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**CHALLENGES OF CONTEMPORARY COMPANIES  
AND THE CONCEPT OF "HEROIC LEADERSHIP"**

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**Abstract**

Modern companies face new challenges in terms of how to manage and define expectations for their employees. Socio-economic changes cause that the employees are expected not only to have specialist knowledge of their job, but also to be willing to take responsibility, make decisions or participate in decision-making process, independent creation of solutions and self-control. The structures of companies are becoming more and more flat, which means that the roles of employees' self-management skills and cooperation between them are increasing. How to create a work environment so that people are ready to meet these expectations? What rules to follow so that the hired employee is personally involved in achieving the company's goals? This article presents the concept of "heroic leadership" based on four principles, which were shaped and implemented by members of the Society of Jesus for almost 500 years. This leadership model stands in opposition to those based on the concept of "one big man". It assumes that everyone can be a leader. The role of Jesuit "managers" was to equip the team members with such skills that they would know what to do to ensure that everyone achieves "high goals".

**Keywords**

Employee – Leadership – Heroic Leadership – Manager's Role – Management in the Company

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## Introduction

Socio-economic transformations cause a change in the requirements for employees, both those working on managerial and serial positions. The demand for employees is still growing - not only for those with high qualifications, specialist knowledge, but also for creative people, capable of solving complex problems independently. The requirements for them are changing. *Employees are not only seen as a source of costs, they are also creators of constructive solutions to emerging problems, a source of new products and processes*<sup>1</sup>. Hence, in modern concepts of management one sees a man as one who, apart from fulfilling a designated role in an organisation, also realises his creative potential and initiates changes<sup>2</sup>. The transition from an employee who performs tasks remarkably, towards an employee who responds to challenges and creates them, involves a change in the role of the supervisor/manager. Instead of a person who decides himself – he becomes a member of the team. His controlling role decreases while the responsibility of each team member for the entrusted task increases. It results from the employees' competence and commitment<sup>3</sup>.

The importance of trained and competent employees was noticed by P. F. Drucker, who was the first to use the term "knowledge worker". He treated knowledge as an important means of production, along with the capital, manpower and natural resources. He proposed to base the management of the organisation on employees, so that the power would be passed from the hands of those who had the power into the hands of those who "know"<sup>4</sup>. According to Drucker, the "knowledge workers" appreciate recognition and prestige, they also value autonomy, independence in making decisions, and respect from superiors. Drucker was a supporter of the autonomy of employees, which can be equated today with the concept of empowerment<sup>5</sup>. The concept of *empowerment* appeared in the 90s of the twentieth century. It assumes involving employees in management, through participation, and delegation of power to the lower levels. *Empowerment* in management is translated as entitlement and positive reinforcement. In organisations, this concept usually takes the form of a program, which should effect in: increasing employees' autonomy, their independence in action and self-control, motivation and job satisfaction and identification with the organisation. The greater loyalty and increase of employee potential is another effect that may be achieved<sup>6</sup>. According to R. Szanferberg, the critical approaches to the concept of empowerment in management theories lead to the conclusion that the objectives set in it can be achieved by a fundamental change in the goals and structures of authority in the organisation. That is why there is a growing interest in new ways of organising work and in traditional cooperative movement<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> A. Mazurkiewicz, Paradygmaty zarządzania we współczesnym przedsiębiorstwie, "Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego" Vol: 19 num 33 (2011), 411-412.

<sup>2</sup> K. Jaremczuk, "Podmiotowość pracownika w zarządzaniu organizacją", PWE, Warszawa 2012. 18.

<sup>3</sup> A. Molter, "Podmiotowość w perspektywie nauk o zarządzaniu", Człowiek i jego podmiotowość a współczesna organizacja - wybrane zagadnienia, red. K. Jaremczuk, WSPiA, PSOIz, Rzeszów. 2011. 93.

<sup>4</sup> M. Klimczuk-Kochańska, "Wkład Petera F. Druckera w rozwój teorii zarządzania", Zarządzanie, organizacje i organizowanie – przegląd perspektyw teoretycznych, red. K. Klincewicz, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wydziału Zarządzania Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2016. 76.

<sup>5</sup> M. Klimczuk-Kochańska, "Wkład Petera F. Druckera w rozwój teorii zarządzania... 77.

