MONOGRAFIA

Wyzwania współczesnego zarządzania
Tendencje w zachowaniach organizacyjnych

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■ The systemic approach to leadership conceptualization and its development in an organization

Abstract: For years leadership has represented an invariably popular problem and continuously subject to reinterpretation. The majority of classical leadership theories put emphasis on individual leaders or groups made up of a leader and subordinates, thus ignoring the broader aspect manifested by mutual interdependencies of organizations and leadership. Within the framework of modern leadership theories a more extensive exploration of the complex phenomenon represented by leadership is possible as a result of taking a systemic approach to the concept of leadership. The elaboration discusses, among others, the concepts referring to complex adaptive systems, i.e. Complex Systems Leadership Theory and Complexity Leadership Development. The purpose of the presented study is to discuss the problem of leadership following the systemic approach (as the system) and to analyze the development possibilities of leadership conceptualization in an organization perceived in such way.

Keywords: leadership, leadership development, systemic approach

■ Introduction

Leadership is the problem which, despite numerous studies and the developed theories of leadership, still remains the subject of new explorations resulting in diverse interpretations, theories and models. Leadership appears in

different aspects of social life, including the life of an organization. It is also worth emphasizing that leadership is defined as one of the crucial (key) elements of an organization success[1], which confirms the need for continuous interest in this problem in terms of management theory and practice of management.

In the course of time the ideas underlying the essence of leadership were influenced by changes reflecting numerous transformations, primarily the social ones. Since the end of the 20th century the society has been subject to extremely rapid transformations, reflected in the concepts of leadership[2]. It resulted in questioning or challenging many of the existing assumptions, referring to leadership and the appropriate leadership oriented behavior, since the rapid pace of changes in science, technology and information circulation results in many traditional and conventional paradigms of leadership being quite distant from reality[3].

In case of the majority of leadership theories the relationship between broader aspects (interdependencies) of an organization and leadership has been ignored with the main emphasis being placed on individual leaders or groups made up of a leader and his/her subordinates[4]. The systemic approach to leadership allows for a more extensive analysis, represented by the complex phenomenon of leadership in an organization.

The purpose of the presented study is to discuss the problem of leadership following the systemic approach (approached as a system) and to analyze the development possibilities of leadership conceptualization in an organization perceived in this way. The study was prepared based on the subject literature review.

1. The systemic approach in the theory of organization and management

The systemic approach (systemic thinking) was recognized as the leading paradigm in science of the second half of the 20th century. Social sciences, including organization and management sciences, have also adopted the paradigm in which the wholeness is more than just its parts, therefore the need for investigating particular elements and analyzing their mutual

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[1] R. Mrówka, *Przywództwo w organizacjach. Analiza najlepszych praktyk*, Oficyna a Wolters Kluwer business, Warszawa 2010, s. 11; G. Hernez-Broome, R.L. Hughes, *Leadership development: Past, present, and future*, Human Resource Planning 2004, vol. 27, s. 25.

[2] G.C. Avery, *Przywództwo w organizacji. Paradygmaty i studia przypadków*, PWE, Warszawa 2009, s. 23.

[3] M. Williams, *Mistrzowskie przywództwo*, Oficyna a Wolters Kluwer business, Kraków 2009, s. 19.

[4] G.C. Avery, *Przywództwo…*, op. cit., s. 140.

relationships rather than studying them as separate items. The focus on the so-called systemic trend in organization and management sciences faded away in the late 70s of the 20th century. However, in the course of the last decade of the 20th century a revived interest in systemic approach has been observed. It resulted from the publication by P.M. Senge[5] as well as other methodological approaches to the mainstream of strategic management[6].

One of the most popular definitions describes this system as a collection of elements involved in mutual relations (interactions) where every single component is either directly or indirectly connected with another one[7]. The systemic approach consists in referring to an organization as a system, and more specifically as an open system, i.e. a collection of interconnected elements to form a certain wholeness distinguished in the environment. The above presented approach results in the following rules applied in the systemic trend[8]:

— overall perception of the cognitive process objects, since a system is always more than just a simple sum of its elements,
— sub-optimization, following which improving subsystems does not have to result in an improved functioning of the entire system,
— wholeness has a larger impact on the functioning of its elements than vice versa.

