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Book Review: Managing Organisational Success in the Arts, By David Stevenson, London and New York, Routledge, 176 pp., £27.99 (Paperback), ISBN 9781138736726

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Abstract:

This article offers a book review on Managing Organisational Success in the Arts, By David Stevenson, London and New York, Routledge, 176 pp., £27.99 (Paperback), ISBN 9781138736726

Keywords: arts management, case study, organisational issues

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“Good management can result in more people making more art and sharing it more widely; surely that makes it worthy of our attention.” – (p.4).

Organisations in the creative and cultural industries constantly witness challenges and face uncontrollable changes such as funding cuts which often trigger crisis or even lead to closure. Instead of lamenting on dynamic external forces that cultural organisations have no control of, this book turns the focus inwards to examine arts organisations’ leadership, strategic management and day-to-day operations in order to seek insights and understanding on how effective management could enable companies in the creative and cultural industries to be sustainable and successful despite all the external challenges they need to face and tackle.

This book has a collection of case studies from five countries (the United States, United Kingdom, Russia, Denmark and Malta). It includes a variety of cultural organisations and art forms such as museums, symphony orchestras, arts and conference centres, music and film festivals. The selected arts organisations vary in their length of establishment and experiences of operation, with inclusions from the historical State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg, Russia founded by Catherine the Great in 1764, the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra founded in 1895 (one of the oldest orchestra in the United States), to newly established ones such as the Valletta Film Festival launched at Malta in 2015, the Kauffman Centre for the Performing Arts opened in Kansas City, Missouri in 2011 and the Lammermuir Festival in Scotland from 2010. With such a wide spectrum of coverage, the collection tells of different issues arts organisations face and how significant transformation might serve as an inspiration for cultural organisations’ seeking success.

Structurally, the book is organised into nine chapters. Chapters one to three look into established arts organisations and how they maintain continuous development. Chapters four to six examine how newly established arts organisations can be successful. Chapters seven to nine investigate companies’ operational issues in the creative and cultural industries. Each chapter focuses on one arts organisation, with chapter five by Patrick Donnelly an exception of a paired case study including both the Mesa Arts Centre in Arizona and the Kauffman Centre for the Performing Arts in Missouri which allows for an exploration of the shared attributes of their success as well as their differences. Each chapter can stand on its own, yet together they comprise a rich picture of complex organisational issues that arts organisations may face whether they are new or well-established.

An important feature of the book is that the case studies are evidenced with empirical research, such as stakeholder surveys, interviews and desk research as well as authors’ own observation and personal experience. For example, chapter six by Steven Hadley provides many interview quotations from key contacts in relation to Northern Ireland Opera as well as notes on related documents from desk research. In chapter three, authors Mark O’Neill and Robert Rogerson reflect on their personal involvement and work with Glasgow’s museums, Glasgow Life and Glasgow City Council. The authors use powerful personal testimony to tell stories about Glasgow Life’s chronological development from 1983 to 2017. With support from empirical research, the case studies in the book provide in-depth understandings of the

contexts that arts organisations are embedded in and offer a reality check for companies in the creative and cultural industries.

Another distinctive feature of the book is that each case study has a “framework for the analysis” which explains the theories and concepts used to analyse organisational issues and provide alternative solutions to problems. For instance, in chapter two by Constance DeVereaux and Jim Richerson, both transformational leadership theory and vertical dyad linkage theory are used as explanatory frameworks to analyse the challenges of Founder’s Syndrome, cronyism, an aging infrastructure, and poor attendance at the Sangre de Cristo Arts and Conference Centre in Colorado. These theoretical lenses also offer insights on changes the centre has made, such as adopting a collaborative approach to leadership, abolishing in-group/out-group divisiveness and engaging actively with stakeholders to build trust and relationships which re-energised the Sangre de Cristo Arts and Conference Centre to move out of stagnation and embrace a brighter future. Chapter eight by Natalia Grincheva employs Bourdieu’s framework of capitals (Bourdieu, 1986) to explain how the State Hermitage Museum in Russia expands globally. This case study provides concrete details to illustrate how bridging, bonding and linking social capitals can be applied by the State Hermitage Museum for its successful global expansion. These operational actions include engaging the Russian diaspora to secure funds and support for the museum, building cooperation with foreign publics and stakeholders with support from the international network of Hermitage Museum Foundations, mobilizing economic and social resources from different countries and nurturing long-term social connections at both institutional and personal levels.

In addition, some of the case studies provide models that proved effective for arts organisations. For example, chapter nine by Lesley-Ann Dickson presents an episodic volunteer management cycle (EVMC) developed by the Valletta Film Festival in Malta. It encapsulates details of a seven-stage volunteer management programme, including: identification (stage one), selection (stage two), preservation and inclusion (stage three), orientation and training (stage four), utilization and recognition (stage five), evaluation (stage six) and redirection, retainment or disengagement (stage seven) which are critical to festival operations and strategies. Chapter seven by Konstantinos Karatzias and Katja Lindqvist presents the Culture Compass, a strategic programming tool for the Culture Yard in Helsingør, Denmark. This tool captures cultural content from the elite to the popular, and from the traditional to the innovative. The Culture Compass also orients the organisation’s engagement with a variety of audiences for educational, social and artistic experiences and integrates organisational activities from fundraising to marketing. These models shed light on how effective management may enable arts organisations to survive and thrive.

However, it needs to be highlighted that this book does not provide a prescriptive instrumental ‘tool-kit’ for companies in the creative and cultural industries, instead, it challenges the metrics of success, such as more tickets, more funds and more visits. It calls for attention to individual contexts and factors, turns focus to organisations’ management and questions a simplistic, one-size-fits-all approach to the issues that arts organisations need to deal with. In other words, the collection of case studies is used to evoke discussions, encourage companies in the culture and creative industries to examine their own situated contexts, understand the roots of problems and analyse their available resources (both internal

and external, national and international) in order to innovate and change organisational management for long-term success.

Overall, the central theme of the book is that management should neither be dismissed nor viewed as an enemy in arts organisations. Management is neither a threat to creativity nor overbearing in the creative and cultural industries. Rather, arts organisations require innovative and experimental spirits to embrace creativity in effective management. The collection of case studies underpinned by theoretical frameworks offers detailed analysis to illustrate the vital role that effective management plays for the success of arts organisations and for the development of a sustainable and vibrant cultural sector. Although most of the case studies in this book are situated within countries characterised by Western cultural and social norms, this collection is an inspiration for understanding the management of arts organisations. It encourages a much larger scope for future research from a broader social, cultural and geographical sphere.

References

Bourdieu, P. (1986) The forms of capital in J. Richardson (Ed.) *Handbooks of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (pp. 241-258). New York: Greenwood.