

Organizational Culture Analysis of

ILLUSION THEATER







2014







Developed for Illusion Theater by the OERG at MNSU, Mankato

organizational effectiveness research group

The Organizational Effectiveness Research Group (OERG) is a consulting service housed within the nationally recognized Industrial/Organizational Psychology Graduate program at Minnesota State University, Mankato. The OERG, comprised of faculty and graduate students, provides contract research and HR consulting services to national and international clients. The OERG offers a wide range of services to both private and public organizations including survey design and analysis, organizational culture analysis, employee selection strategies, employee training and development, and more.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report describes the organizational culture at Illusion Theater, by discussing how the major components of culture are enacted in Illusion's environment and through their employees. The major cultural components that are discussed include history, mission, values, leadership, norms, language, mythology, rituals, icons, products, and the physical environment. In addition, other areas important to Illusion's past and future, including successes and strengths, are also examined.

The data for this report was collected from interviews conducted with the directors, employees, artists, and board members of Illusion Theater. The culture analysis was developed, performed, analyzed, and reported by the OERG at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Major Themes:

- Illusion provides high-quality performing arts theater paired with a spectacular education program
- Illusion uses theater as a vehicle for social change
- Illusion supports and nurtures new artists
- Illusion has deep ties to the community
- Illusion's work culture acts like a family environment
- Illusion employees care for and support one another
- There is always food at Illusion's meetings
- Light and illumination are important parts of Illusion's culture
- Illusion truly cares for the community

**In this report, the word "employees" will refer to everyone involved in the interviewing process, including the directors, the board members, the artists, and the staff.*

ILLUSION THEATER is...



HISTORY

The history of the organization sets up the overall culture of the organization itself. How an organization is structured, its goals and mission, its employees, and more are determined by an organization's past.



The idea for Illusion Theater came from Michael Robins, executive producing director. Michael was inspired by his studies in France in the early 1970s. He returned to Minnesota and created Illusion Theater. Illusion opened its doors on May 16th, 1974. Bonnie Morris joined in 1977, after attending a few of Michael's courses at the University of Minnesota. They have been co-managing the theater ever since. Illusion will be celebrating its 40th year anniversary in May of 2014.

Illusion has produced and performed over 400 plays, seen by over 1.5 million people. Many of the productions focus on social issues. There is a dedication to developing new work and new artists, seen in the Fresh Ink and Lights up! series. Illusion has been a starting point for an impressive amount of new artists' careers (including Jeffrey Hatcher, Kimberly Elise, Lee Blessing, among others). Artists that started out their careers at Illusion Theater have gone on to win Tonys, Obies, and Emmys. Illusion has also organized multiple symposia to discuss relevant and important social issues that its plays portray.



Illusion has been a pioneer in the theater in education field, using plays and theater to teach messages about social issues at schools and in the community. Illusion's education program began in 1978 with a prevention/education play called "Touch," which covered the topic of child sexual abuse. It was the first to develop a theater-based peer education program for youth in 1981. From its inception, Illusion has developed numerous plays targeting the prevention and awareness of social issues that are relevant to the youth of the community, such as bullying, childhood obesity, sexual health, and more.

MISSION

Embodying what an organization stands for and what it aims to achieve, a mission statement stands at the core of organizational culture. Illusion Theater's mission is to

Create theater that illuminates the illusions, myths and realities of our times and to catalyze personal and social change

> Illusion Theater's mission is to create theater that touches people of all ages deeply and personally and that energizes the community around important and complex social issues; and to catalyze personal and social change.

From the interviews of Illusion employees, it was very clear that the stated mission is the basis of their daily work. Everyone within the organization appeared to take the mission to heart. Illusion employees truly believe that their communities, and even the world, can be transformed by the work that they perform. To them, the mission represents shedding light on sensitive issues and bringing up discussions that can help transform the world into a better place.

Illusion Theater is a purpose-driven organization; the mission drives the decision-making of the theater. It decides to perform plays aimed at actualizing the stated mission. Many of the productions are topical representations of the community, which initiate social commentary about sensitive social issues. In addition, the education program propels the mission even further by interacting with the youth of the community. In the education programs, children and families participate in prevention and awareness plays, in addition to other activities that build confidence and important life skills.

In addition, it was stated that employees are encouraged to self-reflect and to challenge themselves to improve. As a result, employees are not only enriching the lives of others, but they are growing and improving themselves through the process. **The mission was listed as a reason why many of the employees joined and remained with the organization.**

VALUES

Values are beliefs expressed by members of an organization and are displayed through the behaviors of its members and the organization as a whole. Organizational values normally flow from the organization's mission statement and determine how the organization will interact with its environment, how decisions will be made, how daily work will be performed, and more.

The following are Illusion's declared values:

- We believe in seeking out new and emerging artists and giving them the opportunity to develop and grow.
- We believe in an on-going critical evaluation of our work that uses specific and appropriate ways to measure our success.
- We believe that as an organization committed to change, we must be willing to change ourselves.
- We believe that the fulfillment of our mission is ultimately achievable only within the context of stable finances. The administrative organization must be strong, disciplined and flexible.
- We believe individually as well as organizationally that we must provide an environment where difference in perspectives, in personal style, in aesthetics, and in our background and culture are celebrated and respected and woven into the fabric of the organization

In addition to the formal values stated by Illusion, listed below are the themes that arose when interviewing Illusion employees about the organization's values:

- Improving the Community
- Bringing People Together
- Helping Others
- Promoting New Work
- Being Adaptable
- Being Courageous
- Leading By Example
- Encouraging Diversity

The following pages discuss these value themes in detail.

