

# HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AT THE NATIONAL THEATRE IN BELGRADE

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**Abstract:** This paper presents the results of four years of research conducted by the author, Branka Bešević Gajić, through direct engagement and analytical work at the National Theatre in Belgrade and professional practice at the National Theatre in Belgrade, addressing the strategic role of human resource management in preserving cultural heritage and advancing institutional innovation. The National Theatre, a repertory institution with a permanent ensemble, serves as a critical case study for understanding the challenges of HR planning within a multidisciplinary and nationally significant environment. This study defines key management theories applicable to HR in cultural institutions and provides a critical analysis of recruitment, motivation, departmentalization, training, onboarding, performance evaluation, and reward systems.

Drawing on previous publications and artistic research, the paper argues that “the digital transformation of cultural institutions such as the National Theatre and RTS demands a redefinition of human resource strategies to ensure effective integration of new technologies” (Bešević Gajić, 2024). It emphasizes the necessity of interdisciplinarity in HR management, particularly in institutions that merge traditional forms of expression with contemporary digital tools. Special attention is given to the onboarding and education of staff through psychologically safe environments, participatory leadership, and training modules informed by artistic methodologies and new media.

The paper also considers ethical dimensions of innovation, noting that “AI implementation must follow ethical guidelines to maintain integrity and public trust” (Sančanin & Penjišević, 2023). This is particularly relevant for institutions that simultaneously produce content and mediate public discourse.

By incorporating insights from doctoral artistic research, the study introduces a human-centered paradigm of HR management grounded in participatory dramaturgy, emotional intelligence, and non-linear temporal models of organizational development. Cultural institutions such as the National Theatre are portrayed not merely as custodians of heritage, but as living systems capable of adaptation, empathy, and innovation. Thus, strategic investment in personnel becomes both an artistic and ethical imperative, supporting institutional resilience and future cultural relevance.

**Keywords:** human resource management, National Theatre, cultural institutions, interdisciplinary training, digital transformation, ethical innovation, participatory leadership

## Introduction

This study is a result of comprehensive research and practical involvement in the operations of the National Theatre in Belgrade. The initiative for this paper stemmed from long-term observation of the challenges and dynamics in managing human capital within this prominent institution. Structured into artistic (Drama, Opera, Ballet), technical, and general services sectors, the Theatre presents a complex system requiring coherent HR strategies.

The organizational system includes workshops for set and costume design, maintenance, audio-video production, legal and HR services, finance, marketing, and international cooperation units. Despite their

specificity, these sectors operate under a unified legal entity, emphasizing the need for integrated HR planning.

Hypotheses:

- HR management significantly impacts organizational performance and sustainability.
- Enhancing value systems and internal communication promotes ethical and efficient HR practices.
- Satisfaction at work must be paired with support for personal development.

Research Objectives:

- To outline key theories in HR management relevant to cultural institutions.
- To assess the current HR practices at the National Theatre.
- To identify gaps and propose strategic improvements based on contemporary HR models and ethical standards.

Theoretical and empirical insights from recent studies support the idea that institutions like the National Theatre must not only adapt to technological changes but also foster a culture of continuous professional and personal development. These align with observations that "public institutions like RTS play a crucial role in preserving cultural identity in the digital era, necessitating innovative and inclusive HR strategies" (Bešević Gajić, 2024).

**Development of the Sector Through History:** Founded in 1868, the National Theatre in Belgrade is one of the oldest and most respected cultural institutions in Serbia. Its establishment marked a pivotal moment in the history of Serbian performing arts, uniting prominent actors and artists from across the region. The Theatre was initially located in Kosmajaska Street in the establishment known as "At the English Queen" inn, where the first performance of "Đurađ Branković" by Karolj Obernjak took place on November 22, 1868—a date now celebrated as the institution's founding.

