

# Strategic Management Assessment of Production Management Patterns in National Theatre of Nigeria



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## Abstract

Production management forms an aspect of theatre administration that deals with the production packaging process. Studies in the area of theatre administration have hitherto focused largely on the commercial aspects and theatre's impact on its audience and vice versa. Little efforts have been made to underscore the peculiar ways of selecting, rehearsing and producing the performances for the audience. It is often difficult to state where production management starts and ends in the process of play productions mostly due to its integral affinities with other salient aspects of the theatre such as business management, stage management, theatre management, publicity and box office. This is because it is holistic beginning from pre-production to the post-production and focuses on the concord of the various aspects of the production to ensure that the finished work, the production: be it dance, drama, music, or a total theatre is seamlessly produced and meets desired goals. This study through the theory of strategic management and utilizing interviews and content analysis, investigates the production management pattern of the National Theatre of Nigeria (NTN) in the production of Femi Osofisan's *One Legend, Many Seasons*. It is observed that the NTN has a structure that conforms to best production management practices and consistency with production output through a detailed production schedule. The research concludes that production management is a holistic process with potent effects on the total quality of production and by extension, the profile of the theatre organization over time.

**Keywords:** Production Management, Patterns, Theatre, National Troupe, Strategic Management Theory

## Introduction

Management is emphatically linked with the survival or failure of the theatre business in the various era of its development up till modern times. In fact, effective management is that which Onah (2008) and Ayakoroma (2013) views as coordinating, controlling, coordinating, organizing, planning and directing money, men, materials and machines to ensure that organizational goals are

achieved. Theatre and theatrical activities has remained the product of several arts and acts of man meticulously orchestrated and packaged to express or externalize his thoughts and feelings.

Theatre administration according to Nwamuo (2003) began when man decided to invite his neighbors, fellow villagers, townsmen, countrymen, or tribes to watch his performances or talent shows. As society developed and became complex, art and theatre management became a venture demanding discipline and faculty in human and material resources. The changes in society have never in any way affected the need for entertainment and theatre activities it only affects the approaches and the packaging of the performance, which must constantly be carved to fit into the present taste of the society. The art of management has to do with the process of achieving organizational goals and objectives through the use of people and other resources of the organization. Management has been closely linked with leadership within an organizational structure and is key to the survival of any business or organization. Terry clarifies this in his assessment that;

Of every one hundred new business establishments started, approximately fifty or one half go out of business within two years. By the end of five years only one third of the original one hundred will still be in business. Perhaps, it would be a valid assumption to state that the major cause of these failures would be ineffective leadership. (6)

In the same vein, while Drucker (1975) and Chandan (2007) agree that managers or leaders are vital to organizational success, they also reiterate that dynamic and effective leadership stands as a prominent distinctive feature between successful and unsuccessful organization. The leader has the vision of what the organization plans to become and elicits collaboration and team work from individuals and keeps key persons in that system driven by persuasion. (Mbaya, 123) Management has to do with getting things done effectively, efficiently, timely and in keeping with the aims and objectives of organization. In the view of Jedo (2007), it has to do with people whose sole responsibility is to harness, coordinate, motivate, and plan efforts of a larger group of people towards efficient and effective actualization of the overall organizational goals.

It is both the science and art of reaching organizational goals within a stipulated period. Theatre management therefore, according to Ohiri has to do with the “science and art of planning, organizing, staffing, and harnessing the human and material resources of the theatre in order to achieve set goals and objectives of the theatre organization” (5). Giving more explanatory remarks

is the opinion of Kimball who maintains that management encapsulates all the responsibilities that has to do with “the initiation of an enterprise, from its financing, provision of all necessary equipment, outlining of the general form of organization under which the enterprise is to operate, to selection of principal officers.” (89)

The person upon who this onerous responsibility lies is called the manager. This personnel is responsible for getting things done through other people; someone who has the mandate to handle and see to the realization of a project (Nagarajan, 2015) and in carrying out this task according to Ogungbesan (2020) he must be able to utilize the available resources, persons and machineries at his disposal to attain set goals and objectives. He must show mastery of the various techniques by which “human efforts are created, maintained and operated.” (Peters cited in Adedokun 2001: 34)

Theatre production management utilizes salient management principles and techniques such as planning, organizing, controlling and directing in the execution of a production. This is different from the entire gamut of theatre management which concerns itself with the “staffing, organizing, motivating, directing and controlling human and material resources in the arts of the theatre and their interaction in order to attain pre-determined objectives of guaranteeing satisfaction, having a full house and maximizing profit.” (Nwamuo 2003: 2) On another scale, theatre management is concerned with the synergic interaction of managing the theatre building and the artistic events that goes on inside of the building. (Oshionebo & Idebe, 2009)

Production management speaks to the process and decisions taken during the course of a production towards ensuring that the essence of such process and decisions are at par with organizational goals. According to Ogungbesan (2020) it is often difficult to state where production management starts and ends in the process of play productions mostly due to its integral affinities with other salient aspects of the theatre such as business management, stage management, theatre management, publicity and box office. This process begins from pre-production to the post-production and focuses on the concord of the various aspects of the production to ensure that the finished work, the production: be it dance, drama, music, or a total theatre is seamlessly produced and meets desired goals.

