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**Author:** Dorota Fox, Aneta Głowacka

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**Dorota Fox** <https://orcid.org/000-0002-6766-4165>

**University of Silesia in Katowice, Institute of Culture Studies**

e-mail: [dorota.fox@us.edu.pl](mailto:dorota.fox@us.edu.pl)

**Aneta Głowacka** <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4622-6315>

**University of Silesia in Katowice, Institute of Culture Studies**

e-mail: [aneta.glowacka@us.edu.pl](mailto:aneta.glowacka@us.edu.pl)

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### **Director leaves, team stays<sup>1</sup>**

The article discusses results of the research carried out in theatres in Silesian in Poland among the technical and administrative staff. The research concerned a crisis situation of change of the director, often being a turning point in the life of each theatre. We examined the employees' attitudes, emotions, and opinions associated with the change. We selected teams which held a lower position in the theatre hierarchy than the artistic team. It turns out that, contrary to a popular opinion, the change in the directorial seat has a certain impact on those employees, who are extremely aware of the processes taking place in the organization. The empowerment of theatre employees postulated in the discussions about culture coincides with the results of our research. It creates an opportunity for the traditionally-managed theatres to transform themselves into so-called learning organizations.

**Keywords:** contemporary Polish theatre, theatre director, theatre management, democratisation of institutions, learning organization

### **Instead of the introduction**

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<sup>1</sup> The text originally appeared in „Zarządzanie w Kulturze” 2020, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 91-106, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego / Jagiellonian University Press, [online] <https://www.ejournals.eu/Zarzadzanie-w-Kulturze/2020/21-2-2020/art/16618/>.

The operation of public theatres in Poland is regulated by *the Act of 25th October 1991 on the organization and administration of cultural activities*, which has been amended a number of times in the subsequent years. According to its provisions, a cultural institution is headed by the director who is in charge of managing it and represents it outside [*the Act on the organization and administration of cultural activities, Art. 17*]. Therefore, all power and responsibility are concentrated in his hands. The Act, despite being constantly amended, still does not provide for other, more modern models of running institutions, adapted to modern times. Article 15a of the Act mentions entrusting management of an institution to a natural or legal person, which means that it may also be conducted by an association or a foundation. This opens the door to the process of democratization of culture. Nevertheless, these solutions are rarely used in practice, and the scope of authority and responsibility of the administrator who will perform management activities of the board (on his/her own behalf or on behalf of a legal person) seems to be similar to the position and responsibility of the theatre director [*the Act of 25th October 1991 on the organization and administration of cultural activities, art. 15a*].

The topic of managing cultural institutions occasionally appears in Poland during discussions about culture, both when it comes to models of its organization and its role, as well as its social responsibility. The discussions cover not only the ways of involving viewers in projects implemented in cultural institutions and making them efficient allies in defending the autonomy of institutions destroyed by neoliberal market mechanisms and more and more eagerly appropriated by politicians responsible for the organization of public culture in Poland. This has been especially noticeable for the last five years, when the so-called cultural policy of the state has been mainly about imposing the ruling party's ideology and subordinating culture to political activities. Earlier, it was also difficult to talk about any state policy which would be favorable to culture and its participants. In the literature dealing with this subject matter, the period of the last thirty years (when after the fall of communism a number of cultural policy models were discussed and solutions were sought) has been referred to as "a process of chaotic, inconsistent actions taken to influence the sphere of culture. As a consequence, no proper homogeneous project was developed which could be characterized by freedom and autonomy of culture from the world of politics"[Przystek 2017: 9]. Therefore, in the debates about culture in Poland there appears the need for starting processes of democratization of institutions, which, in turn, could effectively protect them against political

appropriation<sup>2</sup>. In practice, it means emancipation of those employed in artistic institutions, including theatres, which is expressed by the management's and employees' right to mutual criticism, co-participation of employees in creating theatre programmes and their participation in a decision-making process concerning methods of working or mechanisms of taking decisions [Adamiecka-Sitek 2016]. Strength of an institution lies in conscious and collective actions taken by its employees.

