

PROSPECTS OF BOX OFFICE MANAGEMENT IN A RECESSED ECONOMY: A STUDY OF UNIPOINT ARTS THEATRE

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Abstract

*It is a statement of fact that box office poses a great positive impact on the economy of any nation. However, for theatre organization to record higher levels of economic performance, there are number of critical issues of management that require effective leadership and professional handling. With the recognition of box office as the most commercially viable unit of theatrical production, this paper opines that the box office holds a robust potential for improving the Nigeria's economy. In spite of this cheering potential, the practice of box office management in Nigeria is highly underdeveloped in scholarship. This paper examines the management of theatre business with the view of making possible recommendations that would culminate in improving the Nigeria's economy, using University of Port Harcourt Arts Theatre, as a case study. This paper which adopts historical and literary methodology is anchored on Herbert Simon's **Decision Science Theory of Management** which is simply identified as decision-making. The finding of this paper among others is the scanty nature of the organizational structure of the Arts Theatre; it means that there are organs or arms that ought to be included. The importance of these organs cannot be neglected. Similarly, this paper recommends the immediate need to review the administrative structure and policies of the Arts Theatre. The box office personnel should be made to undergo proper training. Above all, this study provides modalities on how to improve on box office management in order to have enough returns to contribute meaningfully to Nigeria's economic growth.*

Introduction

No matter how good theatrical production turns out to be, the occasion is bound to be a disappointment to the participants if there is no large audience patronage and enough money realised to cover the expenses incurred in the production. Box office is the financial nerve of the theatre, as well as the power-house of the theatre that needs to be oiled, boosted, enhanced, and uplifted for a better tomorrow. In other words, box office is the bedrock of every theatre enterprise, and this has gained prominence over the years. It is also the image maker and the hope of the theatre especially as the economic status of the theatre depends on box office returns. To support this, Stephen Langley posits that,

Box office is the wallet of a theatre. It must be secured, well organised and managed with reverence for accuracy and details. It should also be regarded as a primary factor in creating the image of the theatre, as few things or more conspicuous to the public than the box office and the people who work in it (363).

Going by what Langley said, it is therefore, important to note that box office is the first point of contact between the audience and the theatre management staff. The first impression is essential towards building a lasting relationship with theatre patrons. This is why box office personnel should be persons who are intelligent, efficient to render smart services, diplomatic, and be on familiar terms with the theatre patrons.

The success of any human endeavour anchors on its management. It therefore entails the ability to co-ordinate, control, harmonise and organise its human and material resources towards achieving a target goal. In theatre practice, management of human and material component remains an essential ingredient. Therefore, box office management involves the understanding of human relations, the planning of productions, the projection of results, and the pooling together of resources for the successful execution of a given production. Box office management is faced with various problems, ranging from lack of trained personnel, audience patronage, lack of accountability, management deficiency and others. It is understood that the challenges of box office management in an educational theatre causes some serious setback to the effective and efficient management of an educational theatre.

The causes and solution of economic recession in Nigeria have become the major subject of discussion on the lips of major citizens of Nigeria. Indeed, some economists go so far as to define recession as being characterised by a period of negative economic growth for no more than two consecutive quarters. Rise in unemployment, fall in industrial production, adjustment in real gross domestic product (GDP) or inflation decreases, stagnation or fall in incomes, especially with regard to their purchasing power in wholesale and retail sales and increase in government borrowing are all considered to be characteristic features of a recession. Fortunately, as frightening as these features appear, they tend not to last for too long in a recession. If they last for too long and gets worse, then it becomes a depression, (the a more severe form of recession). Traditional or orthodox economist believe that, as it is in nature economic expansion and growth constitute the normal state of affair in the economic world and recession is an abnormality that does not or should not last for too long. This therefore, is predicated upon the sensitisation of the theatre practitioners on the need for proper box office management in theatrical productions, so as to have enough returns to contribute meaningfully to Nigeria's economic growth using University of Port Harcourt Arts Theatre as a case study.

