Choral Management and Relationship Consciousness in the Port Harcourt Metropolis: Psychological and Sociological Perspectives

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Abstract

The management of a choral ensemble is highly demanding; it requires disciplined and trained personnel for effective administration. Many choral conductors/directors in Port Harcourt seem to experience disputes and conflicts on regular basis in their relationship with their ensemble members which seriously affect their smooth running and performances. Most of the conductors seem to lack leadership, psychological and sociological skills to lead their groups successfully. Consequently, the main thrust of this paper is to offer practical guidance and some psychological and sociological strategies to the choral conductors in the area of this study to positively fulfill their vocation. This study is guided by the Classical Organisation Theory (Management Process Theory) by Henri Fayol, and observation method was used to gather data. Findings revealed that some conductors think that they have to be bullies in order to achieve discipline from their group. The paper concluded that a choral conductor need not be harsh, unfriendly, dull, or in-disciplined but rather be friendly and firm in order to have cordial working relationship with the members of his/her choral ensemble for excellent performance output. It recommended that punctuality, regularity of attendance at practices and performances, discipline in all its ramifications for the conductor/director and all members of the group, all go a long way towards making a good impression for the group.

Keywords: Choral Management, Relationship, Consciousness, Port Harcourt Metropolis, Psychological Perspective and Sociological Perspective

Introduction

Choral ensemble management is a very tasking job; a choral director/conductor must be a trained musician, who should know how to work with people in a group and be able to convey his intentions to his/her members verbally or by means of pantomimes. The director must be disciplined both musically and non-musically to be able to manage and relate with his/her group effectively and proficiently with very minimal or no conflicts. He/she must know how to talk to people, work with them, and get results in a quick and direct manner. Knowledge of a few simple principles of group psychology and sociology are of great assistance in practicing and relating efficiently and in stimulating the performers to a good performance output. It has been observed overtime that when some choral conductors/directors in Port Harcourt give instructions to their group, they want the group to listen to every word they say – but the group often does not listen. Members of the ensemble and even the director are expected to be punctual and regular to practices, and be at their best during performances but most times, they do not. The director wants to be able to give instructions only once, but the group does not really listen. Most ensemble directors in Port Harcourt know that their groups ought to perform better than they do, but they seem not to have the time, patience, communication and cordial relationship skills to do anything about it. According to Nwankpa (2013), "the caliber and attitude of the conductor/instructor towards his/her choral members have bearings on the artistic bravura of the performers and what is learned which subsequently influence the quality of their presentations" (p. 114). So many choral conductors in Port Harcourt seem not to have the psychological and sociological techniques to relate with and teach their ensembles to be at their best during performances. Many of them display harsh and unfriendly attitudes towards their choral members at every slightest provocation or mistakes; they lack the patience to correct mistakes with love, and this many times leads to conflict between the choral conductor and members of the ensemble. Most ensemble directors, be they conductors of school, Church or public concert choral ensembles, share many similar problems of psychology and sociology. But some directors seem to have little ideas on how to go about correcting or solving these problems or, if they do know what to do, they do not

do them. This paper provides some immediate practical psychological and sociological principles which will enable the choral directors manage their ensembles effectively. For there to be practical improvements in an ensemble, the director must be involved in extra work. If you want the members of your group to work harder for you, you must also work harder to guide them aright. An ensemble director is the chief whip of the group and should be very firm with psychology and sociology in order to achieve success.

Statement of Objective

The objective of this study is to provide some psychological and sociological strategies to choral conductors/directors in Port Harcourt for effective choral management and conducting.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by the Classical Organisation Theory (Management Process Theory) by is Henri Fayol. It states that "management must encourage and direct personnel activity for coordinating; management must make certain that personnel works together in a cooperative fashion." Henri Fayol developed his management process theory as a top-down approach to examining a business. He put himself in his manager's shoes and imagined what situations they might encounter when dealing with their team. From this, he concluded that his managers, and indeed management in general, had six responsibilities when it came to managing employees and groups of persons: organise, command, control, coordinate, plan, and forecast. With these responsibilities in mind, Fayol developed the principles of administration that influence how managers should lead their teams. These principles, which range from the importance of maintaining a clean facility to the value of initiative and teamwork, are the foundation for many of today's most successful businesses (Fayol, 2003).

Fayol focused on the organisation as a whole; he was concerned with general management and control of the entire organisation and not just supervision and control of operations at lower levels of management. His focus was on management of the organisation and not simply individual jobs. Fayol (1841-1925) worked with the French Coal and Iron Company as a junior executive and promoted as director in the same company. He retired in 1918. There was a general

belief at that time that 'managers are born, not made', that is, only those who had inherent qualities of being a manager can become managers. Managers cannot be made through formal knowledge and training.

This view was opposed by Fayol who said that managers need not necessarily be born; fundamental strategies, policies, and principles underlying the managerial theory can be taught and, thus, managers can be made. He believed that "management could be taught, once its underlying principles were understood and a general theory of management was formulated."