Talks about how cultural institutions should function in Poland have been continued since the attempts were made to reform the system of organizing and financing culture after the previous regime. However, it has been only several years since the issues of emancipation and self-organization of cultural workers, the need to empower them and to develop new management practices were raised, challenging cultural institutions to be "a laboratory of new forms of social order, in which the quality of common space and interpersonal relations will be an objective as important as the quality of projects implemented here", while "social responsibility of institutions should be their most important *project*" [Adamiecka-Sitek 2016]. The first discussions about self-awareness of employees of cultural institutions took place at the civil Culture Congress in 2016. The issues of socialization and democratization of such institutions continued to be discussed during the next editions of the Future of Culture Forum organized at Zygmunt Hübner's Powszechny Theatre in Warsaw (three editions have been held since 2017). These activities became an impulse for Agata Adamiecka-Sitek, Marta Keil and Igor Stokfiszewski to realize *Agreement*, a research project at Powszechny Theatre in Warsaw. As the originators declared, its aim was "cooperative development of the theatre's identity on the basis of the assumptions of a democratic institution of culture" [Adamiecka-Sitek et al. 2019: 2]. From September 2018 to September 2019, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with theatre employees, which were to provide the management with knowledge about the problems of employees, their perception of the institution and its mission. As it turned out, the main message that emerged from the talks concerned working conditions. Employees complained of fatigue and overwork, excessive tasks and stress which resulted from the change of the theatre's repertoire programme to a repertoire/project programme, which was not followed by the modification of the theatre's internal employment structure. Paweł Sztarbowski, the theatre's artistic director, also talked about it, commenting on the results of the research, where he said: "It turned out that persons used to working in the

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<sup>2</sup> This relatively new topic in Poland is widely discussed in the English-language literature, which has been dealing with issues related to the processes of democratization of culture and cultural democracy for many years.

classic repertoire model cannot fully cope with project thinking, they do not seem to understand these changes" [Sztarbowski 2019: 45–46], which was an issue previously not taken into account by theatre directors.

For the management, the results of the research turned out to be valuable, while for the employees - it seems - the process to which they were subjected was not without significance. It contributed to the growth of their self-awareness. As a result of grassroots initiative in the autumn of 2019 the Artistic and Program Council of Zygmunt Hübner's Powszechny Theatre in Warsaw, consisting of 20 theatre employees, artists cooperating with the theatre and one representative of the viewers. The council, which is the theatre's statutory body, citing democratic values, formulated the regulations of its operation [Artistic and Programme Council of Powszechny Theatre ... 2019: 7-9], as well as *Principles of cooperation of authors and creators with Zygmunt Hübner's Powszechny Theatre in Warsaw* [2019]. The theatre's directors also spoke of the need to change the perspective from which one perceives the institution and thinks about its functioning. While running a theater which is socially and politically engaged, they also noticed the necessity to take a critical look at the place where they exercise power. Sztarbowski, citing Piotr Piotrowski's findings on a critical cultural institution which, apart from reacting to the reality and entering the public space, also performs an act of self-criticism [Piotrowski 2011], summarized the experiences related to the implementation of the Agreement in the following way:

in the theater, everything has always been subordinated to an artistic work, which seems suspicious to me, because a work is an undefined matter, and this creates a space for abuse when we justify various activities with its protection. That is why, allowing various interests and various expectations to speak up seems to me a huge breakthrough [Sztarbowski 2019: 46].

The experiment carried out at Powszechny Theatre has been the only initiative of that kind so far which aims at democratizing this institution and giving the floor to its employees. The project has not been long in operation, so its results are yet to come. It is also worth noting that over the last few years some theatres have made an attempt to include various bodies in their institution-building process. They usually take the form of programme councils which bring together those who play significant roles in the culture of a given region, i.e. artists, intellectuals, teatrologists, journalists or directors of other theatres, as well as representatives of local authorities and sometimes even their staff members. These programme councils are usually appointed by the organizers of cultural institutions with the

participation of their management, but their competences are relatively limited. They approve of the directors' reports for individual periods of their activity, give opinions on projects and offer advice, but they have no real impact on the shape of an institution itself and the processes which take place there. It also happens that the Artistic Council which has been formed with the actors of a given theatre collaborates with the director over decisions concerning a theatre's artistic profile. This occurred in Narodowy Stary Theatre in Cracow, but it is a one-off situation.

