The Making of Miracles:
An Organizational Approach to Ball State University Dance Marathon

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

This ethnographic study examines the growth of Ball State University Dance Marathon through interviews, observation, and participation within the organization. This study explores the question: What are the factors contributing to the rapid growth of Ball State University Dance Marathon? The results are articulated in the themes: 1) Why do we do what we do? 2) What keeps our organization growing? and 3) What are the outcomes of our efforts?

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

We’re spreading hope to all the families, so they look to us and hope that one day no one has to go through what their children did. – Nathan

Ball State University Dance Marathon (BSUDM) began as an annual Greek philanthropy event in 2007 hosted by the sorority Phi Mu and the fraternity Sigma Alpha Epsilon. The event is a fundraiser for Riley Hospital for Children in Indianapolis, Indiana. In 2009, it became an official Ball State University student organization registered through the Office Of Student Life.

Dance Marathon began in 1990, when Indiana University (IU) hosted their first Dance Marathon (IUDM). IU’s Dance Marathon began in honor of prospective student Ryan White who had contracted AIDS from a contaminated blood transfusion while receiving treatment for hemophilia at the age of 13. Faced with fear and ignorance from the community, White began traveling from school to school, fighting a misinformed public and calling for compassion. He died the spring before starting his freshman year at IU (Indiana University Dance Marathon website, 2016).

Riley Hospital for Children is part of a larger national network of hospitals called the Children’s Miracle Network (CMN). The money raised at each college or high school campus goes towards specific programs at specific CMN hospitals located within each school’s region. Funds from BSUDM go directly towards Riley Children’s Hospital.

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1 Pseudonyms are used throughout this thesis in order to protect the confidentiality of all participants, families, and any other persons.

2 Dance Marathon is a national non-profit organization raising money for over 170 pediatric hospitals across the United States. BSUDM is one of more than 350 Dance Marathon programs that belong to the national organization.
Specifically, these funds support two programs within the hospital, the Magic Castle Cart\textsuperscript{3} and the Palliative Care Program.\textsuperscript{4}

As BSUDM’s organizational mission states, Dance Marathon is a “year-round fundraising and awareness effort,” that culminates in a 12-hour event known as “the marathon” that occurs in February each year. This 12-hour marathon centers around a makeshift stage assembled for the event at an on-campus indoor track, and consists of activities such as fundraising, interacting with Riley Families, playing games, learning a group “line dance,” having meal rotations, watching entertainment, and dancing. Despite the name “dance marathon,” the event contains no running, and dancing is mostly sporadic throughout the night. However, no sitting is allowed at the marathon, and the 12 hours is spent standing. This serves as a reminder that the organization is standing up for those who cannot.

The first level of participation in the organization is the role of “dancer.” Dancers are participants who attend the marathon and engage in fundraising before and during the marathon. Dancers represent various campus organizations, like Greek organizations, residence halls, clubs, and so on, that form teams. These teams are assigned colors, giving participants an identity during the marathon as their color team rotates through stations and competes against other color teams in various activities throughout the event.

The next level of participation is the role of committee member. Committee members join a specific committee, such as the Morale Committee, the Riley Relations

\textsuperscript{3} The Magic Castle Cart program consists of two carts that are pushed from room to room at Riley Children’s Hospital, brightening children’s day with “smile-therapy” through the use of games, activities, toys, and stuffed animals.

\textsuperscript{4} The Palliative Care Program, or end-of-life care, is new to Riley Children’s Hospital, and allows the hospital to treat children with terminal illnesses from patients’ homes.
Committee, or the Corporate Sponsors Committee, and perform specific roles within the organization. The director of each committee serves on the Executive Board, often called Exec Board or Exec. In addition to the 23 directors, Exec includes the four vice-presidents and the president.

Preparation for the next marathon begins immediately after each marathon. After a several-week long application and interview process, the Exec Board is set for the next year. Fundraising events and Riley Family events begin happening immediately. “Riley Families” refer to the families whose kids either are currently being treated or have been treated at Riley Hospital in the past. The next few months consist of raising funds and awareness in the form of events, such as a golf tournament, a 5K walk/jog, “canning” (or the act of asking for donations out in public places), and other on-campus events.