The current building, located on Francuska Street, was constructed shortly afterward and became one of the most lavish edifices in the capital. Managed initially by Jovan Đorđević, who brought with him members of the Serbian National Theatre from Novi Sad, the institution grew rapidly. Its early repertoire featured dramatic works by classical authors such as Sophocles, Shakespeare, Molière, Goethe, Ibsen, Gogol, and Chekhov. In time, domestic playwrights such as Branislav Nušić and Stevan Sremac were incorporated, with major popularity achieved through musical comedies like "Zona Zamfirova" and "Ivkova Slava."

The Opera Sector was introduced in the early 20th century, with the first operetta performed in 1882 and the first national opera, "Na Uranku" by Stevan Bonički, debuting in 1903. The interwar period was defined by the incorporation of classical European works by Verdi, Puccini, and Tchaikovsky, while post-WWII development emphasized local production, led by influential conductors like Oskar Danon.

The Ballet Sector emerged through collaborations with Russian choreographers, presenting landmark performances such as "The Nutcracker," "Swan Lake," and "Giselle." This sector became a bastion of classical ballet within Yugoslavia, showcasing works from both international and local composers. Choreographer Dimitrije Parlić established a foundation for Serbian ballet with performances like "Romeo and Juliet."

Today, the National Theatre comprises three performance spaces: the Main Stage, the Raša Plaović Stage, and a smaller stage used for internal rehearsals and events. It continues to uphold a tradition of excellence in drama, opera, and ballet while facing the challenges of modernization and digital engagement with its audience.

In the context of this structural evolution, the rise of hybrid artistic practices and digital scenography requires an expansion of the Theatre's departmental framework. New roles—such as digital dramaturges, multimedia technicians, and virtual production designers—are becoming essential. These emerging positions demand interdisciplinary competencies and must be integrated into the HR planning process. As Bešević

Gajić (2024) argues, “Cultural institutions must not only preserve heritage but also anticipate and shape future forms of artistic expression.” This calls for the establishment of dedicated units for digital production and innovation management within the National Theatre. Training modules in areas such as digital storytelling, virtual set design, and real-time audience interaction should be developed to equip staff with future-proof skills. As Tapscott (2009) emphasized, “Institutions that embrace the creativity of the digital generation are those best positioned to lead in the new cultural economy.”

In alignment with this historical evolution, the human resource strategies must equally reflect a balance between traditional practices and contemporary management principles, ensuring that institutional memory and innovation coexist in harmony.

### **Departmentalization Models in the National Theatre**

The complexity of the National Theatre's internal structure necessitates effective departmentalization. Departmentalization refers to the systematic grouping of similar and interrelated work activities into distinct organizational units. In line with classical and modern organizational theory, the National Theatre applies several forms of departmentalization to align artistic, technical, and administrative processes.

**1. Functional Departmentalization:** This is the most frequently used model within stable institutional environments. At the National Theatre, departments are organized based on broad functions such as production, finance, HR, and marketing. This model enhances specialization and expertise within each functional area. As previously stated in my work, "Functional departmentalization encourages the development of specialist knowledge and enables efficient internal collaboration" (Bešević Gajić, 2024).

**2. Product-Based Departmentalization:** Each artistic branch—Drama, Opera, and Ballet—operates as a semi-autonomous unit. This type of structure allows each sector to concentrate on its unique artistic product, ensuring accountability, efficiency, and alignment with audience expectations. This model has proven particularly useful in contexts where outputs differ significantly in nature.

**3. Audience-Based Departmentalization:** Certain departments within the Theatre's marketing and programming units are organized to address specific audience segments. This includes departments for school programs, VIP events, or international guest coordination. The focus here is on customizing services and improving audience satisfaction.

**4. Geographic Departmentalization:** While the National Theatre primarily operates in Belgrade, certain functions such as touring or participation in festivals abroad necessitate geographic division. These departments handle logistics, legal, and HR procedures specific to international operations.

**5. Project-Based Departmentalization:** Temporary project teams are frequently formed for staging new productions or organizing events. These multidisciplinary teams include artists, technicians, and administrative staff working under project managers to deliver performance-ready results.