On the one hand, the way in which theatres function now results from the legal framework created by *the Act on the organization and administration of cultural activities*, and on the other hand, from a number of common beliefs. According to one of them, for example, neither theatre employees nor its audience have sufficient competences to influence decisions regarding its mission, profile, repertoire or the way it should operate. This may be true in some cases, although underestimating the way theatre's employees perceive their workplace and what they think about it as an institution is puzzling. Taking into consideration these widespread beliefs, but also the need to involve employees in the institution-building process, which has been increasingly verbalized during a general discussion about culture, we decided to research a group of artistic, administrative and technical employees of theatres in Silesian voivodeship in a special moment of the change of their directors.

Changing the director of an institution is always a kind of a borderline situation. Although it may be associated with the fulfillment of various expectations and hopes, for example, it creates an opportunity to change the management style in a theatre, it also causes a degree of discomfort. Our aim was to investigate what expectations and emotions accompany such changes and whether they serve to increase employees' awareness of the institution they work for. Do they have their own vision of how to run it, set goals and how to achieve them, and finally, how do they perceive the role of the director and what are their expectations to the management? In the literature which reflects upon institutions and creative collectives, being their complete opposite, there appears a crucial issue of human constellations and people's expectations, emotions and own dispositions, whose shape depends on the adopted practice [see: Guderian-Czaplińska, Godlewski ed. 2018]. Admittedly, institutions are not commonly associated with relationships. They are usually thought of in legal and financial terms, such as permanent subsidies, appropriate infrastructure, ensuring financial and social security for their employees. They are also seen through the prism of hierarchy, narrow specialization, the need to accept obligations imposed by the superiors, a waste of human energy and unjust distribution of funds, both within an

institution itself and in the entire system of public culture. When talking about institutions, then, it is not only their organizational status that is of import here, but also the purpose and manner in which their individual departments operate. Theatrical institutions have their strictly defined goals included in their organizational charts. We take an interest in the operation and management of such institutions seen through the eyes of their employees, as if from the inside.

When starting our surveys and in-depth interviews, we wished to hear the voice of technical and administrative employees who are not members of the artistic staff and due to the hierarchical structure of the institution which is founded on tradition, and who are not treated as partners, sometimes not even as subjects. While the artistic team is taken into account in a situation of a change: they are interviewed, their opinions are considered, and they frequently become provocateurs of such changes, technical and administrative workers are cast as passive observers, unless they set up trade unions, which is rarely the case in Polish theatres. Anyway, trade unions are a separate topic to be examined. Our diagnoses show that these relationships do not have a long tradition in theatres of various types. It is hard to say that they represent all employees. Even the oldest ones, such as Polish Actors' Association or the Solidarity movement's trade unions, are often not recognized by them. Besides, employees have a lot of distrust towards them. In their opinion, trade unions are established by people who do that in their own interest, because, it is common knowledge that the president of the union cannot be dismissed.

Interviews with theatre employees show that founders and main activists of the unions who have an influence on the choice of the theatre director, usually do not represent employees, but are guided by their own particular interest, sometimes even imposing or supporting a candidate who is not approved by the staff<sup>3</sup>. One of our interlocutors clearly stated that trade union representatives on the competition committee are "weak links", willing to vote for a candidate who will guarantee them inviolability in the next term of office and will maintain their influence. Another reason why employees do not get involved in the processes which take place in the institution, which usually means passive observation, is the lack of faith in their own and trade-unions' agency, resulting from the previous culture of the organization (authoritarian management of the institution) and from their position in the hierarchy (technical or administrative staff members are perceived as menial towards artists).

