

COOPERATIVE PROFESSIONALISM IN THEATRE ARTS PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

Theatre production is a collaborative effort of unit professionals. This article attempts to advance the possibilities of professional cooperative against the huge financial commitment into theatre production by individuals. It strives to position professional cooperative as the cooperation of the various professionals in every specialized area of the theatre. This posit has the potency to create employment, cut cost of production, reduce audition sentiments, enhance loan advancement and engage professionals in production when established. It further argues that cooperative professionalism will ensure that professionals provide the best within their profession with collective effort as the cooperators in theatre production. It concludes that this will substitute a great deal for the huge financial commitment, which has reduced professionals to beggars of sort. This will further strengthen their financial muscles as well as reduce the financial strength of production cartel. It posits that professional cooperative in theatre production is capable of turning the tide to effect a change within the industry that will make professionals totally in charge of the theatre business.

Keywords: Cooperative professionalism, Theatre arts production management, Professional cooperative troupe

Introduction

Cooperative professionalism in theatre production is an argument, which makes a modest attempt at encouraging theatre professionals in different areas of the theatre to come together and form professional cooperative troupe. The main contribution to the professional cooperative troupe is their theatrical specialty. When the various areas of theatre production are fully covered by expert cooperators on professional basis, who at the same time, agree to pool their resources together to meet other needs, theatre production business has started. It is an approach that will aid theatre professionals to employ themselves with a view to participate in theatre production business as professionals as this will enhance the putting in of their best to ensure maximum success. More importantly, it is an approach that will put all the professional cooperators on the same value scale as they will share the profit and loss equally.

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Cooperative professionalism in theatre production when academically and professionally articulated has the synergy to boost professional standards in theatre production, minimize management and production costs, relieve professionals of employment seeking stress and make them acquainted with management procedures in theatre production. Cooperative professionalism fastens cooperative spirit of professionals to conquer business inequality and avail them the opportunity to become participating executive producers as professional cooperators.

Defining Cooperative in Theatre Production

Cooperative professionalism in theatre production is a combination of factors and its definition may not be adequate without examining each constituent. Cooperative has been defined by Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary as operating jointly to the same end; inclined to cooperate. 2. Designating of an organization, as for the production or marketing of goods, owned collectively by members who share its profits (402). It was further defined by the new Encyclopedia Britannica as "organization owned by and operated for the benefit of those using its services (605). Professionalism has been defined as professional quality, status, etc. (1437). These professionals could be specialists in the same field, with each having proficiency in one of the component units of area of specialization. For instance, theatre arts as a profession have various areas of specialization, which include: acting, singing, technical theatre, costumes, make-up, choreography, criticism, management, playwriting, dance, et cetera. Cooperative professionalism in theatre production could be defined as the cooperation of theatre artists or professionals in different areas of specialization towards direct or indirect theatrical production with a view to advancing professional production, reduction of capitalist advantage and profit making. The various specialists within the components of theatre arts can come together based on agreement, which must spell out conditions of cooperation to form a cooperative with a view to providing theatrical services towards advancing professionalism in quality service delivery for profit making. Theatrical services, implies production, either live or recorded. Whichever, service has been provided and consumed, either directly or indirectly. Direct consumption is watching live theatrical performances, while indirect consumption is watching home video, films and listening to radio-drama. As cooperative professionalism is poised at first instance towards providing professional theatrical service, Marcouse et al argues in favour of the above, cultures are developed when individuals with similar training and background form groups to enhance their experience and share knowledge. This type of culture is most often found "among professionals such as " (527), theatre arts professionals who decide to form a cooperative.

As theatre arts is a unit of culture, it automatically assimilates the above argument. Therefore, cooperative professionalism in theatre production is the coming together of theatre professionals in various units to form a troupe. This, however, may not exclude the hiring of other professionals within the profession to achieve their ultimate purpose.

The Need for Cooperative Professionalism in Theatre Production

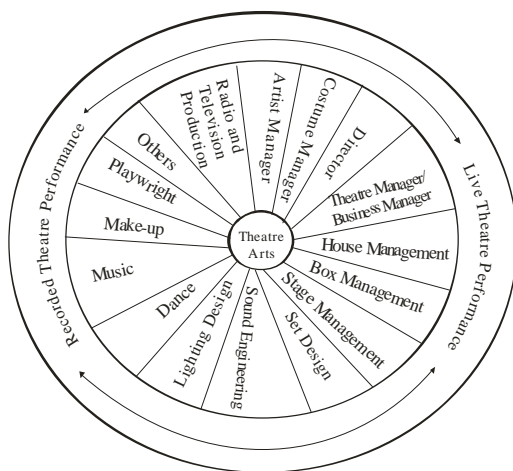
The need to form professional cooperative in theatre production has become so important in recent times. Some of the reasons necessitating it include: scarce investment, unprofessional production, audition bias, facility procurement, and enhancement of theatre profession, reduction of production cost, employment provision, high yielding profit, articulated welfare, participative management and cooperative spirit. The arts generally suffer inadequate or scarce investment. It was observed that theatres' financial plight indicates the situation's social dimension, stage productions have become so lavish that, even if the theatres were full at every performance, they could not pay their way and could require subsidy+ (Hawkes 227).

