How do you handle this?
12. How do you get others inside the organization to carry out your suggestions/advice/orders?
13. How about individuals outside the organization? Are there strategies you adopt to influence others?
14. What about the organization commanded your interest and made you decide to work there?
15. Do you envisage yourself as remaining with the organization for a limited time or for a long period of time?



## **Appendix B: Information and Consent Letter #1**

**University of Waterloo**

### **The Everyday Presentation of Leadership in Nonprofit Organizations**

Date

Dear *(insert participant's name)*:

My name is Megan DePutter and I am a Masters student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Waterloo. Under the supervision of Dr. Robert Hiscott and Dr. Tim Gawley (Leadership Program, Wilfrid Laurier University – Brantford) I am conducting a study that explores how people like you promote your leadership and organizational success in the nonprofit sector. The findings will shed light onto how nonprofit leaders uniquely or similarly present and promote themselves as leaders compared to leaders in other sectors or organizational cultures.

I would like to include you and your organization as one of a dozen participants to be involved in my study. I would like to learn more about how you present yourself as a leader in your organization and how you promote your organization to others. As a leader of a nonprofit organization in Canada, you can make an important contribution to this study.

Your participation would involve an interview (conducted by me) that would last approximately one to one-and-a-half hours. I know that you are a very busy individual, and so I want to emphasize that your participation, including your answering of interview questions or the length of our interview, is completely confidential and voluntary. You may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. In addition to our interview, I would like to request the participation of 3 to 4 staff members in your organization who would also be interested in sharing their views about how your nonprofit organization is promoted. Further details of the study will be provided prior to the interview.

With your permission, the interview will be tape-recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. All information you provide is completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be retained in a locked office and destroyed after the analysis has been completed. Only I will have access to this data. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in your decision to participate, please contact me at 519-746-9411 or by e-mail at [mdeputte@artsmail.uwaterloo.ca](mailto:mdeputte@artsmail.uwaterloo.ca). You can contact my supervisor, Professor Hiscott at (519) 888-4567 ext. 32645 (e-mail [hiscott@watarts.uwaterloo.ca](mailto:hiscott@watarts.uwaterloo.ca)) or Professor Tim Gawley at (519) 756-8228 ext. 5753 (e-mail: [tgawley@wlu.ca](mailto:tgawley@wlu.ca)).

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Susan Sykes at (519) 888-4567 Ext. 6005.

I hope that the results of my study will be of benefit to those organizations directly involved in the study, other nonprofit organizations not directly involved in the study, as well as to the broader research community.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Yours Sincerely,

Megan DePutter

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### **CONSENT FORM**

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Megan DePutter of the Department of Sociology at the University of Waterloo. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be tape recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this thesis, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics at (519) 888-4567 ext. 6005.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

YES NO

I agree to have my interview tape recorded.

YES NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this thesis.

YES NO

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

Witness Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix C: Information and Consent Letter #2**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

My name is Megan DePutter and I am a Masters student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Waterloo. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Robert Hiscott and Dr. Tim Gawley (Leadership Program, Wilfrid Laurier University – Brantford) on the presentation of leadership and leadership success in the nonprofit sector. As part of my thesis research, I am conducting interviews with successful leaders like you.

This thesis seeks to gain a better understanding of how leadership is performed in Canadian nonprofit organizations. The findings should shed light onto how nonprofit leaders uniquely or similarly present and promote themselves as leaders compared to leaders in other sectors or organizational cultures.

I would like to include you and your organization as one of a dozen participants to be involved in my study. I would like to learn more about how you present yourself as a leader in your organization and how you promote your organization to others. As a leader of a nonprofit organization in Canada, you will be able to make an important contribution to this study.

Your participation would involve an interview (conducted by me) that would last approximately one to one-and-a-half hours. I know that you are a very busy individual, and so I want to emphasize that your participation, including your answering of interview questions or the length of our interview, is completely confidential and voluntary. In addition to our interview, I would like to request the participation of 3 to 4 staff members in your organization who would also be interested in sharing their views about how your nonprofit organization is promoted. Further details of the study will be provided prior to the interview.