Improving the Community

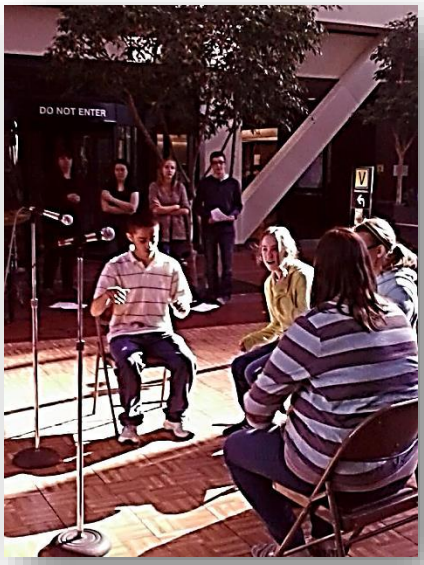
Using both Theater & Education

> "We're here to change the world, our community"
>
> "Everything we do is meaningful"

Many Illusion employees stated that the organization valued making the world a better place. It was stated that everything Illusion does has some meaning to it. Employees truly believe in promoting change and social justice. Illusion wants to challenge individuals and prompt discussions about difficult social issues. It aims to create a safe environment for dialogue. Illusion aims to promote change, not only with plays and other productions, but with educational programs as well. Illusion uses theater as a tool to educate youth and other community members about social issues and life skills.

Bringing People Together

Many Illusion employees cited that a main value was bringing individuals together, especially those who normally would not have been connected. Illusion not only aims to build relationships with individuals outside of the organization, but it also aims to help those outside the organization build relationships with one another. Illusion promotes fairness and equality for everyone and wants to connect people to one another to create a dialogue and to build partnerships.



Helping Others

Some Illusion employees stated that creating a helping and supportive environment was another of Illusion's values. It was discussed that the Illusion as a whole desires to help individuals both within and outside of the organization. It supports and nurtures employees, while also helping members of the community in different ways.

"Illusion is striving to achieve new relationships, new stories, and new causes"

Promoting New Work

Illusion values developing new artists and creating new pieces of work. Artists are encouraged to grow and move on to bigger things if they desire. Illusion is exceptional at creating opportunities for new artists.

Being Adaptable

A few employees stated that the ability to be flexible and adapt to current issues and situations was another one of Illusion's values.

Being Courageous

Another value listed was that of courage. Illusion employees value taking chances and putting effort towards their beliefs. Even when it is risky for the organization, Illusion dares to take on tough issues. For example, Amazing Grace [HIV] and Touch [Sexual Abuse] represented very controversial issues during their time. These plays even received backlash from certain parts of the community. Illusion continued regardless.

Leading by Example

Within the organization, there is personal accountability for one's actions and employees treat each other with great amounts of respect. As a whole, it appears that employees believe in being honest, transparent, and respectful. They portray these behaviors and hope that others in the community will adapt them as well.

Encouraging Diversity

It was apparent that Illusion also values diversity. Illusion has developed a community of diverse individuals. The employees and board members are a diverse group, each with different perspectives and experiences. The organization requests the varying opinions of the employees, board members, and artists when making organizational decisions. In addition, Illusion's work, in theater and education, tends to highlight the differences and similarities between individuals.

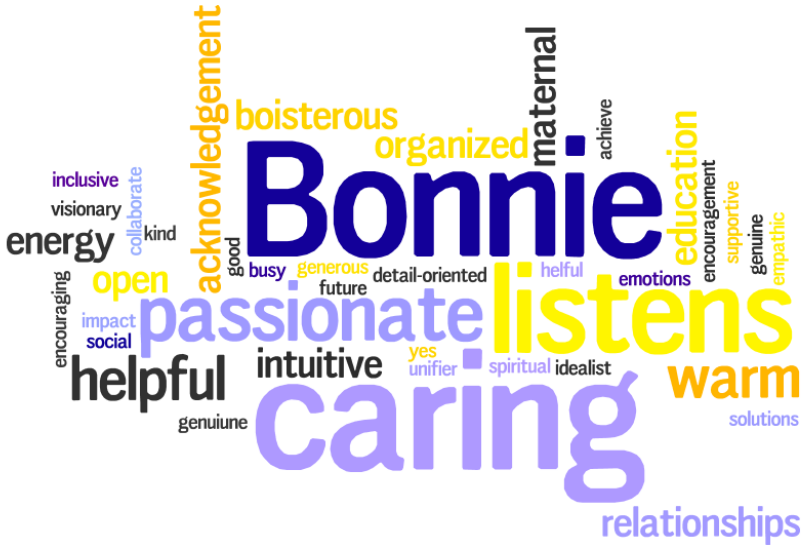


Neither fame nor fortune was *ever* mentioned by any of the employees as something that Illusion

LEADERSHIP

The leadership team is a very central part of an organization's culture. They set the values, mission and goals of the organization and act as the guiding force for action. Michael Robins and Bonnie Morris are the leaders of Illusion Theater.





"Michael and Bonnie are Illusion Theater"

"They complement each other"

While talking to the employees of Illusion, it was apparent that Illusion's leaders, directors Michael and Bonnie, are the foundation of the organization. As an organization, Illusion represents the directors, their values, their goals, and their dreams for a better world. Some employees stated that the leaders ***are*** the theater; they stated that Michael and Bonnie are bigger than the theater itself.

From the interviews, it was clear that Michael and Bonnie are very different leaders. Yet, their differences appeared to complement one another instead of cause friction. Some employee referred to Michael as the brains and Bonnie as the heart. They function as a leadership team, both having their own styles and roles, and both being essential to the organization's functioning. Michael and Bonnie's individual leadership styles will be discussed in the following sections.



Michael Robins



Michael is the founder and Executive Producing Director of Illusion Theater. This organization embodies him enacting his dream. Illusion employees describe Michael as the face of Illusion in the community. Michael is described as direct, practical, open, collaborative, patient, observant, creative and passionate while performing the aspects of running the theater.

Illusion employees described Michael as a task-oriented, yet collaborative leader. He has a good sense of what needs to be accomplished, but is open to ideas and insights from those around him. Michael also leads by example, always keeping a patient and calm demeanor.