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<sup>3</sup> This was the case with the Polish Theatre in Wrocław, where Leszek Nowak, chairman of the NZZZ Solidarity Committee, supported Cezary Morawski, even though his way of running the theatre disqualified him from this function.

We are aware that various theatres have developed different management models over the years, which were conditioned by the history of these theatres and the personalities of their subsequent directors. Therefore, we wish to avoid generalizations, although in our surveys and interviews with various people, there were many similar diagnoses and reflections concerning both directors and the institution. For the purposes of this article, we conducted quantitative and qualitative research in theatres in the Silesian voivodeship, that is 25 questionnaires which we supplemented with 10 in-depth interviews. The respondents filled in the forms on their own, which they provided in paper or electronic version. We conducted our interviews during face-to-face meetings or by phone, if it was not possible to reach a particular interviewee in person. We realize that this is the material for more extensive research, and we consider our experience as a kind of pilot study. For our interviewees, we chose people with long professional experience, i.e. with experience of working with various directors and situations of a change, as well as young persons and those with little experience of working in a theatre, for whom the change in the position of a theatre director was the first such experience in life. We examined a group of women and men aged 29–65. It should also be added that our interlocutors agreed to do the research provided that both their personal details and their affiliation to a given theatre would remain anonymous. A number of persons, although we guaranteed anonymity, did not agree to be interviewed. This may indicate a fear of suffering consequences of such interviews or an accusation of lack of loyalty, which says a lot about the culture of their organization.

In our research, we were interested in capturing and then describing the behavior and emotions of employees in the event of a change of the director, which led us to a number of conclusions and indications:

1. there are some deficiencies in the competition procedures which would test directors' social competences;
2. newly elected directors rarely show interest in their administrative and technical team shortly after taking up their functions;
3. a change in a theatre's situation usually makes its employees reflect on their work and their role in a given institution;
4. it would be worth considering the implementation of practices for empowering the group of employees subject to our research, in addition to the procedures regulated by *the Act on the organization of trade unions*.



## **Prologue - An announcement of a change**

The region of Silesia has a long tradition of managing theatres: Dariusz Miłkowski was the director of Teatr Rozrywki for 34 years, Jan Klemens held his position in Teatr Zagłębia in Sosnowiec for 21 years, Jerzy Makselon has been the director of Teatr Nowy in Zabrze for 12 years. Due to such a long history of management, situations of a crisis were relatively rare in these institutions. The need for a change of the director was not articulated by employees, but only by the authorities with whom the director had a tense relationship. Most of employees ended their work in a theatre due to the end of their term of office or due to retirement. This type of stability also works well with the needs of employees who do not expect any change. Especially members of staff with long work experience who have developed a professional position for themselves feel comfortable in recognizable, stable structures. The vast majority of the respondents assessed their current director positively, which can be explained by the reason for the change (end of term of office, retirement). This means, however, that the director's successor had to come to grips with the legend of the predecessor and take into account the principles and customs he/she introduced. As one of the examples provided by the respondents shows, a sudden change of rules without prior recognition of its determinants triggers conflict, e.g. change of working hours which were determined earlier due to the possibility for communication.

The answers to the question about the opinion about the previous director also revealed the image of a perfect theatre director: employees appreciated the fact that the director had a clear vision of their theatre, charisma, strategic thinking and consistent implementation of the proposed programme. Interpersonal and communication skills were also of value, such as efficient management of employees whom he had managed to get to know during a longer or shorter term of office, propriety and the so-called human approach to employees. Communicativeness was emphasized ("there was less going on, but the organization of work was transparent"). Experience and knowledge counted. Attention was paid to intelligence, erudition and personality. The term 'good specialist' was used many times.

## **Act I - Announcement of the competition for a new director**

*The Act on the organization and administration of cultural activities* does not specify the dates of announcing and holding a competition for theatre directors. Usually, it takes place

in the last six months of the term of office of the current director, closer to its end, although there were also cases of the competition being resolved in the last month of director's office, i.e. just before the end of the artistic season. Given that it is August, which is a holiday month in theatres, the newly appointed director, in principle, cannot count on handing over duties that would prepare him to take over the institution. The western practice of settling the competition for theatre directors a year and a half or at least one year in advance remains basically in the sphere of postulates.