In order to illustrate the characteristics of systemic thinking in more detail it can be compared to classical, i.e. analytical thinking (see Table 1). The presented approaches should be referred to as complementary rather than contradictory ones.

Systemic methodology, in the opinion of J. Rokita, represents a holistic metalanguage describing systemic interactions and systemic designing. It allows understanding chaos and complexity, as well as tries to deal with the dilemma of social systems consisting in the fact that as a whole they become more independent and their parts result in situations requiring choices to be made and increasingly interdependent actions to be taken[9].

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[5] *The fifth discipline. The Art and Practice of Learning Organization* (1990).

[6] R. Krupski, *Powrót do koncepcji systemowych*, [w:] *Zarządzanie przedsiębiorstwem w turbulentnym otoczeniu*, R. Krupski (red.), PWE, Warszawa 2005, s. 240–241.

[7] W. Piotrowski, *Organizacja i zarządzanie – kierunki, koncepcje, punkty widzenia*, [w:] *Zarządzanie. Teoria i praktyka*, A.K. Koźmiński, W. Piotrowski (red.), Wyd. Nauk. PWN, Warszawa 2007, s. 693.

[8] J. Czupiał, M. Karaś, *Rozwój wiedzy o przedsiębiorstwie i zarządzaniu nim*, [w:] *Podstawy nauki o przedsiębiorstwie*, J. Lichtarski (red.), Wydawnictwo Akademii Ekonomicznej we Wrocławiu, Wrocław 2005, s. 44.

[9] J. Rokita, *Uwarunkowania metodologiczne we współczesnym zarządzaniu*, Nauki o Zarządzaniu 2011, nr 8, s. 12.

Table 1. The comparison of analytical vs. systemic approach

Analytical approach	Systemic approach
1. Distinguishes: concentrates on elements.	1. Connects: concentrates on interactions between elements.
2. Examines the nature of interactions.	2. Analyzes the effects of interactions.
3. The precision of details is fundamental.	3. Based on a general, overall approach.
4. Modifies individual variables.	4. Simultaneously modifies groups of variables.
5. Examines phenomena regardless of their duration – reversible.	5. Covers duration and irreversibility.
6. The results are checked based on an experimental sample within the theoretical framework.	6. The results are checked by comparing a model and reality.
7. Precise and detailed models are constructed, however, difficult to apply in practice (e.g. econometric models).	7. Models are insufficiently precise to serve as knowledge basis, but possible to apply in making decisions and actions (e.g. Club of Rome model).
8. Effective approach in case of linear and weak interactions.	8. Effective approach in case of non-linear and strong interactions.
9. Effective approach in case of problems with well-defined structure (quantitative ones).	9. Effective approach in case of poorly structured or mixed problems (quantitative and qualitative ones).
10. Results in disciple focused research and teaching or a multidisciplinary one at the most.	10. Results in multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research and teaching.
11. Leads to actions organized in detail.	11. Results in "focused", goal-oriented actions.
12. Based on details, the objectives are frequently poorly specified.	12. Based on defined goals; changeable details.
13. Focused on description, explanation and prediction of phenomena and processes.	13. Results in identifying rules underlying actions, aimed at changing a particular system or constructing new ones.

Source: W. Piotrowski, *Organizacja…*, op. cit., s. 696.

2. The conceptual framework of leadership – from an individual to a system

According to the changes occurring in the interpretation of leadership essence, the conceptualization of leadership can be approached from the perspective of an object being subject to its conceptualization. The initial concepts concentrate on individuals (individual leaders). The subject literature is abundant in approaches defining leadership as a set of personal qualities or a collection of behavior types to be identified as characteristic for a selected group of people. Such compilation of qualities and behaviors defines the typical behavior of a leader towards his/her followers. A leader influences the followers, however, no feedback occurs. Other concepts focus on a group, i.e. on a leader vs. subordinates relationship. These relationships make up a process which enriches the essence of leadership. It allows e.g. common learning and also the leader's and his/her followers' development. Further evolution of the concept of leadership takes into account the context (situation) in which a given group is functioning.