Illusion employees stated that one of Michael's strengths is that he is great at developing others. He knows how to delegate and let others learn to perform tasks by themselves, while still being available in case they need assistance. He allows new artists to try new pieces of work and assists them when needed. He gives his opinion when asked, yet not in an overbearing manner. The staff appreciates that he is willing to let them perform their work in a way that is conducive to their personal style.



Additionally, employees stated that

- He is tireless; he is always working for the theater, putting in long hours to make sure that everything goes to plan.
- Michael was is extremely knowledgeable about all aspects of theater. Illusion employees view him as a wealth of knowledge and someone that they can turn to for answers.
- He is always "present;" he lives in the moment, observing his environment at all times.
- Michael is practical, analytical, and creative while determining funding.

Bonnie Morris



Bonnie is a Producing Director who has been with Illusion Theater for over 35 years. Illusion employees described Bonnie as being very enthusiastic and passionate about the work that is performed at the theater. She is described as extremely passionate, genuine, helpful, generous, and caring.

Employees stated that Bonnie leads through relationships. She was described as very caring and even maternal. She is intuitive about others and can tell when they are having a bad day or need to discuss something. She is willing to listen to employees' personal issues and give them advice. She is also open and genuine with her own communications, which allows her to develop close relationships with those she works with. In addition, it was stated that Bonnie frequently encourages her staff, letting them know that their hard work is well appreciated. Those around her stated that this behavior makes them feel important, as if they are making a difference.



Employees stated that Bonnie always reminds the staff of the mission, the context in which they are performing the work and why they are making the decisions that they do. She is very conscious of supporting the mission and the goal of improving the world through their work. Bonnie has been described as an idealist, having grand ideas of the future and the impact that Illusion can have.

Additionally, employees stated that

- Bonnie is organized, and very good at finding solutions to problems.
- She is always working and moving to achieve the next set of goals.
- She is boisterous, full of energy, and always busy.
- Bonnie is fantastic when working with the children in the education programs. Her genuineness, openness, and caring allow her to build connections with the children to help them improve their lives.

NORMS AND THE WORK ENVIRONMENT

Norms are the common behaviors that tend occur in specific social environments, such as organizations. In an organizational setting, norms act as unwritten rules for how employees should behave. Norms control how individuals interact with one another on the job and help create the overall social work environment. This section lists general themes that were discovered when interviewing employees about the norms and work environment at Illusion Theater.

Family, Support, Flexibility

> "The beauty in Illusion is the family, caring environment"

One of the main themes that was discovered through the interview process was the idea of treating each other like **family**. It appears that the members of Illusion Theater tend to care about one another and truly wish the best for everyone involved. Food is always present at meetings, both staff and board. This helps create the sense of family and perpetuates the working relationships. Most employees tend to check-in with one another at the beginning of each day to see how the others are doing. The environment is very open and individuals appear comfortable sharing their problems with one another. In addition, there is an overarching aura of **respect**; it seems to be an unwritten rule that employees treat each other well and listen to others' opinions.

Illusion as an organization appears to be a **supportive environment**, not only for the staff and board members, but for new artists and others as well. Within the organization, employees help each other out when needed. They are willing to put aside time to assist one another, even if it takes them away from their current tasks. The environment can be very collaborative at times.



When new plays, or other ideas, are being developed, the opinions of everyone are sought and respected. It was stated that everyone is allowed to take chances, because they do not let each other fail. If someone is having a hard time, other members of the staff will assist them until he or she reaches the goal. This support is not only for professional issues, but personal ones as well.

"We are all team players"

"They have our back and best interests in mind, and so do we for them"

The working environment at Illusion has also been described as **fluid, ever-changing, flexible, chaotic, and adaptable**. Because of all of the new work that is being developed and performed at Illusion, the environment is constantly changing. In addition, there is a **push for excellence** within Illusion in which each individual contributes. The environment is very fast-paced, as the productions and education programs are adapted to new social issues. As they seek to improve their community, the individuals within the organization have to keep up with the changing times and duties that coincide with them.



Overall, the social work environment appears to be friendly, comfortable, respectful, supportive, fluid, and challenging.

LANGUAGE

Every culture has a different language: sets of frequently used words, general communication styles, specific intonations and speech inflections, and more. Individuals within the same culture tend to communicate with each other in certain ways. Hence, employees within an organization tend to share a common language. This section describes Illusion's communication style as an organization.



General Language:

- The word Illusion itself is a large part of the organization. For those within the organization, "Illusion" stands for **illuminating**. This language focuses on brining delicate social issues into the light, so they can be discussed and overcome. It has very positive connotations.
- The word "**catalyze**" is another frequently used word at Illusion. Common language describes the organization as being a stimulant, a match that starts the flame of social change.
- Illusion, as an organization, **rarely says "no."** It is willing to take chances and try out new things, which is something that is frequently expressed in its language. It is a "yes" culture.
- **Storytelling** is also a large part of Illusion's communications. Individuals tend to relate to one another via stories of the past, present, or future, whether they are discussing this within or outside of the organization.
- **Questioning and developing discussions** is another part of Illusion's language. As an organization, Illusion is always asking questions, to the community and to its staff, to discuss opinions on the social issues of the day.



Language between Employees:

- As discussed earlier in the norms section, the communication style and language within the organization tends to be very open about both personal and professional issues. Employees of Illusion tend to talk to each other in a **relaxed, candid, and free-flowing manner**.
- Collective language is also a part of Illusion. Individuals tend to use inclusive language. **"We"** and **"us"** are words stated frequently to describe the theater, the plays, and the successes. In addition, the words **"family"** and **"friends"** are used often as well. Employees refer to each other as family. Audience members are referred to as friends.
- Language of **recognition** is also a frequent part of communication at Illusion. Employees thank each other often, for things both small and large. Gratitude is expressed through verbal communication.
- As stated earlier, collaboration is a large part of the organization; hence, **collaborative** language is often used. For example, "dialogue" and "discussions" are mentioned frequently.



