

## AN ANALYSIS OF FUNDAMENTAL FUNCTIONS OF THEATRE MANAGEMENT/MANAGERS

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The significance of management is much more magnified when applied to the context of Theatre business or enterprise. Unlike many goods and services which are indispensable or unavoidable for many people; performances (entertainment), which Theatres majorly produce are regarded by many, especially in Nigeria, as subordinate to primary and secondary needs, which in a way is the candid reality.

Theatre managers, practitioners, teachers, students, etc., must therefore be very pragmatic and responsive to the core challenges of managing Theatre businesses posed in the current times. The situation imposes a germane need to critically analyze, study and review the fundamental functions applicable or requisite to Theatre Management (in the light of current realities). This undoubtedly will help theatre managers and operators identify and prioritize the key functions of management which are fundamental and absolutely relevant, focus action and often limited resources on them and thus, enhance results as well as contribute bountifully towards the fortunes of the ailing Theatre industry as it relates to the cultural and economic sectors and overall national development. Consequently, this study comprehensively discusses the fundamental functions of management from the perspective of the authors who have been involved with Theatre management teaching – theory, practice and research for about three decades. In terms of methodology, the secondary literary methodology was adopted and applied. The main recommendation is that theatre managers and practitioners should study and abide by the enumerated functions so as to enhance theatre management performance and results in Nigeria and the world globally.

**Key Words: Management, Theatre, Functions, Fundamentals****Introduction**

The importance of analyzing the fundamental functions involved in Theatre management practice cannot be over-emphasized. Management, by nature, is dynamic and universal. Its core elements and vital practices are therefore constantly changing in response to contemporary conditions, realities, situations and trends.

Besides the dynamic nature of management and Theatre management, more and more people every day, are getting involved as directors, managers, producers, etc, in the practice of Theatre as a business, discipline, profession, and vocation. It is very certain that not all of these participants; including even some who may have been in the terrain for some time have an in-depth knowledge of the fundamental functions involved in managing theatre and allied businesses or organizations. An analytic discourse of the fundamental functions involved in Theatre management such as this is therefore meant to proffer an in-depth knowledge of the requisite functions of Theatre management to all who are in a position to benefit from it. The analysis is done discriminately and selectively with regards to standard time-tested Theatre practices and prejudice to current challenging socio-economic realities in Nigeria.

For the sake of proffering strategies that can be applied in dealing with problems presently, plaguing the sector as well as increase the prospects of the theatre industry in general; it is expedient to ask the crucial question of what is the impetus behind the study? the authors feel not just inclined, but obligated to carry out a detailed study of the fundamental functions of theatre management for various reasons. One of such reasons is to clear and erase prolonged assumptions, confusions, doubts, misconceptions, speculations as well as erroneous preconceived notions about the fundamental functions involved in theatre management; which have undoubtedly militated against the theatre discipline, business and profession in terms of retarding its performance as well as its attainment of remarkable results. Secondly, besides erasing and expelling the confusions and doubts which exist in the minds of various people, which unarguably detracts the course of good theatre management, theory and practice; there is a much more fundamental need to state clearly and analytically; the fundamental functions of theatre management in widely circulated and consulted textual publications, so as to serve as a knowledge repository (a form of manual), serving as a reference point and as a guide to all those who engage in theatre management and operations.

Furthermore, in about three decades of involvement with theatre management research, teaching and practice, one is constantly presented with divergent reactions and scenarios of people displaying shallow or half-baked knowledge/information about what theatre management essentially is. Some of such

scenarios give cause for concern; while others are just simply amazing and sometimes surprising. One has been confronted severally over the years with questions from students, departmental colleagues and even faculty members; asking questions like “what is your work as a Theatre Manager, when you are not the Head of Department?” Some ask whether theatre management is really important, in comparison to areas or courses like Drama, Music or Acting and Directing?” “Is it advisable to specialise in theatre management; precisely, is it lucrative to be a theatre manager in the theatre when you can become something more prestigious and profitable?” “Can one ever really be fulfilled or satisfied working as a theatre manager?” “Another question frequently asked is “does theatre management have unique functions as a distinct area of theatre; just like Media, Acting or Directing?”