Participants abbreviate Dance Marathon as “DM,” which can refer to the event, the organization, or the cause. A common question within the organization is some variant of, “Why do you DM?,” meaning, “Why are you involved in Dance Marathon?” The slogan FTK stands for “For the Kids.” It is the heartbeat of the organization, chanted at meetings and events, as well as written out on merchandise and literature.

I was drawn to Ball State University Dance Marathon because I recognized there was something special occurring within the organization. BSUDM is the largest student-run philanthropic organization on campus, and it continues to grow. I have seen friends and peers become so invested in this organization that it becomes their identity. The passion and commitment found in organizational members is special to this organization. I wanted to explore the growth of this organization. Therefore, my research question is:
What are the factors contributing to the rapid growth of Ball State University Dance Marathon?

Methods

Over the course of several months, data were collected through ethnographic strategies, which are described below.

Recruitment

For this study, I conducted six interviews with members of the 2015-2016 BSUDM Exec Board. In order to obtain interview participants, I employed the snowball sampling technique. I started with two friends of mine who were on the Exec Board. I asked for suggestions of further potential participants from these two initial contacts. I then used the organization’s Exec Board web page, which contained pictures, first and last names, as well as members’ titles. Based on this information, I was able to contact potential interviewees through Ball State University’s Webmail services.

Data Gathering

Interviews. After agreeing on a time and place, each participant and I met for a one-on-one conversation in a public cafe, with the exception of one interview, which occurred in the Dance Marathon office located at the University’s Student Center. The interviews were based on 12 questions that I had written down in a spiral notebook. After gaining consent, I digitally recorded each interview as an .mp3 file, for a total of more than three and a half hours of recorded interviews. One interview occurred one week before the marathon, while the remaining five occurred within the two weeks following

5 The Exec Board consists of sophomore, junior, and senior Ball State University Students.
the marathon. These interviews were then transcribed into 101 pages of double-spaced text.

**Participant Observation.** As a participant observer, I attended an Exec Board meeting, participated in the marathon, engaged in fundraising, and served office hours. I also functioned as a “miracle maker” and as a dancer within the organization. As a miracle maker, which is DM’s title for team captain, I created a team of five dancers and filled the role of team captain. I raised the $100.00 fundraising minimum, and attended the 12-hour marathon.

Two weeks before the marathon, I attended BSUDM’s weekly Exec Board meeting. In addition to Exec members, any guests, relevant organizational members, or advisors may attend. I was introduced as a guest, and my status of researcher was made known. During the course of the meeting, I was asked to make various comments from my perspective as “an outsider” to the Exec Board. Furthermore, I volunteered in the Dance Marathon office, where I observed interactions between various Exec Board members, dancers, committee members, and Riley Kids. I also helped count money, the cash and coin referred to as “hard cash,” from a recent fundraising effort, and heard plans about the upcoming marathon. I collected three pages of double-spaced field notes.

**Analysis**

Using the transcribed interviews and field notes, I began the process of primary coding. During my initial coding procedure, I wrote memos in the margin of the transcripts. This produced surface-level observations and short summaries of ideas and

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6 Dance Marathon provides a strong support system for all kids in need. Therefore, the word “kid” in phrases like “Riley Kid,” “For the Kids,” or simply “Kids” may be purposively capitalized to reflect this organizational value.
perspectives. Next, I engaged in the process of secondary coding, where I made a list of themes that emerged from the initial coding. This list included uniqueness, legacy, success, personal connections, mutual support, transformation, cycle of life, tangible results, and being a part of something bigger than oneself. These themes were put into a list and linked together until the themes were grouped into the three themes: 1) Why do we do what we do? 2) What keeps our organization growing? and 3) What are the outcomes of our efforts?

Findings

Why Do We Do What We Do?

*Just keeping sight of why we’re doing what we’re doing, because as soon as we lose focus of that, the whole organization and everything we work for is just worthless.* — Rachael

**Uniqueness.** Exec members refer to BSUDM in terms of uniqueness, defining the organization in terms of aspects that make it special. For example, a collective reciting of the organization’s mission begins each Exec meeting. The mission statement is the first item written on the meeting’s agenda, which as Nathan noted, “doesn’t happen in a lot of places.”