Mythology

Stories, or myths, that employees tell one another are another part of an organization's culture. The stories may be about the organization's history, specific employees, important projects or experiences, and more. They tend to be passed down from generation to generation, and are particularly useful when socializing new employees into the organization's culture. This section describes some of the stories that are told at Illusion.

Illusion Inception

Many of the frequently told stories describe the history of Illusion Theater. Stories about how Illusion started in the 1970s are told frequently to newcomers. In addition, stories about Michael's time studying in France and the inspirations developed there are re-told as well.



Successful Plays of the Past

The story of the play **Touch** was the most common story cited by employees. Touch was a play and education program in the 1980s that discussed the topic of child sexual abuse and helped teach children the differences between good touch and bad touch. It was a very powerful story about an important social issue that others avoided discussing at the time. Touch was wildly successful, moving onto a national audience and garnering multiple awards. Employees still talk about Touch and its success today.

The events surrounding the play **Miss Ever's Boys** is another story told at Illusion. Miss Ever's Boys was a play produced in the early 1990s about the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiments. It was developed to create a social dialogue about the legacy of racism in medicine and the wrongdoing of the Public Health Administration in the experiments. During its time, it was one of the most produced plays in America, and was a runner-up for the Pulitzer Prize. It was eventually made into an HBO movie seen by over 26 million viewers. The dialogue created by the play was far-reaching; because of this production, President Clinton invited survivors and heirs of the Tuskegee Experiments to the White House for a formal apology, 24 years after the experiments had been terminated.

Other plays, such as Amazing Grace (about HIV), are also discussed. These plays are all described as **success stories** because they each helped impact social change in the issues that were portrayed.

Ghosts in the Theater

Some employees mentioned stories of ghosts inside the theater and working spaces of Illusion. The building that holds Illusion Theater is a former Masonic temple. A cleansing was performed in the space because staff members were experiencing supernatural occurrences.

Artists' Beginnings

Other stories relate to the numerous artists that have started their careers at Illusion Theater. With its tendency to nurture new artists, Illusion has been the starting point for many great artists, some of whom have moved on to larger audiences. The stories of artists, such as Jeffrey Hatcher, Kimberly Ennis, and Miss Richfield, among others, are discussed frequently.

Generosity

Employees also mentioned stories that describe both the employees' and the organization's generosity towards members of the community. The Education Director, Karen Gundlach, once bought a young man who was participating in her education program a winter coat, because he could not afford one himself. Illusion as an organization has given scholarships to young adults who have participated in their education programs. Without these scholarships, these youth would not be able to go to college.



Jeffrey Hatcher's Hamlet

In July of 2011, members of Illusion's board met with Jeffrey Hatcher to discuss the creation of a play as a gift to Michael and Bonnie for Illusion's 40th year anniversary (2014). The board had already raised $10,000 for this commission before they unveiled it to the directors in 2012. This story, though still in the present, shows how much Illusion employees care for one another. The board members were so gracious and proud of Michael and Bonnie's hard work at Illusion that they commissioned an entire play in their honor.



The Move

The downsizing of Illusion's office space was another story that was mentioned. After examining the budget in 2008, Illusion decided to downsize their office space. The staff members who worked on-site had to move to significantly smaller offices. In preparation for the move, employees came together to help sort and pack files. The staff members worked with one another cooperatively and respectably to get through the move. Even though it was not an ideal situation, employees worked together to adjust to the new space.

RITUALS

Rituals unite individuals of a culture with the performance of specific behaviors. Rituals function to either celebrate an event or simply strengthen the bonds between members. All cultures, even organizations, have rituals that its members perform. This section describes the rituals at Illusion.

> "There is always food around here, and there always will be. It is a nourishing atmosphere."

Food at Meetings

One ritual that was described by almost every member of Illusion Theater was that there is always food present at all meetings. In staff, board, or artistic associate meetings, eating together (like a family) is a staple behavior. It is representative of the family atmosphere within the organization itself and the sense of hospitality that the members of the theater show towards one another.



Birthday Celebrations for Staff Members

Another ritual is that Illusion hosts a Birthday Celebration for all of its staff members on their individual birthdays. At this celebration, the individual must state one wish aloud, so that all of the other employees can help the person achieve this wish throughout the next year.

Smudging the Space before Shows

Before the opening of every new show, Bonnie "smudges the space." This ritual involves carrying burning sage around the theater and lobby area to purify the space. It is a very spiritual behavior that is believed to bring positive energy to the opening of each new show.

Stages of the Moon

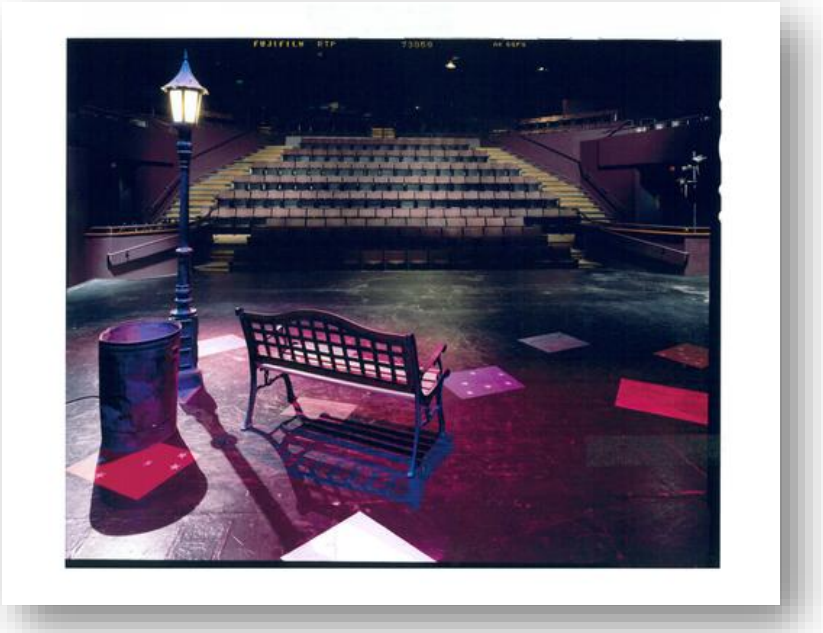
Another ritual is that shows only open on certain stages of the moon. Employees consult a calendar to ensure that shows will never be scheduled to open on a moonless night. This ritual is related to the belief that certain stages of the moon will bring good energy to the opening.

