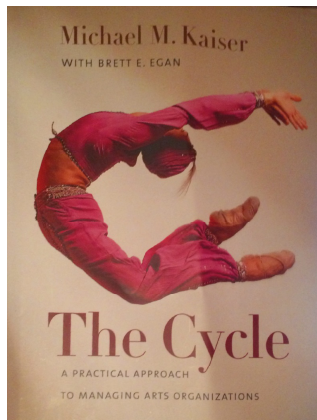


Book Review: *The Cycle: A Practical Approach to Managing Arts Organizations*, by Michael M. Kaiser with Brett E. Egan (UPNE/Brandeis University Press: 2013)



“Every not-for-profit grows to the point that it is uncomfortable. . . . The goal of the sophisticated arts manager is to ensure that the basics are all covered so that exogenous shocks and the desire to accomplish more than is easy are their biggest concerns.”

The next best thing to having Michael Kaiser, “the turnaround king,” in one’s office, may just be having a copy of *The Cycle: A Practical Approach to Managing Arts Organizations* on one’s bookshelf. This third book in a trilogy affords palpable arts-managerial advice that takes on a different life with each read. And yet the practical nuggets so compellingly articulated also convey the importance of the overall strategy of *The Cycle*, which is equally well presented.

Kaiser draws on his successes in bringing new, sustainable life to organizations like the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Yet he asserts that every organization, troubled or otherwise, can benefit from the steps outlined in *The Cycle*. And in straightforward yet inspiring prose he conveys that the steps are often painful but also joy-inspiring; simple but not easy.

In summary, *The Cycle* is a system of consistent self-analysis and planning inextricably linked to an organization’s mission, focused on institutional and programmatic marketing, and contributed to in one form or another by the organizational “family.” Kaiser conveys the significance of keeping the human factor in close view through every step of *The Cycle*.

The “family” to which Kaiser refers encompasses virtually everyone in the organization’s immediate orbit, bringing together external supporters and internal staff and practitioners. The glowing hearth, to extend the metaphor, is the organization’s mission.

Whereas Kaiser advocates transparency in dealing with internal issues, he also warns against any family member criticizing an organization publicly. *The Cycle*, he suggests, can mitigate the drive behind such frustrated outbursts by instilling a sense of clarity and trust and a culture of self-discipline.

Kaiser compellingly describes the gestalt that comes from applying *The Cycle*. Still, some readers might question the use of the term “Family.”

In the 1980s team-building-training frenzy in the museum world, students were advised to avoid the concept of family. The emotional/manipulative associations that come from the word, and the differing definitions of it in society, were thought to interfere with the “team process.”

Kaiser is clear about what he means by family, just as he advocates precision and clarity throughout the book. Each family member understands the relationships between and among the roles and feels like an insider ready to defend the family unit. Given the concern that some

readers may have about the term, however, the book might have included some explanation about why “family” was chosen as a construct over others.

A similar concern that Kaiser addresses head on is the applicability of The Cycle concept in multicultural settings or in off-the-beaten-path arts environments. Kaiser convinces the reader that the core concepts and steps outlined in *The Cycle* are adaptable to environment. Those of us working with, say, another culture presumably can determine cultural considerations and how to work them into the system.

Another major theme of the book is self-discipline. Just as reading some of the passages may lead to exhaustion, acting on many of Kaiser’s steps in The Cycle will be super-exhausting. There is no doubt about it, and, Kaiser asserts, no way around it. In fact, identifying the required level of effort for each “family” member is part of the overall planning suggested in *The Cycle*.

Parts of the book that no doubt will be reread by many are the passages dealing with institutional marketing and programmatic marketing. The distinction between these two efforts, and the critical need for both, are a main theme of the book. Kaiser succeeds in conveying how carefully conceived and executed campaigns are viable for small as well as large organizations.

Of course, programs themselves play a huge role in the process described in *The Cycle*. The book describes a beautifully organic relationship between mission and programs. Kaiser describes the process of self-analyzing programs as well as audiences using tools of everyday life, from the web to the corner coffee shop.

Like many other parts of the book, such passages may cause the reader to think momentarily that nothing new is being discussed. But that in fact speaks to the thoughtfully detailed breakdowns of concepts that work in synergy with an overall synergistic system.

In summary, *The Cycle* reads like a verbal description of a dance. The book’s genius is in providing access to virtually every movement of the dance as well as to its external affect. The book might even be used to persuade an arts skeptic of the arts’ embedded and necessary role in society.

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