

Professional Theatre Management, the Panacea for Cultural Promotion in the Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture

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Abstract

The Bayelsa state Council for Arts and Culture is a government owned cultural institution established by law for the preservation, promotion and presentation of the rich cultural heritage of Bayelsa people. Most arts councils in Nigeria are being managed by non theatre experts. This is because of employment of non theatre arts graduates in the civil service or as a result of political patronage on the part of the governor who appoints the director. The effect of this is inefficiency as the persons so appointed do not understand the artistic requirements that will push for maximum output by the artists. This paper takes a critical look at these issues as it discusses theatre management and cultural promotion in the Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture. It is recommended that the Bayelsa State Government should always appoint a well experienced theatre manager as Executive Director of the council and the appointments of the different heads of departments in the council should be seasoned theatre practitioners who are well trained. Also, this study has lent voice for the call for emergence of professional theatre managers in various arts council with emphasis on the Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture.

Key words: Arts, Theatre Management, Cultural Promotion, Bayelsa

Introduction

The Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture is a government owned arts and cultural institution saddled with the responsibilities of promoting the arts and cultural heritages of

Bayelsa people as prescribed in the Edicts of the council and by extension the Cultural Policy for Nigeria 1998. Since the inception of the council, several directors have been appointed to direct the affairs of the council so as to give direction on how to carry its responsibilities of preservation, promotion and presentation of the rich cultural heritage of Bayelsa people but with little consideration of a professional theatre manager.

Most arts councils in Nigeria are being managed by non theatre experts. This is as a result of employment of non theatre arts graduates in the civil service or as a result of political patronage on the part of the governor who appoints the director. This has been the fate of many government owned arts councils in Nigeria. This attitude on the part of government is one of the numerous reasons why most arts councils do not carry out most of her obligations as required by law. For instance, it is an aberration to appoint a theatre artist as the Chief Medical Officer in any clinic or appoint a theatre artist as the Chief Judge of state. But it is very common for government authorities to appoint non theatre experts to be Executive Directors in arts council or critical arts institution owned by government.

Therefore, this paper discusses professional theatre management as the panacea for massive cultural promotion in the council.

Brief Concept of Management

The word “management” is derived from the word manage which simply means to control or oversee, guide and be in-charge of something. Hall Light defines management as:

The process of planning, organizing, directing, coordinating and controlling men, materials,

machines and money so as to ensure the optimum achievement of objectives (10).

This definition is clear that management includes the efficient carrying out of operation and the design that ensures the smooth accomplishment of the aims and objectives of a business organization. For any organization to thrive successfully, be it government or private, it needs serious and effective management strategies to achieve its aims and objectives. This can be achieved with a professional managerial structure. An eminent authority in management principles, Edward Brech, defines management as:

A social process entailing responsibility for the effective and economic planning and regulation of the operation of an enterprise, in fulfillment of a given purpose or task (3).

Thus, management is the function of a group of persons or board of directors who are appointed in a firm or an institution be it private or government owned, to manage the enterprise. Therefore, management is mainly concerned with the determination and execution of the whole policies of an organization.

Many scholars and renowned authorities have given different conceptions of management geared towards the ability to manage available resources, be it human or capital, in a given organization with the aim to get good results that will propel or enhance growth. Management as a profession and field of study is very crucial for today's society.

Managerial experts have concluded in recent times that the lack of skilled, knowledgeable and purposeful management is basically responsible for management failures in many arts organizations.

Everyone who occupies any managerial position always performs the same functions with slight difference, possibly as a result of the peculiar nature of the environment and organization. In support of this view, Muyiwa Awodiya asserts that:

Management both of arts institutions and of business organization has a respectable history in many countries. From the different cultures and societies there was however, a universal definition of management which puts the manager at the center of the economy (72).

It applies to managers in all kinds of organizations and societies with maybe slight differences. Every manager gathers the efforts of a number of people in his or her organization to achieve a common goal through elements or processes such as planning, organizing, staffing, directing, controlling, leading and motivating.

Planning: According to Chinedu Nwachukwu, this is mostly considered as “the first function of management” (37). This is because it gives a direction to what is to be done concerning the business.

In management several authors hold the same opinion that the concept of planning is the lead position or priority. Okoronkwo Igwe, opined that “The process of determining in advance what is to be done, includes: clarification of goals, establishment of policies and mapping out of programs for the organization” (5). From the various assertions, it can be seen clearly that planning has a significant role to play in any enterprise and it is also seen as the first approach in any organization because it gives a sense of direction and purpose.