The Concept of Theatre

According to Innocent Ohiri, the word, theatre, is derived from the Greek word, *theatron*, which means a place for seeing (1). Theatre is also an architectural structure

built to house dramatic offerings and other types of presentations. Viewed from other perspectives of definition, “a place for seeing”, it can also be seen as an “area” (without any architectural building) for the performance of plays and dramatic spectacles. In other words, it is a scene of important event. Ohiri observes that, “theatre is simply the art of ‘acting out’ something. It does not even need a special building and stage, for it can take place in a threshing circle, in a street or any piece of ground” (17). He concludes that, “in a more specific relation to the art of presentation, theatre denotes the art as a whole, of which the building is only a part” (17). In this sense, theatre could be said to be one of the performing arts, the distinguishing feature of which is the public nature of the expression.

In a narrower but more specific sense, theatre is believed to be an experience. Edwin Wilson explains that, “theatre is experience, an immediate art whose meaning is grasped through an understanding of the encounter between who creates theatre performers and those who view it” (1). He believes that theatre is created by a series of shifting impressions and stimuli where a child can learn and develop a right attitude in the society; and that “theatre is a performance, an action in contrast to sculptures, painting or literature” (1). Hence, theatre is a dynamic art, changing from moment to moment as performers interact with one another and with audience. Oscar Brockett describes theatre in support of the above views as, “the most objective arts, because it presents characteristically, both outer and inner experience through speech and action” (7). Wilson and Brockett believed that theatre is dynamic and transitory.

Viewing theatre from a more complex perspective, Chenery opines that, “no definition can ever be broad enough to capture in words, the elements and the modes or the arts, the facets and the directions of theatrical life” (13). He sees theatre as the art where all art meet. To him, theatre events cut directly and vividly into life, having to do with the currents of man’s being, with personal crises and interesting moments of experience. He therefore, concludes that, “theatre is most notably the art where spiritual light illuminates human living” (9). In attempt to explain the meaning of theatre, Jerzy Grotowski observes that, “theatre is a place where an actor recites a written text, illustrating it with series of movements in order to make it more easily understood” (cited in Herbert 9). By this explanation, the theatre is conceived of as a useful accessory to dramatic literature and other subject areas. The theatre is a place of entertainment. The essence of performance is to educate, entertain and inform the people about the good and bad of the society. This is why Dapo Adelugba asserts that, “theatre mirrors life, therefore, culture which is life itself is mirrored” (cited in Herbert 9).

Looking at the theatre from the perspective of Nigerian culture, Yemi Ogunbiyi observed that, “the primitive root of Nigerian theatre must be sought in the numerous religious rituals and festivals that exist in many Nigerian communities” (3). Going by this, Nigerian theatre and drama originated with the Nigerian himself, embodying his first preoccupations, his first struggles, success and setbacks. Ilami Krama expresses the same opinion, when he said that, “African traditional theatre is a creation of man’s social experiences that attempt the explication of relationships between man and gods, man and man, and man and the environment” (1). However, Ben Ejiofor observes that:

The ambience of theatre reaches beyond the physical location identified as *theatron*. The context of theatre relevant to our purposes is a composite context which employs the arts of playwriting, costume and make-up, acting, scenography and theatre management in concert and performance for the sole purpose of communication (qtd in Ogoh 10).

From the foregoing, the word, 'theatre', as it were does not mean only the structure of a building but it encompasses all other elements of arts. Theatre extends beyond the confines of the stage; it is a marriage between drama and its community with the aim of promoting moral, political, cultural and even religious consciousness in the society. It is through drama that the theatre artiste communicates the experiences, emotions, ideas, and beliefs of the people which lie beyond ordinary speech and action. The action of drama is produced out of human world view. It is a production of what the mind perceives in order to stimulate and arouse the emotions of the audience which serves as a tool for national development.

The significance of the theatre to the society cannot be overemphasised, reason being that, it has the potential to capture and represent life as it is. It deals with human relationships, and uses it as influence to the dynamic growth of the society. The motivation behind any theatrical action may be to redefine a particular thought, out of the desire to educate and create awareness on the consequences of social vices that could impact negatively on the life of the people. Thus, using the theatrical machinery to create the right norms, and values, which fits the trends of the society at that particular time?

The playwright in the theatre handles historical materials different from the historian, because of the power of the theatre artiste to manipulate issues with his/her raw materials to galvanise social vices and at the same, satirising the act of oppression, violence and corruption in the society. Consequently, the theatre empowers the society and eliminates all forms of under-development, maltreatment, social vices arising from ignorance, inequality, injustice and poverty in the society. Austine posits that,

The theatre is visualised as a place of reconstruction. A reconstruction that has the tone of the miraculous, based on the use of the creative imagination to display inspirational ingenuity, augmented by the audience's willing suspension of disbelief (23).