<sup>6</sup> J. Bernais; J. Ingram & T. Kraśnicka, "ABC współczesnych koncepcji i metod zarządzania", Wydawnictwo Akademii Ekonomicznej, Katowice 2007. 37-39.

<sup>7</sup> R. Szanferberg, "Empowerment – krótkie wprowadzenie" <http://rszarf.ips.uw.edu.pl/pdf/Empowerment2.pdf> (15-12-2019).

This is consistent with the vision of Ducker, who in determining the shape of future enterprises stated that the organisational structures would flatten. According to him, managerial levels and the number of managers will be limited to the implementation of tasks by specialists<sup>8</sup>. As the most important challenge for management in the 21st century, he recognised the improvement of the knowledge workers' productivity by forming the systems of remuneration, motivation and creating development opportunities<sup>9</sup>.

Such a trend can be observed in modern organisations, where formal power is losing its importance because they are less and less focused on certain positions. The cooperation of co-ordinating employees is becoming more and more important, because of the vastness of knowledge and information, which makes it difficult to make decisions in a single-person manner. There is a growing need for group thinking and deciding rather than the implementation of a certain type of power. Additionally, the value of competent executive employees is appreciated, hence the decision-making process is passed to them<sup>10</sup>. The role of including an employee in the decision-making process is shown by T. Gordon. He refers to the "rules of participation", confirmed in the scientific studies. It claims that group members are more willing to adopt new ideas and new methods of work when they are involved in making decisions about a change and when they are involved in deciding how to make this change happen<sup>11</sup>.

The increase of the employee's importance in the decision-making process, increasing his independence and self-control has changed the role of the person formally act as a manager. Increasingly, the modern literature combines management with leadership, where both concepts mean influencing people, but leadership is characterised by direction and coordination without the use of coercive elements. The leader can influence others through a set of specific features<sup>12</sup>. Using the potential of the group members, their talents, knowledge and abilities leads to achieving goals, so that the team feels fully responsible for the effect of the action saying "we did it ourselves"<sup>13</sup>. What distinguishes an entrepreneurial leader from the leader of an informal group or a non-profit institution is orientation towards conceptual thinking and acting in terms of economic and business rationality<sup>14</sup>. One of the main skills of the leader is to build a relationship based on trust between those who want to lead and those who want to follow them<sup>15</sup>. Trust is the conviction that others will fulfil what they have undertaken. There is a risk involved because we can never be sure that the person we trust will meet our expectations<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> P. F. Drucker, "Nadchodzi nowa organizacja", Zarządzanie wiedzą, red. P.F. Drucker, Harvard Business Review, Wydawnictwo Helion, Gliwice 2006. 7.

<sup>9</sup> M. Klimczuk-Kochańska, "Wkład Petera F. Druckera w rozwój teorii zarządzania", Zarządzanie, organizacje i organizowanie – przegląd perspektyw teoretycznych, red. K. Klincewicz, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wydziału Zarządzania Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2016. 77.

<sup>10</sup> H. Fołtyn, "Praca współczesnych menedżerów", Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wydziału Zarządzania UW, Warszawa 2009, 27-28.

<sup>11</sup> T. Gordon, "Wychowanie bez porażek szefów, liderów przywódców", PAX, Warszawa 2000, 11.

<sup>12</sup> H. Fołtyn, "Praca współczesnych menedżerów..."

<sup>13</sup> S. Smoleński, "Lider zespołu" Wydawnictwo Ośrodka Postępu Organizacyjnego, Bydgoszcz 2002. 127.

<sup>14</sup> E. Czarnecka-Wójcik & M. Wójcik, "Przedsiębiorczy liderzy współczesnych organizacji. Podejście podmiotowe", Przedsiębiorczość - perspektywą zmian, red. K. Jaremczuk, Wyższa Szkoła Prawa i Administracji w Przemyślu, Rzeszów 2015. 177.

<sup>15</sup> J. M. Kouzes & B. Z. Posner, "Przywódcztwo i jego wyzwania", Wydawnictwo UJ, Kraków, 2000. 21.

<sup>16</sup> J. Famielec, "Przedsiębiorczość relacyjna", Przedsiębiorczość - perspektywą zmian, red. K. Jaremczuk, Wyższa Szkoła Prawa i Administracji w Przemyślu, Rzeszów. 2015. 253.

