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POLAND

Swaying Between Functionalism and Humanistic Management



Beata Jalocho: Assistant Professor at Jagiellonian University, Faculty of Management and Social Communication, Krakow, Poland



Michał Zawadzki: Assistant Professor at Jagiellonian University, Faculty of Management and Social Communication, Krakow, Poland

THE ESSENCE OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership in Poland is associated primarily with the ability to lead an organization to economic success. This state of affairs was undoubtedly affected by the relatively short duration of the capitalist economy that replaced the centrally planned communist economy in 1989. The initial phase of capitalism in Poland, correctly termed by Bolesław Kuc as ‘amateur capitalism’ (Kuc, 2004: 171), promotes the universal tendency to use neo-liberal solutions in conducting organizational activities (including public organizations, such as universities), which impinges on management and leadership consciousness.

The development of leadership in Poland resembles the process of amalgamation, i.e. accumulation, mixing different elements borrowed from various concepts of leadership. Changes in social and political systems over recent decades (and even centuries) have also had a significant impact on leadership and followership development.

Polish leadership is dominated by the trait theory: leaders are expected to have charisma, the personality and capability to be a leader, the ability to motivate others and the determination exhibited in pursuing objectives. The dominant myth of leadership assumes the existence of a ‘hero’, a person who alone is able to solve very complex problems. The transactional approach to leadership also is present and is associated with creating an asymmetrical relationship between the leader and followers as natural and desirable. A leader has to decide, control and take strictly rational social actions – followers should listen, imitate and follow the leader into the fire.

Deviations from these expectations, especially in the private sector, are sometimes defined as pathologies that should be eliminated using management processes. The main objective of a leader is to achieve a high level of follower imitation: conformism is a desired value in many Polish organizations and a necessary condition for the implementation of economic efficiency and is identified as the prime objective of management (Zawadzki, 2014; Sułkowski and Zawadzki, 2015). However, as research shows, shared leadership is becoming more visible in many Polish organizations, usually civic organizations, cooperatives and NGOs. This is a recent and an optimistic and promising phenomenon (Bogacz-Wojtanowska and Jałocha, 2016).

It is common to follow populist leadership texts written by management gurus, particularly from the West (Zawadzki, 2015). Admiration of great individuals especially from the USA is commonplace, with Jack Welch being the most popular heroic leader character. This creates unrealistic expectations in relation to leadership. The discourse on leadership in Poland is shaped also on consultant reasoning, based on highlighting the careers of well-known figures from the business world as examples to follow (see Drzewiecki et al., 2015).

The functionalist approach, exalting conformism and treating organizational culture as a ‘social glue’ (Alvesson, 2013) dominates Polish management sciences as well as university business schools (but, of course, it is not only the Polish case, see Izak et al., 2017;

Magala and Zawadzki, 2017). Management education delays the transfer of knowledge because of outdated theory and populist books and theories being used uncritically. The curricula are still dominated by the outdated Edgar Schein and Geert Hofstede and favourites from the 1980s such as *In Search of Excellence* (Peters and Waterman, 1982) or *The One Minute Manager* (Blanchard and Johnson, 1982) are still having a great time in Poland, and are often objects of uncritical affirmation.

Despite the strong involvement of functionalism, the Polish management discourse includes many examples of alternative, humanistic approaches to leadership. The concept of a trustworthy guardian, by Tadeusz Kotarbiński (1987), the personalistic leadership of Bronisław Bombała (2010), leadership based on democratic coordination, by Czesław Sikorski (2006), the concept of limited leadership, by Andrzej Koźmiński (2013) and *The Three Faces of Leadership: Manager, Artist, Priest* by Hatch et al. (2005) join the international, humanistic leadership trends while maintaining Polish specificity.

THE MAIN INFLUENCES ON LEADERSHIP

By far the dominant paradigm of leadership in Poland is the charismatic leader, which applies in both business and politics. Longing for a leader-saviour has deep cultural, social and historical roots. First, the history of Poland is one of subordination to other powers. Several centuries of partition ended in 1918, and created a mythical image of a leader, the saviour of the nation. An example is Józef Piłsudski, a Polish statesman, soldier and prime minister during the interwar period, whereby followership meant total subordination to the leader's vision. After only 20 years of independence, World War II ended this and was followed by communism imposed by the Soviet Union.

The Soviets attempted to introduce their cults of the mythical Soviet leaders, exemplified by the cult of Stalin. This monstrous cult, 'the inspiration of millions', touched various spheres of social life; from poetry, which celebrated the acts of a 'great leader', to the changes of names of cities in honour of this communist tyrant. The emerging independence movement that resulted in the creation of Solidarity also needed a charismatic leader – Lech Wałęsa, the shipyard worker from Gdansk, who led Poles to regain their independence. Also, the Catholic Church, led by the Polish hero Pope John Paul II, had a huge impact on the resistance movement against communism.

For over 1000 years the Catholic Church has been present in Poland and despite the ongoing social changes, including the secularization of society, it still has a huge impact on the Polish people. The Church played a key role in the collapse of communism in Poland, supporting dissidents and helping internees. At the same time, the Catholic Church, especially its dominant right wing, is one of the least democratic organizations in the world. The followership is based on total submission to visions of the leaders of the Church, with the Pope understood as the personification of St Peter, the apostle of Christ.

This influence is visible in the Polish leadership in several ways, including dependence of political leaders on the Church (the Church's support helps to win elections) or lack of women's leadership.

A centuries-old tradition of strong, individual leadership has become the perfect ground to implant neoliberal concepts of leadership that brought to Poland multinational corporations in the early 90s. The ultraconservative government elected in 2015 supported strongly by the conservative part of the Polish Catholic Church with its emphasis on nationalism has become grist to the mill of further neoliberalization of the public sphere, including the organizational reality (see Harvey, 2007).

