

Strategic Planning in the Arts: A Practical Guide

Author's Note

This book is intended to serve as a guide to those members of the staffs and Boards of not-for-profit arts organizations responsible for developing, evaluating or implementing plans. After years of research and practice, it has become clear to me that most arts organizations would benefit from more and better planning. While planning has been accepted as a routine part of for-profit corporations' activities, not-for-profit organizations have been less anxious to devote time and resources to long-range planning. "After all," arts professionals often argue, "strategic planning is profit-oriented and our goal is to produce a fine artistic product, not a profit."

No one can dispute the claim that not-for-profit organizations, by definition, are not financially motivated. A sad fact of life, however, is that arts organizations operating in the United States today (and, increasingly, those in the rest of the world as well) face even more difficult resource acquisition and allocation problems than the giants of the steel and automotive industries. A coherent approach to these issues is essential if an arts organization is going to offer a "fine artistic product" for any consistent period of time.

While an arts organization is not a for-profit business, arts administrators and corporate executives must handle many of the same problems; many management tools used in the for-profit sector can be employed to great advantage in the arts. The application of these tools does not rest solely with the business side of an arts organization. The benefits of strategic analysis for artistic decisions are numerous. Without a long-term plan that integrates business and artistic strategies, the ability of any organization to sustain a high level of artistry is doubtful. Many artists fear the regimentation of planning and, in fact, may feel that their artistic prerogative is being usurped by such a process.

I believe that artistic decisions belong in the hands of the artists and artistic directors. The planning process, however, will reveal the implications of these artistic decisions, implications that must be reviewed, analyzed and contemplated in a mature, objective manner. In the end, any consistently successful arts administrator and artistic director must recognize the symbiotic nature of their relationship.

Developing these plans is not simple. As a result, many arts organizations that do attempt to develop strategic plans waste many hours because the planning processes they employ are not rigorous enough, are not well designed, or are poorly implemented. Just as success for an arts organization depends on a mix of creative vision and administrative expertise, so too does strategic planning depend on a mix of art and science. While creativity and insight are irreplaceable, the techniques of planning are designed to facilitate the development of insight. As in any discipline, when technique is ignored, creativity becomes difficult to channel.

Strategy development, however, is not a step-by-step process. While this book presents a sequential approach to planning, there is rarely one "correct" strategy that emerges from the planning process. The best planning processes allow for the iterations necessary for the best

solutions "to hatch." In other words, while this book describes a practical approach to developing a strategy, it cannot teach how to think or to create.

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