

HAZARD MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIAN THEATRES: A PARADIGMATIC SHIFT

Gowon Ama Doki

&

Jerry Idah Odeh

Benue State University

Abstract

Occupational hazards of fire outbreak, building collapse, injuries, stress and insecurity are eventualities that are grossly inescapable. However, these can be managed and mitigated for the smooth running of any organization. The theatre and its practitioners as performing artists are as well prone to these hazards as they engage in both artistic and technical activities. This paper examines the preparedness and or otherwise of theatre organizations in mitigating these hazards if and when they do occur. Methodologically, the paper deploys interviews and personal observations as tools of data collection where key informants and in-depth respondents are asked relevant questions. Findings reveal that most theatre organizations be they educational, public arts councils or private troupes do not possess requisite facilities to manage these hazards when they do occur. The paper recommends the creation of the office of a hazard manager as well as the training and retraining of staff in this section on rapid responses when hazard do occur.

Introduction

The continued neglect of a critical component of the theatre by theatre managers is not only worrisome but a risk that practitioners must broach for discussion. While theatre managers dedicate all efforts at ensuring to the organization a surplus or at least balanced budget, little attention is given to the area of hazard management. In their professional wisdom, managers usually insist that “the show must go on”. This popular theatre slogan echoes two premises: first, it presupposes and recognizes the fact that the process of theatre production is susceptible to challenges, critical amongst which is hazards; secondly, in spite of these challenges, final performance is inevitable. A survey snapshot on most theatre houses shows a gap in this direction, yet managers are usually oblivious of the details as can be inferred from the first

premise which presupposes that hazards are inevitable and must be prepared for. According to Oshionebo and Idebi, “theatre management is concerned with the theatre buildings and companies and how artistic events, financial transactions, rentals and box office earnings are interrelated in the running of the theatre” (41-42). Such conceptually parochial definitions permeate most scholarly and practical preoccupation of scholars and managers of the theatre. It is clear from the quotation that a very paramount aspect of management which is the safety of the artist and audience from culpable hazards in the process of theatre making and presentation is neglected. The safety of the artist must be the topmost priority of any theatre organization, for if this is not guaranteed could lead to the disruption of the entire process. While hazards are inevitable, they can be managed, controlled, mitigated and prevented. It is upon this anchorage that the paper proposes a paradigm shift—a move away from the profit making focus of theatre management today to cover hazard management that will pave the way for the provision of systematic, preventive and or managerial approaches and or measures to curb hazards in theatre organizations. Adedokun also toes the same line with Oshionebo and Idebi in his description of the theatre manager’s job thus:

... He is any person who manages a theatre, who coordinates all economic activities, a publicity director, a match maker who brings together the idea, the artist, the place, and the audience. He sets goals, selects plays, books in touring troupes, finds money or raises funds, hire personnel ... supervises and controls theatrical operations from the beginning to the performance. (8)

The practice of theatre management in most theatre organizations centres on general production planning, organization, performance, and production earnings, less attention is paid on the management of hazards in our theatres. Management in utopian terms is the total “utilization of scarce resources in order to achieve pre-determined organizational objectives. These scarce resources comprise people, money, materials machines, information, knowledge, time, etcetera (Oshionebo 95). Szilagyi also maintains that “management is the process of interpreting resources and tasks toward the achievement of stated organizational goals” (7). However, it should be noted that every other resource depends on the people who are the workers of any organization for the success of productions; for they are the ones that make the entire system operational. Therefore, one of the predominant aims of managing any organization should be to first and foremost ensure the safety of

the worker. The worker is the human resource of the organization without whom the organization is left dormant and or un-functional. Rensis Likert emphasizes the importance of the worker in an organization thus:

All activities of any enterprise are initiated and determined by the persons that make up that institution, plants, offices, computers, automated equipment, and all else that a modern firm uses are unproductive except for human effort and direction. Human beings design or order the equipment; they decide where and how to use computers; they modernize or fail to modernize the technology employed; they secure the capital needed and decide on the accounting and fiscal procedures to be used. Every aspect of firm's activities is determined by the competence, motivation, and general effectiveness of its human organization. Of all the tasks of management, managing the human component is the central and most important task, because all else depends upon how well it is done. (qtd. in Oshionebo 97)

Considering the status of the artist in any theatre organization one dares to wonder the level or what measures have been put in place to combat eventualities that they may encounter in the course of dispensing their duties? This is because engaging as a workforce of any theatre organization exposes the artist to a number of risks which include fire outbreak, building collapse, injuries, stress and insecurity among others.