With many near appalling and disappointing questions being asked repeatedly, one has had to be very careful in responding so that, the ones innocently engaging in the questioning are not unnecessarily or prematurely discouraged; knowing that the questions are rooted mainly in ignorance, misinformation, knowledge gap and uncertainty as to what theatre management as an area of theatre comprises. Moreover, these questions all but reveal that not so many even within theatre, though especially outsiders have adequate or detailed knowledge about the intricate and important functions of theatre management. The authors therefore perceive that there is a fundamental need, in fact an obligation to engage constantly in research studies leading to increase in publications designed to increase awareness, enlightenment and detailed knowledge of the fundamentality of theatre management. Additionally, the study is also intended to erase the negative misconceptions as well as attract prospective future theatre managers who otherwise may be lost as well as their potentials and skills. This is definitely most unfortunate, regrettable and should be avoided by all efforts; a cause to which the authors are dedicatedly poised. By providing this exposure regularly and increasingly on a continuing basis; hopefully, more and more people will receive the knowledge and information that would help them to understand the nitty gritty of the fundamentals involved in theatre management as well as the importance and indispensability of the sub-discipline altogether.

### **Analysis of Main Terms and Concepts in Theatre/Management**

#### **What is Theatre?**

Theatre is widely acknowledged to have originated in Greece by the 5<sup>th</sup>c. It has received various expressions, interpretations; even adaptations across the ages in different climes. In Africa – Nigeria, Theatre has been part and parcel of the evolutionary process of various ethnic groups and nationalities. The Yoruba Alarinjo Itinerary (travelling) Theatre tradition is widely acknowledged as one of the earliest, robust traditional/ethnic theatrical manifestations in Nigeria; just as the late veteran doyen of popular cum modern entertainment, Chief Hubert Ogunde is widely acknowledged as the pioneer and father of modern theatre practice and management in Nigeria.

As for its definition, Cohen, (1994: 5-6) gives a comprehensive definition which is suitable for the purpose of this article, due to its detailed overview of the Theatrical concept. His very detailed definition connotes, collates and summarizes the various approaches, meanings, dimensions and types of theatres as well as their distinctive manifestations or operations over the ages. His definition goes thus:

Theatre is the most natural of the arts. There is no culture that has not had a theatre in some form, for theatre, quite simply, is the art of people acting out, and giving witness to their most pressing, most illuminating, and most inspiring concerns. Theatre is at once a showcase and a forum, a medium through which a society's fashions, moralities, and entertainments can be displayed and its conflicts, dilemmas, and struggles can be debated. Theatre has provided a stage for political revolution, for social propaganda, for civil debate, for artistic expression, for religious conversions, for mass education, and even for its own self-criticism. It has been a performance ground for witch doctors and priests, intellectuals, poets, painters, technologists, militarists, philosophers, reformers, evangelists, prime ministers, jugglers, peasants, children, and kings. It has taken place in caves, in fields and forests, in circus tents, in inns and in castles, on street corners, and in public buildings grand and squalid, all over the world. And it goes on incessantly in the minds of its authors, its actors, its producers, its designers, and its audiences. (Cohen, 1994: 5-6).

After this very detailed explanation on the nature, meaning, purpose and application of Theatre over the ages, Cohen caps it up with a declarative conclusion, expatiating that...

For Theatre is, above all, a living art form – a process, an event that is fluid in time, feeling, and experience. It is not simply a matter of “plays”, but also of “playing”, and

a play is composed not simply of “acts”, but also of “acting”. As “play” and “act” are both noun and verb, so theatre is both a “thing” and a “happening.” (Cohen, 1994). In closing his detailed definition and explanation on what theatre has indeed been and symbolized at various times and places to various people across the ages; Cohen outlines a number of fascinating classic paradoxes that distinguish theatre from the more static arts, which include that Theatre is...

Unique to the moment, yet it is repeatable. It is spontaneous, yet it is rehearsed. It is participatory, yet it is presented. It is real, yet it is simulated. It is understandable, yet it is obscure. The actors are themselves, yet they are characters. The audience believes, yet it does not believe. The audience is involved, yet it remains apart. (Cohen, 1994:5-6).

With this detailed and analytic insight presented into the What is presented, by Whom, Where, How, When, and Why on the nature, meaning, manifestations and applications of the term Theatre by Cohen, the next concept to be explained is management.