It is imperative to note from the foregoing, that, theatre operates as an agent of change and transformation that brings to perspective, the very essence of politics, culture, religion and moral in the contemporary society. The real ideal conception of theatre is to bring to reality the very essence of human existence, thus, drawing the relevance of other elements of the arts with the sole aim of promoting a balance in the society.

The Concept of Box Office

The success of every human endeavour anchors on its management. It therefore entails the ability to coordinate, control, harmonise and organise its human and material resource towards achieving a target goal. In theatre arts as a discipline, management of human and material component remains an essential ingredient. Therefore, theatre management involves the understanding of human relations, the planning of productions, the projection of results, the ability to control results, and the getting together of resources for the successful execution of a theatre production. The bane of this study therefore, is to examine the management of theatre business with the view of lack of desired attention in terms of proper box office management in educational theatre practice in Nigeria, using University of Port Harcourt Arts Theatre as case study.

In educational theatre, its success or failure depends on the management of the box office, which Barclays Ayakoroma defined thus:

The box office is the small office in front of house where tickets are sold. It is the point of contact between the audience and the theatre management staff. Thus, the first impression is essential towards building a lasting relationship (39).

Basically, the box office is the life wire of the Arts theatre. The box office returns is mainly generated from the students. This is because the educational theatre is built to enhance learning and practical performances of the students. Therefore, the financial gains that are generated from the box office may not be as much as that of commercial theatre that is profit oriented. The commercial theatre must continue to exist and remain profit oriented, as well as educational theatre which lays more emphasis on learning and research also remain profit oriented. Matthew Umukoro highlights the importance of business management as he stresses thus:

Business management, a major art of the theatre, has steadily become one of the cornerstones of theatre practice, even in the educational theatre which is not supposed to be burdened by commercial considerations, otherwise, known as theatre management business. Business management is concerned with the management of available economic resources in the planning, promoting, surveying and post-production perception of performing project (84).

Although, not a commercial enterprise, educational theatre cannot shy away entirely from economic consideration. It must at least strive to break even, or make some minimal profit for re-investment in the next project to guarantee the continuous survival of the educational theatre. It is pertinent to mention, however, that educational theatre has to depend to a large extent, on extra budgeting and funding, by way of grants, subventions and sponsorships from government, corporate bodies and well-meaning individuals. To this effect, with adequate financial backings, the box office returns would be high and educational theatre can devote maximum attention to its

primary objective of teaching, research and provision of community service, without the anxiety of possible financial embarrassment. However, Barclays Ayakoroma adds that:

One of the aims of theatre management is to facilitate the operation of all the commercial aspects of a production and handle those operations in an efficient and responsible manner. To co-ordinate and control all the theatre business, which includes sales, purchase, and publicity activities remains a major target of the box office manager. Effective theatre event publicity and advertising, to a large extent, determines audience patronage. Where there is no coordination of sales at the box office or purchase of items required for productions, there is bound to be problems (27).

He further adds that, “in the final analysis, theatre management exists for ensuring a good production before a good audience, in a good environment: where there is mutual understanding and a feeling of a shared dramatic experience” (28).

From the foregoing, it is imperative to note that in theatre business, every unit is important. This is why theatre is described as a collaborative art where all concerned contributes mutually to the end product. If one person fails to do his bit, then the product stands the risk of failing.

The Concept of Management

According to Willie-Pepple,

concept in reality is a commonly agreed upon definition of an object, event or process. Scholarly grouping of concepts and principles creates a theory and a theory presents a framework of principles and concept for clarification of a theory. The theory of management is the synthesis of the concepts and principles of management (35).

Going by this, it then appears that for any human endeavour to function properly there must be some organisation of its factors. Consequently, all types of organisations, such as, government establishment, business enterprises churches among others, whether they are profit or non-profit making require management for their effective operation.