Our research shows that administrative and technical employees are actively interested in the change that awaits them, although what ignites their emotions is most frequently based on rumors, other people's opinions and stereotypical phrases of candidates circulating in the environment<sup>4</sup>. Only employees of the younger generation broaden their knowledge of people who take part in the competition by using the Internet, learn about their artistic achievements to date, which may result from greater openness to changes. While waiting for the competition to be adjudicated, fear and a sense of uncertainty are predominant feelings, which often distort the evaluation of candidates.

We also asked about the expectations of the employees towards the new director. The most important skills in team management were decision-making and the ability to delegate tasks and select employees, which, when combined, guarantees methodical and effective cooperation. Only in one case the question of finances was discussed, although the interviews revealed that the employees mainly expect two things from the new director: pay rise and job security. The success of being a theatre director within interpersonal competences depends on the personality and so-called soft skills. The respondents expected charisma. They considered the following characteristics important to be found in their director: honesty, empathy and forbearance, loyalty, mindfulness, justice, which, let us add, testify to maturity. They expected the ability to communicate effectively, mastering the art of negotiation and appropriate delegation of tasks which takes into account the scope of duties assigned to an employee, specified in the employment contract, as well as mitigating conflicts and striving to build a team.

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<sup>4</sup> A significant change in the circulation of information in the environment and about the environment took place at the beginning of the 1990s thanks to "Goniec Teatralny", a magazine founded by Maciej Nowak, which gave up-to-date accounts of what was happening in Polish theatrical life, starting from interesting premieres, ending up with the organization of theatres and their policy. This meant, as the editor-in-chief claimed, "writing about inconvenient matters and gossiping" [quoted after: Nyczek 2010]. The fast flow of information mobilized various groups related to the theatre to act, including the employees from the technical and administrative division.

The answers to questions about the competences and expectations of the new director also undermined an unfair popular belief that administrative and technical employees were not interested in the artistic level of their theatre. Let us add that many of them, especially administrative staff, have higher or semi-higher education, they are graduates of different faculties, such as cultural studies, organization of production, sociology or Polish philology, and they started working in a theatre out of passion, accepting low salaries and the necessity to be subordinate to persons with lower competences. Some of the respondents emphasized long work experience of the director, which in their opinion is a guarantee that he knows how to do his job. The vast majority paid attention to the position of the candidate in the artistic circles, which would allow their theatre to establish cooperation with recognized artists.

## **Act II - Election of a new director**

In practice, the election of a new theatre director is processual in its character. The result obtained by a given candidate during the competition is not synonymous with the nomination. Although, generally, the authority, i.e. the organizer (depending on the type of theatre: national - the Minister of Culture and National Heritage, regional - Marshal of the Voivodeship, municipal - Mayor<sup>5</sup>), ultimately assigns this function to a person appointed by the competition committee, it is not so obvious. The Commission is an advisory body and therefore the organizer reserves the right to choose the most suitable candidate. Regardless of the above, the survey raised questions about what influence the respondents had on the appointment of a new director, whether they could meet the candidates to get to know their programmes, and what kind of emotions were involved in such meetings.

In most cases, employees were fully aware that they could not co-decide about the appointment of a new director or had little or no influence, only through the trade unions. On the nine-person jury, they could have a maximum of two representatives, whom they rarely treated as their representatives. Many interviewees found it difficult to answer the question about emotions, due to the inability to name their feelings, which were often revealed during the interview. Fear and anxiety which arose during the announcement of the competition persisted throughout its duration. The secrecy of the commission's work, the lack of regulations regarding the report on its activities, and the long waiting time for the final decision of the organizer slowed down the efficiency of work, created uncertainty in

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<sup>5</sup> The Act divides theatres into state ones and those belonging to local governments.

employees as to their future, even provoked them to consider the possibility of changing a job or a workplace. The confusion of the employees increased when the programme of the candidates was unknown to them, which was often the case due to the lack of regulations within this area and different practices adopted in individual theatres. The majority of theatres held meetings with candidates for directors, although they were organized informally due to the formal requirements of the competition procedure. In some of them there were only meetings with the artists. This confirms the marginalization of the voice of the remaining members of staff at this stage, and indirectly it means strengthening of the hierarchy and divisions among the employees of this institution.

