SR 890 Research Project Prospectus

Quinton Egson

Omega Graduate School

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Professor

Dr. McCullough

**Assignment 4: Compile the Prospectus**

**Compile all four sections together in the DSL Project Template as a Prospectus.**

**Introduction:**

 Symbolic Interactionism is one of the most endurable social theories of the twentieth century as a foundational sociological theory (Quist-Adade, 2019). The objective of my action research was twofold: first, to answer why some Nonprofit Organizations (NPOs) thrive while others barely survive or shutter. Second, based on action and empirical evidence/research, I set out to develop a tool to help aid NPOs in their quest to reach long-term sustainability. When properly applied, the “Long-Term Sustainability Tool (LTST) can be a guide to help NPOs increase their chances to attaining long-term sustainability.

 As defined by McIntyre (2014), “Sociology is the scientific study of interactions and relationships among human beings” (McIntyre, 2014. P. 2). Furthermore, it is essential to note that sociology, or human behavior, can be messy, especially if viewed through a lens containing faith and science (Foster, 2021). One aspect of human group behavior (although it can be studied and perhaps better understood via sociology that remains consistent is its unpredictability (Spillman, 2022). This unpredictability is a key factor that we, as sociologists (in the making), must grapple with in our studies. As stated (in summation) in a previous lesson plan by Dr. Reichard, the entire academic discipline of sociology rests on three main theoretical foundations (camps) in the sociological field. Those three fields representing sociology's “soft science” are functionalism, conflict/critical theory, and symbolic interactionism. In synopsis, functionalism is a sociological theory that views society as a complex system of interrelated parts, each serving a specific function to maintain stability and order. Functionalists are usually conservative. They believe that societal dynamics, such as poverty and wealth, are needed to maintain equilibrium. Again, functionalists would be classified as conservative. That being the case, I would suggest that most Republicans are functionalists. The contrast to the functionalist would be the conflict/critical theorist. Conflict-critical theorists emphasize the role of power and inequality in shaping social relationships, highlighting how competition and conflict between groups drive social change. It is based on Marxism. The assumption is that the oppressed must revolt against the oppressor and, through conflict, achieve social justice. People occupying this category tend to be more liberal and progressive. In some circles, they may even be classified as revolutionists. In terms of political reference, they are likely to be under the umbrella of a Democrat or perhaps an Independent. Functionalist and Conflict Critical Theorists essentially complement each other. Functionalists' and conflict/critical theorists' approaches to “societal management” act as mechanisms (so to speak) to keep society somewhat balanced. The third category, symbolism or symbolic interactionism, is a sociological theory that focuses on how individuals construct and interpret their reality using symbols and interactions, emphasizing the importance of social behavior. Symbolic interactionism stands alone, apart from functionalism and conflict/critical theory. Furthermore, it is an excellent approach to understanding religion. When speaking about religion, especially in America, which was to be guided by Christian values/principles. Although we are arguably the best country in the world, we still have work to do to reach our full potential. Perhaps the best way to do that is to truly embrace methods for “Christian” social change/improvement.

My chosen sociological theory will be primarily symbolic due to its strong connection with religion and religion-based perspectives. Although the primary theory will be symbolic, the other three theories will also have a limited role in my scope of work.

It will take a concerted value-based (ideally, Christian-led) effort to construct a society where all people, regardless of race, creed, or color, reach their full potential. Nonprofit organizations (NPOs) such as churches, educational institutions, and many others that provide numerous social services will play a vital role in that process. Change must be the norm to level the playing field in America and give meaning to everyone's existence (Spillman, 2022).

Strategically changing America will start with changing people's mindsets; we must broaden our sociological lens. Morrison said it best when he penned, “In looking at society from the perspective of what he called the overlapping social spheres of religion, economy, politics, and law, Webber was among the first to assert that a theory of society could be obtained only by looking at the casual influences of various social spheres, which he conceived of as forming different departments of life (Morrison, 2006, p.5). Social spheres can be diverse. I realize that society demands a separation of church and state (which I agree with). However, we must be mindful that all facets of society overlap and are interconnected.