In management, the trust refers both to the employee who is required to meet the company's goals of his own accord<sup>17</sup>, but also the employee requires that the work is competently organised and managed, and the managers show interest in good work<sup>18</sup>.

## Methodology and Results

Building a relationship based on trust, in the context of management requires specific skills. Many leadership concepts in management were developed; they were prepared both by scientists and based on individual experience of managers. Within the methods we use analysis heroic leadership based on the Society of Jesus' NUESTRO MODE DE PROCEDER.

The concept of "heroic leadership", which was described by Chris Lowney, became an inspiration to write this article. Lowney used to work as the managing director of J.P. Morgan for 17 years<sup>19</sup>. The company is currently one of the world's largest financial holdings. Previously, he spent seven years in a Jesuit seminary. Working in a corporation, he discovered that today's companies have the same challenge as the Society of Jesus for many years of its existence - shaping ingenious, ready-to-risk, ambitious and globally thinking people. In his opinion, the Jesuits have been doing it effectively since 1540, that is, since the Order was founded<sup>20</sup>. He gives examples of monks who, thanks to this leadership model, made great discoveries, created a network of educational and missionary institutions existing for almost 500 years, effectively found themselves in the process of changes.

What Lowney considers particularly valuable considering the needs of contemporary companies is that *in the Jesuit eyes there is no place for a model of command and control based on one great man who leads the others*<sup>21</sup>. The task of the Jesuit leaders was to equip the new members of the Order with skills that would make them see what to do. Thanks to this, it is possible to avoid situations where people following one top leader will act like him without developing their own potential or taking advantage of opportunities<sup>22</sup>. According to him, four principles were implemented by each member of the Society of Jesus caused that they became leaders: self-awareness,

1. ingenuity,
2. love,
3. heroism<sup>23</sup>.

Lowney assigns a special role to self-awareness, or self-knowledge. He refers to the results of D. Goleman's research, who came to the conclusion that the failures of promising managers and the fact that they do not achieve higher degrees of promotion result from the fact that they have cognitive abilities, important at the beginning of their careers, but they

<sup>17</sup> P. F. Drucker, "Praktyka zarządzania", Czytelnik, Nowoczesność, Akademia Ekonomiczna w Krakowie, Kraków. 1994. 287-288.

<sup>18</sup> P. F. Drucker, "Praktyka zarządzania... 289.

<sup>19</sup> Ch. Lowney, "Heroiczne przywództwo. Tajemnice sukcesów firmy istniejącej ponad 450 lat" WAM, Kraków. 2011. 10.

<sup>20</sup> Ch. Lowney, "Heroiczne przywództwo... 10-11.

<sup>21</sup> Ch. Lowney, "Heroiczne przywództwo... 21.

<sup>22</sup> Ch. Lowney, "Heroiczne przywództwo... 21.

<sup>23</sup> Ch. Lowney, "Heroiczne przywództwo... 34.

lack skills defined by Goleman as the "emotional intelligence". Goleman indicates 5 key competences: self-awareness – the ability to recognize and understand one's moods, emotions, aspirations; self-regulation – the ability to control one's destructive impulses and moods, stopping assessments; motivation to work – also for reasons that go beyond status and money; empathy – the ability to understand the emotions of other people; interpersonal skills manifested in proficient building and managing relationships, finding out what connects people<sup>24</sup>.

In the Jesuit concept, Lowney perceives self-awareness as an understanding of one's strengths, weaknesses, values and worldview. According to him, only a person who is aware of what he wants, can achieve goals and inspire others. The main condition for working on one's weaknesses is to get to know them. Self-awareness is shaped throughout life, hence the need for a habit of continuous self-reflection and readiness to learn. Jesuits used to build the self-awareness of the novices with "Spiritual exercises" which were developing features and skills close to the key competences defined by Goleman. These include: the ability to reflect on weaknesses, an integrated worldview and system of values, deep respect for other people, the ability to consider choices and make decisions<sup>25</sup>.

The ingenuity, according to Lowney, is a bold introduction of innovation and adaptation in order to be able to cope with the changes taking place in the world. It is about getting rid of rooted habits, prejudices – it is about a kind of indifference to everything that is not the fundamental beliefs and values in order to be able to react quickly and adapt to changes<sup>26</sup>. The ingenuity is based on the conviction that *most problems have their solutions and that these solutions will be brought by: imagination, perseverance and opening up to new ideas*<sup>27</sup>.