The inability of theatre to pay itself without subsidy has its negative effect on theatre production as a segment of the performing arts, though not exclusive of the other aspects of arts. Although arts and money are two different things, money is required to achieve the objectives of any form of arts. Theatre production in this regard requires elaborate investment because of its elaborate nature to achieve essence. More often, when investors invest on a drama script they are not sure if it will succeed or not. If, eventually, they are convinced to invest, they ensure that it will yield maximum profit. The decision of the investor has effect either positively or negatively on the theatre artist. Most times, the effect is negative because it borders on inadequate welfare, poor remuneration, denial to participate in management decisions, et cetera. Cooperative professionalism is a cornupusia, which is the only standing option against these negative effects of the investor. When properly managed, cooperative professionalism is an initial investment because of the professionals (human resources) involved. In this regard, the money that would have been spent on the hiring of such high caliber professionals is saved. These professionals go further to source for funds to invest in the pursuit of their business ideas, this makes them source of investment.

Cooperative professionalism is also necessitated by the need to improve on the quality of production either on stage or recorded. This is because the production is a product of professionals who are able to bring their experience to the fore. If there is need to hire a professional, they know what to look out for to complement what they have. Furthermore, cooperative professionalism is also a means to reduce audition bias. In theatre production, audition is an important aspect, because it is a means through which characters that are capable of interpreting a playwright's motif

are selected. Sometimes, the directors could be influenced to select persons who are related to them instead of the most suitable for the job. In this case, professional cooperative professionally select the most suitable persons among themselves or among guest artists knowing the implications of selecting unsuitable staff. Besides, it will be easier for a professional cooperative in theatre arts to get loan, grants and other credit facilities than an individual who has no collateral. In the absence of loan and the like, it is also easier for them to contribute resources towards the attainment of their goals. Professional cooperative in theatre arts is also capable of enhancing area of specialization within theatre arts. This is achieved through continuous practice, training and retraining. Cooperative professionalism is also able to reduce cost of production. This is because a reduction in the cost of production in theatre production leads to increase in the profit margin. It is therefore reasonable to cut down on cost of production to enhance profit margin, especially when cooperators are involved in key production areas. Once a person is a cooperator, he is automatically employed, that means cooperators are employees of their cooperative. In essence, they are expected to work honestly, diligently and hard for the cooperative to succeed. The desire and commitment of every member to ensure that their professional cooperative succeeds is a touch of cooperative spirit. These facts reveal the need for cooperative professionalism in theatre arts production, especially in developing nations.

Cooperative professionalism in theatre production functions in a bifocal manner live performance and recorded production which must come through live performance.



Theatre Arts Component

The various components of theatre production, listed within the circle require strategic management application to enable it work effectively because of its attractiveness to realizing the charter of objective (Tourangeau 56). This will aid cutting low-value activities out of the cooperative chain, develop more economical production design processes and aid re-engineering of internal processes (Thompson 258). This strategy must also penetrate each aspect or component of the cooperative through the managers of the various components. Although this is slightly difficult to achieve it is important to the success of cooperative theatre production. Tourangeau acknowledged that what makes exciting strategy a tougher, more time consuming management challenge than crafting strategy is the wide array of managerial strategies that have to be attended to, the many ways manager's can proceed, the demanding people-management skill required, the perseverance necessary to get a variety of initiatives launched and moving, of beveling issues that must be worked out, the resistance to change that must be overcome, and the difficulties of integrating the efforts of many different work groups into smoothly functioning whole. (345 346)

This will enable the realization of the set objectives of cooperative professionalism in theatre production with relative ease with good profit margin as Thompson corroborates itself as follows. "Exciting strategy is an action oriented, make-things-happen task that tests manager's ability to direct organizational change, motivate people, develop core competencies, build valuable organizational capabilities, achieve continuous improvement in business processes, create strategy-supportive cooperate culture and meet or beat performance targets+(345).

This forecloses the importance of strategic planning in cooperative professionalism in theatre production management as an emerging area of theatre arts management with multiple benefits to artists, especially in this era of scarce resources and paucity of jobs.