The most prominent representation of uniqueness is BSUDM’s relationships with their Riley Families, a tenet strongly emphasized in the mission statement. When asked

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7 The BSUDM mission statement: “Our mission is to create a year-round fundraising and awareness effort in support of the children and families at Riley Hospital for Children by unifying the Ball State University Student body, providing a strong support system for the kids, and celebrating hope and healing for our Riley Families through our annual Dance Marathon event.”
what BSUDM does best, Nathan exemplified participants’ attitudes when he said, “It’s our relationships with our families. It’s nation-wide known.” If other marathons need help strengthening relationships with their Riley Families, these schools often reach out to Ball State for advice. “Sometimes as Dance Marathons grow, it’s almost like people just like the fame of being in that Dance Marathon, and at Ball State it’s very different,” Rachael shared. In the same way, Lindsey framed it, “We find so much value in those families. That makes us very different nationwide.” This specialness is recognized at both national and local levels within the larger organization. “We have constantly been told time and time again by CMN...that our marathon is different because we do focus on the family,” Rachael explained.

Part of this uniqueness is filling a void that would not otherwise be filled. Rachael described her personal interactions with staff members at Riley Hospital, and said, “[One of] the doctors in Palliative Care, Dr. Thompson, has told us that if we didn’t fundraise, they would not have a palliative care program.” This creates a very real sense of duty, where the organization continues to push itself because the role they are filling would cease to exist without their work. Exec members such as Katie recognize that “without us, there wouldn’t be a Magic Castle Cart: we fully fund that. We fully fund the Palliative Care Unit....That’s why we work so hard to get a big total.”

This identity as unique carries with it a tone of gratitude and humility. Rachael shared, “I think that the growth we’re seeing is something that’s just very special to Ball State, and I don’t know why Ball State is the special one, but we just are....I think we’re all very lucky to have a Dance Marathon like this at our school.” By defining their
organization in terms of uniqueness, organizational members become excited and engaged in what is going on.

**Personal Connections to the Riley Families.** Another reason BSUDM participants "do what they do" is driven by their personal connections to the Riley Families. Ball State University Dance Marathon goes above and beyond what other marathons across the nation are doing in order to connect with the families. Katie observed:

> Our connection with our families is year-round....We have kind of like an introduction event probably in late spring where we invite families to come to Ball State and meet the new directors, hang out with old directors too....They get to interact with each other. In the summer we have a big family event in Indianapolis, because that's much more central.

The Riley Relations Committee is usually the face of these efforts. This year-round connection travels not only off-campus, but across the state and into the very homes of the Riley Families. BSUDM members build year-round connections by attending graduations, school plays, soccer games, dinners, gymnastic events, swim meets, and any other event that organizational members can attend in order to communicate their love and support to their Riley Kids. This past year, a number of the Exec Board members celebrated Thanksgiving dinner at a Riley Family's home over the holiday season, in addition to being invited over for regular "family dinners." One interviewee boasts the fact that the board members are Facebook friends with all of their Riley Families. Mariah extends her reasons to DM by saying, "Beyond the Kids, I say I
DM for the siblings and the parents. You know, just as the kids are in the hospital, the parents are in the little chair beside them for a couple of years. And they need support."

Another Exec Board member told a story of how the "bigwigs" who supervise Dance Marathon on a national level recognize Ball State as being family-oriented, compared to other Dance Marathons. As Rachael shared, "The fact that our families, even though they participate in many...different Dance Marathons, they still know ours is the one they can count on to be the most family-oriented." Most committees and teams are assigned a specific Riley Kid the day of the Marathon. During the marathon, teams focus on their Riley Kid, which includes giving gifts, decorating a banner, playing games, and giving attention. The goal, according to Mariah, is to make each of the Riley Kids at the marathon "feel like they...are a celebrity for the day, because that's what they are."

**Remembering the Legacy.** Dance Marathon as an activity and as an organization is an emotionally charged experience. By nature of working hand in hand with a hospital, organizational participants see firsthand the weight of death and disease. The role of stories is crucial in the Dance Marathon culture. While every Riley Kid has a "story," findings showed that the term "legacy" was typically reserved in reference to the story of a Riley Kid who has passed away. As Mariah put it, "Although the success stories are great, I feel like the stories that don't end well are the ones that keep you going." By remembering stories, the struggles and successes of Riley Families fuel the organization: they become something tangible worth remembering and fighting for.