Neoliberal leadership trends are visible not only in Polish management theory but also in management practice (Kozłowski, 2013). The myth of success, striving for creating hyperconformity, treating resistance from others as a manifestation of one's own weakness or an organizational dysfunction, the desire for continuous control over others or motivating based on the trivial application of penalties and rewards, create a dramatic image of Polish leaders who cannot go beyond the Taylor–Fordist schemes in their thinking and acting.

Leadership in Poland is well illustrated in the currently popular book *Good Leadership: The Best Practices of Polish Business Leaders* (Drzewiecki et al., 2015), which reflects the concept of 'corporate cultism' described by Peters and Waterman in *In Search of Excellence* (1982) and critiqued by Hugh Willmott (1993). Its crux is the positive valuation of monocultures in organizations based on the homogenization of the beliefs of their members and conformism with reference to the actions of leaders (Zawadzki, 2015). Management processes are to be based on the use of individual autonomy as a means aimed at achieving financial targets: behind the mask of a lofty rhetoric of empowerment and giving the freedom to make decisions, there is the Orwellization and dehumanization of organizational cultures (Gabriel, 2015).

Humanistic and critical trends, however, resist the populist trends, mainly due to the humanistic management environment at the Faculty of Management and Social Communication in Krakow, at the University of Warsaw, at the Gdansk University of Technology and the University of Leon Kozłowski (but not only; see Nierenberg et al., 2015). Also, the rise of civic movements and the development of the 'third sector', derive from a more democratic concept of leadership. Leadership in these organizations is shared, and the values are not based on profit and organizational effectiveness.

LEADERSHIP TODAY AND IN THE FUTURE

In the social discourse, longing for a Messiah leader (Western, 2013) who will lead the nation, who will take care of the people and solve their problems, is still present. However, it is hard to believe that this promise could ever be fulfilled in the face of the

huge changes taking place in the world around us. Undoubtedly, as shown by the recent parliamentary elections in Poland, won by the nationalist party led by a right-wing leader, these dreams are very strong. Polish society at large does not seem to be ready for a new paradigm, a new model of leadership. It was very interesting to observe a clash of two completely different concepts of leadership during the campaign that preceded the last parliamentary elections in Poland, a clash of the nationalist PiS (Law and Justice) party and the left-wing Partia Razem (Together Party). Razem is a young party created by activists coming from left-wing circles, urban activists, academics and activists of the third sector.

Razem, as opposed to PiS, has no single leader; leadership lies in the hands of democratically elected representatives and it aligns its ideals with other European social movements and activist groups. However, the lack of a leader was too much for both the media and the voters who expected a leader for the Razem party and it was not until one of its representatives appeared as a leader in a TV discussion that the party began to gain electoral points. This new party shows that a new generation of civic activists, in touch with wider social change, is active in Poland and will offer a different ideal of leadership to the messianic forces of conservative social actors.

The relatively frequent evocation of the example of Jack Welch as the ideal leader in the Polish discourse is very symptomatic. The attempt to imitate American business solutions in Polish organizations is, in turn, the aftermath of a deeper cultural phenomenon: the Americanization of Polish society. The *American Dream* is still deeply rooted in the Polish mentality. Polish managers seem to be obsessed with this seductive ideal, which is as old as the reforms of Margaret Thatcher and the neoliberal dream of a free market that will provide an effective regulation of all spheres of social life.

It is also worth mentioning that entry to the European Union in 2004 had implications for Polish leadership in several ways. For instance, it creates a dependency on the other, and Polish leaders are overseen by a powerful technocratic system. Although the independence of the Polish public bodies is guaranteed by the constitution, the mass projectivization (execution of hundreds of thousands of projects financed by the EU) means that developmental objectives of public organizations, regions and even the whole country, are subordinated to the overarching goals imposed by an entity that provides financial resources (EU). Hence, the role of public sector leaders is also changing under the influence of these transformations.

What remains largely ignored in Poland, what does not appear in the leadership discourse, is women's leadership. Probably the biggest (though not the only) impact is the right wing of the Catholic Church, which sees a woman as a mother, a wife, a person for whom the family is the primary goal. Women are not encouraged to take leadership roles and in the majority of Polish organizations there is no equality. Nowadays, many Polish women embrace the 'Western' life; they dream of careers, self-fulfilment, however they

still hit the glass ceiling. Research shows that business organizations recruit the same number of men and women, but sadly symmetry in the development of their careers ends at the recruitment stage.

As the Women Leadership in Business Foundation report indicates, in 2014 there were women on the boards of 11.6% of the companies listed on the Polish stock exchange, but they held the function of CEO in only 6.5% of these companies.

Polish leadership today is caught in a socially constructed, political and economic fog. There are the influences of the past, great sufferings, loss of borders, heroic national struggles still very fresh in the minds. There are the post-communist neoliberal reforms, the influences of idealized oversimplified 'Messiah' American leadership models. The influence of the EU and its meta-models of bureaucratic leadership and there is the digital age and globalized forces that make all feel disorientated.

Contemporary organizational leadership leans towards 1980s American models of transformational leadership and conformist cultures, mixed with a heady conservative nationalism that draws on the strength of the Catholic Church and particularly the memory of the Polish Pope, Saint John Paul. As Ukraine falls apart, and the EU struggles with refugees the leaders of Poland are becoming polarized towards conservative nationalist and Messiah forces. In parallel to this, the new emerging humanistic leadership ideas and the political and social movement forces that are experimenting with leaderless and new democratized forms of leadership.

Polish leadership is in flux and there will be ideological, political and economic struggles ahead to define how Polish leadership emerges in the future.

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