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**Lechosław Berliński, *Zarządzanie i dowodzenie
Ochotniczą Strażą Pożarną. Wiedza, nowoczesność
i tradycja*, Warszawa 2012, pp. 294**

The author of the book *Zarządzanie i dowodzenie Ochotniczą Strażą Pożarną. Wiedza, nowoczesność i tradycja* [Management and leadership of Voluntary Fire Brigades. Knowledge, modernity and tradition] published in Warsaw in 2012 is Lechosław Berliński, academic teacher at the Department of Management Systems and Innovation of Łódź University of Technology. He is also the chairman of Voluntary Fire Brigade in Rąbień near Łódź, active member of ZOSP RP (Polish Association of Voluntary Fire Brigades) and Polish Economic Society. He authored or co-authored 14 books, as well as over 100 articles and studies focusing on management and microeconomics, published both in Poland and abroad. Berliński is a management and economics expert in the fields of strategic management, finance resource administration, management accounting and project management and organization.

Interestingly, even with the quite distant date of publication, Lechosław Berliński remains the only author in Poland

to have discussed the topic of running a voluntary fire brigade from a management perspective. His publication has not been reviewed yet elsewhere, and considering the importance of the matter it concerns and very limited choice of other sources on functioning of voluntary fire brigades it is worth analysing and reviewing here.

The author's work has, in his view, two different goals: "transferring achievements of study of management to benefit both the fire brigades volunteers and all other individuals and institutions interested in the topic of improving management effectiveness with the use of latest knowledge and methods, as applied to voluntary fire brigades" (own translation of the Polish original, p. 15). The author also stated that "voluntary fire brigades often are very well managed despite the lack of professional management/administration staff. They show very high efficiency even if the formal support of local authorities is usually lacking (despite strong approval of communities they operate in). They can of

course still improve and perfect the way they operate using the opportunities and tools that can be adapted from contemporary management science, combined with general knowledge of the environment they operate in and resources available” (p. 15). Here it is worth noting that research methods used by author are not named anywhere in the study.

The order of the chapters shows clear logic and reasoning. The publication begins with discussion of legal basis for the functioning of volunteer fire brigades, followed by general principles of management of this sort of organisations, to move on to naming the eventual risks involved with the process of their management. After that the author shifts his focus to fire brigades themselves and explains the structures that exists within them. The social status and role of the volunteer fire-fighting formation is the main focus here. Then Berliński swiftly moves to presenting the environment the brigades operate in and the role they play in managing crisis situations. Next comes a deeper explanation of how the resources available are managed, including a mention of financing from the EU funds. Finally, all of the previously named aspects are summed up, and a quality assessment for all of them – and a suggestion for a grading model – are presented.

As concerns the structure of the monograph, the main content is preceded by a foreword where a brief biography of the author and what motivated him to write this work are presented. Next follows an introduction where the research goals, hypotheses and also some basic information on the chapters are included. As it was mentioned before, the main purpose of the author was to transfer his knowledge of management into the domain of

functioning of a voluntary fire brigades, as well as to raise the level of knowledge and awareness of the volunteer firefighters themselves and other interested parties. Another goal was to be able to implement the suggested solutions in practise. While all in all the goals have been appropriately chosen, the hypotheses are somewhat lacking in precise scientific questions. Chapter One, *Legal basis for functioning of voluntary fire brigades*, names all legal acts regulating the functioning of aforementioned formations, which are subsequently quoted and discussed in seven subsections. Chapter Two concerns *Components of contemporary management of voluntary fire brigades*, and is divided in five subsections, with the fourth of them further divided into three paragraphs. All aspects of management of similar organizations are described in this chapter, with the authors attention focused mostly on strategic management (2.4) and the SWOT analysis tool (2.5). All the aforementioned sections contain plenty of charts, diagrams and tables that are intended to help the reader understand the topic discussed. Arguments presented in this part of the book are extremely important and valid, but could be adjusted to reach a broader group of readers by limiting the use of detailed firefighting terminology. Chapter Three, *Identification of potential issues, safety and risks in management of voluntary fire brigades* builds on the content of Chapter Two. It consists of four subsections covering practical applications of the SWOT analysis method with the purpose of identifying possible managerial issues, a brief explanation of the problem of safety and risks, starting with the definition of the term “risk” and introduction to its various types. Finally, measurement models for safety and risks are explained, illustrated with a chart and

empirical examples. The next chapter uses six sub-sections to analyse what sort of organisation are voluntary fire brigades. The author defines them from 3 points of view (in the legal, techno-economical and organisational sense). Berliński points out highly specific legal features of the brigades, rescue and fire-fighting duties forming part of their everyday activity, relative independence in decision making (full independence internally, limited outside of the force itself). He clarifies that these formations are self sufficient financially, and structurally independent. He continues to explain the structure of command and chain of authority both on the technical and operational fronts of the volunteer brigades, followed by discussion of ownership, as well as financial, training and human resources matters. The last subsection is devoted to all other activities not covered elsewhere, for example cultural (a marching band of the formation). Chapter Five, *Organizational environment of voluntary fire brigades and their relations with other structures*, consists of three subsections. Here the author lists and analyzes various structures that the brigades operate and participate in. The ones listed as macro-environment are ZOSP RP (Polish Association of Voluntary Fire Brigades), State Fire Service, National Firefighting Rescue System. Berliński then discusses the technological, socio-cultural, legal and political aspects of functioning of the organisation within these structures. The elements of micro-environment presented by the author include: other institutions, the natural environment, infrastructure the brigades function in and employ as well as the social aspect. The last subsection of this chapter is devoted to three methods (BCG matrix, scenario analysis and strategic group mapping technique) that can be