In some theatres, employees had the opportunity to meet candidates if the latter expressed such a desire or need. However, this is not a generally accepted custom. According to the interviews conducted, long-serving candidates refused to participate in such meetings, considering them a form of campaign they would prefer to avoid. Interesting is also the practice of presenting the programme of usually one candidate by the outgoing director, treated in the artistic community as an attempt to "anoint" - appoint his/her successor.

### **Act III - A new director of the institution**

After being nominated, the director tries to maintain stability of the institution after taking it over. At the same time, he undertakes many activities allowing him to proceed with the implementation of the programme presented to the commission for evaluation. Therefore, we asked the following questions in the questionnaires:

- Was there a meeting of employees with the new director, where he presented his plans related to the functioning of the institution?
- How did they rate this presentation?
- Did it make it possible to learn about the institution's mission formulated by the director?
- Was the mission clear to understand?

As the answers showed, most often after taking up the position, meetings between the director and the team took place, but not always with the whole team. Such meetings were often held only with the heads of particular divisions and departments or with the representatives of the socio-economic environment and with external stakeholders. By ignoring his own staff, the director primarily proves to fail to notice the impact of the staff's work on the success of the theatre under his rule. Besides, formal power that the director obtains as a result of the nomination does not mean assuming the role of a leader, which

would guarantee the institution's identity and further development, and the co-authorship of its successes and a high status for the employees. Vagueness of the mission and the programme presented during the meetings, which was not highly evaluated, blocks the chance of recruiting employees for the creative implementation of the director's original vision, which is in fact very much expected. This gives them the opportunity to identify themselves with the institution and to co-implement the mission within their scope. Also, it is the leaven of a new or sustains an already existing and established organizational community, so important in the theatre - an institution in which artistic activities of a certain group of employees are closely linked with undertakings of non-artistic nature, that is marketing and promotional or technical and technological of other teams of employees. And although activities within specific groups of employees do not change substantially, professional acts may gain a slightly different meaning.

We assumed that in these programme speeches it is important to answer the question of what employees can expect from the institution and how they will be included in collective actions, therefore the next question was whether the scope of employees' responsibilities was modified with the change of management and whether this change brought satisfaction or disappointment. As the answers showed, two scenarios are most often implemented after the arrival of the director. According to the first one, some employees are dismissed or their termination of employment is accepted and new employees are entrusted with new duties. According the second one, the staff is kept with the current scope of duties or the requirements are increased while salaries remain the same, this being the most frequent reason for looking for a new job.

After the change of management, the emotions that accompanied the competition subside. They are replaced by curiosity how the new director's work will be assessed and readiness to take on new tasks. This is an important time mainly for the director who, after initial declarations, proceeds to specific actions which are closely followed by the employees in the context of his predecessor's achievements and working style. This time could be viewed as the adaptation and acculturation phase for both the new director and the staff. It is in this phase that the ideas and expectations are initially verified. When asked about their expectations towards the new director, the respondents answered very specifically. As for the organization of work, they agreed that the established division of tasks and proven good practices should not be changed, but only better information flow between departments should be ensured and the work system should be improved by introducing task-based working time. The new director was required to respect the already developed rules and to skillfully

coordinate work of individual departments. Changes in employment and hiring new staff were taken for granted and were expected to be dictated by seeking specialists and professionals. "Proper selection of employees in terms of professionalism", according to the surveys, was to prove that the new director would be able to properly organize the work of the staff. For this purpose, meetings should be organized not only with heads of departments and all theatre studios, but also with their members of staff. This gesture, which can be considered a kind of invitation to cooperation, is of great importance in defining the relationship between the supervisor / director and subordinates / employees. On the one hand, this relationship, founded on mutual respect, would allow employees to identify themselves with the supervisor, and on the other hand, though, it would guarantee realism in assessing their achievements and work, which seems to be one of the most important conditions of an institution based on mutual learning. Peter Senge, American management theorist, creator and promoter of the idea of "learning organizations", says that this concept means:

changing the way of thinking - moving from seeing the parts to seeing the whole, from seeing people as passive puppets to seeing them as active participants in shaping the reality, from acting in the perspective of today to the creation of the future [Senge 1998: 78].

