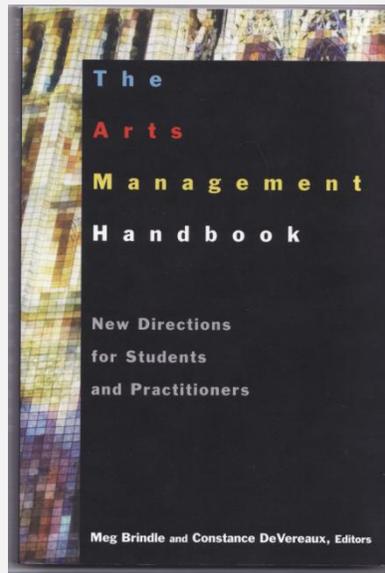


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THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF ARTS MANAGEMENT: A DISCUSSION ON A RECENT HANDBOOK IN THE FIELD



Brindle, Meg and Constance DeVereaux, eds. *The Arts Management Handbook: New Directions for Students and Practitioners*. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2011.

Key words: arts management, visual arts, performances, venues, grants and governmental funding

Although the editors of *The Arts Management Handbook* argue that arts and business tend to intertwine in many cases, cultural and arts management still differ a lot from management in other fields, at least in what regards customer expectations. When people buy mundane products (e.g., electronics) for themselves, their homes, or their families, they don't usually expect the shop assistant or whoever sells them those products to have a significant background in the history of that type of commodity, a deep understanding of the techniques used to assemble those products, and so forth. Selling these products and services is based on certain benefits and advantages for the end user, such as a greater processor speed in the case of computers, less power consumption in other cases, greater storage space in the case of refrigerators, etc. It is, however, highly unusual for an experienced customer in the field of arts to ask about the benefits of certain paintings, performances, and so on. Selling artwork requires a slightly different approach: knowledge of art history is mandatory in almost any case, documentation on the life of the author is most of the time critical, and correlation with other works from the same context (or from another) is definitely a plus. Managing arts needs an almost completely different framework and *The Arts Management Handbook* addresses this need in three ways: (1) the book is first of all a practical guide in the performing and visual arts management, (2) it offers an insight into how education and training in arts management work, and (3) it accounts for the role that the governmental and nongovernmental organizations play in arts management.

The book is intended both for readers willing to pursue a career as arts managers, as well as for those that already work in the field, but need guidance on specific subjects and issues. There are three parts of the book, each dedicated to one of the aforementioned topics, and a total of 12 chapters that deal with what an arts manager's career basically entails. Because the arts managers' activity is multifaceted in itself, so is each topic presented within the chapters. When considering a venue for an event, for example, several aspects might include owning, renting, or leasing real estate, scheduling policy, contract writing and signing, insurances, taxes, staff and many more (chapter 2). A conscientious manager will realize how valuable each of the book's chapters is, simply because checklists such as this one include all the aspects he or she will need to consider before, during and after running an event.

Case scenarios for all chapters (except for chapter 11) and firsthand internship experiences (chapter 8) make the whole of the publication much more easily digestible for students and people not that well familiarized with the field. Tens of pages of practical information are flanked by a problematic situation and its denouement, which gives the book an overall progressive structure, approaching each area of arts

management (the “where”, the “when” and the “how”) by identifying the main possible issues and turning the matter on its multiple sides until the most likely denouement for the case comes to light: protagonists may end up losing their job (page 93), or they may very well realize what they did wrong (page 249) and correct themselves. Therefore, after reading the book, present and future arts managers will gain a grip on the situations that inevitably end up in disaster for one’s career and those that serve as milestones towards perfected professionalism. The situations are tackled in detail, as it is proved by the comparison between the advantages and disadvantages of hiring building-maintenance staff and working with HVAC contractors (page 29), or by the extent to which a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization may develop its business plans (pages 265-8).

What is interesting about this book is that it has a lot of transferable knowledge that may serve business managers who are also involved in non-artistic endeavors. Of particular interest I found to be the helpful tips on negotiating the royalty quote for various permissions from the copyright holders (pages 44-5) and the basic – but not necessarily well-known – steps for asking corporations and individuals for money (pages 301-4). Furthermore, even if the authors mainly refer to the current state of arts management in the US, their studies are also “transferable” to other, international, contexts. For example, the arts management issues brought about by public policies in the US (chapter 9) may serve as an initial study elsewhere, once the framework for identifying them is set (every arts manager will find it easy afterwards to identify what the tax deductions for organizations are in his or her country, visa regulations for international artists, and many more).

The multifaceted approach of the authors is also present when the need to separate theory from practice imposes itself. Even though all large arts organizations should operate with two distinct directors, i.e., an artistic one and an administrative one, reality shows that most of the time this is not applicable. A manager often finds him- or herself in the position of “doing it all”. This is not necessarily new to managers that are constantly under a lot of pressure to carry out various tasks within their organizations, but things go truly wrong when, due to lack of communication, the manager fails to see that he or she is the one that has to “do it all”. Kira Hoffmann’s text (chapter 4) offers some useful suggestions about how to avoid this peculiar situation, which is not very often mentioned in the books. As it is the case with chapter 6, “more planning and less assuming” (page 123) seems to be the suggestion that summarizes all the manifold tools, methods and examples which the reader is invited to make use of for personal as well as for organizational betterment.

Another strong point I'd like to stress is that the book introduces the reader to possible - well documented - future trends and explains how governments, NGOs, and grant writing work in what concerns the arts, without losing sight of the reader as an individual. The becoming arts managers should, of course, be aware of the large-scale structures with which they will interact throughout their career, but they may also be quite fragile as "fresh managers". In this respect, Meg Brindle's text (chapter 8) disambiguates the difficulties which young professionals usually come across in the early stages of their careers. Systematically approaching the point of view of the student, the university and the organization regarding what an intern's responsibilities are, the text succeeds in guiding the new arts managers through what seems to be the most burdensome stage of their desired profession: the passing from studentship to "the real thing".

Even though, in the beginning, the book offers some highly motivational examples of artists that were their own managers (Shakespeare was his own theater manager, William Blake was his own print production manager, and so forth, see page 3), all chapters that follow refer to the arts management as managing other people's works. This might seem misleading for an artist seeking not to pursue a career in arts management, but to simply learn how to sell his or her work. Nevertheless, the book fulfills its task of setting new directions for *students and practitioners* and an artist still has a lot to learn throughout its chapters. I recommend the book to everyone seeking to broaden their understanding of how arts managers contribute by means of their expertise to the development of the arts market in general.