The foregoing, informs the researchers' opinion that leaders, directors, or managers need not necessarily be born; that fundamental principles of management can be taught and thus, managers can be made. Most ensemble directors and even their employers in the area of this study have a common belief that anybody can be a choral ensemble leader/conductor without formal training, whether in music or management in general, believing that leaders are born and not made.

Methodology

Observation method was used in this study. The leadership, teaching, conducting techniques, and styles of the choral directors/conductors in the area under study were critically observed overtime.

Psychological and Sociological Strategies towards Effective Choral Management in Port Harcourt

As earlier discussed in the introductory part of this paper, a choral ensemble manager must first be disciplined both musically and non-musically to be able to manage his/her group effectively and proficiently. This paper presents seven psychological and sociological strategies to guide ensemble directors in Port Harcourt to achieve success.

1. **Encourage Punctuality:** Many ensemble directors complain that their practices always start late in spite of their constant nagging reminders. To achieve punctuality from members of the group, the director himself must show example by being punctual. According to Nwankpa (2013):

> The director must endeavour to start, and indeed insist on starting the rehearsal right in time whether or not there is a full house. Members respect and appreciate a leader with such simple discipline, and the ensemble is better off. Time must be allotted to every segment of the rehearsal to maximise the benefits and learning opportunities (p. 187).

Ekwueme (1993) says the so-called African time is the bane of many ensembles. The lack of prompt attendance at practices wastes so much of precious time and impedes the progress of the group. Indeed lateness at practices encourages and causes further lateness, since everybody then seems to accept that the practice does not start in time; the usually early ones will begin to come late and the usually late ones will come later still. Moreover, late comers annoyingly distract the attention of people working seriously at a piece of music. For example, a late comer most times finds it difficult to find his/her place on the music being performed on his arrival without asking someone else, who has to stop his or her own practice to tell him. Some late comers are not even able to find a seat without shoving at some people who should be busy practicing. These attitudes, interruption, and disturbances annoy an ensemble director so much even when the late comer is a very good and sound member of the group.

Lateness makes practices, and rehearsals drag much longer than is anticipated. It sometimes makes people leave before the formal closing time. This often has the effect of creating personal friction between the choral conductor/director and those who have to leave early as he/she accuses them of being disrespectful. Some members even come late to public performances of the ensemble, which leads to starting the performance late; some even disgracefully walk into the choir stall, stage or platform after the performance has begun.

This is a high level of indiscipline and should not be allowed by any decent group. Punctuality is of uppermost importance in every group or person. When you are disciplined to time management in your endeavours, you will achieve a lot. Prompt attendance at practices, rehearsals, and performances is a very important disciplinary requirement of a good ensemble. The ensemble director must himself be prompt, indeed early at rehearsals and performances. He/she should always start in time, so as to inculcate the habit of discipline and prompt attendance in all

members of the group. Durrant (2018) says "begin your practice on time; however few people may have arrived. Do not say, we will wait a few minutes because we need more people to come." Start punctually even if you have two sopranos and a goat (p. 13).

2. Encourage Regularity of Attendance: As punctuality is important in effective choral ensemble management, so is regularity. It is important that members of the group attend meetings regularly. In the words of Ekwueme (1993), a very disturbing and destructive problem of any ensemble is absenteeism. The parts (whether choral or instrumental) are not balanced if all members are not there. Absent members will miss learning what others have learnt and the whole group will more or less begin afresh if the absent members come on a latter day. Time and energy are therefore wasted unnecessarily. Some members are better and learn faster than others either by having more pleasant voices, or by reading music notes better and faster than others. These better ones generally lead others who usually depend on them for support. These good ones may often feel that their time is wasted because the weak ones take too long to learn what they do in a very short time. Thus, they most times feel bored by so much repetition of very simple things, and they tend to skip practices believing that they can always catch up with the rest on anything they may have missed. This pride is not always justified because some matters which are not on the printed pages of the music may have been discussed or agreed on in the previous practices, example, where to apply a dynamic, take in breath or hold back the tempo a little. By experience and observation, the absence of the good and reliable members of the group slows down the pace of the learning process more. It is therefore important that all members are regular at practices and rehearsals. Bertalot (2002) says: "it is up to the choral director to make sure that regular attendance at practices/rehearsals is a privilege as well as a pleasure" (p. 61). According to Colson (2012), "the director himself must particularly be regular at practices and rehearsals. If for any reason he will be absent, he must make adequate arrangements for a substitute, and inform those who need to know" (p. 43). The habit of the director's absence and making the members wait for so long without being informed of his/her absence discourages the members so much and may lead to more irregularities.

3. Personal Self Control: This includes self-discipline in all its ramifications. A male director should not compromise himself by having intimate relations with female members of his group. This causes lack of respect and the director may find it difficult to reprimand a member whom he has compromised himself with; worse is a pedophile male director. An ensemble director has the responsibility of playing the role of a guardian sent to ensembles, particularly to sing in Church choirs. Parents may withdraw their children from a group where the sexual morality of the director is questionable. Smoking and drinking of alcoholic drinks before and during practices should also be avoided as much as possible. Nevertheless, drinking at a party after a successful concert is not regarded as lack of self-control – though it must be done moderately. It is therefore expedient and important that self-discipline be strictly enforced by any ensemble director in Port Harcourt who aspires to succeed in his music business (Colson, 2012).

