

Original article

Decisions in safety management

Zbigniew Ścibiorek 

Faculty of Logistics and Transport, International College of Logistics and Transport, Wrocław, Poland,
e-mail: zbscibi@wp.pl

INFORMATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The article emphasizes that safety is the most important value for every person. Today, in the face of many threats, its level and interpretation are changing. The conditions of some phenomena also generate premises and possibilities for situations threatening health, life, environment, or infrastructure of a specific area to occur. The probability of occurrence of non-military supernatural events is relatively high. Therefore, it is necessary to skillfully use all the circumstances to distance the potential threats and minimize the possible consequences. It is imperative to take action that will keep and prolong the safety situation. Systemic solutions and the inclusion of many public institutions (organizations) and the society in action taken are essential. Security management is one of the basic functions of all government bodies and public administration, both at government and local government levels. Once the state is achieved, it cannot be maintained for too long. In each case, the procedure will be different. The article presents selected principles of the decision-making process, a procedure aimed at ensuring that the security level is acceptable.

KEYWORDS

safety, threats, management, decision



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Introduction

At the end of the second decade of the 21st century, living conditions are very complex. The complexity results from several reasons. As for people (society), it is natural that they would like to live in a safe environment. What we observe daily is not in line with people's expectations. Violent transformations in almost all areas of every person's activity testify that he or she has nothing to give. New developments in the field of technology, as well as modern solutions to many issues related to everyday life, carry a variety of risks; they have an impact on the perception of safety issues. Besides, various implications resulting from the development of forms of democratization of social life and liberalization of many issues concerning, for example, business or cultural spheres ought to be added to the issues related to safety. Currently, not only is the scale of internationalization of many phenomena and the dynamic

development of forms of democratization of life on a global scale a boon, it is also one of the potential sources of violation of the existing state of affairs, as well as a premise for generating various types of threats [1, p. 23-28].

Human nature has long been oriented towards functioning in a safe environment, without various types of threats that are sometimes difficult to define due to their source or consequences.

The development of civilization provides us with many facilitations in solving everyday problems. The contemporary achievements of science are not always beneficial for us. Through it, humanity has developed and will develop.

There is a maxim that says that there is nothing for free. Civilization brings with it progress but also threats that we do not always see on the right scale. The state of affairs makes modern times differently assessed. In its entirety, it also applies to the issue of safety – the timeless and most significant value for every human being, with different views on even similar issues. The distance between visions of armed conflict and the development of freedoms and rights in many areas of social life and the functioning of institutions has a not insignificant impact on the level of the phenomena under consideration.

Today, individual states and regions face new challenges that cannot be precisely defined. Numerous threats emerge, the effects of which are difficult to imagine. It is worth noting that more and more people, organizations, and public institutions are becoming involved in the process of systemic counteracting possible safety threats. Such a situation allows us to look optimistically into the future. That also suggests that more attention should be paid to security management issues, which is understood primarily as a package of actions aimed at achieving the intended state of safety and maintaining it at a high level. However, there is no reference to two fundamental issues in the studies dealing with it. No description (presentation) exists regarding how to manage safety and the conditions of the decision-making process in this activity. What is more, it is generally stated that the actions taken are intended to maintain safety at a certain level. However, such a term is so vague that it is difficult to refer to it. Moreover, it should be remembered that the specified level can be interpreted differently, for example, because of the wealth or social position of a given person.

The vast majority of articles have been published in various types of publications that include *Safety Management* in their titles. The analysis of their contents, at least in my opinion, is quite critical. That is mainly due to the fact that those publications usually analyze the concept of safety itself, as well as its possible threats and consequences [2, p. 1-16]. There are issues concerning the management of safety, but without emphasizing the decision-making process. I am convinced that this work will inspire other people to take up this issue in a practical dimension. I identify with what is said more than once at various meetings, that it is the most difficult to speak up as one of the first ones to make an introduction to the problem. In many cases, subsequent presentations refer to what has been mentioned above.