Directors Introduce Every Show

Either Bonnie or Michael introduces EVERY show at Illusion Theater, not just the opening nights. This ritual relates back to the friends and family theme. The directors create a very welcoming environment by attending each show and interacting with the audience members.

Attending Openings

In addition to the staff on-site, board members try to attend the opening of each show. They usually come as a unit and often stay after the show to have discussions in the lobby with the directors and artists. This behavior is indicative of the support that the board members give to the theater and relates back to the theme of family.



ICONS

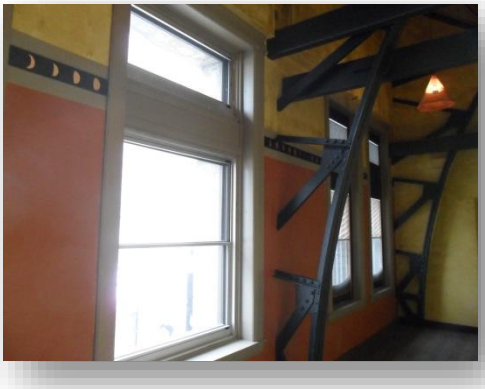
Icons are the physical and pictorial representations of the culture itself. They are images and symbols that exemplify what the culture represents. In organizations, a common icon is the logo, yet other icons also exist. This section discusses the icons of Illusion.

The Illusion Logo

Illusion's logo, an "I" with a flame, was frequently stated as being an icon for the organization. Portraying a lit torch leading the way to a better future, the logo represents the illumination of social issues often left untouched. It portrays the organization as a catalyst for social change.

Light

Similar to the symbolism of the flame on the logo, light itself is an important part of Illusion. The lobby and working spaces of Illusion have numerous large windows, which allow natural light to shine through. It is important to the organization that they create "illuminating work" in a space that is itself illuminated. The importance of natural light indicates that Illusion wants to be a part of the world and the current conversations; it wants to be conscious of the outside world while creating its art. The mere idea of shedding light on social issues is enacted both physically and psychologically at Illusion.



"Light is very important; Illusion would not put forth the same work if it was in a black box."

"There is a different quality of work created with light, being aware of the natural world."

Bonnie and Michael

Some employees stated that both Michael and Bonnie are the icons of the theater. They are the embodiment of the organization. To many in the outside community, Bonnie and Michael act as the face of Illusion Theater. Employees described the directors as Illusion's brand.

PRODUCTS

The products of an organization are what it delivers to the environment. These products display the organization's purpose and mission.

There appear to be two main products at Illusion Theater: the plays and the education program. Both of these products align with Illusion's mission and values. This section describes these products.

PLAYS



"Illusion uses theater as a vehicle for social change."

"Illusion's strength is that they perform topical plays; they make sure theater is a part of the current conversation."

As stated previously, Illusion focuses on developing and performing plays on topical issues in the social context. A few examples of these productions include Touch (sexual abuse), Amazing Grace (HIV), Bill and Dr. Bob (alcoholism), Miss Ever's Boys (syphilis experiments), and more. Much of the work that Illusion creates and performs **reflects the community** in its present state. Many productions focus on **illuminating social issues** to create conversations about taboo topics. Specific plays represent subgroups of the community, but Illusion's work as a whole represents the entire community. The plays create social dialogues between community members and many of them have reached national audiences.





Another major characteristic of Illusion's productions is that many of the plays are new pieces of work. Illusion is extremely committed to developing upcoming talent and provides a welcoming platform for new artists. As a theater, Illusion **cultivates and inspires new artists** and their work.

Illusion employees are very proud of the **high quality** of Illusion's productions. The plays have depth and meaning, while also having high production value.

Employees have also described the productions as very **honest**; they are true representations of specific topics and they are clear on what they would like to accomplish. It was stated that the plays teach social messages through positivity.





With all of the above mentioned, it is clear that Illusion's productions are very **diverse**. Productions include plays about social issues, new work in various formats, the annual Miss Richfield Holiday show, and more. The productions vary greatly between one another, giving the community a variety of options for entertainment at Illusion.

EDUCATION PROGRAM

The education program is another product of Illusion Theater. Theater-in-education is a very elaborate and important piece of the organization. Illusion has been a **pioneer** in this field; it was one of the first theaters to reach into the community and teach valuable life skills and lessons using the medium of theater. All of Illusion's employees were extremely proud of this part of the organization. They believe that it really **makes a difference** in the participants' lives.

"The education program allows kids to go deeper; it gets rid of their outer fear and lets them express themselves. It shows that they have value, that they are important."

The overall goal of the education programs is to develop the youth of the community by teaching them about social issues and important life skills. Many employees stated that these programs **transform the participants** by taking down social barriers and letting them express their true selves. The sessions encourage participants to think critically about issues that they may not have considered otherwise. The program helps them work with others and become team players, while also emphasizing that they have value and are important as individuals. **Illusion helps garner positive outcomes and healthy development in the children of the community.**



There are many components to the education program at Illusion Theater. A few of those components are the residency programs, the summer touring program, and the peer education program.