Consideration for the Formation of Cooperative Professionalism in Theatre Arts Production

Every profession has its uniqueness and challenges. Theatre arts as a profession is not exclusive of this experience, hence it is important to put certain factors into consideration in an attempt to form a professional cooperative in theatre arts production. First, the purpose of establishing such a cooperative must be identified. Secondly, previous experience, training and business acumen of professionals in addition to their reliability: mentally, emotionally and socially should be considered. Thirdly, a strategy, through which the aims and objectives already stated in the working document, must be articulated. It is very important for a cooperative professionalism in theatre arts to establish its management objectives, this is important according to Odiome, who states:

In brief, the system of management by objective can be described as a process whereby the superior and subordinate managers of an organization jointly identify its common goals, define each individual's major areas of responsibility in terms of the result expected, and use these measures as guide for operating the unit and assessing the contribution of each of its members. (53)

This observation is relevant because it will inform the foundation of selection of the professional cooperators and the area each of them can function adequately. Thereafter, the cooperators must consider the interrelationship between each unit because it is part of a whole, considering Fry et al's statement;

The interrelationship between positions in a business can be thought of as a giant super web. Each position in the business is an intersection in that web. So any task accomplished by one person at one location in the web will affect, and be affected by several other members of the organization. (87)

Cooperative professionalism in theatre practice is a new area that is expected to synergize management by objective principles and position interrelationship within the cooperative as argued by the authors cited above. These substantial arguments also have to be strengthened by these primary cooperative factors so as to achieve its objective. They include cooperative loyalty, managerial action, accountability, healthy work place politics, product quality and welfare. These primary cooperative factors are very important towards the success of any cooperative. For instance, cooperative loyalty will enhance commitment of cooperators. Managerial action will deepen management's commitment to policy implementation towards achieving success; bearing in mind that management's conduct influences cooperation. According to Kindersley:

More constructive behavioural attributes will encourage cooperation, openness and self confidence. Some readily recognizable traits of people with appropriate behavioural skills include a proven facility to communicate positively with colleagues at all levels; the swift and generous recognition of the achievement of others; the ability to learn from mistakes and a general approach that is based on collaboration with fellow workers rather than competition. (155)

This may alter the usual system of management, which means the position of the Board of Directors may be taken over by the cooperative professional Board and replace line managers and supervisors with professionals in the same capacity. That means, the drama director within the cooperative will be in charge of directing drama the choreographer within the cooperative will be in charge of dance and the musician within the cooperative will be in charge of music, et cetera. In other words, members of

the board of directors are going to participate in production. This is against the usual procedure which may not be convenient for cooperative business to abide with, hence it was stated that it will be wise to eliminate modern business prove of stakeholders, Board of Directors, top management, middle management & stakeholders are the owners of corporations & stakeholders virtually never take active note in a company (80).

Professional cooperative in theatre brings about accountability, as an important aspect of cooperative business or any other, as it strengthens workers' faith in the cooperative management team and enhances commitment. Healthy work politics is a product of accountability, it brings about faith and commitment, and neutralizes negative mindset on which unhealthy work place politics thrives. When management lacks accountability in a business or cooperative, it dampens workers' or cooperators' spirit and brings about unhealthy work politics, which strengthens laxity, stealing, lateness, cheating et cetera. These elements of unhealthy work place politics affect product quality. However, they are manageable with the entrenchment of accountability. Professional cooperative in theatre arts must ensure product quality, which will ensure continuity of business and attraction to products. Most importantly, workers welfare is a core element in cooperative management. This is because it will boost their moral; give them sense of assurance of continuous fair treatment that they are the first asset of the cooperative or company.

In a professional theatre cooperative, the Board of Directors may not be relevant. This is because they do not actually participate in the company's production activities. Usually, they perform management advisory role. The cooperators are professionals; they can advise themselves where necessary or hire an external body where necessary.

Recommendations

Professional cooperative in theatre arts should be managed through leadership rotation, whoever is the deputy to the current head, must be the person to take over from him. That means, in the process of deputizing, he would have understudied the process of management so as to take over leadership. The practice of eliminating unnecessary positions and acquisition of unnecessary materials must be checked to avoid waste. This will allow the direction of more funds into welfare. The welfare of staff must be given adequate attention considering the fact that human resources form the base of any business success. Internal and external checks and balances must be intensified so as not to give room for laziness and corruption. This is why accountability must be emphasized to enshrine trust.

The process of admitting new members as articulated in the working documents of the co-operative. The process of appraisal punishment and reward for outstanding achievements should be parts of the working document. Co-operative policies must be implemented and evaluated so as to redirect policies in areas where implementation is weak or not implemented.