Management, according to Enikanselu and Oyende, is “a process of planning, organising, directing or leading, representing, coordinating and controlling the efforts of the organisation members and the use of organisational resources (human and technical) in order to achieve stated organisational goals” (5). This view sums the details of management irrespective of the background. The fact that management is an activity involving humans makes it an action achievable via human beings. This view explains why the concept can be said to be “the process of working with others to achieve organisational objectives in a changing environment. Central to this process is the effective and efficient use of limited resources” (4). The import of this view suggest that working in surplus or excess of required prerequisites for any production process

requires management or amounts to wastage of resources. This explains why management occurs whenever people take responsibility for an activity and consciously try to shape its progress and outcome. In view of these, it is obvious that management is an act which involves distribution of available resources to achieve the desired objective.

The Concept of Box Office Management

The practice of theatre box office management ensures the proper harnessing of resources and coordination of individual efforts in an arts theatre to achieve goals or meet the objectives of the theatre's administration. To this effect, box office management becomes the process of designing and maintaining an environment in which the box office is effectively and efficiently managed to accomplish the set goal. The practice of box office management becomes the careful organisation and coordination of the efforts of various people working together in order to achieve the theatre's aim and objectives. Ayakoroma defines theatre box office management as, "the process or art of handling, controlling and directing all commercial and non-artistic aspects of any production programme in order to generate audience patronage, audience satisfaction, and maximise profit" (4).

From the foregoing, the theatre box office management aims at getting as many patrons as possible to get money off them by ensuring that they are satisfied with artistic performances. To achieve this aim, certain principles which include: planning, organising, directing, and controlling have to be applied.

According to Chris Nwamuo, "the theatres in the university campuses acquire and deploy human, material and financial resources in executing their planned academic and professional programmes and activities as well as artistic productions" (41). To this end, the appropriation of funds and planning of operating expenditure are expected to be considered as unavoidable financial strategies by managers in the arts theatres. It becomes desirable to think of various ways of designing, installing, and operating a viable system of box office management.

More significant to a theatre's survival is the public perception of the operation. An efficient, organised, pleasant box office will encourage ticket sales. Expensive advertising and high production values may never thwart a negative experience at the box office. The forms and procedures that follow will help organise a theatre box office operation, one that avoids the embarrassment, confusion and financial losses that can result from disorganisation. Clifford's comments are particularly noteworthy. In this regard, he posits that,

No one can deny that the educational theatres must also spend time, energy, and devotion on the commercial aspect of production. Materials must be purchased, tickets must be sold, money collected and deposit records kept, and a budget prepared and adhered to (64).

The subject of theatre management has been extensively discussed but there are few scholarly works aimed at promoting box office management in Nigeria. Considering its

importance, this researcher feels that it is high time a detailed research such as this was conducted.

Economic Recession in Nigeria

The recession that has depreciated the Nigeria economy in the past two years has in no little measure crumbled growth, shut down businesses, increased loss of job, caused scarcity of cash, hyper-inflation and the likes. In the midst of the prevailing results of abject poverty and hardship inflicted deaths, amongst other devastating effects; the country appears to be moving to a negative direction. Nwinee observes that,

The federal government of Nigeria has adopted economic stimulus packages in the initial phase of the recession, pushing up public spending, but the persistence of the recession has led to a decrease in national revenues and an increase in deficits. Pressure from financial markets forced many governments to cut budgets. Social protection responses have worried considerably in magnitude and makeup. When budget cuts became unavoidable in certain state, the shift from stimulus to consolidation increased inequality and contributed to worsening living conditions for citizens (5).

From the responses of sub-national governments to the recession in the country, it is obvious that none of them was prepared for the extent or depth of the recession and none reacted in the same way. Many states of the federation with higher levels of vulnerability would have been wise to strengthen their safety nets during the pre-recession period of dynamic economic growth, which was marked by rising disparity and a growing concentration of wealth. As a country, we are currently faced with difficult choices, limited budgets and worsening financial conditions of the citizenry. Looking at this, it is quite clear that, if the poor response to the recession persists, the crises among the citizenry will continue and the social well-being of the Citizens of Nigeria will be at stake.

Theoretical Framework

It is necessary for managers to understand and implement a theory in order to achieve productivity or organisational goals. Generally speaking, the organisational structure of the theatre is divided into two namely, the artistic and the administration. While the artistic aspect is headed by the director, the administrative is the responsibility of the theatre manager.