Reichard states, “Clinical sociology is the implementation and evaluation of interventions for groups, organizations, and communities using sociological theories and methods” (Reichard, 2024, p. 369).

**Statement & Background of the Problem:**

As stated by Liu, “One essential role of nonprofits (NPOs) is to provide opportunities for people to participate in movements and resolve collective issues (Liu, K., 2024, p. 1). Furthermore, as with my organization, nonprofits usually impact communities by delivering services to those in need. In my community of roughly 500,000 people, we have more than 1200 nonprofit organizations (NPOs).

 Most of them are doing good work that is not being done elsewhere; however, some small-sized and usually underfunded NPOs spring up and duplicate work that is already being done at a high level by another agency. This causes a strain on limited resources, and those usually well-intentioned mom-and-pop-sized organizations often fade away within five to ten years.

According to data from the National Center on Charitable Statistics, the average lifespan of a nonprofit is around 10 years, with roughly 30% of nonprofits ceasing to exist after that period. The million-dollar question is, “Should those NPOs have started to begin with?”

According to the National Association of Nonprofit Organizations & Executives (which I am a member of), ultimately, nonprofits fail because they should not have existed in the first place (Ebarb, 2019). That is a somewhat harsh but true statement; more often than not, small NPOs come to bear with much passion but are void of a sustainable business plan.

My organization has been an NPO leader in the community for about sixty years, and I have been an employee for over 40 years. Over that time, I have witnessed hundreds of NPOs enter the saturated market just to be dissolved within a few years.

As a consultant and national training associate (NTA) for Boys & Girls Clubs of America, I have assessed many organizations and, in doing so, learned that many factors can contribute to an NPO's demise, including the nonprofit starvation cycle. Hala states, “The cycle starts with donors’ long-held unrealistic expectation that lower overhead is better.

The desirability of leaner organizations in the donor market puts pressure on nonprofits to reduce their overhead spending” (Altamimi & Liu, 2022, p.1325). In a for-profit business, overhead is expected, whereas, in a nonprofit company, overhead is “Frowned upon.” Too many nonprofit leaders are trapped in this never-ending, undefeatable cycle, usually leading to their demise. My advice to them is always to remember they are a nonprofit organization working to make society better while at the same time realizing that they are a business and must employ business-like principles to become or sustain solvency (Altamimi & Lui, 2022, p. 1332).

The problem nonprofit organizations (NPOs) face is that 30% will shutter in ten years or less. The program that oftentimes contributes to their demise is threefold. To begin with, too many come into existence with tons of passion but void of a business plan. Secondly, NPOs allow outside influences to pressure them to embrace the starvation cycle mentality, placing the NPO in a compromising position that will eventually lead them to fail. Lastly, too many NPOs (even ones doing fine) do not embark on developing and implementing a long-term sustainability plan.

**Analysis through Sociological Theory & Faith-Based Analysis:**

The sustainability of nonprofit organizations, including churches, is crucial to America's well-being. Nonprofit organizations, including churches, are not just about charity or spreading religion. They are instrumental in building healthy communities by offering essential services and employment opportunities. Their significant economic impact, often overlooked, is a crucial aspect of their contribution to the community. Usually seen as charitable, these organizations strive to make a difference by providing services to the underserved population.

Many do not realize that nonprofits, through their services and jobs, are a significant force for economic stability and community health. This dual role of nonprofits as service providers and employers, a crucial aspect of their contribution to the community, is a testament to their multifaceted impact and enlightens us about their economic significance. The sustainability of nonprofit organizations is crucial to the well-being of America.