The answer to the question about the assessment of a new director in relation to the proposed work organization and team building skills was conditioned by the intensity of contacts with employees and the employee's decision-making dependence. Employees with many years of experience emphasized the importance of the existing cultural "capital" of the institution, considered it extremely important for a new director not to ignore the "memory of the institution", which, let us add, is a key component of its identity, and at the same time allows employees to identify with the institution. Consequently, the allegations that the director introduced too abrupt and in many cases incomprehensible changes to the rules of operation established by the predecessor were understandable (e.g. introduction of on-call duty, no clearly defined expectations as to the scope of duties, lack of reliable information, "simulated reshuffles", hiring employees without appropriate competences), which caused organizational chaos. While the interviews with the staff undertaken by a new director during which he clearly communicated his expectations towards them were well assessed, such cases, according to the surveys, were rare. Most of the respondents counted on such talks, and only one person decided to initiate them. Also, the answers to the following questions: Did the director define expectations towards the staff? Did he define expectations towards you? How do you evaluate the quality of this communication? showed the director's little interest in building a team composed of all theatre employees, not only the acting staff. The respondents

and interviewees revealed that the main problem was communication which is at best one-sided and takes the form of not so much a conversation but an instruction, at worst, it does not exist at all. Lack of a substantive conversation, failure to listen to the voice of employees, lack of interest in creating conditions for this type of conversation raises employees' fears that their substantive comments will be taken personally or their proposals may be considered as an interference with the director's competences. The new management does not pay attention to an improvement in communication - it often lacks the skills to do so. No time is found for such discussions or they are ignored, as evidenced by the change in arrangements made during conversations with employees. As a consequence, it leads to chaos and frustration of the employee who cannot plan to work in the new conditions. Moreover, keeping employees uncertain and ignorant about their future and not very transparent support from the director provoke thoughts about changing a job. When asked about staying in the theatre or not - the answer of older employees was: I can't leave without crossing out my 20 years of work. Younger employees responded differently: they were considering leaving the theatre because the new management did not meet their expectations of a change. It should be added that the willingness to work in an institution other than a theatre was the most frequently considered.

The main reason for the frustration and instability of the staff is not so much low wages as the lack of proper organization of teamwork, which takes place in the difficult conditions of financial instability of the institution, and above all, the failure to perceive the employees of administrative and technical departments, often treated only as subservient employees, without listening to their vision of theatre. And yet, as the long-standing literary manager of one of the theatres emphasized, many of them simply "love theatre, and not only love themselves in the theatre". Due to their various professional duties, they watch each performance a dozen or even several dozen times, participate in its preparation and operation. When asked about the repertoire proposed by the directors (old and new), they respond very willingly. When assessing the repertoire proposals, they also take into account the expectations of the current viewers. They confront the new programme with the programme of their predecessors, which proves that they have their own vision of the theatre that no one takes into account, as evidenced by the answers to the question about the director's skills of team building. For them, the success of a theatre in which they work is a matter of prestige not only of the institution itself, but also of themselves. The symbolic value of their company still guarantees their high social status, compensates for low wages and becomes a significant justification for full commitment to work performed in the theatre. Therefore, this creative and creative potential should not be underestimated.

