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Assessing and Evaluating Theatre Management Approaches of Repertory Theatre Troupes in Nigeria

By

Kazeem Rufai-Ahmad*

Abstract

Historically, series of repertory theatre companies have emerged in Nigeria after the period of the *Alarinjo* traditional repertory travelling theatre. Among the professional repertory theatre troupes that emerge in Nigeria between late 1940s and 1980s are the Hubert Ogunde, Oyin Adejobi, Kola Ogunmola, Duro Ladipo and Moses Olaiya theatre troupes. Using deductive method and the adoption of Robert Kiyosaki's B-I Triangle's model, this study assesses and evaluates the management approaches of these theatre companies. This study reveals that these professional repertory theatres performed excellently well through the exploration, manifestation and implementation of the three basic structural elements of; Mission, Team and Leadership qualities which are elements that give structure to a business, while cash flow and system management are identified as the cause of their extinction. The study concludes that the proper application of the B-I Triangle to the management approaches of repertory theatre troupes is germane to the sustenance and survival of theatre business in Nigeria.

Keywords: Theatre Management, Traditional, Repertory, B-I Triangle, Theatre Troupes.

Introduction

The history of theatre practice in Nigeria has witnessed series of prospects and challenges especially when we make reference to the practice of repertory theatre. "Repertory theatre refers to a theatre company usually in residence, which has a repertory or store of plays ready for production on a regularly changing basis" (Fosudo, 1999, p. 71). Over the years, differentrepertory theatre companies have emergedand gone into oblivion in Nigeria after the period of the *Alarinjo* traditional travelling theatre. Among the professional repertory theatre troupes that emerged in Nigeria between late 1940s and 1980s are the Hubert Ogunde, Oyin Adejobi, Kola Ogunmola, Duro Ladipo, Moses Olaiya, Ori Olokun by Ola Rotimi, Pec Repertory theatre by J.P. Clark, Odu Themes Meridian by Bode Sowande,

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Artistes Resort by Bode Osanyin,among others.A little recall of their activities in the 1940s and 1980s revealed their contributions in terms of artistic excellence to the development of theatre practice in Nigeria.

However, Akinleye (2001, p. 69) comments that, "what happened to the troupes that were raised between the 50s and the mid-80s? Most of the travelling theatres have disappeared into the thin air". This statement, among other cogent reasons are the motivation for this study. The question raised by Akinleye is relevant to this paper. This paper therefore,intends to interrogate, assess and evaluate their management approaches to establish the causes of their extinction through the application of Robert Kiyosaki's B-I Triangle.

Hubert Ogunde's Theatre

Hubert Ogunde's foray into the world of theatre practice started in 1946. His motivation to take theatre as a career was propelled by his active involvement in the church theatre festival during Easter and Christmas celebrations. While talking of a history of professional Repertory theatre in Nigeria, a reference must be made to this theatre personality. This is because his contribution to the development of theatre in Nigeria cannot be quantified. Adedeji (1998, p. 47) opines that "Ogunde's strong attachment to the cause of the theatre is based on what the traditional theatre existed for". This implies that his early exposure to the operation of Alarinjo traditional travelling theatre promoted his firm beliefs and readiness to operate his theatre in accordance with the Yoruba culture. The portrayer of Yoruba culture surfaced in his total theatre idioms in form of folk opera performances. Obviously, this practice promoted his travelling company thereby bring him to limelight. These gave Ogunde's artistic talents full scope. He rose to fame as a composer of sacred songs and operative plays". Hubert Ogunde's plays addressed social vices and politics. Some of his plays are culturebase plays, morality plays, historical plays and satires. Among his numerous plays staged during and after independence in Nigeria are; *Tiger's Empire* (1946), *Mr. Devil's Money*, *Human Parasite*, *Strike and Hunger*, *Towards Liberty* (1947), *Yours Forever* (1948), *Bread and Bullet* (1950), *Yoruba Ronu*, *Begger's Love* (1952); among others.

There are certain theatre management styles common to Ogunde Theatre and his contemporaries. None of these troupes enjoyed subventions or any form of financial supports from the government. Also, they derived substantial income from the proceeds of box office (sales of ticket). More so, the leader of each group instilled discipline into the members of cast and crew, and also emphasised training as yardstick for staff motivation and personnel development.

Ogunde adopted pata-familiar model for recruitment into his theatre company. This is a system of involving large number of cast and crew from one's family. Majority of his cast came from his family members-wives and children. This was as a result of the attitude of people towards theatre

profession at that time. His company was first to be credited with corporate advertisement and marketing in Nigeria theatre practice. From all indications, Ogunde started theatre business as a real entrepreneur, "who had an organisational approach, referred to, as the director-manager system.This system placed artistic, managerial and administrative responsibilities under the care of one figure"(Ododo, 2014, pp. 60-61). Ogunde was the artistic director, composer, and chorographer, and at the same time, the theatre manager of his production company.