The word philanthropy comes from two Greek words meaning “love of people.” In modern times, this goodwill, or humanitarianism, is often expressed in nations of property, money, or volunteer time to worthy causes. Similarly, charity comes from a Latin word meaning “love “in the sense of unconditional love, kindness, compassion, and seeking to do good. The roots of these words remind us of the fundamental reasons for the work of most nonprofit organizations. The United States has the world's most extensive system of organized private philanthropy. In this country, nongovernmental organizations have been created— and funded through private sources—to provide services. If nonprofits in the United States were a single industry, they would rank as the nation’s largest industry, accounting for just under 10 percent of the workforce and about 5 percent of the gross domestic product. This significant economic impact, often overlooked, is a testament to the vital role of nonprofits in our society. Understanding and acknowledging this economic significance should make us more aware of the impact of nonprofits in our communities (Klein & Yogi, 2022; Klein et al., 2024).

Nonprofit organizations play a vital role in meeting the needs of people, particularly in underserved areas. They often assist with food insecurity through food banks, health services, affordable childcare, and more. Their crucial role in addressing the needs of the most vulnerable in our communities should evoke a strong sense of empathy and support for their cause. It is essential to recognize and appreciate these organizations' tireless efforts to make a difference in the lives of those in need.

However, it is a common oversight that an NPO, despite its service-oriented nature, is also a viable business that must operate effectively to survive. Recognizing that Nonprofits, often misperceived as not being businesses, operate on a unique business model is crucial. This unique business model, which includes revenue generation, a volunteer workforce, a focus on cost containment, a distinct leadership model, and the importance of image and brand, is a crucial aspect of their operations that is often overlooked. It is time to acknowledge and appreciate the nature of nonprofit businesses and their crucial role in our communities (Cullom & Cullom, 2011).

Over the last five decades, since I have been an active church member and involved with a well-known NPO, I have seen many NPOs, including churches, come and go. Some merged with more substantial organizations, while some shuttered. According to what I learned while attending the nonprofit organization management program at the University of California Riverside (UCR), nonprofits were designed to meet societal needs that were left unmet by the government, and in doing so, they would be granted nonprofit status to receive donations to raise money for their needy cause. The benefit to the government was that the services would cost a fraction of the cost if the government provided them. The benefit to the people is that the services are usually affordable or accessible at no cost. All in all, when it works out, society benefits. However, many NPOs fail to make it over the hump due to lack of funding and other factors, with the main one being leadership. “An organization's efficacy is contingent upon its leadership.” While completing an Advanced Diploma of Christian Ministry and Theology (with an emphasis on business) from Vision International College.

 I learned that internal and external environments directly impact businesses, churches, and other NPOs. In summation, the internal factors of an organization, over which we have significant control, play a pivotal role in influencing organizational activities, decisions, and employee behavior and attitudes. It encompasses events, factors, people, systems, structures, and conditions, including the company's mission statement, organizational culture, and leadership style. Furthermore, controlling these factors empowers us to make decisions/changes that can considerably impact the organization. This enables us to assess the times and changes to meet the needs of our people and, in turn, will help us build a better case for financial support. For example, over the last few years, due to COVID-19, we (my organization) have seen a need to provide more mental health services for our clients, which opened the door to approaching a new slew of funding partners. Times are constantly changing, and successful organizations are innovative enough to move harmoniously with the changing times. Internal factors are not necessarily easy to deal with, and external factors are factors outside the company that cause change inside organizations that are mainly beyond the company's control and are even more challenging. External factors such as customers, competition, the economy, technology, political and social conditions, and resources can significantly influence an organization's operations, growth, and long-term sustainability. Ignoring these forces can be a detrimental mistake. Therefore, it is imperative that leaders continually monitor and adapt to the external environment, making proactive changes earlier on rather than having to take a reactive approach, which can lead to a vastly different outcome. The urgency and importance of this proactive approach cannot be overstated, underscoring the need for swift and strategic action (Magezi & Nanthambwe, 2024, p.8).