4. Clarity of Instructions: It is important for a choral director to give clear, unambiguous instructions so that every member of the group will understand and adhere strictly to instructions. In the case of practice/rehearsal, the conductor must give clear instructions so that every member of the group can find his place on the music and know exactly where to start from, recommence, or end. According to Ekwueme (1993), it is a good idea for everybody to have his/her own copy of the music. Sharing of music sheets may cause confusion and distractions; it yields an easy excuse for indiscipline. It is also important that everybody should use the same edition of the music under study, so that references are made to the same page or markings. It is also good to be consistent in the method or order of giving instructions on the music under study, example, page, line, measure, beat, etc. This method of instruction should be easily followed by everybody.

5. Hard work and Mental Alertness: This is another very important factor towards effective ensemble management. There is no success story for a lazy and dull choral director. Any director who desires to be successful in his/her music business must plan his/her work. Every score of the music that is to be taught should be studied very well before the first practice. According to Ekwueme (1993), if a music director is looking at the music the first time at the same time with his/her group, he/she might get away with a very easy practice if he/she is really a good musician. It is important for a director to study every music before-

hand and foresee the difficult areas which will need more work and concentration than others before he/she comes to the practice. Music sheets should always be organised and prepared for the ensemble by the librarian or secretary of the group. The director should be sure of the day's programme and should not have a haphazard, slip-shod arrangement where things are left to chance. It is advisable for a choral director to stand at practices/rehearsals or sit on a high chair or stool to enable his/her visibility by all members. A sloppy, stooping director, sluggishly and slovenly calling out pages, will get an equally sluggish response from his/her group, with sloppy entries and un-projected voices from faces buried in the scores and books. Such a conductor cannot demand the attention or even the respect of his/her group.

6. Friendly Attitude: This is a very important factor for any conductor who hopes to succeed in his music business. So many conductors think that they have to be bullies in order to achieve discipline from their group. This is not true at all. According to Ekwueme (1993), a friendly conductor is more likely to get the respect and cooperation of the members of his group than one who is a tyrant. When members of an ensemble know that their director is friendly, they will always be willing to cooperate with him/her, and do whatever is requested. They will perform with and for him/her, and be glad to stay longer and come for extra practices/rehearsals when the need arises. It is also important for conductors to show concern to their members' challenges and support them when and where possible. Conductors should also follow up their members in cases of absenteeism without apologies or permission. Bertalot (2002) says if someone is absent from a practice, rehearsal, performance, etc, without permission or apology, the conductor should show concern preferably with a phone to find out why the member was absent. If you do not follow up every unexplained absence immediately, you will give permission for that member to be absent again without telling you. Following up unexplained absences gives a clear message that the member is important to the group; and when a member has the impression of belongingness, he/she becomes more committed to the group.

7. Sense of Humour: This may be the most important aspect of all. A choral director is advised to maintain a cheerful heart and smiles; relax, be playful, make practices/rehearsals fun. Do not make the ensemble members look ridiculed when

they make mistakes. The ability for a choral director to find things funny and elicit funny things is a very important and necessary quality of a successful director.

Inneh (2016) says: "the conductor must be able to laugh at himself and elicit laughter from his members. If the director has the ability to use words in a clever and humorous way, and is able to make a joke out of incidental occurrences during practices/rehearsals, he will be regarded as a genius by members of his group. With this, he can get away with many other shortcomings" (p. 6).

A director must at least be able to appreciate and initiate humorous situations. He/she should bear in mind that laughter has no language barrier, and it is perhaps the most beautiful language of all. Conlon (2009) says: "Wit makes its own welcome, and levels all distinctions. No dignity, no learning, no force of character, can stand against good wit" (p. 50). The ability of an ensemble director's sense of humour cannot be overemphasised.

Conclusion

Choral management require an understanding and application of managerial skills; a competent ensemble director/conductor must do more than just standing in front of the ensemble to direct their singing. He/she must possess some leadership, managerial and teaching skills and be able to interpret the music, reflecting the style and expression of the musical score through physical gestures. A choral conductor need not be harsh, unfriendly, dull, or in-disciplined. The strategies stated in this paper are of assistance for choral conductors/directors to achieve success with their choral members. Any choral conductor/director who hopes to be successful in his/her career needs to apply some psychological and sociological strategies to relate with his/her choral members for effective communication, cordial relationship and excellent performance output.

Recommendation

For a choral conductor/director in Port Harcourt to achieve a good height in his/her music business with his/her group, the strategies enumerated and explained in this paper should be considered and maintained at all times. Punctuality, regularity of attendance at practices, rehearsals, and performances, discipline in all its ramifications for the conductor/director and all members of the

group, all go a long way towards making a good impression for the group. Application of these strategies will lead to an impressive musical output which will transform the ensemble from the mediocre to the very good or extraordinary.

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