The power of legacy is woven in the fabric of the organization. BSUDM differentiates itself from other Dance Marathons as it creates a personality based on the
Riley Kids that are a part of its own BSUDM family. This is seen through awards and events that recognize legacies. As Lindsey remembered:

I was on the last executive council that got to meet Tyler Jackson before he passed away. And now our FT5K is in honor of him. [His] family came this year and spoke to all of our runners. And it makes a huge difference to the students involved to see we’re making miracles happen in the lives of families that are still here, but we’re also making a difference in the lives of the families who have lost someone very important to them.

Every year, two awards are given to Exec members in honor of Riley Kid legacies. One is given in honor of Ryan White to a person who, as Rachael stated, “encompasses the passion for Dance Marathon all year round. Ryan, his motto in life, was just to be passionate about everything.” Leah Turner is another legacy held dear by many in BSUDM. The Keep On Shining Award is given out each year and commemorates Leah’s daily choice to keep on shining despite the physical, emotional, and relational toll that living with a terminal illness brought. The award recognizes a female committee member who despite adversity demonstrated the ability to go above and beyond to give to the organization. To Rachael, it’s a moving experience to watch Leah’s legacy live out through each recipient.

At the 2016 BSUDM, 15 families stood onstage and shared their stories, full of setbacks and successes, and even some of the ultimate loss. As Rachael reflected, “Remembering is almost how we find our inspiration to keep going.”

One way this act of remembering occurs at the marathon is through the Inspiration Tent, which Katie called “a secluded area where you can go to see all of our
Riley Kids’ stories. Each Riley Kid has a board, and it has pictures on it, and their story.” Katie went on to describe how the lights and candles create an intimate feeling. The black cloth tent serves as an ever-present somber reminder of the legacies that Dance Marathon keeps alive.

Devin shared his story of why he first began to DM:

I DM for a friend of mine, his name is Seth. He was 14. Seth told his mom before he passed away..., “I don’t want to be forgotten.” [By telling his story, I give Seth] that ability to not be forgotten, that he’s always living on [because I share] his story with others. Seth should still be here. But, I’m glad that he’s continued to impact people to this day. Because he has.

These stories play an important role in Dance Marathon. Katie said that sharing these stories “brings you back to the roots of why we’re doing this.” Like Rachael summarized, “[Remembering the legacies] is almost everything about Dance Marathon.” To the participants, sharing these legacies is viewed as a commitment to the Turner family to remember Leah’s life and passion every time they dance. Katie said, “I want to keep Jenna’s...[and] Leah’s legacy alive, and I feel like honestly without DMs they wouldn’t, you know what I mean?...They wouldn’t.”

**The Tension of Success.** Another theme that emerged from the data was the tension of how to define success for BSUDM. On one hand, success was defined as always putting the Kids first. On the other hand, success was consistently referred to in terms of fundraising dollars. Exec Board members repeatedly claimed that the fundraising total, often called “the number,” was secondary to focusing on the Kids. As Katie stated, by “continuing to inspire people and...not lose sight of why we do this... I
just hope that we can still keep the Kids and the families at the forefront of what we do.”

Over and over again, both organizational members and the organizational mission point to success as always putting the Kids first. Nathan claimed:

   Everything we do is for the Kids. So, if that means raising money for the Kids, we’ll raise money. If that means the day of the marathon we’re $100,000.00 away from our goal and raising money would detract from being for the Kids, then we won’t. We won’t hit our goal. Whatever the Kids need, we do, you know?

BSUDM navigates this tension well. As noted earlier, Ball State is known for its attention and focus on the Kids. As Katie has found, “Parents who have been to other dance marathons have told us, ‘Ball State, even though you guys raise these huge amounts of money, you really do always keep the families first.’”

Exec members at Ball State described how other Dance Marathons across the nation often struggle to keep the Kids as a higher priority than the fundraising. Devin noted:

   Some marathons get caught up in [raising money] where they want to raise money because they want to be top. They want to be in the top ten. And being in the top ten is amazing...but, the real reason you’re doing what you’re doing is for the Kids.