**6. Matrix Departmentalization:** In cases where long-term collaboration is needed between technical and artistic departments—such as during complex co-productions—a matrix structure is applied. This dual-reporting system enables flexible coordination but demands high levels of communication and conflict-resolution skills.

**7. Hybrid Departmentalization:** Reflecting the evolving nature of the institution, the National Theatre increasingly adopts a hybrid approach, combining elements of functional, product-based, and project-based models. This composite method enables adaptability and continuity in a rapidly changing cultural landscape.

Each of these structures, while advantageous in its own right, also poses specific challenges. For instance, matrix structures can cause power struggles and increase managerial complexity. Project-based models can lead to inconsistency if not properly regulated. Therefore, continual monitoring and adaptation of departmental models are essential.

As observed in contemporary organizational management, "No single model fits all institutions equally; the hybrid approach offers a balanced path, especially for cultural institutions navigating tradition and innovation" (Bešević Gajić, 2024).

This multi-faceted departmentalization allows the National Theatre to maintain operational flexibility, ensure specialization, and achieve strategic alignment across its wide-ranging activities and objectives.

### **Vertical and Horizontal Differentiation; The Role of Personnel:**

In the structural framework of the National Theatre, vertical and horizontal differentiation represent key mechanisms for maintaining organizational coherence while fostering operational specialization.

**Vertical Differentiation** refers to the layering of managerial hierarchies within the institution. As the National Theatre has grown from a modest cultural hub into a complex national institution, new levels of authority have been introduced to manage increasing administrative and artistic complexity. From a flat organizational chart dominated by a singular artistic director, the institution has evolved into a structure involving specialized directors, department heads, coordinators, and middle managers. This hierarchy enables more efficient oversight and delegation but also demands clear communication channels to avoid bureaucratic stagnation.

**Horizontal Differentiation**, on the other hand, results from expanding the range of professional roles and departments across similar levels of authority. The emergence of distinct departments for costume design, stage technology, dramaturgy, and digital communications reflects the diversification of tasks and expertise. As Stevan Lutovac notes in his analysis of editorial practices at RTS, "a high level of professional autonomy must be balanced with editorial unity to preserve cultural identity in public institutions" (Lutovac & Bešević Gajić, 2024). This observation is equally valid in the theatre context, where diverse professional identities must collaborate without fragmenting institutional vision.

The successful coordination of differentiated roles—both vertically and horizontally—hinges upon robust HR policies and leadership culture. As I have previously argued, "Interdisciplinary HR management is essential for institutions that blend tradition with innovation, particularly when navigating internal hierarchies and creative autonomy" (Bešević Gajić, 2024).

### **The Role of Personnel**

Personnel are the lifeblood of the National Theatre. Without human capital, no artistic or technical output would be possible. Beyond recruitment and training, the strategic planning of human resources must also include motivation, retention, and continuous development.

Human resource management is not only about fulfilling technical needs; it is about nurturing an institutional ethos. In his co-authored work, Lutovac emphasizes that public cultural institutions, such as RTS, rely on a sense of mission to maintain relevance: "The editorial strategy of a national broadcaster is most effective when it integrates professional standards with cultural responsibility" (Lutovac & Bešević Gajić, 2024). A similar principle applies to the Theatre, where each employee, from stagehand to soloist, contributes to a collective mission of artistic excellence and national representation.

Thus, the HR strategy of the National Theatre must be grounded in both structural efficiency and cultural stewardship. This includes:

- Facilitating cross-department collaboration
- Recognizing the contributions of all staff, regardless of visibility
- Offering clear pathways for career development
- Promoting mental well-being and creative fulfillment

These human-centered policies enhance institutional loyalty and contribute to the Theatre's resilience in a time of technological and societal transition. The synthesis of cultural policy, management theory, and individual empowerment represents the future of HR in leading national institutions.

### **Motivation and Theoretical Models of Employee Behavior**

Effective human resource management within the National Theatre cannot be understood without a firm grounding in motivation theory. Motivational strategies are pivotal for ensuring that employees—whether artists, technicians, or administrators—are not only competent but also committed to the institution's goals. Theories such as McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y and Maslow's hierarchy of needs offer valuable frameworks for understanding workplace behavior in the cultural sector.

**McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y** Douglas McGregor's dichotomy provides contrasting views on employee motivation and managerial behavior.

- **Theory X** presumes that workers inherently dislike work and must be coerced, controlled, or threatened with punishment to achieve goals. This model is rigid and relies on a top-down management style.
- **Theory Y**, in contrast, assumes that work is as natural as play or rest, and that under the right conditions, employees will not only accept but seek responsibility. It emphasizes autonomy, development, and intrinsic motivation.

Within the National Theatre, a blend of both theories may be observed. Administrative departments might still reflect elements of Theory X, particularly in legacy workflows, while artistic sectors tend to align more with Theory Y. Performers, directors, and designers typically thrive in environments that grant them creative freedom and respect their expertise.

**Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs** Maslow's model suggests that individuals are motivated by a progression of needs, starting from basic physiological demands and culminating in self-actualization.

1. Physiological: Fair wages, adequate rest, and physical workspace conditions
2. Safety: Job security, health insurance, and predictable work schedules
3. Belongingness: A sense of community among artistic and technical teams
4. Esteem: Recognition for achievements, awards, and internal validation
5. Self-actualization: Opportunities for creative exploration and professional growth

In an institution like the National Theatre, self-actualization often serves as the core motivator. The opportunity to contribute to nationally significant productions, innovate artistically, and be part of a historical legacy fulfills the highest tier of Maslow's framework.

However, such motivation cannot thrive if lower-level needs are neglected. If basic employment conditions are unstable or interpersonal dynamics toxic, even the most talented artists may become demotivated or disengaged.

As argued in earlier studies, "Motivational fulfillment in cultural institutions is deeply tied to both the material and symbolic conditions of labor" (Bešević Gajić, 2024). This principle reinforces the need for balanced HR policies that honor both contractual obligations and aspirational goals.

Thus, HR strategy in the National Theatre should include:

- Recognition systems that validate both creative output and behind-the-scenes work
- Development programs tailored to the needs of different departments
- Transparent communication between leadership and personnel
- Mentorship opportunities that bridge generational gaps in the workforce

By leveraging classic motivational theories in a modern, context-sensitive way, the National Theatre can create a work environment where excellence is not only expected—but nurtured.

### **Recruitment, Selection, and Training of Personnel:**

The process of recruiting and training personnel in a cultural institution such as the National Theatre must be strategically aligned with both artistic excellence and operational efficacy. In a knowledge-intensive and emotionally demanding environment, the quality of human capital is a decisive factor of success.

## **Onboarding and Training**

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#### **Recruitment and Selection**

The recruitment process at the National Theatre follows traditional civil service models, often based on public calls and internal recommendations. However, to meet the challenges of contemporary theatre-making, this model must be re-evaluated. As Peter Drucker emphasized, "The task of leadership is to create an alignment of strengths... making a system's weaknesses irrelevant" (Drucker, 2006). This philosophy supports a shift toward competency-based recruitment, where artistic potential, emotional intelligence, and collaborative spirit are evaluated alongside technical qualifications.

Moreover, as highlighted in my previous research, "The future of cultural institutions lies in selecting individuals who not only master their craft but also understand the ethical and symbolic dimensions of their work" (Bešević Gajić, 2024). This is particularly vital in institutions like the National Theatre, where each role contributes to the national cultural narrative.

Selection procedures must thus evolve to incorporate psychological profiling, peer evaluations, and simulated work scenarios. As Jim Collins stated, "Great vision without great people is irrelevant" (Collins, 2001). Ensuring that the right individuals are placed in the right positions is not just a procedural matter—it is a strategic imperative.