Production management aids in the setting of the overall principles for the economy of the production. This makes production planning and control the focal thrust of production



management in line with Webb's (2004) thoughts that there must be a clear cut plan in place which spans the beginning to the final product, a plan that is to be kept up to date and adequately followed in order to ensure and control quality. It is on this premise that this work sets out to underscore the production management patterns of select theatre troupes to ascertain if they are in line with the best practices of production management.

Production management forms an aspect of theatre administration that deals with the production packaging process. Studies in the area of theatre administration have hitherto focused largely on the commercial aspects and theatre's impact on its audience and vice versa. Little efforts have been made to underscore the peculiar ways of selecting, rehearsing and producing the performances for the audience. Nwamuo (2003; 2006 & 2007) looks at the commercial value enhancement of the theatre. His work on *Theatre Marketing Process* (2007) and Drucker (1975) stress the need for sustaining live theatre practice through marketing and commercialization. Kimball (2009) emphasizes the place of policy formulation in establishing, sustaining and financing an enterprise as well as the role and duties of the manager in the survival of the enterprise while coordinating the activities and outputs of an organization through effective utilization of the available machineries, money and materials forms the central thrust of Onah's (2003) thoughts. Terry (1993) focuses on leaders and organizational success or failure while Ayakoroma (2013) deals on the management of theatre structures generally which aims at optimum achievement of the objectives of the theatre.

A common trend for all the studies above is the commercial aspect and the positive image laundering that are consequent upon effective use of the human and material resources of the theatre. While these are laudable efforts in the dynamic discourse of theatre and arts administration, it is evident that very little focus has been given to the unique ways of performance selection, rehearsal and final performance especially within the public theatre spaces: a gap which this study sets out to fill. This study is anchored on the production management patterns and its impact on the National Theatre of Nigeria (NTN) using the production of Femi Osofisan's *One Legend, Many Seasons*. The objective of this study is to discover the place and impact of production management to the performance operations and profiles of both institutions in selected performance

**Theoretical Framework: Strategic Management Theory**

Strategic management taken from the key work ‘strategic’ or ‘strategy’ which has to do with what Omolaja and Eruola (2011) describes as Broad determination of the goals and the rendering of alternative methods or course of action towards achieving and sustaining the set goals. A strategy spans the development and implementation processes involved and such that are willing to be taken in the pursuance of a task or reaching a set goal. Kvint (2009) sees strategy as a system of finding, formulating, and developing doctrines that ensures long term success if followed faithfully. Strategic management in this sense according to Jofre (2011) refers both to developing and implementing strategies or plans in the course of pursuing a set goal. In a more lucid and explanatory format, Omolaja and Eruola posits that;

strategy is the pattern of decisions in a company that determines and reviews its objectives, purposes, goals, produce the principal policies and plans for achieving these goals and defines the range of business which the company is to pursue, the kind of economic and human organization it is or intends to be and the nature of economic and non-economic contributions it intends to make to its beneficiaries (60)

The use of strategic management is used interchangeably by various scholars with strategic planning which is integrally linked to strategic thinking as the basic thrust of management is to constantly anticipate problems and prepare to tackle them for sustainability of the organization. According to Ugiri, this management setup is “analytical in nature and refers to formalized procedures to produce the data analysis used as inputs for strategic thinking which synthesizes the data resulting in the strategy. In another sense, it happens around the strategic thinking or strategic making activity.” (54)

Jofre (2011) explains that being a relatively new approach to management, the ideologies of strategic management have rapidly evolved in the last four to five decades from its nature as financial budgeting in reaction to globalization and the learning organization in the late 50s. In the 60s strategic management corporate planning became the core concern of strategic management wherein focus was more about formalizing the planning process. Market dynamics was the hallmark of the 70s and premium of strategic management was placed on the market positions of organizations in the wake of emerging realities and competence of the managers and the management process in rapidly growing economies.