Occupational Analytical Frame

In this segment, an occupational analysis is done to reveal all operations and sub-operations of the theatre artist and the hazards associated with them. Information here presented was generated through interviews with key informants and in-depth respondents as well as personal observations. According to Nyiahule “the world of work is comprised of various areas called occupation. To develop vocational instructions in a particular occupational area, the occupation is analysed into specific job titles. Next the jobs are described and the duties are stated. Then the tasks performed by the worker on a job are listed and validated, usually through a survey” (1). Occupational analysis is also used in times of job recruitment in organizations; this is because it gives clear information of the job requirement, existing loopholes in the labour force and equipment and the number of

persons and equipment needed. This section and or segment of the paper carefully applies Nyiahule’s occupational analytical model, for it is through this analytical frame and or process that the various engagements of the theatre artist may be deciphered and the likely hazards associated with the various tasks phantom for further analysis, comprehension and solution proffered.

Job Title and Job Description

Job Title	Job Description
Theatre Artist	A Theatre Artist is someone who carries out theatrical performances to entertain, enlighten, educate and inform audiences. He/she may wear different kinds of costumes typical of the role being played. He/she may work in state’s arts council, national theatre, private troupe, or university/college of education as student or staff or a freelancer. He/she may be designate; however, the nature of his/her job may require going out to perform at occasions and other functions. He/she may also engage in directing, management, administration, costuming, makeup as well as the control of lights and sound equipment.

Table 1: Shows the Job Title and Job Description of the Theatre Artist

Tasks Description

As earlier noted, job analysis entails listing the various tasks involved in the performance of each duty. The task of a theatre artist falls under three broad categories of artistic, technical and managerial tasks. Below is a graphic tasks description of the theatre artist.

1. Artistic Task

Operations	Sub-Operations
Acting	Internalization of pre-written lines, creation and internalization of lines, rendering of lines, movements, shouting, screaming, recording of blockings, private and general rehearsals and performance.
Singing/Music	Internalization of pre-set song verses, creation and internalization of songs, creation and playing of musical instruments, private and general rehearsals and performance.
Teaching	Source for materials, read literatures, make lecture notes, teach students, set test/exams, mark scripts, record scores, and anchor productions.
Dancing	Mastering of pre-set dance steps, creation and mastery of dance steps, playing of drums, private and general rehearsals and performance.
Acrobatics	Gaining mastery of pre-set acrobatics, creation and mastery of acrobatic movements, private and general rehearsals and performance.
Directing/Choreographing	Reading of script, pre-blocking on paper, framing the design concept, supervision of the designer, costumier, and make-up artist's work, blocking and teaching of dance steps.

Fig. 2: Shows Artistic Activities of the Theatre Artist

This aspect of the artist's task is rigorous and highly demanding; it consumes energy, time and intellectual resources of the artist. From the preparatory stage which is characterized by recurrent and repetitive actions in form of rehearsals in order to gain mastery of the idea to achieve a near perfect performance to the performance itself and post-performance assessment where strength and weakness, failures and successes of the production are chronicled to boost the quality of subsequent productions, this makes the artistic task very important though very tedious. In teaching, the teacher has to engage in serious reading of literatures to also gain mastery over what he/she is to teach before attending classes and in the course of teaching he/she is likely to demonstrate, repeat, and simplify what he/she teaches in order to elicit the understanding of the students. Acting on the other hand requires memorization of pre-written lines in a play text or creating lines or dialogue in the case of improvisation. Singing, dancing and acrobatics also entail creating one or practising pre-set songs, dance and acrobatic steps or movements for perfection. The task of the artist is fundamentally the transient performance raw material which is presented to an audience, though rehearsed and ready for performance, this raw material is considered and or remains naked without the aesthetics embellishment and or dexterity of the technical tasks that cloth the performance, create and prepare the performing environment for the performance. Below are the technical tasks of the theatre artist.

