CultureCase

Arts organisations should not blindly adopt corporate management techniques

This research was conducted by **Martin Beirne and Stephanie Knight** at the **University of Glasgow and Queen Margaret University College, UK**

Summary

This paper took a critical look at the way in which management techniques from the private sector have infused arts organisations. The authors suggest that simply incorporating management practices without taking account of the unique and special circumstances of arts organisations risks undermining the artistic process and leading to diminished productivity. By looking in depth at three theatres they found that the effective running of an arts organisation can be enhanced or constrained depending on whether the management approach adopted remains authentic to its core artistic and people-centred values.

The findings were based on research into three different types of producing theatre

The researchers spent time with three theatres in the UK where they conducted interviews with Artistic Directors and many other members of staff. The identity of the theatres remains concealed.

The vocabulary and values of corporate management were resisted

The interviews highlighted various aspects of theatre practice and management processes that were affected by being encouraged to adopt a more corporate management style. There were clear differences in style and vocabulary between consultants and funders and the theatres. Organisations

implored (or compelled) by funders to make use of consultants tended not to implement their recommendations.

The theatres instead developed less formal management structures

Despite resisting the imposition of commercial or managerial approaches, the theatres were pretty vague when describing what an artistically-led organisation looked like, or how people-centered management actually worked in practice. The researchers found that the management of the three theatres depended heavily on the commitment, passion and goodwill of staff who frequently worked beyond their job description and pay grade. This created tensions and (eventually) disruption, which is described in detail in the paper.

Keywords

theatre **UK** **management** **interview** **strategy** **staffing**

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