This management approach was also adopted by some of his contemporaries, such as Duro Ladipo, Kola Ogunmola, Oyin Adejobi and Moses Olaiya. However, Moses Olaiya improved upon his management style by decentralising the management structure through the employment of "a full-time manager, who handed the business of booking, touring arrangements and publicity" (Akomolafe, 1981, p.426). Sequel to the employment of a theatre manager, "the Alawada group not only had a written scheme of service for its members, members of the owner's family were put on monthly pay" (Akinleye, 2001, p.68).

Duro Ladipo's Theatre

Another important icon in the history and the development of repertory theatre practice in Nigeria is DuroLadipo. He was also a theatre practitioner of high repute during his life time. The operation of DuroLadipo theatre cannot be divorced from the ways and means in which his contemporaries have excelled during their engagements in theatre profession. DuroLadipo was a core theatre professional who understood the reality behind the African cosmology and mythology. His passion for theatre grew out of his experience while leading the school choir with pupils in Holy Trinity School, Ilesha. According to Raji-Oyelade, Olorunyomi and Duro-Ladipo (2008, p. 4) "DuroLadipo taught the Standard III pupils, directed the school's drama group and composed for, and sometimes led, the church choir". From this, his passion to take theatre as a career developed and consequently, DuroLadipo produced an adaptation of *As You Like It*by Williams Shakespeare. This experience led to his personality being projected as he engaged himself in "a monumental vocation, which magically turned into a career, in theatre arts and cultural performance" (Raji-Oyelade, Olorunyomi and Duro-Ladipo, 2008, p. 4).

Furthermore, DuroLadipo's love for a theatre led him to convert the downstairs of his residence in Osogbo which was primarily used for beer parlour, to a place of theatrical performance. Therefore, in 1962, his residence, turned to a theatre and named MbariMbayo was officially opened and his first historical and legendary play *Oba Moro* was premiered.The success achieved from the production of *Oba Moro*made Ogunbiyi (1981, p. 341) to describe DuroLadipo Theatre as "a genuine sense of cultural revivalism, Ladipo reached beyond the morality plays characteristic of the forerunners of Yoruba travelling theatre, into the new

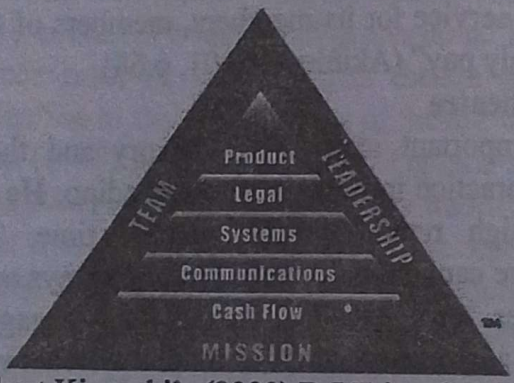
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territory of Yoruba historical drama". The genre of his artistic providence premised on historical plays, morality plays especially those drawn from biblical story and comedy. These include; *Oba Moro, Oba Waja, Oba Koso, Obatala, Moremi, Aaro Meta, OtunAkogun, Karounwi*etc.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is premised on the theoretical construct propounded by Kiyosaki (2000) which is known as the B-I Triangle. The B stands for Business while I, stands for Investment. Kiyosaki (2000, p. 295) furtherstates that "a business with a sound mission, a determined leader, and a qualified and unified team, begins to take shape as the sections of the B-I Triangle come together".

The three basic structural elements and five elements of business operation are arranged by Kiyosaki (2000, p. 294) in the diagram below:



Robert Kiyosaki's (2000) B-I Triangle Model

The outer layer of the above diagram consists of five operational elements; cash flow (inflow and outflow of cash/fund) communication, (excellent sales and marketing operation), System management, legal management and product/service management. Kiyosaki inferred from his experience as an entrepreneur that a true business required a minimum of eight different skills. That is eight different people working together to attain set goals and objectives. Trump and Kiyosaki (2006, p. 151) further state that three basic elements (Mission, leadership andTeam) give a business its structure, while (product/service, legal, systems, communications and cash flow) areelements of business operations.

Therefore, attaining success in business operations lies in the hand of the leader, the team and the mission conceived at the inception. Hence, the leader makes sure that all elements are well aligned and united. It is Kiyosaki's (2000, p. 293) opinion that any business which is not moving well is due to a breakdown in one of the elements highlighted above. Consequently, this study engages this postulation to interrogate the imbalance and breakdown in some theatre companies which have gone into oblivion in Nigeria and forward suggestions on the proper application of the B-I Triangle to sustain live theatre business in Nigeria.

