

MANAGEMENT AND THE ARTS

Chapter 4

The Adaptive Arts Organization

Chapter Overview

Arts managers need to be keenly aware of the many different forces that can have an impact on their organization. This chapter explores how six external environments help shape the way arts organizations respond to the changes that can help or hinder successfully fulfilling its mission. Techniques and tools are covered which are designed to help an arts manager stay informed and tuned into their community.

Environments are:

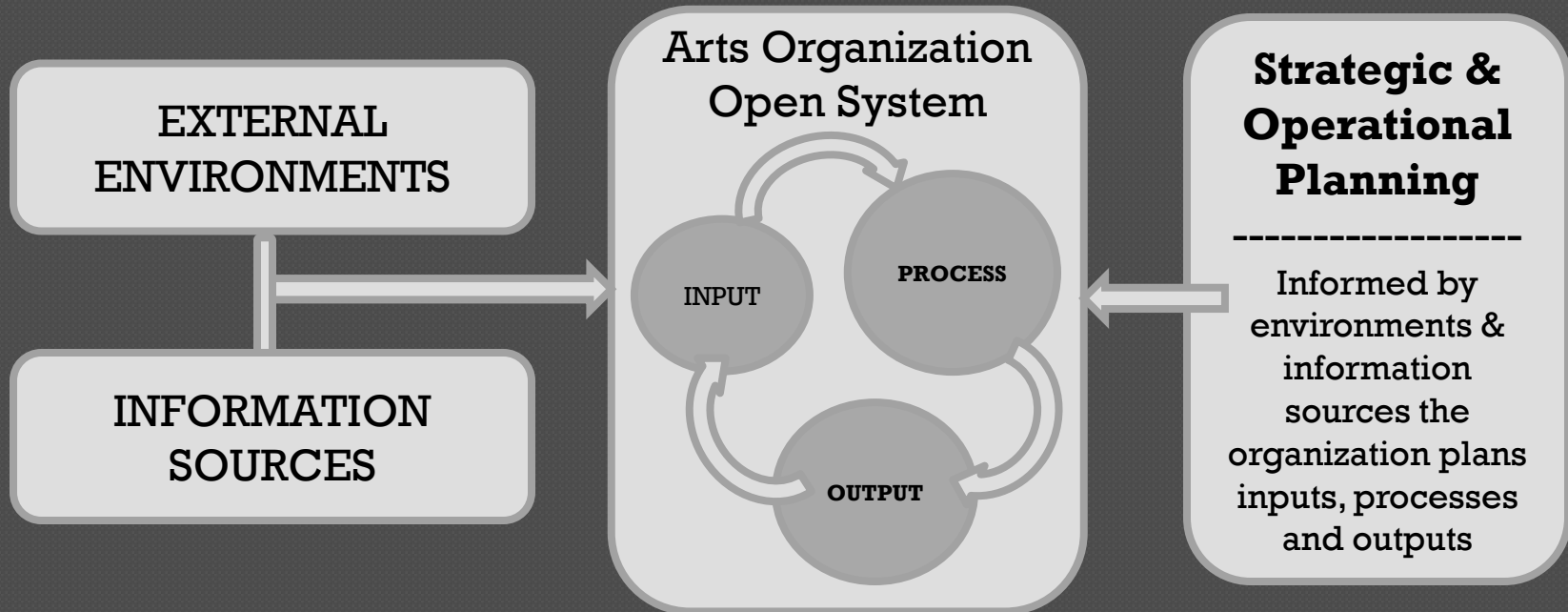
- Cultural & Social
- Education
- Demographic
- Economic
- Political & Legal
- Technological

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Information Sources are:

- Audience & Community
- Board and Staff
- Other arts groups
- The Media and Critics
- Professional Associations
- Consultants



Content Management System

In order to effectively process all the information coming from the external environments and the information systems, the arts manager needs to develop their preferred content aggregation and management system and processes.

Economic Environment

Arts organizations feel the impact of the macro and microeconomic environment as does any business. When the economy is generally doing well and signs of positive job and income growth are in the news, that bodes well for arts organizations. As you will see in Chapter 10, spending on arts and entertainment programming are typically considered discretionary expenses. When the economy is struggling, arts organizations often feel the impact as people focus spending on what they consider core expenditures and activities.