used in management of a specific fire brigade to define and analyze its current and future situation. Chapter Six, *Crisis management – the role of voluntary fire brigades* consists of five subsections explaining the principles and basic terminology related to functioning of the volunteer fire fighting formations, mostly based on Natural Disasters Act (Journal of Laws of 2002, no 62, item 558). Readers will find here a description of stages of crisis management, such as prevention, preparation, reaction and rebuilding/recovery both on smaller, local level (extending to just one local brigade/branch) all the way to a disaster of national proportions. Chapter Six is based on real-life experiences, and contains an analysis of voluntary fire brigades reaction to a railway catastrophe that happened near the town of Szczekociny. Inclusion of more examples of this sort in the publication would be a good solution to ensure that, firstly, more readers not connected to any firefighting structures understand the real issues in the event of such a disaster and secondly, that the volunteer firefighters could compare experiences and avoid future mistakes. Chapter Seven, *Managing the resources available to voluntary fire brigades*, is the most comprehensive and by far the longest one in the monograph. It is divided into three subsections, further divided into paragraphs. The first subsection describes the roles of a volunteer fireman, team leader and manager, followed later by information concerning leadership of volunteer fire brigades, recruitment of new members, their training and development within the formation, rules of command, and finally the issues of motivating the volunteers and group problem solving. The next subsection focuses on operational and technological potential of the formations, divided into

permanent and non-permanent potential categories. Finally, the last subsection covers finances, going deep into financing and investments, revenues and expenditures, financial statements and operational financial assessment. This chapter contains numerous empirical examples. The next chapter talks about financing of volunteer fire brigades, and contains discussion of issues arising when funding is received from the EU. Structurally it is composed of 6 subsections with subsections two, four and six split into smaller paragraphs. The chapter describes the entire financing process, starting with submitting an application for EU funds. It also contains information about what qualifies as an eligible project, what are the EU structural funds, what are the specific rules of project financing, expenditure categories and their eligibility for funding. Next the author describes how the procedures and their application looks like and all the audits, controls and checks that follow (both as concerns the financial and conceptual/substantive aspects). At the end of the chapter Berliński offers advice and guidance concerning writing an application for funding of a new project. Chapter Nine, the last one, discusses *Quality of management and command over voluntary firefighting brigades*. Firstly he points out the importance of competent leadership and that it can be measured by its level of activity, efficiency and ability to adapt. Then he presents two different models for management quality – a theoretical and a practical one. Once again the chapter contains plenty of charts and mathematical formulas that, unfortunately, can confuse readers and may impede their ability to understand the meaning behind them. It would be very beneficial if the author replaced some of these with experience-based comments

and clarifications. The monograph ends with a concise conclusion.

The publication has a highly descriptive character, and the author focuses on very detailed explanation of various elements breached in it. He usually begins with basic definitions that are followed by more and more complex aspects of the topic at hand. The research portion of the work, in the form of non-standardised interviews and charts, is in comparison rather underdeveloped, with the descriptive part of the publication clearly the main focus.

As concerns the bibliography, majority of the references are publications on management and human resources, with only a few exceptions of publications strictly about firefighting. Berliński refers also to relevant laws and legal acts such as the Law on Associations, the Fire Protection Act, the Natural Disasters Act, the State of Emergency Act, Act on the State Fire Service, the Act on Crisis Management etc.

The basis for selection of the topic of voluntary fire brigades was the author's real-life experience, which is also mentioned explicitly several times in the publication. From the perspective of 6 years since the book's publication, one can say that not all its aims as stated by Berliński were met. The author's knowledge has indeed been applied to the domain of daily functioning and management of volunteer fire brigades. The publication does enlighten readers and even after this period of time remains still the only source of information on this topic. Unfortunately, it is practically unavailable for a broader audience and thus not fulfilling its more ambitious educational role – one can not use knowledge that is impossible to understand (or find). Some possible issues (ex. lack of formal approval for the brigades)

are only mentioned at the very beginning of the publication, but are not followed up in the later chapters. It is also worth mentioning that the description of legal bases these formations are founded on is a bit too extensive; more focus on personal experience and personalised comments would in my opinion provide a better portrait of everyday functioning of the vol-

unteer firefighting brigades. Complicated charts and mathematical formulas that are supposed to help readers grasp the content are in fact making it harder to assimilate the information. Making the work more personal and experience-based would all in all greatly help a broader audience understand how Voluntary Fire Brigades function and are managed.