Leadership refers, however, to a higher level – the level of an organization – therefore it should be analyzed following a systemic approach. As J.J. Sosik and D.I. Jung indicate, leadership in an organization should be approached from the perspective of mutual relations and interactions between a leader, his/her followers, the existing situation and the remaining elements constituting the entire system. A leader, his/her followers and the situation in which they find themselves constitute the core components of the entire leadership system. The remaining elements of the system include colleagues and also assessment, reward and development methods functioning in an organization. There are other system components that are not quite as obvious, like limitations, barriers, opportunities and challenges, which are subject to change over time. All components of the described system are interdependent and cannot function separately, especially its three core components[10].

The next look at the essence of leadership is associated with the changes in terms of four aspects, i.e. the objective of leadership, research on leadership, the source of leader's power and acquiring leadership skills, which are presented by P. Aitken and M. Higgs (see Table 2).

The above presented areas of changes, in terms of leadership essence, indicate how the core aspects of leadership were evolving. These changes should be perceived as moving towards higher levels of leadership in an organization (higher levels of leadership maturity/leadership awareness in an organization). It should also be emphasized that the subsequent concepts of leadership do not replace (eliminate) the previous ones, but rather become their extension or alternative. Depending on the context in which an organization is functioning, as well as its maturity/awareness in the area of leadership, the concepts of leadership can vary in each organization. First of all, these concepts can be different depending on the adopted assumptions (see Table 2).

The literature on leadership is rich in interpretations, theories and models. G.C. Avery attempted to organize the existing concepts in an orderly manner by dividing them into four groups called classical, transactional, visionary and organic paradigm[11]. The identified paradigms represent the method for integrating numerous theories and research results within one scheme. It is an attempt to find their mutual relationships and to distinguish the general concepts of leadership. In his division of leadership concept G.C. Avery takes into consideration both multi-faceted and holistic approach towards leadership problems.

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[10] J. Sosik, D.I. Jung, *Full Range Leadership Development. Pathways for People, Profit, and Planet*, Taylor and Francis Group, New York 2010, s. 47–49.

[11] G.C. Avery, *Przywództwo…*, op. cit., s. 38.

Table 2. Changes in the essence of leadership

Change areas	Change characteristics
The objective of leadership	For a long time leadership was identified with delivering results. In the significant part of subject literature this perspective was mainly focused on delivering financial results. In the 70s of the 20th century a different way in leadership goals' perception appeared. To an extent, this change referred to a transition from delivering results to carrying out an effective change in an organization, which was a response to changes occurring in business environment. In the late 80s of the 20th century the objective of leadership was associated with the development of organization's potential and possibilities. Currently the idea concerning leadership goals is connected with the integration of three basic, above-mentioned points of view.
Research on leadership	A change in this respect occurred in two areas. The first one refers to moving away from concentrating on leaders at the top level of an organizational hierarchy towards those on all levels of an organizational structure. It means that leadership is no longer identified with the occupied position and instead perceived as a process in which a leader involves his/her followers. The second change consists in moving away from approaching leadership as an individual phenomenon towards group actions.
The source of power	Since the initial research on leadership till the 70s of the 20th century an assumption dominated that the power in the hands of a leader results from his/her position occupied in an organizational hierarchy. Starting from the seventh decade of the current century power was to a lesser extent identified with the occupied position and more with individual predispositions and skills helpful in influencing others. It was related to the growing importance of charismatic aspects characteristic for leadership. Currently the complexity of an organization functioning results in leader's power being mainly perceived as the ability to establish relations between a leader and his/her followers.
Acquiring leadership skills	According to the initially dominating belief one had to be born a leader. Such attitude resulted in concentrating on the identification of qualities identified with an efficient leader. In the 60s of the 20th century an opposite approach appeared, which assumed that one can become a leader. It means that certain actions can be taken to develop leadership skills. Currently the prevailing opinion is that leaders are both "born themselves" and created. Such view suggests that even though leadership skills can be developed certain predispositions are still needed to become a leader.