These various opinions attest to the fact that planning is based on future preparation which things to be done and methods to achieve them. A good plan of action in management enhances productivity, reduces risk and emergencies. It avoids crisis and constitutes standards of judging performances while at the same time deciding advanced methods of action that will determine the likely obstacles to the implementation of the set goals, how they can be avoided, who is suitable to the plan that need to be consulted and the time and resources needed for the implementation of the plan. Odeyemi sums this up as follows;

Management at the appropriate level is supplied promptly with information concerning deviations between plan and information. In this way, the necessary correction can be taken before it is too late (46).

Considering the opinions of these scholars in relationship to the Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture, the Council sees planning as an integral aspect of management and theatre practice. The director meets regularly with the management of the Council to discuss and plan activities that will be carried out within the year, stage performances, carnivals and festivals that the council will attend. This process of planning enables the council to draw out its budget, how to raise funds and the schedule for preparations on how to achieve the set goals of the councils within the stipulated year. The management, most times, involves the unit heads of the various departments who make meaningful contributions on how to achieve the set goals.

Organizing: Organizing as an integral part of management simply means the art of gathering the necessary inputs for production. It is the creation of an intentional framework or structure of rules for people in an enterprise or an organization. This entails the assemblage of all human and material resources in an orderly manner. Hall asserts that:

The organizational chart is the blue-print of the company's internal structure, a record of the formal organization relationship, lines of communication and flow of authority and responsibility with the hierarchy. (59)

Celestine Nwachukwu adds "That organizational chart is a visual device that shows the various departments and how they relate to one another. This emphasizes the interrelatedness of jobs and offices in any establishment" (70).

Joe Agbato sees organizing as "Who will do what with whom, when and why so as to achieve the organizations desired end, goals and aims" (6-7). Agbato's assertion is enforced in the Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture as responsibilities are well coordinated and distributed to various divisions and units as a means towards the actualization of the set plan of the Council.

Staffing: Staffing is the determination of competent human resources or personnel to be employed to assume responsibilities that are necessary for the achievement of targets. Responsibilities are structured and allocated to staff that can or are fit to carry out such duties or responsibilities.

Characteristics

The Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture has staff strength of about two hundred and eleven workers and presently over

thirty guest artists who are mostly Theatre Arts graduates. These workers are drafted to various units within the Council to function.

Directing: Directing is another vital aspect of management that plays a supervisory role. It is through directing that the human resources of any organization are supervised for effective and good performances that achieve the set goals of any organization. This primarily has to do with influencing the behavior of personnel to meet or accomplish organizational goals.

Directing as a basic function of management is well applied in the Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture. The director supervises and gives instruction to all departments of the council. The director ensures strict compliance to all directives given to various departments as an approach towards implementation and actualization of the set goals of the Council.

Leading: Leading as a function of management ensures that resources of an enterprise or an organization are effectively utilized for the achievement of pre-determined goals, aims and objectives of the organization. Leading unifies the structure of relationships to get work done for effective or efficient results. This is what Temitayo Odeyemi calls “a process of influencing and inspiring subordinates to perform duties willingly, competently and enthusiastically” (109).

Therefore, a leader must be well experienced, knowledgeable, intelligent, friendly, mature and creative. These are some basic characteristics which are important aspects of effective leadership.

Leading, in the Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture, lies primarily in the hands of the director who is at the helm of affairs

in the council. All directives and information come from the directorate before they are passed to the various departments of the council. The director ensures that government policies as stipulated in the edict are carried out in the discipline of erring staff and the implementation of the core mandates of the Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture.

Motivation: Nwachukwu defines motivation as “an internal psychological process whose presence or absence is inferred from observed performances” (181).

This has to do with the workforce or labor which is the driving force behind worker’s actions in an organization. It compels, induces and maintains behavior of workers. For Lilian Nosiri, it is “a feeling of belongingness in a group or identification with the goals of the group. It is seen as the pattern to affect underlying effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction” (229).

Motivation is a determining factor in human behavior. For a management to achieve desired results, the management must be sensitive to the operational needs and desires of workers. According to Agbato, “Motivational behavior is goal-oriented behavior i.e. behavior resulting from internal drives”. (66).

Odeyemi notes that:

The recognition of ability is a vital form of motivation. Minus financial conclusions, a word of appreciation, or giving of further responsibility to an employee had a stimulating and encouraging effect which the promise of financial reward might not achieve (5).

With motivation, human behavior and attitude towards jobs is shaped by the satisfaction of their urges, aspirations, drives and needs. The achievements of planning in any organization or

enterprise lie in the hands of the workers. So they need to be inspired and motivated.

Controlling: In management, controlling acts as a parameter in appraising the personal performance of workers. It corrects the performances of workers to ensure that everything concerning the organization conforms to what has been planned. In controlling, standards are set; performances are measured against standard, feedback of results is critically analyzed and deviations from the set standards are corrected. In a nutshell, controlling as an aspect of management determines whether an assigned job was done. To Agbato, it is “the activities managers undertake to assure that actual outcomes are consistent with planned outcome” (7).