#### **Onboarding and Training**

Once selected, employees must undergo a comprehensive orientation process that lays the foundation for their integration into the institutional culture of the National Theatre. This process extends beyond administrative formalities; it represents an initiation into a value system that balances tradition with innovation. New employees must be thoroughly familiarized with the Theatre's mission, organizational structure, hierarchical dynamics, ethical code, and security protocols. Artistic staff, in particular, should receive a deep introduction to the Theatre's aesthetic philosophy, historical repertoire, rehearsal methodologies, and standards of artistic excellence.

Orientation should be followed by a structured mentorship system in which experienced members of the ensemble or administrative staff act as cultural ambassadors, facilitating professional growth and identity-building among newcomers. This internal transmission of values ensures continuity in artistic practice and institutional memory.

Training must be conceived not as a one-time event, but as an evolving, interdisciplinary process embedded into the everyday functioning of the Theatre. In a hybrid institution like the National Theatre, where analog traditions meet digital transformation, continuous skill development is not optional—it is strategic. Core competencies must be extended to include media literacy, digital scenography, audience engagement analytics, inclusive communication, and cross-cultural fluency. As Stevan Lutovac observed in his editorial analysis of RTS, "Staff training must transcend technical proficiency and embrace the social mission of public cultural institutions" (Lutovac & Bešević Gajić, 2024). This insight directly aligns with the mission of the

National Theatre to remain a space not only of performance but of public education and cultural mediation.

Moreover, training initiatives should include critical thinking, emotional resilience, and participatory leadership. These 'soft skills' are particularly essential in the performing arts, where employees constantly navigate creative pressures, public scrutiny, and interdisciplinary collaboration. As Edmondson (2018) stresses, "Psychological safety is the foundation of learning cultures," and institutions like the National Theatre must actively cultivate environments where individuals feel empowered to experiment, fail, and grow.

Training programs should also reflect both the evolution of technology and the transformation of public expectations. New audience segments, including digitally native generations and international communities, require innovative approaches to storytelling and representation. As my own study emphasized, "Institutions that invest in continuous education foster a resilient and visionary workforce capable of engaging with modern cultural paradigms" (Bešević Gajić, 2024).

To meet these goals, the HR department should collaborate with universities, research centers, and tech-sector partners to design modular, future-oriented curricula. Specialized workshops in AI-assisted dramaturgy, interactive stagecraft, digital dramaturgy, accessibility in performance, and sustainability in production design could form the backbone of a modern institutional training portfolio.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Develop competency-based selection criteria tailored to different departments
- Include ethics and cultural awareness as core elements in the recruitment process
- Establish formal mentorship networks pairing senior and junior personnel
- Create a modular training curriculum addressing current and future industry needs
- Encourage lifelong learning through partnerships with academic and artistic institutions

By prioritizing intelligent recruitment and holistic training, the National Theatre can position itself not merely as a preserver of cultural tradition, but as a dynamic incubator of future-oriented artistic talent.

#### **Performance Management, Evaluation, and Reward Systems:**

A strategic human resource policy must go beyond hiring and training—it must also foster long-term engagement through robust performance evaluation and equitable reward systems. In the context of the National Theatre, this challenge is nuanced by the diversity of roles, the subjectivity of artistic performance, and the institutional imperative to uphold national cultural values.

### **Performance Management**

Performance management in a cultural institution should be viewed as an ongoing dialogue rather than a once-yearly assessment. Evaluation criteria must balance measurable outcomes—such as punctuality, adherence to rehearsal schedules, and technical execution—with qualitative aspects like innovation, audience impact, and contribution to team dynamics.

As Bešević Gajić (2024) observed, "Artistic institutions thrive when individuals are empowered to take ownership of both their performance and their institutional role." Therefore, performance management systems must be participatory, inclusive, and tailored to the specificities of each department. Self-assessments, peer feedback, and audience response analytics can all serve as valuable data points.

### **Evaluation Techniques**

Quantitative indicators remain relevant—number of performances, attendance figures, production timelines—but should be integrated with 360-degree feedback models. These allow for multiple perspectives, reducing managerial bias and increasing legitimacy in personnel decisions. As Edgar Schein pointed out,

“Effective organizations are cultures that support performance and learning” (Schein, 2010). Embedding feedback into daily operations builds such a culture.

