Chapter 3
IT and the Transmission of the SME Culture of Nonprofit Theatres

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ABSTRACT

It is often assumed in the MIS literature and in practice that only large organizations are capable of transmitting culture and information technology (IT) to small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The authors use the framework provided by the metaphor of the third space as proposed by Bhabha (1994 and 1996) to gain insights that refute these popular misconceptions, by demonstrating that dominant powers and former colonies exchange cultural artifacts such as information and communication technologies (ICTs) and best management practices in mutually influential ways. The authors’ research furthers their understanding of the initial relationships (termed mimicry) between small and medium-sized nonprofit theatres and commercial productions (symbolized by Broadway productions) as well as their current and future exchanges facilitated by hybridity in the third space. The authors discover that both groups possess unique cultural competencies that open the door to using Web 2.0 technologies for staging and promoting productions, building relationships with theatre patrons; and numerous other management issues where their expertise can be usefully exchanged.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we use the epistemology of the third space developed by Bhabha (1994) and extended by Frenkel (2008) along with Bhabha’s idea of mimicry (1994) to examine the past relationship of dominant commercial productions and native nonprofit theatres. Although both Bhabha and Frenkel were discussing knowledge transfer, we use their conceptualizations to characterize and explore more deeply the transfer process of culture (and thereby IT, useful management practices, and worthwhile lessons) from small, professional, nonprofit theaters to large commercial productions.

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Since the inception of the community theatre movement in the US, vaguely dated to have begun between 1850 to the mid-1870s, there has been a noticeable amount of communication between the large commercial productions and small theatres. Development of nonprofit regional theatres dates from around the turn of the last century (Conte, and Langley, 2007, pp. 114-119.)

The intent of this chapter is to examine the MIS research pertaining to SMEs, and to characterize the theatre literature regarding large commercial productions in relationship to small nonprofit theatres. We then use Bhabha’s (1994 and 1996) framework on power relationships characterizing colonial and post colonial relationships as encounters of mimicry, whereby hybridity of cultures emerges, as well as the third space of in between to identify the problems of colonial powers, seen as large commercial productions, and small nonprofit theatres, the dominated, as they exchange cultural artifacts such as ICTs (information communication technologies), and actively use them to promote and stage theatre productions, build relationships with theatre patrons, and share many other strategic management practices. In addition, we provide specific recommendations for IT practitioners and managers, and suggest future research directions.

The objectives of this chapter therefore are to:

1. Examine the MIS research pertaining to SMEs and characterize the theatre literature regarding large commercial productions in relationship to small, professional nonprofit theatres.

2. Use Bhabha’s (1994 and 1996) framework of power relationships between colonial and post colonial relationships to understand the relationship of large commercial productions (symbolized by Broadway) and small, professional, nonprofit theatres embodied in Off-Broadway theatres.

3. Discuss the findings of our Bhabhaian analysis in order to identify and illuminate mimicry, hybridity, and the third space of nonprofit Off-Broadway and commercial productions of Broadway where exchanges of cultural artifacts such as ICTs, promotion and staging of theatre productions, building relationships with theatre patrons, and sharing other strategic management practices take place.

4. Provide specific recommendations for IT practitioners and managers.

5. Suggest future research directions in the possible exchanges of IT innovations between SME theatres and large commercial productions.

Bharati and Chaudhury (2009) present a framework for SME and IS research. Our research about the transmission and sharing of IT advances in the theatre industry fits well into their relationship link 2. They aptly point out that Levy et al. (2002) concluded that SMEs were moving towards a wider set of goals that included innovation and collaboration. The difference in our research is that we observe collaboration not only among small nonprofit theatres. We also observed mimicking, sharing, and collaboration between small nonprofits with large commercial productions.

Bharati and Chaudhury also point out that a number of researchers have concluded that factors such as reduced operating costs, improved service to customers, improved market intelligence, and even enhanced relationships with partners encouraged Internet adoption by SMEs. We observed that there were many additional factors pushing SMEs to adopt IT, including pressure to conform with government and granting agency requirements, the interests in technology of the nonprofit’s patrons, competition, and cooperation.
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