Without proper controlling mechanism, there will be chaos and absence of successful management. Therefore, control constitutes a vehicle for the provision of the means to consciously know what is going on in an organization. Cole further asserts that “Controlling ensures that the traveler knows how well they are progressing along the route, how correct their map is, if any, they need to make to stay on course” (225).

A professional theatre manager should be conversant with the various skills to manage either a theatre or cultural institution. Herman Glaser asserts that “Art and cultural administration is based on the skillful ability to procure resources and spend them effectively for a set goals and objectives in a position to produce the socio-political dynamics and flexibility which are essential for democratic” (31).

In the case of Bayelsa Arts Council, since its inception, the council have produced directors which some are core theatre arts practitioners while some are not. The appointments of non

theatre experts have hindered some aspects of cultural promotion because some of these administrators lack interest, the requisite knowledge of arts administration and cultural promotion. The Edict of the council have laid down the responsibilities of the council and how it should operate but many aspect of the edict is being ignored lately because of lack of professionalism on the part of management who are not theatre professionals.

Some of these directors became directors or managers of the council as a result of their number of years spent in the service. Working in arts council or any arts institution for a stipulated number of years can hardly make one a professional theatre manager because a theatre manager must undergo some fundamental training on management or theatre in general. The present management team of the council, some are people with work experience and not trained theatre professionals and out of

Brief History of the Council

The creation of Bayelsa State on the 1st of October, 1996 by the then Head of State, General Sani Abacha, marks the emergence of the Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture. With that development, staffs of the Rivers State Council for Arts and Culture who are Bayelsans were transferred to the newly created Bayelsa State with effect from 6th October, 1996. These staff moved to Yenagoa the state capital, to form the Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture.

The Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture was a parastatal under the then Ministry of Information and Culture but presently under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Officially the Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture edict was signed into law in

May, 1998 by the then Military Administrator, Navy Captain, Omoniyi Caleb Olubolade. The Council is saddled with the preservation, promotion, presentation and development of the rich cultural heritage of the Bayelsa people.

The Council started without a well constituted leadership to run its affairs. The most senior staff was given the mandate to run its affairs until 18th of November, 1998 when the Commissioner for Information and Culture, Mr. Paul Orieware appointed Mr. Bekewuru Benedict Ballard, a trained theatre arts graduate from the University of Calabar as director. Mr. Ballard, before his appointment was teaching drama and creative arts at St. Jude's Girls Secondary School, Amarata Yenagoa. Mr. Ballard held brief until 30th March, 1999 when Lt. Col. Paul Edor Obi, who had taken over from Navy Capt. Omoniyi Olubolade as the Military Administrator of the state, appointed Chief Simon Ambakederemo as the first substantive Executive Director of the Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture. The same day, a ten-member board with Mr. Bronzuk C. Ikuli as chairman was also inaugurated. With this development, Mr. Ballard was redeployed to head the Performing Arts Division.

In June 2000, Chief Ambakederemo retired, having put in the mandatory thirty-five (35) years of service in the civil service and the board was dissolved. On the 22nd of August, 2000, His Excellency, Chief DSP Alamiyeseigha approved the appointment of Mr. Barclays Foubiri Ayakoroma, a Theatre Arts lecturer from the Department of Creative Arts, University of Port Harcourt as the Second Executive Director of the Council. Barclays Ayakoroma's tenure ended on the 1st of December, 2009. Others who became Executive Directors of Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture are: Mr. Ineye Johnny Dudafa (21/01/2010 –

16/02/2016), Mrs. Payeboye Festus-Lukoh (09/10/2016 – 15/01/2020) and Mr. Andrew Ebi Krifagha took over from Mrs. Payeboye Festus-Lukoh on the 15th of January, 2020 as Acting Executive Director of the Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture till date.

Cultural Promotion

Cultural promotion deals primarily with the dissemination of cultural aesthetic for massive appreciation and preservation of culture. Also, the Cultural Policy of Nigeria, defined culture as “the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempt to meet the challenges in their environment which gives order and meaning to social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization, thus, distinguishing a people from their neighbors”. The Cultural Policy of Nigeria, 1998 is a detailed document that guides the cultural sector in Nigeria on the preservation, promotion and presentation of Nigeria’s diverse rich cultural heritage. Also, it gives direction on administrative structures that enhances cultural promotion in Nigeria. To successfully implement, the policy advocates education through the performing arts, fine art, crafts and through the establishment of parks and sites, monuments, mass media, museums, literature (oral or written) cinema, film, music etc.

