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Determinants of Managing Philharmonic Institutions in Poland

Abstract

The philharmonic orchestra is a cultural institution with its own artistic ensembles, established for the purpose of organizing and presenting classical music concerts. The aim of a philharmonic orchestra is to generate cultural and culture-creating value. In addition to musical works, it also incurs enormous costs associated with the performative presentation of musical works, which in literature has been called “Baumol's disease”. As a result, the unprofitability of this type of activity means that the criteria of economy and profitability do not apply here, which significantly changes the way philharmonic institutions are managed. The distinctiveness of the functioning of philharmonics is therefore manifested in the specific way in which its objectives (public good, merit good) are formulated, its work is organized and coordinated, its activities are evaluated, and the way in which they are communicated.

What makes public cultural institutions unique is their roots in history, long-standing prestige, high quality, professionalism, and reputation. However, the traditional way of presenting classical music during symphony concerts requires a high level of cultural competence, which are currently disappearing in the society.

The development of civilization is shifting cultural audiences towards consumer and digital cultures, which poses challenges for traditional institutions such as concert halls and theaters. This forces them to redefine their role and adapt their operating logic to new conditions – from moving away from a hierarchical model of communication with the audience to greater openness to co-creation of content and cross-sector cooperation. Cultural management in Poland therefore faces a dilemma: how to balance traditional forms of protection and presentation of cultural heritage with the need for innovation and adaptation to dynamic social and technological changes?

A thorough analysis of the organization of work at the philharmonics (and conclusions drawn from empirical research) leads to the conclusion that some of the solutions that have proven effective in business organizations are not applicable in the cultural sector. There is a need to develop atypical solutions for both human resource management (artistic and non-artistic divisions) and work organization (orchestra, choir). The lack of references to economic results is a major problem in terms of financial motivation of employees and the complexity of artistic event production. Not only are the musician's style of work, the employment structure with low wages and limited promotion opportunities archaic, but so is the rigid organizational structure. The picture is completed by autocratic leadership, one-person management, low employee participation, and a kind of “hierarchical superiority” shown to both audiences and employees.

Empirical research has confirmed the low level of advancement in the application of modern management concepts, also in terms of awareness of their use. The level of advancement and professionalization of management is also low. Admittedly, the notion that management only works in business and that culture does not require management is slowly becoming marginalized. The reason for the low level of application of (not only modern but also classical) management concepts in Polish philharmonics is the person of their director, who more often than not has the skills of an artist rather than a manager. The management and organizational processes that take place in Polish philharmonics are therefore characterized by slow evolution.

It must be admitted that the framework for the functioning of philharmonics – marked by transformational changes – does not meet the current needs of running cultural institutions. Both legal and tax and financial solutions make it difficult to establish cooperation, partnerships, sponsorship agreements, or tax deductions.

The most widespread project management works well in the implementation of increasingly complex and sophisticated artistic events. Polish philharmonics are slowly introducing basic project management methods, although they are not supported by modern technologies or strategic thinking. However, the potential for development here is enormous and stems from the one-off nature of concert presentations, which corresponds to the logic of project management.

The list of management methods and concepts used in Polish philharmonics is very short. What is more, these are not modern concepts, but classic ones, known for a long time and firmly established in business practice. The absence of lean management

and reengineering concepts is surprising, as is the low degree of implementation of the ideas of participatory management, knowledge management, talent management, process management, and change management. The respondents themselves explain the lack of innovation by fear of change (64%) and lack of finances (which is obvious). Thus, the statement that “we can only do what we know how to do” proves to be true. Stagnation dominates over development, which is not an inherent feature of Polish philharmonics—especially in the context of the conservative and anti-revolutionary ideas professed by some of the respondents.

Few factors in the wider and immediate environment of Polish philharmonics motivate and stimulate them to seek efficiency, optimization, and effectiveness. Neither the subsidy system, nor the supervision of the organizer, nor the actions of external stakeholders have led to the development of effective evaluation tools. In the context of a lack of pressure related to results (neither artistic/substantive nor economic), Polish philharmonics are stuck in an imperfect system of political and financial dependencies, which teaches only clientelism and humility. Perhaps this is why the way Polish philharmonics operate remains unchanged, even though the environment is changing dramatically in every possible dimension.