### **What is Management?**

Unlike the term Theatre which to a great extent consistently promotes the same specific meaning; management often connotes different things to different people, especially the layman. Administrators, Managers, Scientists, Artists, Economists, Psychologists, Philosophers, Sociologists, Anthropologists, Educationists, Politicians, Religious Zealots, Militarists, Medical and Legal Experts, etc, have characteristically imposed disciplinary or professional biases and slants in their assertions, conceptions or perceptions of what management essentially portends.

However, management has become widely acknowledged in recent times as a dynamic and universal phenomenon; an activity with a consistent and distinctive proven character; marked by consistently unique principles; which produces routinely outstanding results in every context, when well applied diligently or meticulously (methodologically) in the same way. Management has also become widely acknowledged as being comprised of art and science. The science comprises the theory or technical know-how, while the art comprises the (practical) application of the scientific and technical know-how in producing desired results of any kind, but especially in terms of products which are economically or commercially marketable and valuable goods or services relevant to people far and wide such as a good musical, dramatic or variety theatre performance or production of any genre. Furthermore, the art and science of management culminate in management processes and systems. A system or process infers an organized procedure of operations. Managers of all kinds, regardless of their specific aptitudes, callings or skills carry out interwoven, interdependent or interrelated coordination, organizational or supervisory functions in different institutions and enterprises.

Stoner and Freeman (1989:4) define management as “the process of planning, organizing, leading and controlling the efforts of organization members and of using all other organizational resources to achieve stated organizational goals”. This definition has great similarity in terms of distinctive features with that offered by Robbins and Coulter (1999) on the vital nature and purpose of Theatre Management.

Additionally, Koontz, O'Donnell and Weihrich (1980:1) opine that: “The task of all managers is to design and maintain an environment conducive to the performance of individuals who are working together in groups towards the accomplishment of some preselected objective”.

Donnelly, Gibson and Ivancevich (1984: 2-4) propound that, “management is the process undertaken by one or more individuals to coordinate the activities of others in order to achieve results not achievable by one individual acting alone”. Donnelly et al strongly advises that, “the process of management should be studied by anyone planning to become a successful manager”. Dessler (2001) as well as Weihrich, Cannice and Koontz (2006) equally offer definitions of Management of great similarity as Donnelly et al.

Leaving foreign authors and a little more recently, Awodiya M.P. (2006:146) observes that, “Management harnesses human resources and coordinates the activities of people so that individual objectives become translated”. He further avers that, “all managers, regardless of their particular aptitudes or skills, engage in certain interrelated activities in order to achieve their desired goals. The four basic activities Awodiya identified in which managers are typically involved are– planning, organizing, leading and controlling. All of these activities and more are aptly recognized as principles of management by many scholars “can be applied in managing Nigerian arts, culture and tourism to attain a productive economic benefit”. (Awodiya, 2017:120).

The definition of management by Awodiya (2017) could actually have been ended at the point of the first sentence which ends with “their desired goals”. The inclusion of the last portion into the scheme of the definition is informed by his statement of the four basic activities, (which can alternatively be called principles, skills or strategies) by which managers achieve desired goals; which are planning, organizing, leading and controlling. The inclusion is more importantly however due to Awodiya's proposition that

these specific principles be applied in managing Nigerian arts, culture and tourism; according to him, in order to; “attain a productive economic benefit” (Awodiya, 2017:120). The implication of the above is that Awodiya is very confident of the definition of management he has given. He therefore recommends its application in managing Nigerian arts, culture and tourism sectors in order to attain very hopefully or optimistically; unprecedented results. From the foregoing definitions proffered, the essential nature, meaning and functions of the term management can be adequately deduced. Next is:

#### **What is Theatre Management? (The University of Benin Theatre Context)**

Theatre management which is the deliberate and purposive coupling, welding or unification of the two terms discussed earlier is geared towards creating environment conducive for managing theatre, arts and cultural institutions towards optimally achieving preselected aims and objectives par excellence. Thus, the umbrella term - Theatre Management basically is an all-pervasive function that affects or involves all the sections or units of a theatre institution.