**Nonprofit organizations (NPOs) are guided by their mission:**

Nonprofit organizations are led by their mission. It is the purpose for being in existence. The mission and mission statements are imperative because they showcase what the organization is and does. As stated by Powell and Bromley, “The organization’s mission also drives founders to start it and provides a sense of purpose that energizes and justifies its existence. In an important sense, the mission signals what a nonprofit organization regards as good and important, and that signal induces supporters to invest their time, energy, and resources”. (Powell & Bromley, 2020, p. 591).

**Nonprofit organizations (NPOs) approach to long-term sustainability: (Purpose and Objectives)**

Organization improvement, which will undoubtedly lead to organizational change, is a vital part of reaching the goal of long-term nonprofit organizational sustainability (Lewin, 1951).

Organizational change will call for motivational leadership to improve the company's culture and a comprehensive planning strategy (Oreg & Benson, 2019; Paais & Pattiruhu, 2020).

The more than 1.5 million Nonprofit Organizations (NPOs) in the United States are vital resources to communities, often providing services for the marginalized, overlooked, and underserved.

Unfortunately, although most, if not all, are doing good work, the average lifespan of an NPO is ten years (Klein & Hill, 2024). By implementing a well-thought-out sustainability plan, NPOs may increase their lifespan or attain long-term sustainability.

Planning, as described by Hall & Tewdwr-Jones, “is a general activity, is the making of an orderly sequence to actions that will lead to the achievement of a stated goal or goals” (Hall & Tewdwr-Jones, 2019, p.3). The book of Proverbs in the Bible says, “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18). Planning shows leadership, helps develop organizational health, and gives people a visual road map towards reaching and sustaining success. The goal of the following framework is to help NPOs reach long-term sustainability.

**Long-Term Sustainability “Intervention” Tool (LTST)**

**Objective:**

Develop a tool for leading Nonprofit Organizations to a place of long-term sustainability. By working to implement the following sustainability plan consisting of eight goals, which can be classified under the three significant categories of planning, leadership, and organizational health:

*Goal: 1*

*Ensure the board leads the organization toward reaching its full potential.*

The Board’s actions are acceptable when.

1. They assess their culture
2. Develop a best practice operations approach
3. They research the best organizational capacity building strategy and work with the CEO to implement the strategy
4. Measurement = Implementation of the plan

*Goal: 2*

*Improve the management of the organization.*

The CEO will set the tone regarding operations by working with an outside company or consultant. The following steps will be adhered to.

1. Assess her/his leadership style
2. Be coached and receive honest, constructive feedback
3. Develop an Individual professional development plan (IPDP) for the leadership team
4. Measurements = received written coaching document for the CEO; Implementation of individual professional development plans for the leadership team

*Goal: 3*

*Ensure the CEO reaches his/her full potential*

This process will be acceptable when the CEO

1. Assess his/her current skill set
2. Work together with the board of directors (BOD) to develop a personal professional development plan
3. Measurement = Implementation of the CEO’s individual development plan

*Goal: 4*

Work to create a culture that retains current staff and attracts top talent.

Work with Human Resources to solidify a viable onboarding and professional development initiative. The following steps will be adhered to.

1. Assess the hiring protocol
2. Assess the professional development strategy
3. Develop a protocol to hire and develop the right talent
4. Measurement = successful implementation of the onboarding initiative

*Goal: 5*

*Improve the organization’s policies and procedures.*

Human Resources (HR) will work to develop and/or, if necessary, make appropriate changes to policies and procedures. The following steps will be adhered to.

1. Review of the policies and procedures
2. Make recommendations to improve policies and procedures
3. Work with the appropriate person to implement new policies and procedures that are in the best interest of the organization
4. Measurement = Implementation of new policy and procedures

*Goal: 6*

*Develop an ongoing balanced budget.*

Introduce the best practice tried-and-true budgeting strategy/process. The following steps will be adhered to.