The following decade shifted its focus to the analysis of acquisition and development of resources and capabilities in firms, and on the probably most common concept in contemporary management, the concept of competitive advantage. From the year 2000, strategy management hugely focused on the emergence of a new economy fuelled by the increased knowledge and communication in businesses, becoming more innovation and knowledge driven. Today, in the analysis of French (2008), globalization has become the hallmark of all strategic planning and management in ways that globalization prompts policies, work ethics, standardization, and marketing such that regularly cause the organizations to review positions and strategies in their goal pursuits within the global realities. Hence, strategic management has evolved from static and remotely specific phase to a broad and complex dynamics of systems that transcend organizational borders. Among the early contributors of strategic management are Peter Drucker, Philip Sebrick, Alfred Chandler, Igor Ansof, and Bruce Henderson.

Strategic management provides the overall directions to the enterprise in the order of stating organizational objectives, evolving policies and plans to reach the objectives, and the allocation of resources for the implementation of the plan. Formulation and implementation are the two milestones of strategic management. Formulation entails the analysis of organization operational environment, decision making on how best the organization engages the competitive market and ending with the series of goals to be pursued by the organization and the standard for which these goals are measured. Implementation concerns itself with how the resources of the organization will be engaged/deployed to realize the objectives.

### **National Troupe of Nigeria (NTN) and Production Management Patterns in *One Legend, Many Seasons***

This section is not given to the historical development and antecedents that led to the formation of the National Troupe of Nigeria however, it is important to note that the National Troupe of Nigeria (NTN) since its creation, has exhibited competence in cultural representation and contributed to the quest for a national identity through performances that serves as a “tapestry in which culture and history of nations are interwoven.” (Lewis, 1) The identity in this case can be based on ethnicity, religion, race, class and the extent of cultural development as evidenced in packaged artistic exhibitions designed for national and international tours.

The NTN to a large extent, has represented this cultural diversity in several international and national tours and has recorded successes in their performances which include the play titled *Yemoja* which won the best prize for drama at the 2002 Cervantino International Festival, Mexico; *Tafiadis* a play that focuses on the life and times of Shehu Musa Yar'Adua and the 'Kolanut Dance' which also received high commendations. On several occasions also, the troupe has been commissioned by Federal Government to package national and international events ranging from the Commonwealth Heads of Government These performances have helped in shaping the perception of Nigerian culture within and outside Nigeria which furthers Howard Becker's thought that "culture can be said to shape the outlooks of people who participate in it." (22)

The troupe has exhibited high profiled performances for corporate institutions like the NLNG, Flour Mills, Texaco, Coca-cola, MTN, The Rockefeller Foundation among others as well as partnered in the hosting of national events like the annual Abuja Carnival. Some Dance, drama and musical repertoire includes Arnold Udoka's *Mbarra*, and *Long Walk to a Dream*; Nwajei's *In Chants of Two Seasons*; Ahmed Yerima's *Attahiru*, *Little drops*, Ola Rotimi's *Ovaranwem Nogbaisi* and Femi Osofisan's *One Legend Many Seasons* among others. The play chosen for this analysis is Femi Osofisan's *One Legend Many Seasons* and Directed by Josephine Igberaese on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2014 at the Cinema Hall II of the National Theatre, Lagos. Data of the production were gathered from interviews and sighting of the production relics and other archival materials about the production profile of the National Troupe of Nigeria.

The play which is an adaptation of Charles Dicken's *A Christmas Caro* focuses on a means spirited and wealthy but finds it difficult to be of help to others. He saw Christmas as a waste of time and therefore cares less about the spirit of Christmas. His attitude however changed when the ghost of his friend who departed seven years ago visited him and warned him of the dangers ahead if he refused to change his attitude and view about life. The play portrays the three major stages of the major character, Alowolodu, who neither married nor had any children as a result of his selfish life. He was visited by three spirits: the spirit of Christmas past (Osetura), the spirit of Christmas present (orekelewe) and the spirit of Christmas future (Orisanla). Alowolodu through those spirits was able to see the past, present and future of his life.

In line with management best practices, the professionalism of managers come to bear in the total output of the production as well as the alignment of the process in line with the ideal structures of



play production. In this sense, production management analysis will focus on the professionalism, process, level of involvement, and impact/relevance of the production. In line with theatre production management practice, the production process begins from play selection to opening night and post-production. According to the Director, Josephine Igberase, the play was considered best among other plays presented at the meeting of management of NTN and was approved by the artistic director as suitable for the time and season being Christmas. The play selection conforms to best production management practices of an ideal theatre outfit which has to do with selection of plays based on the goals of the theatre. It is noteworthy here that the Performing Arts Department of the NTN is divided into Dance, Drama and Music, each having their directors and production choices can emerge from any or all of these sub-divisions. Supervisors in productions are usually the director from whose sub-unit the production originated.