These “other” Dance Marathons were said to struggle with desiring “fame” instead of being there for the Kids. According to Mariah, “At the end of the day it doesn’t matter if you raise 200,000 dollars or if you raised 600,000 dollars, students got together and raised this money.”
While it appears that these sentiments are genuine, “the number” continues to be the defining measurement for marathons. Almost every interviewed participant, in some form or another, referred to the organization’s history in terms of how much money was raised, as exemplified when Lindsey recalled:

[BSUDM] started only raising like 12,000 dollars. And then up from there, just doubling that almost each year. I was involved on the executive council in 2013, and we raised 196,000 dollars. So then just seeing it come from that to 610,000 dollars.

This tension is further highlighted through the way that Nathan defined what sustains the movement of Dance Marathon. Nathan described, “Part of the culture of Dance Marathon, part of what makes it successful is those rising numbers. It’s important that those numbers go up each year because if they go down one year, where does the moral go for the campus?” Each Dance Marathon is asked to grow their total fundraising dollar amount by 20% from year to year. Several members echoed the essential aspect of always raising more and more money by talking about their fear of “plateauing,” or the undesirable day when fundraising dollars quit increasing. As a general model, plateauing happens around the tenth year of a Dance Marathon. This is a timely trend for BSUDM to keep in mind as the organization prepares for the 2017 marathon, the organization’s tenth year.

Although this tension exists as an ever-present struggle for BSUDM, the organization has continued to put the families first. Up until this point, the two dichotomies of success have worked together to compliment the other, but the tension remains.
What keeps our organization growing?

As a director, I have reached out to a couple other directors... It's very open and people are always willing to help and give feedback. – Mariah

**Mutual support.** As the largest philanthropic organization on campus, BSUDM has a lot of support. Support radiates from the organization’s structure. According to field notes, the organization has five different advisors. The first is a national advisor, then a regional advisor, a university level advisor through the Office of Student Life, and two graduate assistants.

Participants describe a support system within Dance Marathons as well. Mariah noted how BSUDM “feeds off other schools,” and that the growth and energy from other marathons are contagious from campus to campus. For example, BSUDM partnered with Butler University’s Dance Marathon for a combined Riley Families event. Mariah described, “We got to hang out with a couple more new families, and the Kids and the families can see that Dance Marathon is a network.” Another form of support comes from a national Dance Marathon conference that Exec members attended over the summer. This impactful national conference brought together Exec members from across the nation, reminding participants that Dance Marathon is a network of support.

Furthermore, mutual support is seen in BSUDM’s presence on campus. Lindsey recalled how, “Dance Marathon likes to return [support] by attending philanthropies for all of Greek Life, making sure that we’re making a presence at all of these organizations’ events... because they have decided to find our organization important.” BSUDM intentionally sends representatives and teams to other philanthropies throughout the year to the organizations that have teams involved in Dance Marathon.
Internal support was seen through the use of the family metaphor. Lindsey demonstrated this by saying, “Part of being a family is loving one another, regardless of what happens....We kind of create that culture around the fact that we just love what we do and that we love each other while we do it.” This family metaphor, at least in discourse, extends to all levels within the organization. Mariah stated, “We’re a family with our Executive Board. We’re a family with our committee members. We’re a family with our dancers....We want to help them. And then we have a family with our Riley families too.”

Another source of support comes from the Riley Families themselves. While the organization exists to support the Riley Families, the data showed an incredible amount of support coming from the Riley Families too. This mutual support at such a personal level within the organization seems to be the propulsion that moves BSUDM forward. Individual Riley Families are perceived as dedicated advocates to not only the cause and organization, but to the individual members as well. Lindsey said, “I’m really close to Emily Johnson’s mom, Karen....We call her Momma Jo....She latched on very quickly to my executive council...and since then, she’s been the one who’s [said], ‘It’s going to be ok. You’re going to do it.’” Both Riley Families and Exec members simultaneously give and receive support. Lindsey referred to Karen as “the cheerleader for everything we do,” and continued by saying, “Last year, when $502,000.00 seemed almost unattainable, she looked at me at 1:30 in the morning, and [said], ‘It doesn’t matter what happens, your Riley families are so incredibly proud.’” The use of the family metaphor suggests the unconditional love that an ideal family evokes, and forms the foundations of the mutual support that is evident within the organization.
Cycle of Life. BSUDM exists on a one-year life cycle. Every 12 months, the organization holds elections through an extensive student-run interview process. The same person rarely fills the same position twice. This gives as many people as possible the ability to experience different roles. It also gives "the next generation" the chance to lead, bringing more and more people into the core of the organization. The high rate of leadership turnover, seen as positive in this context, seems to contribute to the rapid growth that the organization has experienced. Since people are likely to only have one year in a given position, there is a strong drive to leave the organization better off next year.