Residency Programs: The residency programs involve a partnership between Illusion Theater and local schools. Illusion employees going to schools co-teach sessions with the English teacher at the school about different social issues. These sessions also help students learn how to relate to one another. Sessions occur about 2-3 times a week.



Summer Touring Program: The summer touring program invites youth to be part of a traveling play. Children learn about a social issue, along with the skills to portray it through theater. During the summer, these children travel to other communities and youth organizations to perform the play. They spread the message to other communities, while developing leadership skills in the process.



Peer Education Program: The peer education program is a nation-wide program developed by Illusion Theater. To start the first stage of the program, Illusion licenses a script about a social issue important to children. Then, Illusion conducts a two-day retreat involving all of the peer educators. At this retreat, the peer educators learn about the play's content and how to perform it. After the retreat, the peer educators travel back to their communities and perform the production. This program spreads messages about social issues to far-reaching communities. The program is currently in 4 states and about 10 schools.

COMMUNITY TIES

With all of the work that Illusion does to support and represent the community, it is clear that they have developed deep ties in the social and artistic circles of the area. Michael and Bonnie have strong, long-lasting relationships with many individuals in all parts of the community. This is particularly true for the artistic community; they hold strong bonds to individuals in the arts throughout the country. They keep in touch with artists that they have nurtured from the beginning, some of whom have moved into larger artistic markets.



PHYSICAL LAYOUT

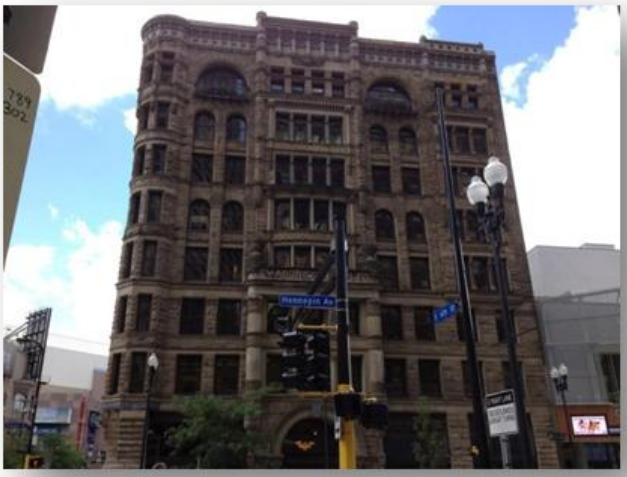
The physical layout of the workspace is often a very good indication of the organization's culture. Different workspaces tend to create different working environments. The environment has a lot of impact on the work that is produced. In addition, physical layout in the public spaces of the theater communicates a lot to the audience. It portrays to the public what the organization represents and how individuals should feel and behave at the location. The following section describes the physical layout of Illusion Theater

Light

As stated earlier, light is a very important and constant part of Illusion's culture. The physical layout of the space includes large windows in both the lobby area and the workspaces, allowing natural light to enter. Illusion employees believe that the light can stimulate creativity, and helps them remain aware of the natural world. They are physically illuminated while creating their work highlighting social issues.

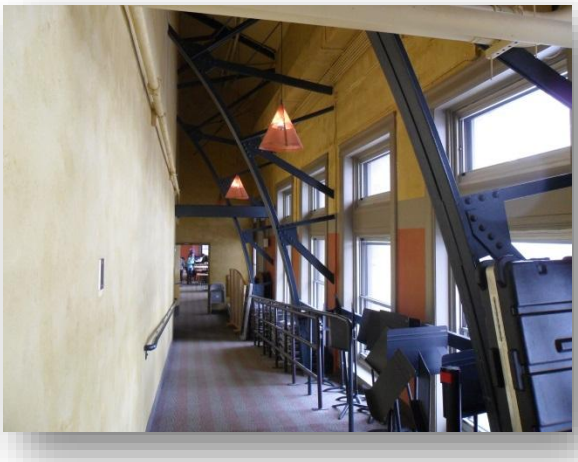
Masonic Temple

The theater and office spaces of Illusion Theater are housed in a former Masonic Temple. It contains beautiful architecture that flows well with Illusion's aesthetic.



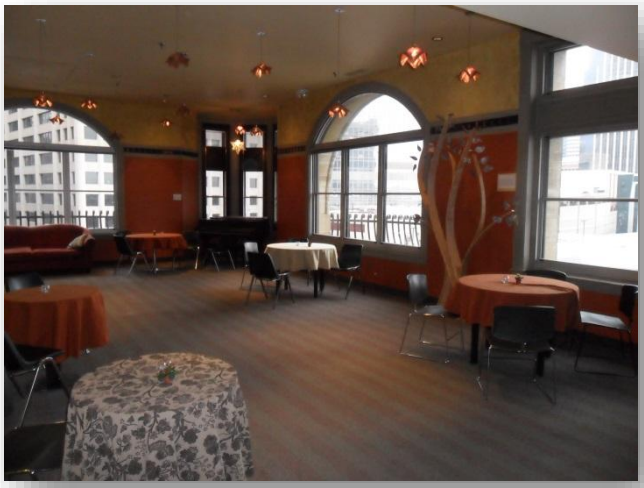
Workspace for staff

Currently, the workspaces for staff are rather small. As stated earlier in the Mythology section of this report, Illusion had to downsize its office space in 2008. Employees stated that this was not an issue. Because Illusion is much more about the work that is produced than it is about the beauty of the workspace. The work is what matters to the employees, and as long as they have space to do their jobs, they will persevere.



Lobby

Illusion employees, particularly Dean Holzman (Illusion Artistic Associate), designed the lobby area of Illusion Theater. The lobby represents Illusion's public persona. As a whole, the space creates an open, intimate, user-friendly, and fun environment. The shape of the lobby itself flows, spiraling into a full circle. Employees stated that it is a place where everyone feels welcome.



