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## Determinants and attributes of leadership in the public safety management system

Katarzyna Sienkiewicz-Malyjurek<sup>a\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Silesian University of Technology, Faculty of Organisation and Management, Roosevelta 26 Str., Zabrze 41-800, Poland*

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### Abstract

The objective of this paper is to identify determinants and attributes of leadership in the public safety management system. This aim has been accomplished based on the desk research method and participant observation. As a result it was concluded that leadership in public safety management is determined by external and external forces, situational circumstances, characteristics core to the entities of the system, and relationships occurring between them. It was also ascertained that the principal attributes of leadership in the system examined include complexity, sharing and collaboration.

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### 1. Introduction

The public safety management system represents a dynamic configuration of an unlimited number of entities with the goal of ensuring secure conditions for all entities operating on the specific administrative territory using resources possessed within the framework of formal rules and informal relationships, typified by non-repeatability and volatility as well as continuous adjustment to current circumstances and needs occurring (Sienkiewicz-Malyjurek and Kozuch, 2015, p. 40). To carry out activities under such circumstances, being characteristic to the public safety management system requires appropriate leadership. This is critical to adequately orchestrate ventures, coordinate operations and transfer information between specific sub-systems across the system. However, even though leadership is one of the most widely explored issues in the theory of management sciences (Hunt and Dodge,

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\* Katarzyna Sienkiewicz-Malyjurek. Tel:+443-4421-12.

*E-mail address:* [katarzyna.sienkiewicz-malyjurek@polsl.pl](mailto:katarzyna.sienkiewicz-malyjurek@polsl.pl)

2000; Peterson and Hunt, 1997), a research gap remains in the field of safety and emergency management (Silvia and McGuire, 2010, p. 267; Hannah et al., 2009). This paper is an attempt to fill this research gap, and its objective is to identify determinants and attributes of leadership in the public safety management system. Moreover, the reference literature underlines the need for holistic all-ranging approach to the issues of leadership because the research conducted in this respect are largely atomistic in their nature, thereby failing to grasp its complexity (Avery, 2009, p. 29; Van Wart, 2003, p. 224). Therefore, analyses presented in this paper rest on complexity theory, which extends the capacities for a holistic approach to leadership (Marion and Uhl-Bien, 2001; Schneider and Somers, 2006).

The purpose of the publication has been achieved on the basis of research carried out under the project entitled "Coordination, communication and trust as a factors driving effective inter-organizational collaboration in the system of public safety management". This project is financed by the National Science Centre based on decision no. DEC-2012/07/D/HS4/00537. To achieve the purpose of the article, the desk research method and participant observation were carried out. Observations were conducted on 16 shifts from September to December 2013 in the Province Headquarters of the State Fire Service in the Silesian Region. They covered principles underpinning the operations of fire service. The observations were performed while executing preventive measures (formal and informal meetings, debates) and combating hazards (technical, chemical, medical rescue).

## **2. Basics of leadership**

Leadership is a complex set of processes that evolve in time and characterise with diversity of typology, approaches, styles, tools and models. It is an age-old concept that transforms with the advance of social interactions (Trottier et al., 2008, p. 320). Nevertheless, the reference literature lacks the definition to fully reflect the spirit and complexity embedded in leadership. Moreover, despite long-time research, it is still not clear what leadership precisely stands for (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995, p. 220). It is commonly believed that it comprises the collection of processes executed so as to induce people to collaborate in favour of the organization. Essentially, this refers to behaviours, attributes and outcomes of the leaders' activities which tend to be interpreted by members of the specific group and they depend on their perception as well as relationships between leaders and group members. When carrying out research into leadership, Gayle C. Avery (2009, p. 38) distinguished its four basic paradigms, namely: classical, transactional, visionary and organic. The classical paradigm, the oldest one, relies on leader dominance through respect and/or power to command and control. Underlying the involvement among group members is fear or respect to the leader as well as a quest for reward or penalty avoidance. Whereas transactional paradigm involves exerting influence on group members in personal relationships and through incorporating their opinions and feelings. Another, the visionary paradigm, is built upon a leader who inspires group members to take actions. While the organic paradigm, currently binding, is premised on joint interpretation of the setting in the group. From this perspective leaders may be selected from among the group instead of being formally designated. Similarly, Montgomery Van Wart (2013) claimed that fundamental leadership theories embrace: classical management and role; transactional leadership; transformational leadership; horizontal or collaborative leadership; and ethical and critical leadership theory. He also believes that each theory includes significant characteristics of leadership, and it is related to a specific research period and each continues to evolve.

Today's approaches to leadership emphasize its complexity and multi-dimensionality (Schneider and Somers 2006; Avolio et al., 2009; Hernandez et al., 2011). They focus on leaders' integrational skills and they also concern ethical issues and values of leadership. They reveal that it is dispersed and emerges in different parts of the organization. Hence, it may be investigated in terms of complexity theory, whereby leadership is executed spontaneously and unconsciously, and tends to be temporary in its nature and forced by the situation (Schneider and Somers, 2006, p. 356). It requires entanglement among the roles of administrative, adaptive and enabling leadership (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007, p. 306). Therefore, the public safety management system constitutes an adequate field for examining present-day determinants behind leadership.

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