2. Technical Task

Operations	Sub-Operations
Construction	Designing/drawing on paper, meet with the director and other crew, metalwork; wedding of sets/props, woodwork; flats, platforms, rosters, steer case, use of nails, harmer, saw, chisel, etcetera.
Painting	Drawing and painting of cycloramas, painting of sets and props. Use of paints brushes, water. Requires concentration, stability, and thorough evaluation,
Costuming	Reading of script, research into the culture, drawing a costume chart, meet with the director, designing and sawing of costumes.

Make-up	Reading of script, research into the culture, drawing a makeup chart, meet with director and other crew and make performers up.
Sculpturing	Design on paper, moulding with clay or cement. Mould and remould to meet specification. Requires carefulness, stability of hand, and creativity.
Lighting/Sound/sound effects Creation	Reading of script, drawing the lighting plot, chart, light cue sheet, general pre-set sheet, listing of equipment, meet with director, installation of lights and sound equipment, sound check, and lighting the production.

Fig. 3: Shows Technical tasks and sub-tasks of the Theatre Artist

The technical tasks of the theatre artist are basically behind the scene activities. It involves preparing the sets and props, costumes and makeup, lighting, as well as backdrops. The enormity of the technical tasks requires both physical and intellectual capacity of the artists; this informs the place of the technical artist's work in the production process which is very paramount. Peter Brook emphasises the importance of set construction in theatre production when he said that "the set is the geometry of the eventual play ... a wrong set makes many scenes impossible to play, and even destroys many possibilities for the actor". He further maintains that this creative impute calls on the designer to think of his designs as being in motion, in action, in relation to what the actor brings to a scene as it unfolds". This frame of mind therefore, subjects the "designer to evolve step by step with the director, going back, changing, scrapping, as a conception of the whole gradually takes form" (qtd. in Parker, Wolf, and Block 1). This makes the technical tasks of the theatre artist a herculean one, for he/she continue to design and redesign to meet the design specifications of the performance, in essence designing ends after the performance has been done, for even during actual performance, adjustments of deigns is likely. However, the entirety of artistic and technical tasks cannot be successful without a viable management orientation. Below therefore is the description of management task.

3. Managerial Task

Operations	Sub-Operations
Organizational	He sets goals, selects plays, books in touring troupes, finds money or raises funds, and hires personnel.
Management of Human Resources	Brings together the idea, the artist, the place, and the audience.
Administrative	Supervises and controls theatrical operations from the beginning to the performance.

Fig. 4: Shows the Managerial Tasks of the Theatre Artist

Undoubtedly, the managerial tasks of the theatre artist are enormous, the enormity of his/her task exposes him/her to a number of risks and or hazards, which are likely to deter, or disrupt the production process. These hazards are isolated below.

Hazards in Nigerian Theatres

The above job description reveals the fact that the theatre artist is not a magician neither is he/she an immortal, he/she is therefore susceptible to serious danger and or hazards in the course of executing his/her job. This has necessitated an inventory into this neglected aspect of theatre management in Nigerian theatres. In doing this, it is pertinent to adopt the quadruple process of hazard management which is identification of hazards, assessing the factorial precursors that make for the hazards, deciphering the effects on the worker cum consumer as well as the saleability of the products and finally, suggestion of controlling, mitigating and or preventing measures of the hazards. Below is the tabulation of some occupational hazards collated through oral interviews with theatre practitioners in selected theatre organizations in Nigeria.