If you are interested in participating, or would like more information about the study, please contact me by e-mail or at 519-746-9411. This study has been reviewed by, and has received ethics approval from, the Office of Research Ethics, University of Waterloo. You may also contact my supervisors Dr. Hiscott (519-888-4567 ext. 32645 or e-mail: hiscott @watarts.uwaterloo.ca) and Dr. Gawley (519-756-8228, ext. 5753 or e-mail: tgawley @wlu.ca) for further information.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Megan DePutter

The University of Waterloo

## Appendix D: Email Script

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

My name is Megan DePutter and I am a Masters student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Waterloo. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Robert Hiscott and Dr. Tim Gawley (Leadership Program, Wilfrid Laurier University – Brantford) on the presentation of leadership and leadership success in the nonprofit sector. As part of my thesis research, I am conducting interviews with successful leaders like you.

This thesis seeks to gain a better understanding of how leadership is performed in Canadian nonprofit organizations. The findings should shed light onto how nonprofit leaders uniquely or similarly present and promote themselves as leaders compared to leaders in other sectors or organizational cultures.

I would like to include you and your organization as one of a dozen participants to be involved in my study. I would like to learn more about how you present yourself as a leader in your organization and how you promote your organization to others. As a leader of a nonprofit organization in Canada, you will be able to make an important contribution to this study.

Your participation would involve an interview (conducted by me) that would last approximately one to one-and-a-half hours. I know that you are a very busy individual, and so I want to emphasize that your participation, including your answering of interview questions or the length of our interview, is completely confidential and voluntary. In addition to our interview, I would like to request the participation of 3 to 4 staff members in your organization who would also be interested in sharing their views about how your nonprofit organization is promoted. Further details of the study will be provided prior to the interview.

If you are interested in participating, or would like more information about the study, please contact me by e-mail or at 519-746-9411. This study has been reviewed by, and has received ethics approval from, the Office of Research Ethics, University of Waterloo. You may also contact my supervisors Dr. Hiscott (519-888-4567 ext. 32645 or e-mail: hiscott @watarts.uwaterloo.ca) and Dr. Gawley (519-756-8228, ext. 5753 or e-mail: tgawley @wlu.ca) for further information.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Megan DePutter

The University of Waterloo

## **Appendix E: Profile of Participants and Participating Organizations**

### National Health Charities and International Development Organizations

#### ***Organization A***

Canadian, National Health Charity

Revenue, 2005-6: \$150,000,000 - \$200,000,00

Size: 150+ (national office)

**Joan**- CEO

#### ***Organization B***

Canadian, National Health Charity

Revenue, 2005-6: \$1,000,000 - \$50,000,000

Size: 50 - 100 (national office)

**Gene**- CEO

#### ***Organization C***

Canadian, National Health Charity

Revenue, 2005-6: \$1,000,000 - \$50,000,000

Size: 1 - 50 (national office)

**Fred** - CEO

**Courtney** - Executive Director

**Debbie**- Regional Director

**Tina** - Senior Staff

#### ***Organization D***

Canadian, National, International Development

Revenue, 2005-6: \$1,000,000 - \$50,000,000

Size: 50 - 100 (total)

**Chuck** - CEO

***Organization E***

Canadian, National, Poverty Reduction

Revenue: \$1,000,000 - \$50,000,000

Size: 1 – 50 (Local chapter)

**Diana** – Executive Director

**Janis** – Senior Staff

Local and Regional Organizations

***Organization F***

Canadian, Local – International Development

Revenue, 2005-6: \$1,000,000 - \$50,000,000

Size: 1 – 50 (National office)

**Jimmy** - Co-CEO and Co-Founder

**Pete**- Chapter President

**Patty** - Senior Staff

***Organization G***

Canadian, Regional- HIV/AIDS

Revenue, 2005-6: \$1,000,000 - \$50,000,000

Size: 1 - 50 (Single office)

**Joe** - Executive Director

***Organization H***

Canadian, Local – Women Ethnic-Minorities

Revenue, 2005-2006: \$50,000 - \$1,000,000

Size: 1 – 50 (Single office)

**Melissa** – Executive Director

**Organization I**

Egyptian, National Health Charity

Revenue: \$50,000 - \$1,000,000

Staff Size: 1 – 50 (Single office)

**Jann** – CEO and Co-Founder

**Annie** – Senior Staff

**Liz** – Senior Staff

***Organization J***

Egyptian, International Voluntary Association, Poverty Reduction

Revenue: \$1 - \$50,000

Staff Size: 1 – 50 (Local chapter; note that local chapter is voluntary).

**Steven** – Chapter President

**Organization K**

Egyptian, Local – African Development

Revenue: \$1 - \$50,000

Staff Size: 1 – 50 (Single office; note that organization is voluntary).

**Robert** – CEO and Founder



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