Over the years, in the University of Benin Theatre Arts Department, the term and the course “Theatre Management” has been narrowly applied to fundamentally the business and commercial aspects or dimensions of production or performance functions to the exclusion of other units of the Theatre which directly come under its purview going by its very distinctive nomenclature. This anomaly can be explicitly deduced from the course contents and descriptions of the course which have been concentrated on front-of-house, box office, publicity, advertising, house management as well as ushering functions. The scope of the course should address the range of functions or activities that are circumvented within the broad process, system or spectrum of managing a theatre organization totally. Theatre and management therefore connote and fundamentally imply the deliberate and skillful application of the principles, processes, dynamics and skills of management towards enhancing and facilitating every aspect, unit or department of a theatre organization. Theatre management is defined in the light of the understanding canvassed above by Nwamuo cited by Evbodaghe Jennifer, Offor Prudence and Orji James (2018) in a theatre management class seminar thus:

“theatre management is the art and science of planning, staffing, organizing, motivating, directing and controlling human and material resources in the arts of the Theatre and their coordination in order to achieve predetermined objectives.

In a similar vein, Awodiya (2006:43) opines that Arts, Theatre or Culture Management “is the organization and coordination of the various people working together in order to achieve the arts institution’s goals and objectives”. In summary, specifically, the authors (Nwamuo and Awodiya) in their submissions on what Theatre management as a concept implies that:

“Theatre management is essentially a programme or process which enables the application of the fundamental principles of management to the fundamental processes involved in managing Theatre organisations, viz productions (performances), economic and commercial operations, etc; in order to enhance smooth running and optimum achievement of preselected aims and objectives in theatre enterprises or organizations (Diakpomrere and Bardi, 2018).

In the light of the foregoing, what are the specific fundamental functions of Theatre management that can be referenced?

#### **Fundamental Functions of Theatre Management**

Langley (1980:24) identifies four (4) principal elements by which theatre functions and to which the principles of management are, or can be applied in a typical theatre organization. They are Performance (the idea), the performers (the cast and crew), the place of performance (the theatre or venue of a performance) and the audience (the people) that watch the performance.

This view by Langley is supported by Adedokun (2001:32-55) who in his discourse on the functions of theatre management asserts that, the theatre manager is the coordinator “of the several aspects of a theatre production”, where management is “the process by which managers create, direct, maintain and operate purposive organizations through systematic, coordinated, operative human efforts”. (Peters, cited in Adedokun, 2001:34).

However, our perspective in this study is that the following functions can be considered as the expedient and fundamental functions of theatre management (especially under distressing and challenging conditions or situations), whilst acknowledging that this least may not be exhaustive:

1. Trained, competent and experienced Theatre managers formulate realistic, realizable, productive, profitable, measurable and adjustable goals aimed at attaining peak performance in a theatre organization.