Every society have their peculiarities and characteristics that distinguished them from others. Bayelsa State have various ethnic groups like; Ogbia, epie/atissa, nembe etc. These groups have distinct cultural orientation with few similarities to each other. The Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture has been at the fore-front in cultural promotion of the rich cultural heritage

of the Bayelsa people. Irrespective of the different ethnic groups like: Epie/Atissa, Ogbia, Nembe, Ijaw et cetera, the council over the years has done justice in promoting the cultural heritage of Bayelsa through dance, drama, festival, music, traditional dresses, masquerade, carvings, sculpture, weaving, cuisines, internet, social media etc. These rich cultural heritages have been placed in the world map of culture because the council has taken the cultural performances of Bayelsa to global platforms in the United Kingdom, China and France. These tours outside the shores of Nigeria brought many accolades to the staff of the Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture who are seen as ambassadors of the state.

Traditional Dance; Dance has been an important medium which the Bayelsa Arts' Council has adopted to showcase the rich cultural heritage of Bayelsa people. These dances have their originality deeply rooted in the culture of the people that have passed them on from generation to generation. Also, these dances are creative and well-choreographed expressions used to tell stories embellished with songs as a means of entertainment for different occasions. These dances cut across the various ethnic groups of the state as a means to promote our cultural heritage. These dances include: Ngu-sei, Culture, Dou, Akorlor, Agbekor, Ateli, Segibo, Intercessor's dance, Ekegene, Alisco 1&2, Effi-excerpt et cetera. These traditional dances are embellished with traditional indigenous music.

Drama: Dramatic expressions are used by the Bayelsa State Council for Arts Culture to project our culture and traditions. As a means of education, information and entertainment, our traditional values are dramatized through plays and sketches to tell our stories. Most of the plays are published and unpublished

plays like: *Akassa You Mi* by Ola Rotimi, *Dance on His Grave* by Barclays Ayakoroma, *Mangrove in the Desert* by Ineye Dudafa et cetera. Ijaw playwrights and literary giants have over the years adopted the use of drama as a means of promoting our rich cultural heritage. Recently, we witnessed the collaboration between Nollywood, Hollywood and the Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture in the movie “Oloibiri” as directed by Curtis Graham and produced by Rogers Ofime. This movie tells the story of the Ogbia people, her culture and exploitation of their resources by the Anglo-Dutch company, Shell Petroleum Development Company.

Music: Music is an integral part of theatre. Music has been a veritable tool in promoting our rich cultural heritage. As part of entertainment, the Bayelsa Arts Council over the years has adopted music as a means to promote culture. The council achieved this with the setting up of the Glory Beat Band which has composed several traditional music albums with the sole aim of promoting her cultural values, beliefs and rhythms.

Traditional Dresses: Traditional dresses are used to promote our rich culture in the Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture. In every performance, the council ensures that our traditional dresses are used as costume as a means to project our traditional fabrics and way of dressing. Few years ago, the Bayelsa State Government assented bill legalizing the compulsory wearing of traditional attires every Friday by all public servants in the state.

Internet/Social Media: The use of internet technology and social media in recent times has been a veritable tool in the promotion of the rich cultural heritage of the people. The Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture during Barclays Ayakoroma’s tenure adopted the internet method of promoting the cultural

aesthetics of Bayelsa. The creation of the arts council's website made it possible for people all over the world to see and appreciate the arts and culture of the Bayelsa people. Log in to www.bayelsaarts.ng.com. The public relations unit is in charge of Internet/Social Media in the council.

Conclusion

This research critically examined professional theatre management and cultural promotion in the Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture. Professional theatre management will unfold the hidden potentials of the council. The Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture has lived up to her responsibilities in terms of cultural promotion which is the core mandate of the council. The number of laurels won in the various National Festival for Arts and Culture (NAFEST) has made the council to be adjudged to be the best Arts Council in Nigeria.

Findings and Recommendations

It has been revealed that professional theatre management has been an issue lately in the running of the Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture. The lack of professionalism has hindered some growth in the council as a result of lack of knowledge and requisite skills that will enhance massive promotion of culture in the council.

The appointment of Executive Director in the Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture should be based on professionalism. Only trained theatre arts practitioners or experts who have requisite knowledge and experience in theatre management should be appointed by the Governor.

The appointments of managers of the various departments in the council should be made of theatre graduates with vast knowledge on other areas of the theatre. Presently, out of nine managers in the council, only three are trained theatre artists in the council.

Since the council operates under the civil service, senior officers who have worked for at least twenty years in the council should be encouraged to have a minimum of Diploma in Theatre Arts from recognized institution as a criterion to become an Executives Director of the council.

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