Co-operative professionalism in theatre production is necessary at this time because new politics and economic forces are continually reshaping our perception towards alternative means of business and new ways of doing it (Hottman and Moore 72). This implies sharing collective professional views towards collective success. For co-operators to achieve success in any professional business, it requires synergy found in co-operative spirit. This has influenced it to be successful as observed by Safra et al, that co-operative has been successful in a number of fields, including the processing and marketing of farm products, the purchasing of other kinds of equipment and raw materials, and in the wholesaling, retailing, electric power, credit and banking, and housing industries (605).

If cooperative has been successful in all these areas, it is obvious that it will succeed in theatre production. This is in consideration of the fact that theatre arts is a collaborative business that can easily accommodate cooperative principles. Although, it is a new area of operation, its practice, if sustained will go a long way to enhancing the professional and economic status of the practitioners. It has been viewed that:

Elizabethan England theatre groups were organized as shares' companies and that 'these companies owned costumes, properties and plays in common, and hired the adult members of the company,õ ' the capitalist first made his appearance as the owner of the theatre in which these companies played, among whom was James Burbage. He is of the view that theatre owners became employees and that it worked best when the theatre manager was also the leading actor. (Ana agudo-Agu 3)

The companies who owned costumes, properties and plays are professionals in theatre business, their business pattern could suit cooperative, and otherwise, it would have been difficult for them to do business in their era. These companies from my views must have emerged with a view to control the excesses of the capitalist. James Burbage's observation, that theatre owners became employees and that it is better for theatre manager to serve as leading actor implies that cooperative professionalism in theatre production was being experienced, perhaps in a different way and that it will succeed now, especially in Nigerian and African setting, where capitalists with eyes on large profit and mind on less welfare for the artist, are out to take over the profession in spite of the fact that they know nothing about the profession. The workability of cooperative professionalism in theatre arts is capable of reducing the dictatorial influence of the capitalist and his artistic director, bring professional cooperators into mainstream theatre business with a view to growing the industry.

Conclusion

Theatre Arts, from inception, has been a collaborative business by its very nature, this collaboration must exist in order to accomplish the

ultimate goals of the theatre manager full house, guaranteed satisfaction and maximize profit. Even in a theatre outfit that is not profit oriented, such as, the college theatre, the various theatre personnel must work together in order to succeed. The theatre manager, who of course, must be a master of the art, cannot claim to know it all, hence it is always advised that a cordial relationship exist among all the personnel in the theatre. In the views of Innocent Ohiri, "one thing that is very desirable (sic) for the success of every production is good relationship. Theatre practice or production involves teamwork. For any team work to achieve its purpose, there must be good and proper understanding" (133). The ultimate goal of the cooperative professionalism in theatre production and management is to minimize cost and maximize profit. So, it will not be out of place if some groups of theatre professionals come together to make things work to their own advantage as theatre experts.

In my opinion, cooperative professionalism existed even in the early days of theatre in Nigeria, especially when the theatre practitioners decided to practice the Town and Gown system. This was a situation where the university theatre professionals decided to go beyond the four walls of the university into the town and recruited those who were not even theatre artists into the theatre business due to their professional acumen in their various fields, which would be useful to the theatre practice and production. This was the practice at the Ori Olokun Centre, Ile-Ife in 1968 when multi-talented actors with proficiency in their different areas of specialization were employed and paid by the Centre. In the words of Foluke Ogunleye:

It was a rare opportunity to have local performers from Ile-Ife town rubbing shoulders on the same stage with lecturers and students from the university. Margaret Oldfield, a graduate in drama and a lecturer in the English Department, helped with the diction, while Agbo Folarin from the Fine Arts section of the institute designed the set. Abiodun Odebona, of the Faculty of Science, acted as the business manager and the cast included Femi Robinson, a lecturer in the Faculty of Agriculture, and Olu Akomolafe, who later became a lecturer in the Department of Dramatic Arts. The play was well received by the town and gown audience, and this shot the Ori Olokun Centre into limelight (16).

From the foregoing we can see that cooperative professionalism has long existed in the theatre, though with a slight difference. What is even startling here is that those involved were never professionals in the theatre business, yet they made their mark by contributing to the growth of the theatre center. According to Foluke Ogunleye, Kole Omotoso and Ola Rotimi described them as "enthusiastic amateurs" who comprised farmers, carpenters, mechanics, labourers or teachers who had little or no western education (15). If those people so described could work together to achieve the goal of the theatre company, it then remains a truism that professionals who have all it takes to achieve tremendous success in the theatre may not

be limited by the sky if they come together as cooperative professionals. In fact, it is high time we practiced the age long adage 'united we stand, divided we fall' and since no man is ever an island, cooperative professionalism will certainly bring profuse success in the theatre industry.

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