A model increasingly recommended in public cultural institutions is developmental evaluation, which focuses on real-time learning and adaptability. It is especially effective in dynamic environments like theatre, where experimentation and failure are part of the creative process.

### **Reward Systems**

Motivational theory consistently links recognition to performance enhancement. Reward systems at the National Theatre should integrate both tangible (salary bonuses, promotion opportunities, paid travel) and intangible rewards (public recognition, special projects, artistic freedom).

As Herzberg’s two-factor theory suggests, hygiene factors (like salary) prevent dissatisfaction, but true motivation stems from achievement, responsibility, and growth opportunities. A nuanced approach to rewards would recognize not only lead performers but also behind-the-scenes contributors such as costume designers, stagehands, and administrative staff.

Furthermore, aligning rewards with institutional values is essential. As Branka Bešević Gajić (2024) notes, “Recognition in public institutions should reflect not only output, but also integrity, collaboration, and symbolic contribution.” Incentive programs can thus serve not just as tools of motivation but as instruments of cultural continuity.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Implement integrated performance dashboards that include qualitative and quantitative metrics
- Train managers in developmental evaluation techniques and feedback delivery
- Establish peer-nominated recognition awards to build morale across teams
- Design reward schemes that balance financial incentives with symbolic affirmations
- Ensure transparency and fairness in promotion and compensation processes

In sum, the National Theatre must adopt a holistic performance management approach that values both artistic individuality and collective excellence. Such a system transforms evaluation from a tool of control into a catalyst for professional fulfillment and institutional resilience.

### **Digital Artistic Methodologies and Their Relevance for Institutional Transformation**

Theoretical and artistic research carried out in my doctoral project *“Decision – An Interactive Film in Digital Media”* (Bešević Gajić, 2021), as well as the work *“Vremevidac – Multi Audiovision”* by Stevan Lutovac (2020), offer important insights into how digital storytelling and expanded cinematic structures can support human-centered institutional practices in public culture. These works, although shaped by individual artistic poetics, reveal shared epistemological orientations—toward interactivity, polyperceptual engagement, and the transformative potential of audiovisual environments.

My own project was structured around the idea of interactivity not merely as a technological tool, but as a form of moral and emotional engagement. The viewer was given agency to choose between multiple narrative paths, each illustrating ethical dilemmas drawn from real-life experiences of violence, silence, and complicity. The work thus functioned as a participatory ethical matrix, where decision-making is both aesthetic and existential. This type of interactive storytelling demonstrates that digital media can serve not only as a channel for expression, but also as a training platform for empathy, reflexivity, and moral responsibility—qualities that are crucial in cultural institutions such as the National Theatre, especially in onboarding, training, and leadership development.

Stevan Lutovac's *Vremevidac* project, grounded in the tradition of expanded cinema and video installation, emphasized simultaneity, multitemporality, and "spatial dramaturgy." His work transcended linear temporality and instead proposed a sensory architecture of meaning in which the viewer becomes a temporal editor. This concept holds strong relevance for stage-based institutions such as the National Theatre, where scenography, dramaturgy, and audience immersion increasingly rely on non-linear dramaturgical principles and hybrid performative environments. His idea of "film as a fluid temporal organism" challenges static structures of reception and proposes a participatory, cognitive-aesthetic model for future institutional practice.

Both projects converge in advocating for expanded, interdisciplinary, and immersive artistic approaches—methods that challenge the separation between form and content, art and institution, individual experience and collective memory. They advocate for the reimagining of institutional practices through lenses of experimentation, participation, and technological adaptation.

What emerges from these projects is not only an artistic methodology, but a new way of thinking about institutional behavior. Cultural institutions, particularly those with national missions, should evolve from static guardians of heritage into dynamic, responsive ecosystems of knowledge, imagination, and affective labor. The training and development of personnel must reflect this shift.