The theoretical framework of this research is anchored on Herbert Simon's decision science theory of management. Herbert Simon (1916-2001) was an American political scientist, economist, sociologist, psychologist and computer scientist who proposed decision science theory of management. This theory is simply identified as decision-making. Herbert Simon distinguishes between programmed and non-programmed decisions. Programmed decision denotes decisions made by following a pre-arranged set of instructions or conventions and traditions, while non-programmed,

decision is often complex and unstructured. This is based on judgment, intuition, experience, training and insight that allow individuals to arrive at different conclusions given the same subject and information. Decision-making is the process of planning, identifying problems, searching for alternative solutions, evaluating such solutions and arriving at a sensible choice of options.

The existence of anybody or corporate organisation depends on the principles of its management which is the bedrock by which it will endure the passage of time. Theatre has been an enterprise and therefore, needs managerial personnel who know the rudiments of running a theatre business, be it commercial or educational. Innocent Ohiri posits that, “theatre can be used to educate the public” (15). In fact, we are talking about forming, establishing or running a theatre with the aim of teaching or educating the people. These and other problems have necessitated a good research into the management of these theatres. A good theatre is much more than entertainment. The arts of the theatre rest on a common foundation with all learning on man’s capacity to explore wonder and reflect. On the other hand, it would be dishonest to pretend that theatre always functions on the level of great art. As an imitation of life, it embraces almost everything that life embraces, including much of life’s chaos and confusion. It then requires good managerial skills and principles to run this great network.

Management is a process by which we achieve desired results through efficient utilization of human and material resources. Badeian asserts that, “whatever is the goal of the organization concerned; management is the process by which the goal can be achieved” (qtd in Obanye 13); while Nwachukwu posits that, “there is no human endeavour that does not requires proper management for its functioning, whether profit making or non-profit making, every endeavour require good management to function, which takes us to the theatre discipline” (2). Thus, it is imperative to note that, management plays a key role in any organisation that is desired to achieve a target goal; a desired result can be achieved through efficient utilisation of human and material resources.

Ohiri defines theatre management as,

the art and science of planning organising, motivating, directing, and controlling human and material resources in the art of the theatre and their interaction in order to attain the predetermined objectives of guaranteeing satisfaction, having full house and maximising profit (1).

The most distinctive mark of management therefore, is the integration and application of knowledge, and a detailed breakdown study approach developed by so many other disciplines. Every management process (that of theatre not excluded), has a fundamental knowledge underlying it. In other words, the concept of management is strictly to design and maintain an environment that is conducive to the performance of individual who work together towards some preselected goals. Nwachukwu sees management as, “getting things done through people, the guidance or direction of people towards organisational goals, through planning, organising, directing and controlling” (4).

In all of these definitions, there is a trace of similarities, involving performance, activities, persons, and so on. Therefore, management is functional, not organ mental, concerning people primarily in occupying the performance positions of authority for activities and how to go about them. Going by performance, management involves disciplines; it can be described as marketing, advertising and annexation of the gains of production.

University of Port Harcourt Arts Theatre (The Crab): An Overview

Friday Nwafor, informs that, “the University of Port Harcourt Arts Theatre (The Crab) came into existence in 1979 (81). He further notes that, “the Arts Theatre popularly known as, “The Crab”, under the Directorship of Ola Rotimi, was meant to serve as a laboratory for the then Department of Creative Arts that was established in 1982” (81). According to him, the Arts Theatre structure was designed to host a small drama presentation and a few class lectures, especially as the population of students at the time was not as much as it is currently. Beyond serving as a laboratory and model for the department, The Crab, according to the founding Resident Director, Ola Rotimi, was also designed to serve the following functions:

- a) Act as workshop for the Department of Theatre Arts in the area of theatre practice;
- b) Serve as lecture venue for the Certificate in Theatre Arts (CTA) programme, thus relieving the Department of Theatre Arts of her problem of lecture space;
- c) Serve as venue for public lectures, concerts, symposia and conferences;
- d) Serve as venue for enhancement of communal and intellectual life of the University through artistic displays;
- e) Serve as venue for command performances;
- f) Assist the University in the reduction of cost of jobs requiring artistic skills; and
- g) Found jobs for the personnel of the theatre in pilot-roles as technical/acting instructors under whom both the certificate and degree students of Theatre Arts shall undergo apprenticeship in the technical as well as historic aspect of theatre.