As another principle in shaping the leader, Lowney indicates love understood as attracting others with a positive and loving attitude. In leadership, love manifests itself in perceiving the talent, potential and dignity of each person, including passion, commitment and courage in helping others to fully benefit from their personal potential. This in turn causes loyalty, trust and mutual support for the team members, building the team's energy and unity<sup>28</sup>. In a corporation such attitude manifests itself in the recognition and not rejection of any talented or valuable person because of his origin, skin colour, education, etc., and managers' attitude towards the development of employees' potential and teamwork with more love than fear, which causes that people work not with coercion, but with pleasure<sup>29</sup>.

The fourth element of this concept of leadership is the heroism understood by Lowney as adding oneself and others the energy to action by awakening heroic ambitions. Heroism manifests itself here in motivating oneself to above-average results and focusing on the greatest possible potential of each moment. The Jesuits described it as *magis* - a constant urge to look for something better in every opportunity<sup>30</sup>. This attitude requires courage in making choices and being ready for the risks involved. The Jesuits achieved them by encouraging novices to transform their religious mission into a personal mission, focusing on the independent shaping of a given skill, inducing their own "great desires" and

<sup>24</sup> Ch. Lowney, "Heroiczne przywództwo..."

<sup>25</sup> Ch. Lowney, "Heroiczne przywództwo..."

<sup>26</sup> Ch. Lowney, "Heroiczne przywództwo..."

<sup>27</sup> Ch. Lowney, "Heroiczne przywództwo..."

<sup>28</sup> Ch. Lowney, "Heroiczne przywództwo..."

<sup>29</sup> Ch. Lowney, "Heroiczne przywództwo..."

<sup>30</sup> Ch. Lowney, "Heroiczne przywództwo..."

enabling personal development through participation in significant team activities<sup>31</sup>. They were convinced that above-average results are achieved when individuals and teams aim high<sup>32</sup>.

Lowney argues that only a combination of these four principles leads to success in leadership. For example, self-awareness facilitates creativity, because those who have defined their values and goals are ready for new solutions and are not afraid of risk. Similarly, the new challenges give us the opportunity to learn about ourselves in new situations and deepen your self-awareness. Heroic, ambitious goals also tend to seek new ways of doing things. All together, they form one integrated approach<sup>33</sup>.

The value of such an attitude in modern times is justified by Lowney with reference to the research and conclusions of P. Ducker and his concept of "knowledge-based economy"<sup>34</sup>.

## Conclusions

According to Ducker, the work requires mainly the ability to manage oneself and find oneself in the continuously changing situation of each company. There are fewer and fewer supervisory positions, fewer and fewer commands appear, structures are becoming flatter, hence the possibility of supervising their work by managers is diminishing. Employees are expected to have their own initiative, to perform their tasks independently and to respond quickly to changes, including the decision-making process. Some time ago the skills used to be needed only for top level managers, now they are necessary for every employee. The successes are achieved by people who can accurately assess a rapidly changing situation, make decisions, introduce innovations, who are ready to take responsibility for their tasks and take risks. In the past, professional skills were mainly determined by professional skills, now, as Drucker writes: *professional careers develop when people are prepared for occasions. This is because they know their strengths and weaknesses, advantages and methods of work*<sup>35</sup>.

The concept of "heroic leadership" by Ch. Lowney is not a ready-made program for use in a company, it does not propose quick techniques to influence a person or a team. It first requires building the internal foundations of the person, the inner vision, developed as a result of deep self-reflection and self-knowledge. However, this concept can be an inspiration for contemporary managers. Especially because its foundation lies in the assumption that everyone has leadership potential and that true leaders release this potential in others. Thanks to this attitude, the company can be a place for shaping more and more independent employees, ready to be personally involved in achieving its goals.

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<sup>31</sup> Ch. Lowney, "Heroiczne przywództwo..."

<sup>32</sup> Ch. Lowney, "Heroiczne przywództwo..."

<sup>33</sup> Ch. Lowney, "Heroiczne przywództwo..."

<sup>34</sup> Ch. Lowney, "Heroiczne przywództwo..."

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