2. Theatre managers (such as described above and implied throughout hereunder subsequently in this section) create an environment that is conducive for efficient and effective operations, thereby establishing operational structures that enhance as well as assure maximum productivity and overall achievement of the goals of a theatre organization.
3. Additionally, theatre managers provide/perform day to day administration and direction, thus driving the theatre organization in achieving its fundamental aims and objectives; as well as fulfil the lofty dreams/ideals which sustain the theatre organization.
4. Similarly, theatre managers by fulfilling their core and statutory functions enhance the credibility, performance, presentation, promotion and preservation of the fundamental objectives of a theatre organization.
5. Because they are trained and passionate about it, theatre managers promote the image and uplift the identity of the theatre they belong to through consistent devotion and dedication to upholding ideal, time-tested theatrical conventions and standards.
6. Theatre managers ensure that the artistic, administrative, economic and commercial activities or duties are carried out skillfully and vigorously to ensure financial well-being of the theatre organization through the careful selection and appointment of skillful and specialised labour/personnel.
7. Theatre managers ensure a continuous system of play production and presentation in order to fulfill the artistic, administrative, technical and training (in educational theatres) needs of the theatre organization.
8. Theatre managers skillfully and systematically arrange and coordinate pre-production, production and post-production processes to ensure that productions are executed perfectly, proficiently, profitably and sustainably.
9. In times of economic recession, social insecurity, severe competition, unhealthy rivalry from disadvantaged competitors, unfavorable governmental policies, unbridled inflation resulting in spiraling production and overhead costs, diminishing productions and patronage; trained, competent and experienced theatre managers are inevitable and indispensable antidotes for providing the much needed panacea that would keep the theatre organization afloat.
10. Besides rescuing the theatre organization in troubled times, theatre managers help in planning, organizing, providing adequate as well as relevant personnel (staff), formulating policy, providing direction, leadership, controlling, guiding the theatre organization in the way it should go, propelling it in the way forward.
11. Theatre managers, oversee key life-wire non-artistic functions such as overseeing the box office, front-house, creating and implementing accurate advertisement and publicity schemes, carrying out human and public relations to sustain a positive image for the theatre organization, overseeing house management, ticketing, ushering and ensuring a balanced, healthy and progressive Theatre Organization.
12. Theatre managers help in ensuring that the theatre personnel (cast and crew) are adequate, competent, focused, controlled, hardworking, motivated, diligent, creative and resourceful, through careful recruitment and in-house training.
13. Theatre managers ensure that the theatre as an organization is abreast with the latest trends and developments in theatre and cultural industry.
14. Theatre managers help their theatre to adopt state of the art, best practices, cutting edge technology, quintessential finesses as well as other lofty human relations practices that put the theatre organization ahead of others.
15. Theatre managers help to create excellent marketing plans and recruit sagacious aggressive sales-force who sell the theatre and its products, programmes and activities to ensure the theatre makes reasonable profit at all times.
16. Theatre managers help in talent hunt, talent discovery, recruitment, placement, promotion, training and helping generally in discovering, preserving and encouraging those with a genuine flair for the arts.
17. Theatre manager with the competence or through specialized personnel under his direction helps in preparing budget estimates of projected income and expenditures, creating ledgers and balance sheets for financial transparency, ensuring that production tickets are sold out, that productions break-even, creating unique selling points, creating additional revenue generating options, ensuring remunerations are paid promptly and well deserved, that dividends are well declared and that shareholders/trustees/board members are properly catered to.
18. Theatre managers, help in keeping inventories of theatre organization facilities, furniture equipment and materials, ensuring that they are constantly maintained, upgraded, preserved and kept from becoming obsolete or moribund.

19. Theatre managers ensure that the publicity director (if separate) carries out press releases, chats, linkages, etc, to keep the theatre organization in the eyes of the community and in their continued good will.

20. Indeed, good theatre managers are committed and devoted to every course that will take their theatre organizations to a place of envy in the highly competitive global arena.

This list which as earlier stated may not be exhaustive, reveals the enormity and diversity of fundamental Theatre management functions. Suffice it to say that Theatre managers are the heart and soul, of a Theatre organization.

Unarguably, such personnel (theatre managers) are indispensable to any theatre organization, which is why serious attention should be given to training and equipping theatre managers, because quite simply, the theatre cannot exist meaningfully without theatre managers. The invaluable nature of Theatre managers is incontestable because without them, there can be no successful theatre enterprise, industry or organization of any sort.

### **Findings**

The study has revealed that, there are fundamental theatre management functions which are crucial and indispensable to the success and sustainability of any worthwhile theatre enterprise.

It discovered that, it is very crucial and paramount for those engaged, or venturing into a theatre business as well as teachers, trainers, students and other theatre practitioners to have an in-depth knowledge of the fundamental functions of management with which they may be directly or indirectly saddled so that they can deploy them correctly, efficiently and effectively.

Another finding which is also supported by the earlier ones is that, theatre managers who are well trained, competent and experienced are of extreme importance to the smooth running and optimum achievement of preselected aims and objectives. More importantly, in a time of depression or recession when a theatre is facing rigorous challenges, a detailed understanding of the functions involved in theatre management will become an undisputed asset which can help theatre managers prioritize functions as well as allocate action and limited available resources, time and effort to them frugally.

### **Recommendations**

This study has revealed that it is imperative for all theatre managers to be well grounded in the details and peculiarities of the fundamental functions and roles involved in theatre management. Only those who have good training, proven competence and versatile experience should engage in the management of any theatre enterprise so as to enhance goal achievement as well as the well-being and development of the theatre entertainment business and its contributions to the nation's artistic, cultural, economic and educational advancement.

### **Conclusion**

It is clear from this study that a detailed understanding of the fundamental functions involved in theatre management is most important to theatre managers and indeed all those engaged in the theatre business or enterprise.

Without having a clear knowledge and understanding of the fundamental functions and their roles, theatre managers will engage in mere trial by error and failure and the practice of success by chance approach in managing the theatre, which will unarguably increase the chances of them jeopardizing the theatre business, making things bleak and uncertain.

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