The department started with five students (two males and three females) in the theatre unit. In the subsequent session, there was a gradual increase. With the aid of the Rivers State Council for Arts and Culture, the department was able to perform plays, which were used to tour schools; and it was in 1982 that a staff of the Rivers State Council for Arts and Culture, Columbus Irisoanga transferred his service as a producer in the Arts Theatre of the University of Port Harcourt. Ola Rotimi, as the head of the department, doubled as the artistic director of productions. The department could not afford a house manager but rather had a business manager, who also doubled as a house manager. In 1985, the CTA programme was introduced. It ran for twelve calendar months without any break. The programme was entirely different from the degree programme, which had the semester system. With the introduction of the certificate programme, it was possible for the theatre to have a variety of plays productions during convocations and festive periods. The department also extended its working relationship

with the University Demonstration Secondary School and by so doing helped the school to start its own drama club. This was done with the aid of Gloria Hart, an American visiting lecturer, who had on several occasions done some work with the secondary school students. The department was noted for its efficiency in productions and as a result its plays were taken to schools in Port Harcourt. Such plays included *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, written and directed by Ola Rotimi, himself. He was able to use his influence and that of the department to go on national tours. Ola Rotimi's *If...* was one of such plays the department took on tours to Ibadan, Ife, Lagos, and Port Harcourt. The third tour which the department embarked upon was done with Rasheed Gbadamosi's *Behold! My Redeemer*. It was performed at the National Theatre Lagos, with the playwright as the sponsor. In 1991, the department had its first international tour during the World Universities Games that took place in Sheffield, England. The play, *Orukoro*, written and directed by Henry Bell-Gam (now a Professor), depicts the rich cultural heritage of the Rivers people.

The Administrative Structure of the Uniport Arts Theatre (The Crab)

Friday Nwafor states that,

in terms of administration of the University of Port Harcourt Arts Theatre (The Crab), there is scanty Organisational Structure with the Head of Department as the Resident Director. He is responsible to the Vice-Chancellor of the University. The Resident Director can go directly to the Vice-Chancellor to report matters and take feedbacks affecting the theatre. Other staff under the Resident Director are Producer(s) Managing Director, Business Manager, Artists, Attendants Drummers, cleaners (qtd in Anyanwu 75).

Looking at the scanty nature of the organisational structure, it means that there are organs or arms that ought to be included. Positions for Scenic Designer, Costume/Make-up Officers, Property Officers, and Lighting Designer are missing. There are also some non-artistic Organs missing in the Chart, such as, Publicity, House Management, and Box Office Management etc. The importance of these organs cannot be neglected.

University of Port-Harcourt Arts Theatre Box Office Operations

The box office of the University of Port Harcourt Arts Theatre is one of the units that is crucial to the survival of the arts theatre. In spite of this, most of the facilities are not functional. A study of the Arts Theatre reveals that, lack of production facilities is one of the challenges of box office management in the University of Port Harcourt Arts Theatre (The Crab).

Insufficient fund is another challenge; especially as one cannot run a theatre production without sufficient funding of such production. In the arts theatre, the students who are most of the times the target audience are the contributing factor to poor financial returns of the box office: most of the students tends to watch such production without paying gate fees, especially as they dubiously gain free entrance into the

auditorium to watch shows. This singular act adversely affects the production output. Unreliability and irresponsibility of the box office personnel is another great challenge of the Box Office. When some box office personnel face poor economic situations, they may resort to fraud, thereby creating the problem of poor box office returns. Lack of proper management of the box office contributes to gate crashing in the University of Port Harcourt Arts Theatre. The box office needs careful management to avoid the audience gaining free access into the theatre to watch shows.

In a normal, standard and functional arts theatre, box office staff takes care of any ticket issues at any event. Beyond this, they may have to serve in the theatre café, bar or as an usher. The job carried out by box office staff is often more of short administrative tasks. Customers often face problems such as redeeming tickets issued for the wrong performance, exchanging tickets, getting refunds and even dealing with counterfeit tickets. Box Office Treasurer is responsible for managing the box office and supervising the box office assistants and other staff. It is also their responsibility for making sure that customers are well taken care off. His job is also part of the marketing department of the theatre, and may be responsible for maximising revenue from the sales of tickets. He may be expected to provide a comprehensive data base analysis and other information to support the marketing objectives of the theatre, such as sales information, audience profiling and identifying audience trends.