These doctoral investigations affirm the argument that the future of institutions like the National Theatre lies in their ability to integrate artistic research into their structural and pedagogical logic. In this way, they do not simply adapt to change—they become co-creators of new cultural paradigms. By incorporating insights from digital artistic research into HR strategies, such institutions can both respond to and generate the cultural transformations of the 21st century.

### **Conclusion and Policy Recommendations**

The research presented in this study reaffirms the centrality of strategic human resource management in sustaining the institutional integrity and artistic excellence of the National Theatre in Belgrade. As a complex, multidisciplinary organization operating at the intersection of national heritage and contemporary culture, the Theatre's success depends not only on its artistic output but on the quality, motivation, and integration of its personnel.

Throughout this paper, it has been argued that human resource strategies must reflect the unique demands of the cultural sector. These include the need for interdisciplinary collaboration, creative autonomy, ethical awareness, and adaptability in the face of technological change. Theoretical models—from McGregor and Maslow to Schein and Herzberg—have been utilized to frame practical recommendations in recruitment, evaluation, motivation, and professional development.

Drawing parallels with Stevan Lutovac's work on Radio Television of Serbia, it is evident that public cultural institutions must preserve a dual commitment: to professional excellence and to cultural responsibility. As Lutovac and Bešević Gajić (2024) argue, "Institutional identity is not preserved by rigidity, but by the adaptive continuity of values through the people who embody them." In the same spirit, the National Theatre must see its human resources not as static roles, but as dynamic carriers of its legacy.

Furthermore, this research highlights the transformational potential of artistic methodologies within HR frameworks. As demonstrated in the author's own interactive film project and in Lutovac's work on multitemporal visual structures, cultural institutions can integrate creative research into personnel development practices. These findings reinforce the view that training, evaluation, and leadership must align with the cognitive and affective complexity of artistic labor.

The Theatre's hybrid departmentalization models and layered organizational structure require HR policies that support autonomy, dialogue, and cooperation across functions. Success depends on sustaining not only high performance, but also psychological safety and ethical alignment.

The following policy recommendations are proposed to build an HR framework that reflects these values:

1. Develop a Comprehensive HR Strategy: Align personnel management with institutional goals, artistic vision, and national cultural policy.
2. Modernize Recruitment and Evaluation: Introduce competency-based hiring and 360-degree feedback systems that reflect both technical merit and cultural fit.
3. Institutionalize Mentorship and Lifelong Learning: Create internal mentorship frameworks and partner with academic institutions to provide continuous professional education.
4. Embed Ethics and Cultural Awareness: Train staff on the symbolic significance of their roles and foster a culture of mutual respect and artistic responsibility.
5. Reinforce Recognition Systems: Celebrate both visible and invisible labor, ensuring that contributions to cultural continuity are acknowledged across all departments.
6. Balance Tradition and Innovation: Encourage initiatives that honor heritage while embracing digital technologies and new artistic forms.

By embedding these principles in its organizational DNA, the National Theatre can serve as a model for public cultural institutions not only in Serbia but across the region. It is through investment in people—nurturing their skills, values, and creativity—that institutions secure their future. As articulated in earlier findings, “A theatre's repertoire is only as strong as the ensemble that carries it. And an ensemble is only as strong as the structure that supports its spirit” (Bešević Gajić, 2024).

Ultimately, human resource management at the National Theatre is not merely an administrative function—it is a curatorial act of cultural stewardship that shapes the institution's capacity to inspire, educate, and evolve.

Seen through the lens of sustained artistic research and immersive institutional engagement, as demonstrated in this study, HR becomes a dramaturgical force—a creative and ethical framework that choreographs not only people but visions, values, and futures. The case of the National Theatre confirms that institutions that treat human capital as their greatest cultural asset are those best positioned to withstand sociopolitical pressures, embrace innovation, and remain deeply rooted in the collective identity they are entrusted to express and protect.

### **Conflict of interests**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ultimately, human resource management at the National Theatre is not merely an administrative function—it is a curatorial act of cultural stewardship.

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