Participants consistently used the words "growth" and "potential" in reference to the organization. Mariah's words of, "We're going to grow. We have so much potential," reflect a general and reoccurring attitude of growth. Rachael stated, "The growth that Ball State Dance Marathon has experienced is absolutely huge...and I think that's not going to stop." Just like any living thing, growth is essential to survival, and the organizational members recognize that. The yearly exchange of leadership positions raises the expectation for the next year. Mariah summed it up by saying, "We've got very big shoes to fill but that's very exciting."

Transformation. Ball State University Dance Marathon leaves a permanent mark on those involved. Exec members talked about the transforming experience that BSUDM has been for them. Katie stated, "My leadership skills have definitely developed since I joined....[BSUDM] allowed me to come out of my shell." Katie also shared, "[BSUDM has] taught me to never be afraid....[and] to not take things for granted." The organization's positive impact is held in high regards. Devin noted, "[BSUDM] is a
positive impact for students. It teaches them a lot. And it’s important for them to see that what they do really does make an impact in somebody else’s life.” Participants shared stories of watching transformation occur in their committee members. Rachael admitted, “I’m changing because Dance Marathon is changing me.” In the same way that participants want to leave both the organization and the cause better off, participants find themselves better off as well.

**Hard work.** While Exec members had very strong positive things to say about the organization, it comes at a price. The successes seen by the organization are achieved through the hard work of the students involved. Mariah confessed:

I put in so many hours and stayed up so many nights, and stressed and had so much anxiety about things that were out of my control, but it’s because I believed in the cause and I believed in the impact we were making.

Katie said, “We just...spend so much time together. We have like three meetings a week...I mean, we all work so hard for this. And we don’t get paid, we don’t get service hours.” Despite the difficulty of the task, the emotional investment and the time given in service to Dance Marathon seems to give members more of a buy-in, more of a connection to the cause. Rachael reflected, “When January and February come, your whole life is Dance Marathon for two months, that’s just how it is.” By the time the marathon comes around, the hard work and investment is climaxing. But, the reward for the hard work comes. Lindsey said, “You won’t ever actually know until you’ve put all of this hard work in for 12 months, and then get to see it in each of your families that says ‘thank you’ at the very end of the day.”
The reveal, or when the final fundraising total is revealed at the end of the marathon, is the arrival point. During my volunteer hours in the Dance Marathon office, I saw a glimpse of this hard work in action. As I sat down for an interview with one of the participants, they asked, “Do you mind if we move this to the office? I don’t think anyone is there and someone has to cover it.” Over the next two hours, over a half dozen people came in and out off the office to pick up merchandise and fundraising supplies, drop off donations and supplies, count money, or just to socialize.

What are the outcomes of our efforts?

It’s taught me not only is it easy to get involved in something, easy to make an impact, but it’s important. – Devin

Bigger than Oneself. Organizational participants repeatedly viewed BSUDM as a way to be a part of something bigger than oneself. Lindsey stated, “We’re a generation that’s told we don’t find anything outside of ourselves to value, and yet we have 1,400 college students that said, ‘yeah, there is something bigger than what we are.’” This gives members the feeling that they have a purpose for what they’re doing. As Riley reflected, he said, “[BSUDM has] taught me that you can be part of something bigger than yourself.” Attendance at meetings and fundraising events are ways that organizational members can be a part of this movement that’s bigger than them. There is pride in identifying with a group that is achieving incredible impact. Lindsey felt a part of something bigger than herself when she mentioned, “It’s a nationwide movement. It’s proof that college kids do find worth and value outside of themselves.” The goal of the organization is to work itself out of existence, so that all disease has a cure and Dance Marathons are no longer needed. A goal like this invites people to invest in a bigger
vision. Participants are also invited into something bigger than themselves through the discourse of “For the Kids.” Often abbreviated simply as “FTK,” the slogan served as a chant at the marathon, repeated in unison hundreds of times throughout the night. FTK appears on t-shirts and merchandise. In fact, Mariah had an FTK sticker on the back of her cell phone, carrying the slogan wherever she goes. For the Kids, the inspiration of organizational members, refers to all Kids past, present, and future who are in need of help, love, and support. The slogan allows people to add personal meaning and interpretation to a universal goal, and thereby taking part of a bigger vision.