Occupational Hazards	Cause of Hazards	Effects on the Artist
Acoustical Problem	Un-controlled loud noise.	Deafness.
Optical Problem	Un-controlled high light beam, close proximity of	Sight deficiency.

	lights to performers, looking directly into light beam.	
Stress	Excessive workload, uncoordinated work priorities, disorganized work procedures, tight deadlines, prolong rehearsals.	Headache, neck and shoulder pain, insomnia, depression, etc.
Physical Injuries	Lack of balance, wrong kinetics in dance and acting, mistake and or wrong usage of construction equipment.	Fractures, dislocations, cuts and bruises.
Collapse of Building	Poor architectural design, use of substandard building materials, lack of maintenance, and use of theatre buildings for purposes other than for theatrical performances.	Impediment of performances, poor patronage due to unkempt environment, and total collapse of theatre organizations.
Electrical hazards	Faulty electrical connections and use of substandard accessories.	Sparks, macro-shock, micro-shock, and fire outbreak.
Insecurity	Unemployment of youths, poor policing and surveillance, late hour closure from theatre houses.	Low patronage of theatre productions, detention, sustenance of injuries as a result of attacks, and death.

Table 5: Shows the Occupational Hazard, Cause of Hazard and Concomitant Effects.

Managing Hazards in Nigerian Theatres

The management of hazards in Nigerian theatre must be understood to be a top most priority owing to the fact that the safety of the artist and his/her general well-being determines the resourcefulness of the theatre organization. This segment hereby presents some managerial modalities.

The Creation of the Office of a Hazard Manager

Theatre organizations must create the office of a hazard manager which will be saddled with the responsibility of procuring and maintaining hazard management facilities as well as the training and retraining of staff on rapid responses and preventive measures of hazards. In doing the latter, occupational health approach should be used. Occupational health is “a multi-disciplinary and comprehensive approach that considers an individual’s physical, mental and social well-being, general health and personal development” (*Occupational Health* 13). Occupational health is aimed at:

- i. the protection and promotion of the health of workers by preventing and controlling occupational diseases and accidents by eliminating occupational factors and conditions hazardous to health and safety at work.
- ii. the development and promotion of health and safe work, work environments and work organization;
- iii. the enhancement of the physical, mental and social well-being of workers and support for the development and maintenance of their working capacity, as well as professional and social development at work;
- iv. enabling workers to conduct socially and economically productive lives and to contribute positively to sustainable development. (*Occupational Health* 13)

Once this approach is employed and staff well equipped with the needed knowledge, smooth and hitch free productions and increased earnings will be guaranteed. To this end, the training should be done regularly with the participation of all staff of theatre organizations.

Curricula Expansion

Students in the Ivory Tower and Colleges of Education must be exposed to the rudiments of hazard dictation, assessment, prevention and mitigation. This can be achieved if the gamut of theatre management as a course is expanded to cover this critical aspect. As the foundation and training ground of theatre artists in Nigeria, the knowledge of hazard management will instil in students the ability and skill to prepare against and for hazards if and when they do occur. This knowledge will also be useful to them when employed and in their everyday lives as well.

Provision of Managerial Facilities

One of the managerial facilities that must be procured and used in managing hazards in Nigerian theatres is fire extinguisher. A stand by fire extinguisher in the theatre house is pertinent to curb incidences of fire out brake during preparatory, performance and post-performance stages. As the technical artist makes use of electricity to illuminate and create sound and sound effects for the performance as well as for wedding and woodwork, there is the likelihood of experiencing hic-ups. These problems may arise from faulty connections, the use of substandard cables, incompatibility of the voltage consumed by lighting, sound and contraction equipment with the kind of cable used as a way of cutting down cost and more. If this occurs, this can easily be put out without it escalating beyond measure. Fire extinguishers are affordable and readily available in shops across Nigeria. Theatre practitioners must see to it that this hazard management equipment is always available and operational. They must also see to it that all artists have knowledge of its operation. This will do away with the improvisatory methods like the use of detergent and water, as well other irrational and non-conformist methods of putting out fire outbreak which are characterized by dalliance since there are not readily available in the theatre building and cases of escalations.

Another managerial facility needed in managing hazards is the first aid box. Unfortunately, most of the theatre organizations visited by the researchers either has worn-out and out-dated first aid boxes which are dump by the corner somewhere in the green room or do not have at all. Some of the organizations without first aid box include University of Calabar and Benue State University amongst others. First aid box enables immediate treatment of a patient; it sustains the pertinence especially in times of severe injury before he/she is taken to the hospital. In such instances, the absence of a stand-by and functional first aid box may lead to death of the patient or severity of the injury. Also, in cases of minor injuries, minor headaches, body pains, muscle strain, a well-equipped first aid box can be used in taking care of the injured person. Theatre organizations on providing the first aid box must train their workers in order to gain good knowledge of how to use the first aid box in accordance to best practice.