Source: author's compilation based on: P. Aitken, M. Higgs, *Developing Change Leaders. The Principles and Practices of Change Leadership Development*, Elsevier, Oxford 2010, s. 5–6.

The paradigm of classical leadership covers the period from ancient times till the 70s of the 20th century. Power resulting from the position occupied and used for making orders and controlling remains the basis of the discussed leadership paradigm. Involvement and submission of group members result from either respecting or fearing their leader.

Transactional leadership paradigm covers the period from the 70s till the middle of the next decade of the 20th century. Transactional leadership consists in influencing group members. A leader considers the opinions and attitudes of the group members as a result of which contracts are negotiated and transactions are concluded. A leader can put forward a certain vision of the future, however, its implementation effectiveness is not related to the group members supporting it.

The paradigm of visionary leadership covers the period from mid 80s till 2000. Following visionary (charismatic, transformational) leadership ideas a leader inspires group members by acting on their emotions in order

to achieve better achievements. The leader's charisma, common vision and individual approach to group members remain the source of their dedication and involvement.

The paradigm of organic leadership covers the period after 2000. Mutual communication is fundamental for this paradigm. Leadership emerges in mutual relations between organization members, who interpret their environment and the changing conditions together. Group members create the vision, values, processes and share them. A group, as an entity, is most important in the paradigm of organic leadership. A particular individual does not have to present leadership powers, even though the particular group members can adopt leadership roles for particular reasons[12].

G.C. Avery emphasizes that none of the above-mentioned paradigm offers an ideal solution individually in all sorts of circumstances. Classical and transformational leadership works in stable or slowly changing conditions, whereas in case of ongoing and rapid changes visionary leadership is required. Organic leadership, on the other hand, offers one of the possible reactions to both dynamic and complex environment where knowledge is of basic importance. The emerging forms of network organizations, organic organizations or inter-functional working groups require a different concept of leadership, which considers the growing dispersion of workers and the complexity of relationships between organization members.

The majority of the already discussed leadership theories provide that it is the leader initiates and controls in practice his/her interactions with the environment, especially in case of classical, transactional and visionary paradigms. However, in case of the analyzed systemic approach leadership remains the quality of the entire system, resulting from the currently occurring interactions between the important elements of an organization. Obviously, both leaders and their subordinates represent important elements of an organization, but organizations and other social systems develop their own logic and rules which makes it necessary to extend the analysis beyond an individual leader or take a closer look at particular systems[13].

Certain interdependencies occur between an organization and leadership. It was confirmed that the nature of an organization, its goals, strategies and plans play an important role in identifying the appropriate type of leadership, people who take the role of leaders, as well as types of actions and behaviors which are recognized and rewarded. What is more, it was also proven that

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[12] Ibidem, s. 39–57.
[13] Ibidem, s. 141.

leaders can significantly influence the nature of an organization and its strategic directions[14].

Complexity theory is a movement that contains new tenets about a type of system, referred to as complex adaptive systems[15]. Complex adaptive systems are a basic unit of analysis in complexity science. Such systems comprise a large number of elements called agents, the functioning of which is regulated by particular rules. Agents control their behavior by mutual interactions and adjustment to other agents' behaviors, which results in developing the system regarded by them as the standards of behavior. What is more complex adaptive systems are unique and desirable in their ability to adapt rapidly and creatively to environmental changes[16]. Theory based on complex adaptive systems is Complex Systems Leadership Theory (CSLT)[17]. This theory defines leadership as a social process which changes the rules of interactions at all analyzed levels, i.e. among people, working groups, departments and organizations. CSLT is also described as the function of the system changing the rules of interactions between people, groups, or in social networks as a response to and/or as a result of the expected changing circumstances.