The responsibilities of the box office treasurer include managing box office staff and ensuring they are appropriately trained to manage box office systems, sales, banking rates, reporting and evaluation of sales and system management. A box treasurer is expected to have an excellent proven customer care skills and experience with computerised box office systems. He may also be expected to have sales and marketing skills and experience. More importantly, he is responsible for the care of the foyer and front of house generally, making sure marketing and promotional materials are displayed effectively, and health and safety rules adhered to. He is as well responsible for the sales of other items and services, such as memberships, programmes, merchandise, or refreshments, including pre-performance meals. Langley posits that, “because most seasoned theatre goers have had negative experiences at the box office, treasurers should be closely supervised in regard to customer relations. They should be good salespeople who are also honest, efficient, courteous and well groomed” (366). The foregoing suggests that treasurers are expected to ensure that customers are well taken care of under the supervision of the box office Manager, especially as the box office is also the general reception and its staff may need to deal with enquiries from other members of staff, assist with organisation of interviews and the delivery and dispatch of goods.

From the above, it is obvious to note that in theatre production, the box office treasurer plays a multiple administrative roles. Most importantly, he controls the box office staff. He assists the theatre manager and the production manager in the planning of the business activities of the theatre. He does this through his supervision of the staff under him and the control of the audience at the box office. No wonder Ohiri notes that, “the box office treasurer qualifies as one of the managers of the theatre and theatre’s productions” (104). By this assertion, it is imperative to note that Box Office Treasurer

may also be addressed as box office manager. The box office treasurer maintains order, contributes to human and financial management of the theatre in order to ensure accountability and financial progress. The staff that assists him in this capacity; the assistant treasurers, season ticket treasurers, mail order treasurers, groups sales treasurers, and the agency treasurers. These are the staff that takes orders from the box office treasurer while he enforces the rules of the box office.

Langley maintains that, “Treasurers’ duties depend on the size of the box office staff and the type of theatre in which it functions. In all cases, one person should be appointed as the box office manager, ticket manager or head treasurer, to be directly responsible to the business manager or general manager” (367). He further states that,

At least two treasurers should be employed in all but the smallest operations and should share responsibilities related to mail orders, telephone orders and information, customer window service, ticket counting, and box office statement computation. Box office hours should fit the convenience of potential customers, and treasurers should give their full concentration to their work. While no box office business should be carried out of the box office, so too, no other business should be carried into the box office.

Treasurers must be responsible for keeping the box office clean and well organised because maintenance personnel should never be allowed into the room. Treasurers should also keep themselves well informed about productions so they can provide accurate information to the public. It is never advisable to be vague or dishonest about answering such questions as: Is it appropriate for children? Is it a comedy? Is it risqué? And as mentioned, copies of all press releases, brochures and advertisements should be given to the box office – customer comment, questions or complaints about such material will come to the box office, not to the press office. And the house manager or the stage manager should provide the box office with exact curtain times and intermission times (367-8).

The duties of a Box Office Treasurer are many, and vary in relation to the stages of a theatre production. John Clifford explained them as follows:

Pre-rehearsal Stage:

- Revising the box office procedures and policies in readiness for forthcoming productions.
- Renovating the box office and making sure that all necessary structures are on ground.
- Employing new staff if necessary.
- Training new staff on procedures for selling tickets and running the box office.

Early Rehearsals:

- Attending production meetings.
- Submitting a budget for the printing of tickets.
- Contacting previous Season's patrons.
- Establishing a sales campaign.
- Setting up the box office.
- Assigning personnel to run the box office.
- Bringing in and racking of the tickets.
- Pulling complementary tickets and house seats.
- Filling mail orders.
- Obtaining sufficient change.

Performance Stage:

- Opening the box office – even outside the theatre's location if necessary.
- Selling tickets.
- Preparing a box office report at the end of each day.
- Submitting the box office report, money, stubs and season ticket coupons (if any) to the business manager at the end of each day (in Ohiri).

Post Production:

- Boxing and filling the stubs and other deadwoods.
- Preparing and sharing the final box office report for the run of the play.