I identify with the fact that safety management – in general terms – is the activities aimed at minimizing the likelihood of adverse events and creating opportunities to control and monitor them [3]. Such an approach to the perception of safety management makes it possible to state that it is about the identification and assessment of the occurrence of undesirable events – safety-threatening ones. The resolution of quite specific situations follows that.

Issues resulting from the general theory of organization and management, as well as those included in the decision-making theory, serve as the point of reference for the deliberations.

Following such a position, the basis for reflection will be paradigms resulting from the assumptions of modern management and the determinants of the decision-making process concerning issues related to safety, mainly violation of its acceptable level.

There is no doubt that many factors influence safety issues, mainly internal security. They cannot be seen in isolation. Nowadays, both internal security and state security must be viewed as a determinant phenomenon. It is difficult, even impossible, to perceive issues related to what is happening and can take place in a country without a broader context. Issues related to the core values of a human and the state must be considered systematically. However, the system of state security is an overriding category, and its element (subsystem) is internal security. Such a position is a point of reference for considering further matters related to the very complicated matter of making decisions in the security management process.

1. Safety as a timeless and leading value

The threat is a security antonym, as I mentioned in the introduction. It is generally accepted that threats are physical or social phenomena that cause uncertainty and anxiety, i.e., a feeling of insecurity. It is a condition and/or situation often accompanied by fear and dread [4, p. 35], and internal anxiety.

The feeling of security relates to all areas of human life and activity, thereby creating a multidimensional mental comfort vector for people who feel safe. Therefore, this safety threat covers the whole spectrum of phenomena that perceive this comfort in specific areas of life and activity or their various configurations [5, p. 30-1]. In a slightly broader dimension, the threats are of significant importance, including those factors that violate the constitutional order and the peace and security of people's existence in purely physical terms, i.e., they may result in the loss of life, health or property, which constitute the basis of the existence and enable further development of the individual, as well as the community in which he or she functions and on which depends [6].

Contemporary threats are related to different spheres of social life. As a rule, there are multidimensional phenomena (problems) that constitute a new quality due to the current political system conditions. Both the sources and types of potential threats are diverse – apart from the old and known ones, new ones are still appearing, resulting from the civilization progress in many spheres of human activity.

Security is a fundamental value for a human. Many different threats occur both during peace and military conflict (war). When a threat appears, it is important to follow appropriate rules to increase one's safety.

Diagnosis of potential threats is the starting point for taking activities, from which those aimed at distancing unfavorable events and/or phenomena or minimizing unpleasant consequences are of primary importance. At the same time, a lot is being done for the benefit of cooperation, which is understood primarily as conscious action of people related to the achievement of common goals that are perceived as general social ones. The aim of cooperation understood in this way is to achieve a synergy effect manifesting itself in increasing the effectiveness of joint actions in relation to individual actions or achieving goals that go beyond the capabilities of each of the entities [7, p. 26]. Moreover, achieving a synergy effect, where people are a very active entity, especially in the local dimension, will be involved

in the social perception of security issues. That should be understandable to everyone since the safety of each of us boils down to not endangering the current standard of living, the willingness to possess and/or freely dispose of those resources that are owned by an individual or society. An issue that still raises a lot of emotions, or is it unresolved, is the answer to the question: How to do it?

This question cannot be answered unequivocally. That is due to several facts. First of all, each of us interprets safety in a different way, usually from a particular perspective. The matter becomes complicated when we look at it through the prism of a specific community, e.g., a district or an individual economic entity.

2. A bit of theory

It is widely accepted that management is a set of activities (planning, organizing, motivating, controlling) directed at the organization's resources (human, financial, material, information ones) used to achieve the organization's objectives [8, p. 6]. In other words, management is a comprehensive range of activities, processes, and decisions that, when applied to resources, persons, capital, or the organization, are intended to provide conditions for their effective functioning leading to the achievement of defined objectives. That leads to the conclusion that security management is a package of actions aimed at achieving the intended state of safety and maintaining it at a high level. Arriving at this point, some reflections about the expression high emerge. The reservations stem from what I have stated in the previous paragraph and concern the fact that everyone understands and interprets safety differently.