3. The development of leadership in an organization considering the systemic approach

Two concepts function in the subject literature discussing the problems of leadership: leaders development and leadership development. A part of the subject literature refers to both of the above concepts as identical, whereas in another part a distinction is made between them. The study by D.V. Day[18] is a classic example pointing to the differences between the development of leaders and the development of leadership. This researcher indicates that the traditional conceptualization of leadership refers to an individual level of skills, however, leadership is also a social process which involves every member of a society (community). In this respect the development of leaders,

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[14] P. Aitken, M. Higgs, *Developing Change…*, op. cit., s. 15–16.

[15] M. Schneider, M. Somers, *Organizations as complex adaptive systems: Implication of Complexity Theory for leadership research*, The Leadership Quarterly 2006, no. 17, s. 353.

[16] M. Uhl-Bien, R. Marion, B. McKelvey, *Complexity Leadership Theory: Shifting leadership from the industrial age to the knowledge era*, The Leadership Quarterly 2007, no. 18, s. 299.

[17] Ibidem, s. 304–305; B.B. Lichtenstein, D.A. Plowman, *The leadership of emergence: A complex systems leadership theory of emergence at successive organizational levels*, The Leadership Quarterly 2009, no. 20, s. 617–618.

[18] D.V. Day, *Leadership development: a review in context*, The Leadership Quarterly 2001, vol. 11, no. 4, s. 581–613.

referring to an individual, and the development of leadership, referring to a particular community, can be distinguished[19].

The studies conducted by the Center for Creative Leadership also distinguish between the development of leaders and leadership. The development of leaders is defined as an extension of competencies to an effective execution of the leader's role and the implementation of leadership oriented processes. On the other hand, the development of leadership is defined as a collective ability to determine the direction of activities, cooperation and involvement[20].

In the study of A. Nahavandi there is used similar approach, i.e. leader development focuses on developing the individual, taking a more holistic approach to increase self-awareness and provide skills, while leadership is aimed at developing leadership ability across the organization[21].

The comprehensive perspective on the establishment of leadership in an organization is offered by the development of leadership approached as the social capital formation in an organization. Social capital is recognized as the desirable element in an enterprise functioning, as ingrained in social relations, and means the ability to cooperate within one enterprise and its environment in order to carry out common goals, which is related to the existence of leadership in an organization. Human capital represents one of the basic components of social capital. It means that the development of leadership should be analyzed in a broader perspective than the development of leaders. Therefore the development of leaders can be approached as the component of leadership development. Hence the development of leaders should be combined with the development of leadership in an enterprise. Due to the fact that a leader figure represents one of the three basic elements of leadership, organizations should concentrate their development oriented activities on their leaders' development (presenting skills to generate, take advantage of and maintain the existing social capital), who should also invest their attributes in developing leadership as the competence of an organization.

Since the early 1990's leadership development has shift form an event approach to a system approach[22]. Differences between event approach and system approach are presented in Table 3.

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[19] Ibidem, s. 583.

[20] *The Center for Creative Leadership Handbook of Leadership Development*, E.V. Velsor, C.D. McCauley, M.N. Ruderman (eds.), Jossey-Bass, San Francisco 2010, s. 2, 405.

[21] A. Nahavandi, *The Art and Science of Leadership*, Pearson Education International, New Jersey 2009, s. 330–331.

[22] C.A. Guarrero, *Toward a Theory of Leadership Development: A Grounded Theory Assessment of Existing Leadership Development Programs in Select Global Companies*, Dissertation AAT 3155318, Golden Gate University, 2004, s. 151.

Table 3. A paradigmatic shift in leadership development

From Event Approach	To System Approach
1. Leadership development as an event	1. Leadership development as a process with a number of developmental components
2. Developmental activity	2. Developmental experiences
3. Conceptual learning	3. Feedback intensive learning
4. Development is generic, employee responsible for figuring out what learning applies to their situation	4. Development embedded in a business context, supporting the strategic direction of the firm and challenges of future
5. Teaching development to the "mean"	5. Individual difference in the ability to learn is recognized and accepted
6. Development independent of the workplace; no internal support systems	6. Development as part of the daily work experiences, with supportive internal systems
7. Clearly and narrowly defined developmental objectives	7. Learning to deal with unstable and evolving complexities
8. Employee abdicates responsibility for development in exchange for the agreement the organization will take care of them	8. All levels — employees, managers, senior executives, and the organization at large — must be closely involved in all aspects of development, from planning to implementation to ongoing support to continuous evaluation of the chosen processes

Source: C.A. Guarrero, *Toward a Theory…*, op. cit., s. 138.