Good Maintenance Culture

Unfortunately, Nigerian theatre artists have continued to demonstrate deficit infrastructure management culture as well due to concentration on production organization and earnings. The nature of the theatre environment is capable of luring audience to the performance venue and vice-versa. Awodiya reports

“the Main Hall of the National Arts Theatre, according to Osofisan, started leaking six months after FESTC 77” (211). Three reasons are advanced by Awodiya as responsible for the problem, one of which stems from poor building materials. He notes that the materials used for the roofing were inappropriate for tropical areas; secondly, no Nigerian designer was involved in the process and lack of provision of funds by the government (federal, state or local) for maintenance of public facilities and utilities as soon as the basic construction and installation work on them have been completed. This explains why the National Theatre is in the most dilapidated state. For other theatre organizations like educational theatres and State Arts Councils, the problem is attributed to lack of fund to maintain them. With this scenario, what are the government and the theatre organizations doing to solve the problem? Theatre organizations can raise funds via box office productions and the creation of a situation whereby the audience is moved by aesthetic pleasures of a performance to give certain amount of money as token of appreciation. Such performances, if done over time, may generate enough money that can be used by theatre organizations to manage some of these challenges, instead of waiting on government. Therefore, with a well-kept environment, interest and patronage audience will be sustained.

Enough Rest and Frequent Medical Check-up

The job of the artist exposes him/her to health challenges of deafness, sight deficiency, headache, neck and shoulder pain, insomnia, depression, shocks, burns cuts and more. These health challenges are capable of deterring an entire production either at the preparatory, performance or post-performance stages. Cases of the artist that have collapse or died on stage are many across the world, this point to that fact that the theatre artist pays less attention to his physical and mental well-being-his general health. In view of this, theatre artists must prioritize the promotion of sound health as pretext to efficient running of the theatre organization. They must do this with the understanding that though the show must go on, the process of production is delayed or at some point aborted due to the breakdown of an artist or his/her tools of operation.

Adequate Security

Theatre organizations in Nigeria will fail in their task to contribute to societal transformation if the safety of lives of both performers and the audiences are not guaranteed. Also, being one of the fundamental challenges confronting live theatre today, there is every need to put all measures to prevent any form

of behaviour that will endanger the lives of the artist and his/her patrons. In doing this, theatre organization can employ the services of the law enforcement service to foster peace and coherence in the performance venue, they must avoid late closure from rehearsals or performances, in the institutions of higher learning theatre students must be provided accommodation in the school hostel so as not to walk long distance to their place of abode off campus. These measures will go a long way in securing the interest of both the artist and the audience.

Conclusion

This paper has applied the quadruple ameliorative and hazard management paradigm in managing hazards in Nigerian theatres. This demonstration makes clear the job of the artist, his various tasks and the various hazards he may encounter in the course of executing his job. The place of theatre in the society is very critical; this makes the safety of the artist a topmost priority. His physical and economic wellbeing, health and security are very important; however, the apt emphasis on harnessing artistic, technical and other aspects of management activities and the economic gains against the safety of the artist and the audience in the country is grossly worrisome. The situation becomes worse as government fails to provide regulatory laws, supervision and provision of necessary managerial facilities that will set this sector to work effectively and within the ambit of the law which determines the effectiveness of an organization, and invariably contributes to national development. Theatre organizations must make this area very prominent so that the artists will be conscious and ready to either prevent or mitigate these hazardous occurrences, just as they must endeavour to provide all the necessary managerial facilities to enhance the smooth running of the theatre organization. With the reconsideration and redirection from over concentration of theatre organizations on organization and performance earnings to incorporate the artist physical, mental, social and general health wellbeing, the prosperity, success and resourcefulness of theatre organizations in Nigeria are assured.

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