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Political and Legal Environment

An arts manager needs to closely monitor the political and legal environment at the local level and beyond. Since an arts organization is a business in the local community, it is important to be engaged in issues and concerns that effect everything from the quality of life to local taxes. Compliance with laws and being an active part of the dialog about policy that may affect the arts, makes for a very busy schedule.

Organizations like Americans for the Arts play a key role in helping to advocate and lobby for the arts. Restrictions on the type of lobbying that can be done are built in to the IRS regulations for 501(c)(3). However, that does not mean arts managers and the people who support arts organizations are prohibited from getting information to lawmakers about the impact of pending or current legislation



Cultural and Social Environment

Arts organizations exist in communities made up a mix of people with values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors that influence how they interact with each other and institutions. Generally, the perceptions people hold about their communities are not always clear and often are anecdotal. An arts manager needs to move beyond the generalizations to understand what boundaries and areas for exploration exist in their community.

The organization's mission becomes its calling card and its programming is a manifestation of the ideas and stories that can add value for its community. The programming may reflect the community or it may offer new ways of viewing or thinking about problems faced by groups of people in society.

Arts and culture organizations also have the opportunity to create programming that expands the vision and extends the horizon of its community. The ability to bring about changes in values and beliefs can be an important role for an arts organization to play.

Demographic Environment

Artists do not typically start organizations by taking demographics into account. As the arts manager begins working with artists, the importance of gender, age, race, income, occupation, education, and the birthrate begin to take shape. Why? The changing demographics of a community, region, state and nation can have an impact on attendance, ticket revenue, donations, and the programming selected by the arts organization.

A great deal of free information is available from the Census Bureau website and, when combined with local and state demographic data, it can form the basis for more informed decision-making.

For example, a demographic profile showing the education levels in a community can be a stronger predictor of attendance at arts events than income or occupation. Arts organizations engaging with young audiences and that develop multi-generational educational programs are exhibiting strategic thinking and action to build capacity.

Technological Environment

The technological environment encompasses a broad array component parts that can include the way artistic products and experiences are distributed and shared, to the processes used in the creation and management of the arts.

Technology can make it easier for people to participate in the programming produced by arts and culture organizations and, at the same time, it can make it easier for people to select other avenues for entertainment that completely excludes arts organizations. Technology can also make it easier and affordable for artists to take ownership of their creations and bypass arts organizations all together.

How does an arts manager position their organization to respond to and leverage the growing opportunities to connect programming to audiences world-wide? Being aware of the potential for technology as a tool in service of the mission and then strategically acting on that awareness will be mandates for the 21st Century arts manager.

Educational Environment

Education can be a pathway to a life long engagement with the arts. It can also be an effective way to cultivate and build audiences. The education environment is actually many different segments. Arts manager need to formulate multiple level developmental strategies based on age and grade brackets. Arts organizations are more effectively partnering with schools to address the needs of students and teachers.

The ability of arts organization to influence education policy, while growing in its significance, is hindered in the USA by the decentralized structure that requires far more points of influence than can be sustained.

Partnerships between university arts programs and schools or colleges of Education are focusing on the STEAM initiatives – Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math. In addition, research on teaching and pedagogy supports the idea that the integrating the arts as a way of thinking and problem solving deepens student learning.

Information Sources

- **Audience & Community** – Actively seek feedback, apply what has been learned, then assess if change has taken place
- **Board and Staff** – Often your most dedicated and passionate supporters and advocates can offer feedback and share perceptions that can help shape how the organization communicates with its stakeholders
- **Other arts groups** – The ecosystem of the arts community can be a valuable source for feedback
- **Media and Critics** – Have access to people who are opinion-makers and who can offer informed insights into the organization
- **Professional Associations** – Peers from around the region and nation can offer best practices and lessons learned
- **Consultants** – Expert knowledge that can draw upon successes and failures that is informed by analysis and insight over time

Sampling of Trends for Arts Managers to Monitor

- ✓ Recognizing the reality and significance of the demographic changes that are underway in America and around the world
- ✓ Beginning a process of overhauling the pricing structure of arts events with a focus on truly lowering the economic barrier of cost
- ✓ Developing programs and processes to deepen the arts experience for the dedicated arts audiences – the *arts omnivores*, so to speak
- ✓ Finding ways to connect with potential audiences by sliding into digital entertainment stream and not try to divert it
- ✓ Developing mission-relevant multi-generational educational programs designed to help make the arts relevant and part of people's lives
- ✓ Working with foundations, boards, and donors to build sustainable endowment-funded organizations – funding beyond activities