This article deals with decisions in safety management. That means that all the members included in the title should be divided into first factors. Doing so in relation to decision making and management means that several steps must be taken in a logical order. First, we need to diagnose the initial state, assess what is in orbit of our interest. Next, it is necessary to evaluate our potential and answer the question: what do I have and what can I do? If the situation and the resulting threats are known, and if we recognize what resources we have at our disposal, it will appear possible to resolve the issue contained in the question: how to distribute what is at my disposal (what I have at my disposal) so that safety does not suffer from it, and so that its level is acceptable.

By making some generalization of the issues already approximated and contained in the safety management studies, it can be concluded that those steps lead directly to a solution coinciding with a commonly accepted interpretation of management. In turn, making settlements (making decisions) is a logical sequence of specific activities. J. Kurnal believes that the decision-making cycle consists of two phases: preparation and decision-making [9, p. 186]. In turn, W. Kieżun, when defining the decision-making process, claims that it involves transforming input information into output information [10, p. 299]. According to him, the input information includes messages, reports, instructions, knowledge, and experience, and the output information comprises directives, orders, orders, and instructions. The positions are divergent on this issue. The view that the stages of decision making refer to defining the subject of the decision and its purpose, collecting the necessary information, developing the assumptions made for the decision, defining the principles and ways of executing the decision, and establishing the principles and control of the decision execution is taken frequently. The decision-making process is interpreted otherwise by A. Czermiński and J. Trzcieniecki

[11, p. 74], who believe that the following stages: determining the problem, collecting information, determining the possibility of discussing the result with a specific value, as well as specifying the decision criterion and selection constitute the decision-making cycle. M. Zdyb does not distinguish between the stages, but the phases of the decision-making cycle, hence his position is interesting in this matter. The phases mentioned above include identification and determination of the decision problem, decision formation (solutions), and the selection and determination of the decision [12, p. 127-8]. Sometimes we can meet the view that the decision-making process consists of the phases such as problem definition and diagnosis, search for solutions, decision, as well as evaluation of the effects of changes.

W. Flakiewicz and B. Wawrzyniak also refer to the phases, as previously mentioned [13]. These authors distinguish three phases in decision making: the phase of recognition, i.e., determination of the problem, the phase of design, i.e., formulation of possible solutions to the problem, and the phase of selection, i.e., giving an answer to the question, which is not the best solution. Such an optics of making decisions as well as perceiving and managing complex safety issues will form the basis for further considerations.

The issue is not only complicated because of the complexity of the decision-making process. The afore-mentioned rationality may also find different interpretations. Professor T. Kotarbinski distinguishes between rationality in the methodological sense and rationality in the material sense [14]. If rationality in the methodological sense does not raise objections, the same cannot be said for rationality in the material sense. It is not uncommon to see rationality in the sense of the word as rationality in the material sense, which seems to have a specific subtext directed at facts, events, and things. That means that when we are talking about the accuracy of a decision, its adjustment to reality, in other words – its effect, we mean substantive rationality, namely rationality in the oral sense. On the other hand, when we are considering the way it was made, we are discussing methodological rationality.

3. The assessment of the situation as the beginning of rational action

Information is the basis for any decision. Problems accumulate in its flow, collection, processing, sharing, and management. All this makes that taking a rational decision is not a simple thing; it is a process consisting of many operations (actions), which should be carried out not only in the right way but also in the right order.

In the literature, the cycle of making decisions is generally identified with the process of solving problems. At the same time, it is usually assumed that deciding is making a non-random but conscious choice of one of the possible ways of proceeding. The result of the decision cycle is a decision, i.e., an act consisting in the selection of one solution variant from among many (at least two) possible ones in a given situation, which needs to be diagnosed.

According to H. Simon, the identification and determination of a decision-making problem should boil down to (be a consequence of the occurrence):

- revealing the discrepancy between the current state of affairs and the state we want,
- the entity (decision maker) must have clear objectives – it must be known what is desired to keep or achieve,
- It is necessary to be aware that there are measures to overcome the situation and, at the same time, some doubts which of the ways of solving the decision-making situation is the most appropriate [15].