## **Epilogue - What next?**

The topic undertaken requires detailed analyses and great caution owing to the complicated mechanism of transmission of the tradition of theatre as a cultural institution, established working methods, styles and management methods, which in the constantly changing sector and the imprecise legal situation of theatres, create many threats and crises, both for the institution itself and its staff. The situation of change outlined in the title ("director leaves, team stays") allowed to focus research on a particular moment for the institution, in which reflection on its past (nostalgic or critical) and its future, mobilised the staff (administrative and technical team) to determine ideas about the nature of this institution, its identity and its own role within it. As many researchers have claimed, recognizing the identity of an institution, which determines its specificity and the set of behaviours adopted by it, is an action on a living organism, it is "reaching to the very heart of an institution / enterprise" [Strategor 2001: 411]. Asking questions regarding the emotions of employees, about ideas and expectations that relate to the psychological processes accompanying the change of director, led - as we were to be convinced during the research - to a range of reactions. It created a fear of self-disclosure and disloyalty to the institution / company. Paradoxically, the research indirectly proved the existence of actual or alleged widespread oppressive techniques throughout institutions in this sector, where work is not only low-paid, but also often uncertain due to the unstable situation of the institution itself, further reinforced by the current period of contracts for the director (five years, although in some cases only three years). In such a short time, it is difficult to recognise the specificity of the team and confront the challenges posed by the external environment.

In the last few decades (actually, from the political change and the decentralization of theatre), various styles of theatre management have developed. In discussions regarding the characteristics of individual directorates, employees indicated several types of leader: the bureaucrat who, while maintaining good contact with authorities / organizing body, showed no interest in the matters and problems of employees, was unreliable and unavailable. Valued higher was the autocrat, a leader who implemented their programme consistently, disregarding costs and requiring the total dedication of the team. On occasion, this type of director, owing largely to their charisma, won over the team, as under their rule the institution gained clarity, and the director's ideological character justified hard-handed management. An extremely different type was the manipulator director, the worst rated narcissistic and



psychopathic leader who introduced chaos to the team, created conflict among employees, significantly reducing their efficiency and creativity. Somewhere within this range, space should be found for two similar types of directors: the negotiating and the prudent<sup>6</sup> types, which - as it turns out - best fit to the nature of the institution, that being repertoire theatre with rich traditions and history, founded on work that requires full commitment and various competences to implement its mission.

The skills of integrating members of all employee groups, appropriate for this type of leader, activating them to take up new challenges, and creating an atmosphere for harmonious development are typical of developing organizations. Their employees are open to new ideas:

people are constantly expanding their possibilities of achieving truly desired results, in which new patterns of bold thinking arise and team aspirations develop freely, and where people constantly learn how to learn together [Senge 1998: 17].

What distinguishes them from traditional authority-based organisations is the mastery achieved at every level, which is largely due to the fact that they are made up of fantastic teams of people who trust each other, strengthen each other's strengths and complement shortcomings, and above all - aim to achieve greater joint goals than individual ones. As Senge writes, in the future organisations that "discover how to use human commitment and learning opportunities at all their levels" will win "[Senge: 1998: 17–19].

For cultural institutions, including theatres, the ability to quickly adapt to change seems particularly important if they are to be organisations that deal with the challenges of the contemporary world (both in the artistic and organisational terms) and respond to the needs of the audience. Institutions that focus on the development of their employees and decide to introduce democratic practices will form an important link in the process of democratising culture. This, in turn, may lead to cultural democracy in the future, about which, for example, Owen Kelly wrote many years ago. The idea of cultural democracy implies cultural pluralism, where one "scale of values" is replaced with the "idea of multiple localised scales of values" created by communities and applied by them to individual and collective actions. "In a complex democracy, common meanings should be created democratically, or at least the

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<sup>6</sup> The typology of theatre directors, which emerged from the questionnaires and interviews with employees, seems to coincide with the identification of the types of leaders proposed by the authors of the work entitled *Company Management. Strategies, structures, decisions, identity* [see Category 2001]. In the diagram developed on the basis of various theoretical propositions, the authors distinguished: a narcissistic, possessive, negotiating and prudent leader [Strategor 2001: 528–533].

means by which they are created should be open to democratic control and accessible to democratic decisions" (Kelly 1985: 6).

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