

The Artist-Staff Model of the International Contemporary Ensemble

TEACHER NOTES

Learning Objectives

- Weigh the advantages and disadvantages of an organizational staffing model.
- Provide a recommendation for hiring that probes levels of musical and administrative expertise.
- Evaluate the history and prospects of the artist-staff approach for an organization.
- Appraise the value of the “artist-run” identity among the constituents of an arts organization.

Topics For Discussion

Artist-Staff vs. Administrative Staff

- One of the advantages of having musicians in administrative roles is that they are naturally fluent in the artistic and organizational goals of ICE, as well as in the logistics of rehearsing, performing, and collaborating with concert presenters. Yet, they often come to these roles with minimal administrative experience, requiring additional resources for training and task orientation. Ask the class to consider the advantages and disadvantages of hiring artists to take on the following duties. To what areas of the business are artists best positioned to contribute?
 - Fundraising
 - Budget management
 - Concert programming
 - Event planning and logistics (including rehearsal scheduling, travel, etc.)
 - Marketing and publicity
 - Web development
 - Recording and sound production
- Have students break into small groups and imagine that their group constitutes a new chamber ensemble. Brainstorm a comprehensive list of roles that need to be filled for the group to attain professional status, using the suggestions above. Ask each group to consider the following questions:

- Which of these duties could your ensemble manage with the personnel currently on hand?
- Would you have enough time to balance these tasks with your performance commitments (whether with your current commitments or with hypothetical schedules in this new ensemble)?
- How many additional staff would you need in order to fulfill all of the roles you have listed?

Appointing and Hiring New Artist-Staff

- Artists do not always have substantial administrative experience. What should the policy be when artists do not perform their office duties effectively? How could ICE remove artists from administrative roles but keep them on the roster of performers? How would this affect the dynamic of the group? Is there a way to avoid this scenario in the first place (e.g., through some form of trial or training period)?
- Many artists are reluctant to take on a lead role for a project, particularly when they already have busy careers. However, appointing project leaders from the artist ranks helps ICE's executive management identify potential artist-staff to fill permanent positions. What incentives can ICE provide for artists to serve as project leads? Ask students to think of their own lives as active performers with minimal free time. What would appeal to them about the opportunity to oversee a particular concert or program? Consider elements such as flexibility of programming, control over marketing, and the personal sense of empowerment.
- Suppose ICE intends to add several musicians to its roster, but the leadership also knows there will be multiple administrative employees leaving soon. It would be ideal to hire musicians who have some administrative background. How should ICE executives organize the audition process? Should they simply seek the best performers possible or require applicants to have experience with arts administration? Should they look to collegiate arts management and entrepreneurship programs? Should they bypass a stronger performer in favor of someone with more targeted administrative expertise?
- The case study asks students to draft guidelines and recommendations for two ICE roles: executive assistant and general manager. Compare students' lists and discuss which recommendations would be suited to both positions. Are there any guidelines that are particularly important for musicians or non-musicians? How can musicians set themselves apart in an ICE audition, given that ICE artists often take on leadership roles?

Maintaining the Artist-Staff

- Within ICE's artist-staff model, musicians frequently move in and out of roles. This can happen when an artist gets a new teaching job, wishes to devote more time to a solo career, or starts a family. When roles change, projects and tasks must either be reallocated to current artist-staff or assigned to new staff members who are trained accordingly. How can ICE ensure that such transitions occur smoothly and efficiently?

- Consider possible strategies to prepare for these transitions. Should each staff role be shared between two people, so that when one person leaves, the other can begin training a replacement? Should artist-staff who decide to leave (or who change positions) be required to train those who will take over their former assignments? What kind of situations favor each approach?
- Because they must balance performance and rehearsal commitments with office duties, artist-staff members are often busier than full-time administrative employees. Should there be a default approach to assigning tasks to ensure that artist-staff are not overwhelmed? For instance, it may be best to limit the number of performances in which artist-staff are allowed to participate. Alternatively, artist-staff roles could be capped at 20 hours of office work each week. This latter scenario might create problems, however, if ICE needs someone to fill a 40-hour/week vacancy. Would they simply hire two artist-staff, or bypass the artist-staff option altogether? Poll students on recommended strategies to address the question of an appropriate workload for artists. Is there a “one-size-fits-all” option?

Ensemble Identity and Alternative Structures

- The role of executive director has traditionally been assigned to a non-artist to ensure that this person can commit to a consistent schedule in the office. Can and should ICE make this position available to current performers? What problems might arise if the head of the organization were unavailable in a crisis because he/she was involved in a performance or on tour? Could a chain of command be established to protect against this possibility? Could the role of executive director be shared?
- ICE’s expansive concert season requires multiple full-time administrative staff who can work in the office year-round. Going forward, they may need additional non-artist staff to work in the finance office and, perhaps, in other roles. Does the presence of more administrative staff impact ICE’s identity as an “artist-led” collective? How many non-artists can ICE hire before the perception of this identity begins to erode?
- Given that ICE has continued to expand both its roster and concert season, is the artist-staff model still worth maintaining? Survey the students about whether an alternative approach might better suit the needs of a growing ensemble. Could ICE replace its artist-staff with administrative employees, for instance, but still utilize artists for other key roles?
 - Will McDaniel has suggested that artists are particularly well-suited to formulating ensemble vision, interfacing with concert presenters, and expanding the network of ICE supporters. Could artists contribute to these roles in a more limited, “non-official” capacity? Would this still make ICE an “artist-run” ensemble?
- ICE performers regularly communicate with students and audiences, which means ICE musicians remain the public “face” of the ensemble in all of its artistic endeavors. Given this circumstance, is the “artist-run” identity still necessary to set ICE apart in the world of contemporary music? What does ICE gain by adhering to its original vision, and what is it sacrificing? Can ICE differentiate itself in other ways?