The play followed through to the audition stages and then the rehearsals where every cast and crew was made to get involved through contributing their various arts towards the success of the production. The script posed a great challenge for the director who likes to explore the experimental approach to productions. Her first thoughts after reading the play was to let the play meet with technology in order to bring the fast moving montage and tempo in the play together hence her experiment of blending two distinct artistic techniques which is the stage and multimedia. The nature of the play influenced the casting and other stage collaborators and placed professionalism in these areas at the fore. According to the stage manager Bayode Abifarin, “all the production management team members were professionals employed by the National troupe based on their areas of specialization and are hence allocated with such duties.” (Interviewed July 2017) The process of the auditions was holistic as in-house artistes were also auditions “to give a level playing ground to both in-house and invited artistes.” (Dir. Igberaese, Interviewed July 2017)

The level of professionalism involved in the process of the auditions and the handling of cast and crew were relevant to the amount of successes the production recorded. Meetings were held with the management team to crew members to be briefed about the workings of the production, the demands on their various roles and timelines by the director. According to the director also, “it was for them to also analyse the play based on their areas of expertise and come up with a budget that will be all-encompassing for the entire production. That done, the rehearsal commenced and the various areas started to get their arts together. According to Emmanuel Adejumo (interviewed



July 2017), the choreographer of the production, the rehearsals were in segments and all areas of the production were managed as music, drama and dance never clashed in the rehearsal timing.

Rehearsals times were mornings and evenings. Designers know when to take measurements of casts and stage, and the casts knew when to rest as they were not robots. Ogungbesan throws more light on the time management of the rehearsal and the duration in his words that “the rehearsal starts at 10am to 1pm for the morning session and 2pm to 6pm for the afternoon session from Monday to Saturday adhering to a detailed rehearsal schedule.” (94) At the commencement of the run-through rehearsals, the director starts to bring the production management team/crew members into the rehearsal to “understand and key into the flow of my play.” (Dir. Igberase, Interviewed July 2017) The various professionals gets to imagine and fit their bits into the overall picture and concept of the work so as to credibly realize the directorial concept of the play.

The production was a success in the several nights of its production between the 15<sup>th</sup> of December 2013 and 1<sup>st</sup> December 2014. The aims and objective of the production which is to reinforce the reason and season of Christmas which entails giving and love were realized as captured in the words of the former Minister of Tourism, Culture and National Orientation, Chief Edem Duke thus;

It is a thing of great surprise and showed in a season like this, we should be mirroring the story of a man with great wealth who should use his wealth for the betterment of the society, but unfortunately this is not the story. My dear people, there is a lesson to be learnt and the lesson is that we must love our neighbors as ourselves. We must love our family and our nation. So, I bring you this message of goodwill that as long as we must live we should respect one another, show respect for our leaders and use the stories of our forbearers to teach the lesson of goodwill to mankind during Christmas. (Qtd in The Nation Online, 2013)

Despite the success of this production, the issue of finance seemed to be the only challenge faced by the production management team in the discharge of their duties to the production. The production being very large and artistically demanding, and in the hands of an experimental director who could be in constant flight, would have been affected by poor funding. In the directors words,

I dare to dream with so much excitement hoping that Zmirage Company will assist to achieve this dream, however, what you see today is an abridged version of that dream due to financial constraints. The technical director promised to get as close as possible to that dream. (Dir. Igberaese, July, 2017)

Others like the choreographer, Stage manager, and technical director also had to face the issue of finance and were able to find ways around it as professionals in their roles. The business of production management has to do with tackling challenges and realizing the aims and objectives of the production.

### **Conclusion**

The National Troupe of Nigeria has confirmation of the workings of a production management team. The structure of this production management team is composed of specialists in various aspects of the theatre whose expertise enabled the seamless realization of the production and achieving the desired aims and objectives of the production despite challenges. The professionalism of the team influences the output of the production. The idea behind production is to satisfy a perceived need in society as well as meet organizational goals and objectives. To this extent, it is therefore, necessary that human, financial and material resources are effectively utilized to reach these goals. In the theatre parlance, especially with the study production of NTN, results are achieved when all hands are on deck. The productivity of an organization entails considerations of the summary measures of quality and quantity of work and labor in relation to the resources utilized. In summary, the outcome of the process is goes beyond the resources deployed to encapsulate the personnel who utilize these resources. Theatre production management is a necessary aspect as it impacts the level of success, quality and resource utilization in the realization of theatrical productions. The increasing positive profile of the NTN in terms of outputs in productions is tied to a well structured process in the management of productions. Production management thus, is integral to the success of theatrical productions and by extension, the profile of any theatre outfit.

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