The new paradigm of leadership development shows that organizations see leadership development as a process. Additionally, they use multiple developmental component that accept individual differences, in order to improve the focus on learning. Development is a part of daily work experiences. There are supportive internal systems, and organizations no longer allow employees to abdicate their responsibility for their own development.

Although a complexity perspective of leadership recognizes a role for human relations or personal influence model, this is only as part of much broader set of leadership processes associated with managing dynamic systems and interconnectivity within networks[23]. The key focus in Complexity Leadership Development (CLD)[24] is seeking to influence the contexts and processes that give rise to these network dynamics. CLD model presents two levels of the analysis, i.e. system-level development, and individual-level development. Each of these levels describes targets for leadership development that are explained as bringing about the conditions for tension and autocatalysis within the social system. These in turn give rise to the possibility of the system's positive adaptation. At the system level three key criteria for development are identified: network conditions, shared leadership, and organizational learning. At the individual level of analysis, CLD moves

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[23] N. Clarke, *Model of complexity leadership development*, Human Resource Development International 2013, vol. 16, no. 2, s. 137.

[24] Ibidem, s. 138–142.

away from a focus on the structures and processes to the individual behaviors required of formal and informal leaders within the social system.

■ Conclusions

The development of knowledge about leadership shows that it should be approached holistically in an organization rather than from the perspective of individuals holding the positions of leaders. Leadership is born when people work together and maintain mutual relations. It is a dispersed process involving many ordinary people rather than the result of actions performed by one exceptional individual. The leader's actions are not independent but codependent on the activities carried out by the other members of an organization and its processes. Thus leadership is combined with a complex system covering diverse subsystems, such as: personality of its members, intergroup processes, tasks, processes and practices, settlement systems, rules, administration structures. If leadership is supposed to be effective these subsystems have to fit within the framework of the entire system.

The analysis of leadership, from a systemic perspective, puts new challenges before researchers attempting to explore this complex phenomenon. The traditional methods applied in social sciences are quite imperfect for studying the dynamic social systems in the way which maintains their configuration and takes into account their complexity and uncertainty[25].

The establishment of strong leadership in an organization requires taking appropriate developmental actions focused on turning leadership into one of the attributes in an organization[26]. The development of leadership should be focused not only on individuals but on the broader perspective which has been presented in this elaboration.

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[25] G.C. Avery, *Przywództwo…*, op. cit., s. 142.

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■ Systemowe podejście do konceptualizacji przywództwa i jego rozwoju w organizacji

Streszczenie: Przywództwo jest zagadnieniem niezmiennie popularnym od lat i ciągle na nowo interpretowanym. Większość z klasycznych teorii przywództwa kładzie nacisk na indywidulnych przywódców lub grupy złożone z przywódcy i podwładnych, ignorując jednocześnie szerszy aspekt, przejawiający się we współzależnościach organizacji i przywództwa. W ramach współczesnych teorii przywództwa na szersze zgłębienie złożonego zjawiska przywództwa w organizacji pozwala systemowe ujęcie przywództwa. W opracowaniu zostały między innymi przedstawione koncepcje bazujące na złożonych systemach adaptacyjnych, tj. Complex Systems Leadership Theory i Complexity Leadership Development. Celem niniejszego opracowania jest przedstawienie zagadnienia przywództwa w ujęciu systemowym (jako systemu) oraz analiza możliwości rozwoju tak postrzeganej konceptualizacji przywództwa w organizacji.

Słowa kluczowe: przywództwo, rozwój przywództwa, podejście systemowe