Project Planning for the Stage
Tools and Techniques for Managing Extraordinary Performances

Rich Dionne

“Dionne has taken the science of project management and translated it into the art of theatre. By distilling foundational concepts into practical examples, he takes the reader on a journey to improve both their personal practices and their production outcomes.”—Mark Shanda, coauthor of Drafting for the Theatre

Instructions for crafting praiseworthy productions

Author Rich Dionne reframes the theatre production as a project and provides essential tools for understanding and managing it efficiently, whether it be a stage play, an opera, a dance piece, or other performance that requires the collaboration of the artists and artisans creating the visual and aural landscape for it.

Project Planning for the Stage is organized into four sections corresponding to the life cycle of a theatre production: defining the goals and scope of the production and assembling the crew; planning, estimating, and scheduling; executing and managing; and closing and strike. Each section focuses on relevant concepts and skills and outlines the application of effective project-planning procedures and techniques—including critical path analysis. Dionne provides essential tools for tracking and monitoring a project’s progress and uses examples from different theatre genres to illustrate these processes in clear and concise language.

This book is a valuable addition to the libraries of technical managers in live entertainment. Technical directors, costume shop managers, master electricians, properties masters, and video supervisors—anyone managing even part of a production—needs to understand project-planning concepts such as the boundaries of authority and responsibility, parametric and bottom-up estimates, and precedence diagrams. The incredibly useful and powerful tools outlined allow any technical manager to deliver the best possible outcome for a production.

Rich Dionne is an assistant professor and faculty technical director in the Patti and Rusty Rueff School of Design, Art, and Performance at Purdue University. He has published articles in TD&T and Stage Directions. He has served as the production manager at the Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey and as the technical director for the Berkshire Theatre Festival, Alpine Theatre Project, Weston Playhouse Theatre Company, and Dorset Theatre Festival.

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List of Illustrations

Foreword

Bonnie J. Monte

Introduction

Part I. Productions as Projects

1. Projects
   Introduces foundational concepts about projects, including the differences between traditional, functional work, and project-based work; project-based organizational structures; project management approaches; and the four stages of a project’s lifecycle, from conception to closeout.

2. Project Definition Phase
   Explores in more depth the first stage of any project: The Project Definition Phase. It is during this part of the project that the goals and scope of the production are defined, the team is gathered, and the overall objectives of the production and the resources available to complete it are fleshed out.

3. Gathering the Team
   Examines putting together a production team, including basic hiring principles and key labor law considerations in the live entertainment industry.

4. Leading the Team
   Explores what it means to manage a team, including the differences between managing and leading, the importance of strategic thinking, and understanding principles of organizational communication, including the relationships among authority, responsibility, and accountability.

Part II. Planning the Project

5. Estimating
   Explores analogous and parametric estimating techniques and methods.

6. Costing: Definitive Estimates
   Presents steps in generating definitive costing estimates.

7. Scheduling and Estimating Time
   Examines project scheduling and understanding logical dependencies between project tasks and resource allocation. This chapter includes explanation of the processes for developing PERT diagrams and Gantt charts, and for determining the critical path of a project.

Part III. Executing and Managing the Project

8. Tracking and Reporting Progress
   Presents methods of tracking a project in terms of quality, time, and cost, and methods of reporting progress to the rest of the project team.

9. Variance and Control
   Examines how to recognize variances from the planned progress of the project and how to develop control methods for managing project variance. Also discussed are methods of managing those changes to the scope of a production process that are inevitable as the project evolves over the course of its life cycle.

Part IV. Closing Out the Project

10. Project Closeout and Review
    Explores methods both for encouraging reflection on the production process and for archiving the production.

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