Listed below are a few of the lobby's features:

Boats

When the lobby area was first under construction, Illusion employees placed little sailboats in structure of the walls. The walls were finished with the boats inside. These sailboats all face the theater. The boats' purpose is to help guide community members to the theater.

Faces on the Floor

In the entryway of the lobby, the floor is composed of metal loading dock plates. Between the plates, faces of famous artists are carved into copper and steel. Dean Holzman, the designer of the floor, surprised Bonnie and Michael by including their faces in this piece of art. The floor is the first thing visible after stepping off the elevator; it welcomes the community into the space.

Moon Phases

Along the walls of the lobby, there is a border of moon phases. Important words to Illusion such as “re-volve,” “hid’den,” “e’merse,” “long-ing,” “trans-fig-ure,” and others are engraved among the moon stages.



3 Trinkets

There are three trinkets hidden within the lobby area of Illusion Theater. They are representative of the mysteries of life and the truths that Illusion aims to discover.







Mural

A large mural of the night sky dominates the walls in front of the entrance to the theater. This work was commissioned by a local artist.

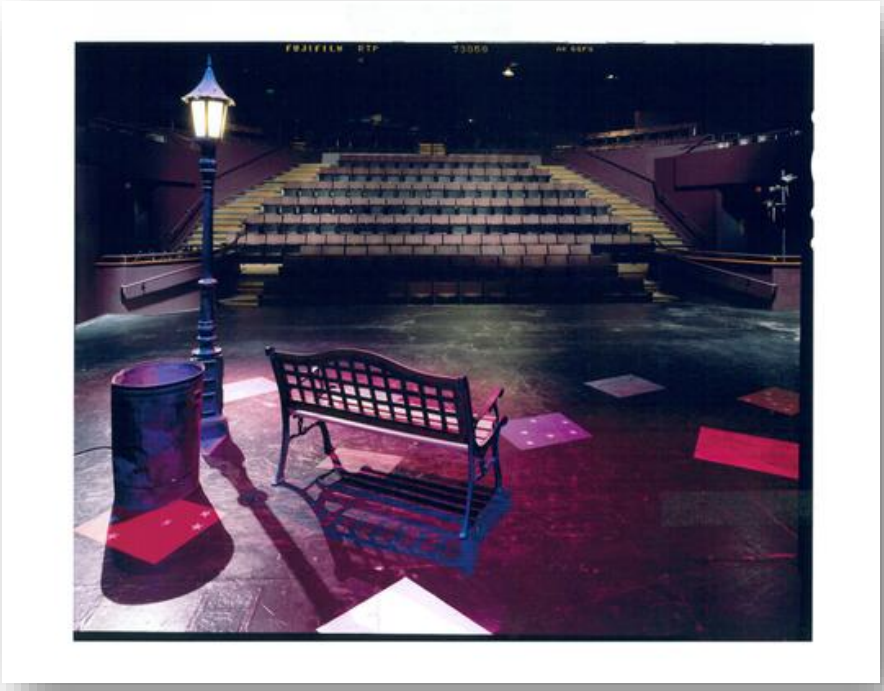


Theater

- **Size**
  - The theater itself can seat 280 total audience members. Part of the seating area can be closed off to create a more intimate environment for smaller audiences.

- **Purple**
  - The color of the stage at Illusion is black mixed with purple, as opposed to the normal black. The seating area and the chairs in the theater are also purple. Employees stated that this color was symbolic. It is something other than white or black, because they present plays that are neither right nor wrong. It makes the statement that things are not always one way or the other, but usually somewhere in between.

- **Artist's Row**
  - In the first row of the theater, seats are named after artists that have a long-standing history with Illusion. It represents the respect that the theater has for both new and established artists and friends.



DISTINGUISHING ILLUSION

To survive, an organization needs to be unique. It is valuable to discover how the organization differs from others in its industry. This section describes what factors distinguish Illusion from other theaters.

Empowering Employees and Artists

Many employees stated that they appreciated the freedom to take charge of their work. At Illusion, employees and artists are encouraged to try new things, even if there is a possibility of failure. Bonnie and Michael appear to have great faith in their staff and artists and allow them the opportunity to work in their own style. This culture of respect and faith in one another is very beneficial to the artistic process and supports the employees' development.

> "Illusion is good at praising and supporting people's work."

New Work

The theme of new work appears again in this section. Illusion is known for creating topical plays on social issues and for giving new artists chances to try out new pieces for the public. Other theaters do not create new work as often, because of the risks involved. Illusion is the exception. The Fresh Ink series at Illusion is solely for the development of new work.



Education Work

Illusion Theater was one of the first theaters to go into the community and use theater as a tool to teach children about social issues. Illusion started these programs before other theaters even thought of it as a possibility. Not only was Illusion one of the first, they also tend to perform this work in higher quantities than other theaters.

Community

Another distinction is that Illusion has developed a very tight-knit community, which has developed over its long history. Illusion employees have long-term relationships with each other, artists, and other community members. The theme of family also reappears here, because they treat their connections as if they were friends or family.

Mission

Illusion's mission about catalyzing social change is also distinct in the theater community. They truly try to achieve social change and improve the community through their work. The fact that the employees are so committed to this mission is something not always seen in other theaters.