The Theatre Ticket

A theatre ticket is a rental agreement that guarantees whatever is printed on it will be delivered. Should a theatre be unable to furnish what is promised on the ticket, it must offer a refund. The two types of tickets are reserved ticket and unreserved, or general admission tickets. Unless the theatre prints tickets by its own computer, all tickets should be ordered from a bonded ticket printer. They should be numbered by an automatic printer rather than by hand from 1 to the capacity number of seats in the house. Most reserved tickets come in a standard size (they should fit easily into a wallet) and should include the following information:

- a) Name and address of the theatre
- b) Performance date
- c) Seat number
- d) Row number
- e) Section (orchestra, balcony, and so on)
- f) Performance day (Monday, Tuesday, and so on)
- g) Curtain time
- h) Aisle number (optional)
- i) Title of production (optional)
- j) 'No refund or exchanges' (optional but good practice)
- k) 'Programme subject to change' (optional but good practice).

When ordering tickets, all such information should only be submitted to the printer in writing. The first reserved seats are ordered from a ticket printing company, the theatre should send a detailed floor plan of the auditorium, clearly showing every seat in the house and indicating seat numbers, rows, sections, and aisles. This is known as a ticket manifest. It is retained by the printer to simplify future orders. The printer sends a confirmatory ticket-order report to the theatre before tickets are printed, to provide a final check against incorrect information. All tickets should be notched or perforated to permit easy and uniform tearing by ticket takers, and all vital information should appear twice on each ticket, so that both the stub retained by the customer and that retained by the theatre tell the whole story.

Accounting for the Ticket

Before each performance the ticket taker should be provided with an empty, locked box into which all the stubs from customers' tickets can be deposited. The longer portion of the ticket should be placed in the box, the shorter given back to the customer. If there are different price categories for tickets, the stub box might have different slots and compartments for each. This will help to save time later when the stubs are counted.

Box Office Statements

A box office statement is a financial report that shows the final accounting of tickets and income for a particular performance. Copies of the statement are usually submitted to the producer, the business manager, the accountant, and anyone who is receiving a percentage of box office receipts (playwright, star, and director, or their representatives). Obviously, the information on statements is confidential.

Box Office Auditing

An audit of the box office should be conducted at the end of each production or season and any other time a notable discrepancy appears between the numbers of tickets missing and the amount of income. The audit should be conducted or at least supervised by the accountant and not by the business manager or the treasurers. Essentially, an audit involves counting all the unsold tickets on hand, then making up a box office statement showing income-to-date for all future performances" (105-107). If all these modalities are adopted and properly managed, no doubt, the theatre should be having good box office returns in order to contribute meaningfully to Nigeria's economic growth.

Recommendations

To proffer solution to some of the challenges of box office management in the Arts Theatre, a strict measure should be put in place to check mate students from gate crashing. Box office tickets should be authenticated to avoid forgery, as some fraudulent members of the audience may cultivated the habit of forging theatre tickets. For smooth running of the theatre business, the University Authority should provide and maintain the theatre facilities such as the foyer, the ticket booth, the lobby, the stores, the lounge,

the lavatory, the lighting booth and others, especially, as unavailability of the facilities affects box office returns, and the standard of teaching/learning in educational arts theatre. Government and the University authority should provide a bigger theatre structure with modern facilities so as to meet up with 21st century standard. For effective and efficient performance, the box office personnel should be made to undergo proper training. This will enable theatre staff to improve in the job. Finally, this study recommends the immediate need to review the administrative structure and policies of the Arts Theatre. If the above recommendations are properly put in place, box office will help to improve the Nigeria's economic growth.

Conclusion

In concluding this paper, it could be said that the bureaucratic nature of the University Authority delays subvention for maintenance of the Arts Theatre. Although, educational theatre is not profit-oriented, money is needed to run and maintain the house. To get rid of the low economic status of the educational arts theatre, the theatre management staff needs to devise means of gathering revenue internally to assist itself in taking care of the immediate needs by putting up productions and organizing shows. Since the primary objective of the box office is to gain good audience patronage, it is therefore, advisable for the box office personnel to be humane and cheerful to the audience so as to generate sufficient funds for the theatre. The box office manager is expected to see that money is generated from theatrical production, and genuine accounting done through the help of the business manager and box office personnel.

Finally, the finding of this paper, among others, is the scanty nature of the organizational structure of the Arts Theatre; it means that there are organs or arms that ought to be included. Positions for Scenic Designer, Costume/Make-up Officers, Property Officers, and Lighting Designer are missing. There are also some non-artistic Organs missing such as Publicity, House Management, and Box Office Management etc. The importance of these organs cannot be neglected. Adherence to the above solutions will help to contribute meaningfully to Nigeria's economic growth.

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