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Assessment and Evaluation

There were common attributes that these theatre owners possessed which could be said to be a breakdown in the operation of their theatre businesses. One of these is the fact that they were all owner-managers. Sugars (2006, p. 13) asserts that "my definition of a business is the following; a commercial, profitable enterprise that works without me. Anything elsehas to be classified as something other than a true business". They worked in the business instead ofworking on the business. There was no solid system in operation which could make the business to continue after their demise. The business was run as a sole proprietorship. Consequently, the absence of a system which is an element of business operation, brought the business to a sudden end after the demise of the owner. Though, the family of some of them survived in the industry, long after, but not in the same company. Ogunde, Ogunmola, Duro Ladipo, Oyin Adejobi and Moses Olaiya theatre had skilful and talented leaders, good team work, good communication and better services in term of artistic products, there was inadequacy in legal arrangement, contract agreement between artists and the owner-manager, funding policy and sound system in terms of operational policy, remuneration, promotion, etc.

The issue of funding also served as constraint for the survival of these theatre companies. This is an area of the B-I triangle which Kiyosaki emphasised as operational element which can cause a breakdown in the continuity of a business venture. Kiyosaki (2000, p.279) asserts that "when one system fails, such as when cash flow dries up, all the other systems begin to fail almost simultaneously". This constraint is applicable to early travelling theatres that have been in existence in the history of repertory theatre practice in Nigeria. Indeed, "no board of directors, no governmental grants and no accountability to anymore. It has no permanent theatre and is unused to the luxury of a vacation as it works twelve months in a year" (Adedokun, 2001, p.84).

The inability of these actor-managers to build their own theatres as a result of funding, accounted for the extinction of their company.Ogunbiyi (1981, p. 336) attests to this claim that "one of the obstacles in the way of evolving a vibrantly rich theatrical tradition in Nigeria has been the marked absence of theatre structures and buildings owned and managed by individual theatre groups". Obviously, these travelling theatres set out with a good mission, developed high level of team spirit and leadership quality. The major constraints are the system and cash flow management. What these practitioners should have done in addition to the set goals and objectives (mission) is to build a permanent theatre, where good system will be in operation. Akinwale (2001, p. 27) also submits that:

> Another type of theatre which is yet to be formed in Nigeria is a truly professional company, whose source of funds is at

the stock market. This is a company where shareholders will invest in the operations of the company by buying shares.

From Akinwale's point of view it is evident that the establishment of theatre companies, either through private placement memorandums (PPMs), or stock exchange market, will solve the problem of financing. This is because this arrangement allows pooling of resources together to actualise the goals of the company, instead of one man carrying all the risk and liability of the company. Furthermore, to put a good system in operation, the company needs to build a strong team spirit, which can be organised by having board of directors, committees and workable organisational structure.

Inferences from Terra Kulture and Muson Centre, Lagos

Theatre companies should be organised and run in such a way that it can survive long after the demise of the owner. A lesson can be learnt from the operation of Terra Kulture and Musical Society of Nigeria (MUSON) Centre located in Lagos. These are professional arts organisations that had survived the sudden bust of economic recession, because of workable system operation and cash flow management. One of the strategies adopted by Terra Kulture and MUSON centre is the setting up of attraction. Attraction can be adopted to enhance cash flow management to sustain the continuity of existence of theatre companies in Nigeria. The establishment and management of ancillary services such as restaurant, club, libraries, art gallery, rentals, music schools and the exploration of festival programmes in dance, musical concerts, drama, comedy, talent hunts, awards, events management, are attractions that have sustained the continuity of both Terra Kulture and MUSON centre, respectively. These companies have discovered that theatre companies cannot survive by the proceeds of the box office alone, but by engaging in other related ventures which can be located within and around the theatre premises. The incorporation of ancillary products and the formation of board of trustees helped to sustain cash flow management and system management.

Conclusion

The thrust of this paper has been established from the assessment and evaluation of the management approaches of repertory travelling theatre such as Hubert Ogunde, Duro Ladipo, Kola Ogunmola and Moses Olaiya's theatre by using Kiyosaki's (2000) B-I Triangle to interrogate the inadequacy and imbalance in their operationand management structure. The B-I Triangle is anchored on eight significant elements, which can aid the survival of a business. These include the three basic structural elements and five operational elements. The view of Robert Kiyosaki on these elements is that a breakdown of one of them will automatically lead to the death of a business venture. It is discovered that the repertory travelling theatre of Ogunde,Ladipo,Adejobi, Ogunmola and Olaiya had in operation the three

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basic elements; mission, team and leadership. While system and cash flow management are operational elements, which caused the early extinction of these ventures. PEC Repertory theatre, OriOlokun theatre, KankaunSela, Kompani, etc. also had similar experience. These early Repertory theatres lacked a permanent place of performance where audience can come and have a theatrical experience. With the absence of a permanent theatre facilities, expansion, longevity and financial opportunities were major constraint of the ventures.

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