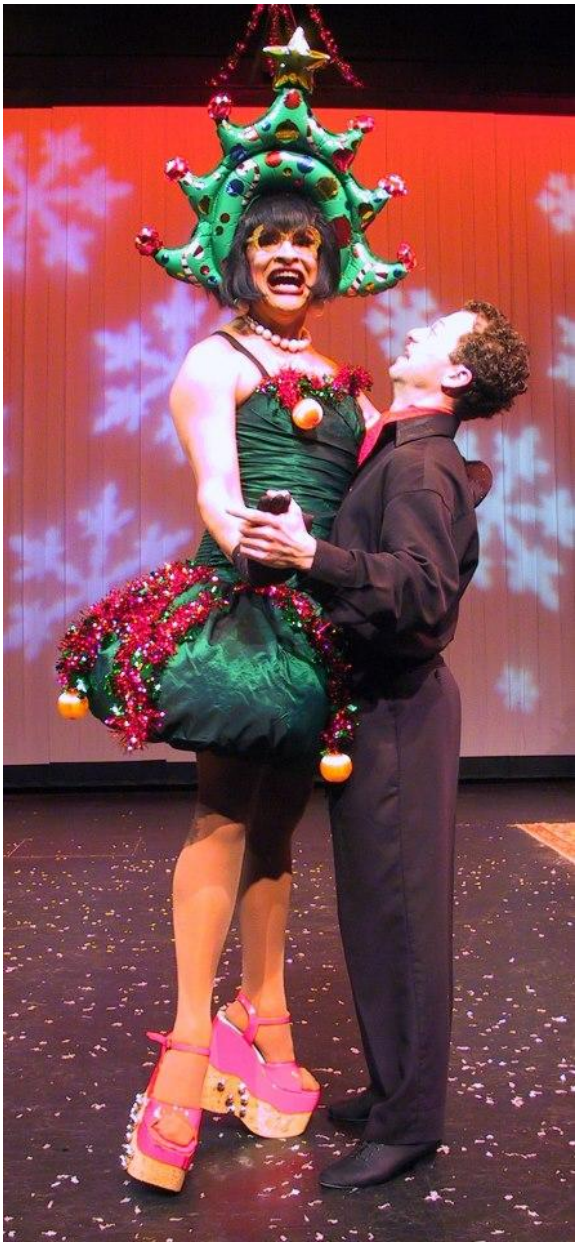
"Art changes everything- it is transformational."

"We are here to change the world"



ILLUSION'S STRENGTHS

Staff members, board members, artists, and the directors were asked to discuss the strengths of Illusion Theater. This section will discuss what Illusion does exceptionally well as an organization.



Passion: Many employees cited the passion, of the leaders and other members of Illusion, as a major strength.

Flexibility: Illusion adapts plays to current issues, allows employees to bring in their own opinions, and is not afraid to change when needed. This is benefits the organization's functioning as whole.

Community Ties & Partnerships: Illusion gives so much to the community with its education program and its discussions of social issues, that it has developed long-term, beneficial, and caring relationships with individuals, organizations, and companies. For example, Illusion has collaborated in the past with corporations in areas such as training and employee development.

Saying "Yes" : Illusion has a history of agreeing to do new things. If social change needs to happen, Illusion will address the issue. They are willing to take chances. The theme of Illusion's commitment to new work appears again. They are able to develop topical plays to make sure that theater is part of the current conversation. They use theater as a vehicle for social change.

High quality productions and the **collaborative environment** were also listed as strengths of the Illusion.

COMPONENTS TO ILLUSION'S SUCCESS

Illusion has achieved high levels of success throughout it 40 years of business. It not only puts forth high quality, important productions about social issues, but also has wide reaching influence in the community with its educational programs. Illusion has won over 20 awards for its work. See Appendix XX for a list of awards and accomplishments. Employees, board members, artists, and the directors were asked to list the most important contributing factors to Illusion's success.

Dedication

"They don't just give you a job, they give you an opportunity."

It was clear that the staff, directors, artists, and board members all believed in Illusion's mission. They were very dedicated and supportive of the push to make the community a better place by catalyzing social change. Members were committed to the theater and the social causes represented by the productions. In addition, Illusion was described as being a tenacious organization, one that never gives up.

Directors

Many members of Illusion cited the directors as the reason for Illusion's success. This theater was their dream and they have remained incredibly passionate about it. They truly care for the community. Both Bonnie and Michael have been cited as working non-stop. They are great at developing and nurturing their staff and artists. They create a safe environment where people are able to develop from within.



Community Involvement

The groundbreaking work they started in the 1970's (Touch, for example) put their names into the community; they have been developing relationships ever since.

Educational Programs

Some employees stated that creating and maintaining the education programs greatly affected the success of Illusion.

Board Involvement

The board members are involved in the functioning of Illusion and are committed to the Theater and its cause. They are a very diverse group of individuals in the community and they all have a set of skills to bring to Illusion.

Developing New Talent

The theme of developing new talent was also present as part of Illusion's success. They are committed to creating opportunities for new artists, their staff, and their board members.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX XX

Awards

- Twin Cities Mayor's Arts Award
- Minnesota Educators Awards
- Minnesota Family Council Awards for Excellence
- 1997 National Endowment for the Arts and the U.S. Department of Juvenile Justice Award, which named Illusion as one of eight exemplary programs using arts as a way to conduct violence prevention.
- In 1999, Illusion was one of only a handful of U.S. organizations invited to present a workshop on our Peer Education model at the Regional European Conference of the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) held in Israel.
- 1999 Sally Ordway Irvine Award for Vision
- 1999 Minneapolis Award presented to Michael Robins and Bonnie Morris for their "outstanding accomplishments and contributions to the city of Minneapolis"
- 2000 *Coming Up Taller Award* in recognition of our work with youth, sponsored by the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the National Endowment for the Arts.
- 2002 Finalist for the *Leadership for a Changing World Award*, sponsored by the Advocacy Institute and the Ford Foundation
- 2006 *Ivey Award* for the "emotional impact" of its production of *Sez She*
- 2007 The National Theater Critics Association chose our production of *Autistic License* by Stacey Dinner Levin as a finalist for their *Best New Play of 2007* award.
- 2009 *Ivey Advertising Award for Excellence*. Illusion received the first award in this category acknowledging the theater's innovative communications strategies.
- 2010 *Ivey Awards* for its world premiere production of *My Antonia* (actor Katie Guentzel and playwright Allison Moore), an Illusion-commissioned adaptation.
- 2012 Ivey Award for *Ballad of the Pale Fisherman* (emotional impact)