**Tangible Results.** The efforts of participating in Dance Marathon are quite visible. Both fundraising dollars and dancer totals are quantifiable and tangible measures of achievement that members can hold on to. Each participant sets their personal fundraising goal, and can work towards that all year until it cumulates in a tangible finale. Furthermore, those involved in the organization get to see firsthand the Kids that their fundraising dollars go towards helping. As Nathan said, “We allow the participants and the students to interact with the families and kids. We really put the face to the cause and to the efforts they’re putting in.” The faces and stories that fill the Inspiration Tent are more than just pictures: they are children laughing, running, and playing at the marathon. Exec members want to clearly communicate where the money is going, and thus being transparent and open with donors. This goes along with the idea of “putting a face to the name.” The marathon does an intentional job clearly defining the Magic Castle Cart and the Palliative Care Unit, so all participants know where their money is going. Katie stated, “There’s just something about DM [where] you can see that you’re making an impact, and where your money is going does matter. You are changing lives…”People
want to be a part of that. They want to feel like they’re making a difference.” Two participants mentioned their experience of visiting Riley Hospital and volunteering with the Magic Castle Cart. Rachael described her experience by saying:

I’ve actually had the chance to go down to Riley twice and push the Magic Castle Cart around... on the cancer floor.... It is a very surreal experience to see something that you worked so hard for actually in Riley.... There’s a big plaque that says BSUDM.

By witnessing the tangible results, participants become more invested in the mission of the organization.

Conclusion

*We always say, ‘We dance for those who can’t in the hopes that one day we won’t have to.’ But in the meantime, our goal is just to give as much as we can, to make sure we can keep fighting for a chance for each of those Kids.* — Lindsey

By exploring the factors contributing to the rapid growth of Ball State University Dance Marathon, this qualitative study examined how participants made sense of both their organization and their world. My analysis revealed the following themes: 1) Why do we do what we do? 2) What keeps our organization growing? 3) What are the outcomes of our efforts? By describing the experiences of organizational participants, this study provided insight into Ball State University Dance Marathon. This study provided practical utility by providing an in-depth look into the organization at one moment in time. It adds to the understanding of Dance Marathon because it provides a look at organizational members’ perspectives. Furthermore, this study helps other organizations understand where BSUDM has found growth and success.
Limitations

Interviews only occurred with members of the Exec Board. People who fill leadership roles within an organization are often more passionate for the cause compared to other members. As a result, the views expressed in these interviews may be more strongly represented in the Exec Board members and not be reflective of all organizational members. Furthermore, participants that served as committee directors may have skewed perspectives towards their role within the organization. For example, those who dealt mostly with corporate sponsorships would have a much different experience than those who dealt directly with the Riley Families.

Future Directions

Future studies may want to look more at the structure of the organization. This could include how attitudes and perspectives change within different parts of the organization.
References

Office of Research Integrity
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DATE: January 28, 2016
TO: Alex Romoser
FROM: Ball State University IRB
RE: IRB protocol # 852746-1
TITLE: The Making of Miracles: A Historical and Cultural Look At Ball State University Dance Marathon
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF NOT HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH
DECISION DATE: January 28, 2016
REVIEW TYPE: Administrative Review

The Institutional Review Board received the above protocol. After review and consideration, the IRB concluded that this project does not meet the definition of 'research with human subjects' at this time, as specified by federal regulations at 45 CFR 46.

Research: A systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge.
(Activities which meet this definition constitute research for purposes of this policy, whether or not they are conducted or supported under a program which is considered research for other purposes.)

Human Subject: A living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains: (1) data through intervention or interaction with the individual or (2) identifiable private information.

Consequently, this project does not require IRB approval as submitted. The IRB accepts this information for our records and will retain it in our files. Thank you for providing the IRB with these materials for review. Please contact the Office of Research Integrity if any details of the study are to change so that the IRB may reconsider the protocol, if necessary.

If you have any questions regarding this decision or would like to respond in person, please contact the Office of Research Integrity.