1. Review/Assess your current budgeting process
2. Introduce the best practices and or a tried-and-true budgeting process method
3. Develop a balanced, workable budget annually
4. Measurement = Implementation of an annual balanced budget

*Goal: 7*

*Develop a marketing plan/strategy.*

Develop a marketing/fundraising plan. The following steps will be adhered to.

1. Review/evaluate current marketing and fundraising efforts
2. Work to improve and diversify current fundraising efforts
3. Implement the plan while making necessary adjustments along the way
4. Measurement = The outcome regarding implementation of the plan ensures that enough funds are generated to cover expenses

*Goal: 8*

*Build a great program.*

Maximize programming effectiveness. The following steps will be adhered to.

1. Evaluate current programs
2. Possibly add or delete programs and or develop a process to improve current programs
3. Implement a comprehensive program strategy that leads to mission fulfillment and financial gain
4. Measurement = Implementation of program strategy

**Disclaimer:** This is only a tool, and therefore, its utilization/implementation may yield varying results based on many factors, such as leadership, tenacity, timing, manpower, company buy-in, consistency, and good old-fashioned hard work.

Furthermore, based on several years of experience and empirical research, although immediate results may be achieved, a tool like this can take up to three years to show notable results.

Many nonprofit organizations (NPOs) do social work by feeding people experiencing poverty, providing free health services, offering shelter, etc. Without the services provided by NPOs, more people would be homeless, suffer from food insecurity, and would not have access to healthcare. Furthermore, the roughly 300,000 religious-based NPOs and countless other NPOs that provide social services are making a dent in leveling the “societal justice playing field” by advocating voting and simply attempting to exercise goodwill to all of humankind. In the book of Acts (10:38), the Word of God says (in summation), “Jesus went around doing good.” Like Jesus, nonprofits aim to insert some good in an often not-so-good world.

Without a doubt, as is stated by Lewis, NPOs provide a vehicle to promote “much needed” social change that would not be available otherwise. (Lewis, 2023). The role of nonprofit organizations is to build society by offering services to people at a reduced cost or for free. The long-term sustainability intervention strategy should be a beacon of light and provide some hope in the often-dim world by providing services to people who could not receive them otherwise. The services include faith-based initiatives and countless other viable societal enhancing services, and, therefore, they should face minimal if there are any issues regarding their ethical standings.

**Resources Needed:**

1. Administrative assistant
2. Computer
3. Paper
4. Zoom meeting platform

**Timeline:**

The intervention is a three-year process

**Measuring Success:**

Pre- and post-questionnaires measured the success of the initial program. Moreover, the final long-term sustainability tool will have a built-in measurement component.

**Ethical Considerations**: See page 12

**Adherence to Professional Ethics:**

Ten people, seven middle managers and three administrative personnel—were introduced to the initial segment of developing the long-term sustainability plan. All agreed to participate in the process.

**Confidentiality and Privacy**

The findings of the questionnaire were aggregated

**Avoiding Harm**:

The initiative's purpose is to help those who want it. The tool will be utilized as the agency sees fit, tailored to meet their company's needs; therefore, harm, although not impossible, is highly improbable.

**Addressing and Disclosing Bias:**

The action research was conducted to develop a tool for those who would like to use it and, therefore, does not contain any known biases.

**Transparency and Accountability:**

Please refer to the background portion of the document, which covers transparency and accountability. Various other portions of the document also cover these topics.

**Site Permissions**:

I am the CEO of a sizable organization, and twelve people agreed to participate in the training exercise.

**Delivery and Evaluation:**

See the long-term sustainability plan (outline) regarding delivery and evaluation.

**Long-term sustainability tool (LTST) “supplement”**

**Nonprofit sustainability pre and post-questionnaire (circle your best answer)**

1. Unfamiliar
2. Somewhat familiar
3. Familiar
4. Extremely Familiar
5. How familiar are you with nonprofit sustainability?

1 2 3 4

1. How familiar are you with understanding how funds are raised to meet the budget?

1 2 3 4

1. How familiar are you with the “organizational health index?”

1 2 3 4

1. How familiar are you with the percentage of nonprofits that go out of business within 10 years?

1 2 3 4

1. How familiar are you with the top three things that can increase the probability of a nonprofit's success and sustainability?

1 2 3 4

If familiar, please list the top 3 things.

1.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

2.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

3.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Conclusion:**

The sustainability of nonprofit organizations, including churches, hospitals, and educational institutions, is crucial to America's well-being.

Nonprofit organizations, including churches, are not just about charity or spreading religion. They are instrumental in building healthy communities by offering essential services and employment opportunities. Their significant economic impact, often overlooked, is a crucial aspect of their contribution to the community. Usually seen as charitable, these organizations strive to make a difference by providing services to the underserved population. Many do not realize that nonprofits are a significant force for economic stability and community health through their services and jobs. Furthermore, nonprofit organizations play a vital role in meeting the needs of people, particularly in underserved areas. They often assist with food insecurity through food banks, health services, affordable childcare, and more. Their crucial role in addressing the needs of the most vulnerable in our communities should evoke a strong sense of empathy and support for their cause. It is essential to recognize and appreciate these organizations' tireless efforts to make a difference in the lives of those in need.

Nonprofits also play roles in society that many people are unaware of. For example, in my local paper, the Desert Sun, a USA Today article inserted by Barber titled Who Gets to Determine When U.S. Is in Recession read as follows**:** “Recession panic is back, if it ever went away. Social media is filled with claims that the U.S. has already entered one, with some ushers even coining the term 'recession core,' which reflects an aesthetic trend of minimalism and practicality. The number of posts online about an impending recession and stock market behavior show Americans are worried amid escalating trade wars. However, social media and stock prices do not determine when the country will be officially on notice that it has entered a recession, and the word does have an actual definition. Eight economists who serve on the Business Cycle Dating Committee within a nonprofit research organization not affiliated with the federal government, known as the National Bureau of Economic Research, make the call” (Barber, 2025, p. 2B).

Again, NPOs play a crucial role in America and the American way of life, and they must be on a solid footing for long-term sustainability.

Two tools, the sustainability questionnaire and the long-term sustainability tool (LTST), are one way to address the need for NPOs to be solvent for the long haul.

 Last month, the nonprofit sustainability questionnaire was distributed to twelve Boys & Girls Clubs of Coachella Valley employees before a 2-hour training and professional development Zoom session regarding sustainability. Although many of the participants occupy high-level positions, most had not spent much time thinking about sustainability, and their score on the questionnaire was pretty low before attending the session. The average score of the groups' understanding of long-term sustainability was about 60%. The post-test score was about 92%, yielding an increase in understanding of nonprofit sustainability by 32%. The importance of increasing the team's understanding was to create a sense of buy-in for drafting and implementing a long-term sustainability plan. I am sure all nonprofit organizations believe they do good work, and if they want to be around for the long haul, they need to develop a plan to increase their chances of sustainability.

Although there may be many definitions and strategic approaches to conducting “action research,” according to Bradbury, action researchers nearly always start with questions like “How can we improve this situation?” (Bradbury, 2015, p. 12; Masters, 1995). Based on Bradbury’s comment, I asked myself, “How can I develop a framework to help nonprofits increase the probability of sustaining?”

The action research conducted regarding the viability of nonprofit organizations and their role in society is fundamental but extremely limited. A group of seasoned nonprofit professionals put together the sustainability plan, but more research would be better to refine and define it.

Based on my consulting work and mentorship of many young CEOs having challenges making ends meet in their NPOs, the simple plan I developed based on my action research findings can help them improve their organizations.

Many nonprofits have much passion but lack a plan. This work is undoubtedly not the solution; however, the sustainability questionnaire outline/plan can help move many NPOs towards long-term sustainability if approached with an open mind.

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