Detailed analysis in the context of situation assessment aims to determine the causes of the problem [16, p. 238]. In contrast, the diagnosis of causes may, in some cases, be based on intuition, as they are usually not visible, and personal experience or the scope of responsibility might be the cause of subjective identification. Besides, at this stage, the decision-making process's objectives are determined (determining what could be an effective solution to a predefined problem to achieve the organization's objectives).

The result of the assessment of the situation is a clearly and precisely formulated problem, developed based on a detailed analysis of documentation, discussions, meetings, conferences, and others. In safety management, it is imperative to have direct contact, which allows us to correct uncertainties on an ongoing basis and to adapt the content of information to real needs in terms of security threats. It is useful at this stage to use experienced specialists, even from outside of a given administrative division unit. The assessment of the situation and the conclusions that result from it are usually presumed. If, however, it follows from a deviation from the solutions we have implemented to date (the current security situation), a deviation from the assumed plan or information from the public, especially institutions that monitor threats, then the value of such information will be much higher. The real value of the information will become apparent when making decisions and implementing the taken decisions.

The monitoring of security risks is crucial in respect of the assessment of the situation. A necessary condition for counteracting them is the detection of potential threats and their identification (recognition). It concerns both the type and size of the event. The type and amount of means used to over-estimate their effects, as well as the method of rescue operations, depend on it. The way of monitoring the type and degree of threats and detection and identification of occurrences depends on their nature, which is understood as the way their physico-chemical impact on humans and the environment. I am not interested in the reasons, whether they are natural or civilizational threats, and among them those deliberately caused by specific groups of people, e.g., terrorists [2, p. 6].

The synthesis of the above views means that there are always three questions:

1. Is there a problem? And, if so, what is the problem?
2. What are the possible ways to solve it?
3. What strategy (way of action) should be chosen?

4. Design phase

The information that reaches specific people or organizational units is verified and then serves as a basis for further proceedings aimed at resolving security threats.

The design phase takes place after collecting and analyzing information and drawing conclusions from it. It constitutes the basis for creating variants of the concept of solutions to the decision-making problem. Such a position, once again, emphasizes the importance of information in the process of making decisions in situations posing dangers to health, life, or unfavorable phenomena in the natural environment.

Before commencing to build the variants, it is necessary to know the conditions in which they will be implemented. It is indispensable to know the forecasts concerning the aspects that are of interest to us in the time under consideration and the specific environment (operating

conditions). Predictability is an essential element of every decision cycle, and at least some of its results should be known a little earlier before the variants are created.

In order to be effective, solution variants must be based on the primary principle that the proposed solution variants are not subordinate to a predetermined subjective concept of a solution preferring specific part-like objectives. It is clear from practice that failure to adhere to this principle leads to the creation of fictitious solution options. In such a case, we are further dealing with an obvious choice, as it is determined by a non-objective preference for the significance of the assessment criteria.

Haste is not conducive to the search for the best solutions. Too small a limit of time that can be spent on this process is the main driving force limiting the number of developed variants and their quality. If there is a hurry, the search is frequently concluded when a satisfactory variant is found, but it is not clear whether it is the optimal variant. That means, among other things, that inaccurate recognition of the situation, caused by haste, entails the creation of variants with a lower probability of effectiveness. It might also give rise to many unforeseen conclusions during their analysis. Many question marks may also appear during possible implementation.

Other temptations often hinder the preparation of a sufficient number of options. That is the tendency to evaluate individual proposals as they are developed. The temptation must be resisted; practices of this kind do not serve well to solve the problem situation. At this stage, the evaluation of variants is premature and hinders the search for other viable solutions.

The options that will be formulated should meet specific requirements. They determine what characteristics a proper variant should have. The practice provides many interesting insights into the clarification of those requirements. After some generalization, it can be assumed that a good option should:

- not violate the limitations, i.e., be the so-called acceptable option,
- ensure that the objectives are achieved, or at least stay close to those objectives,
- be enforceable,
- be characterized by insensitivity (resistance) to interference,
- take account of the impact of the developed solution on other systems, i.e., consider the interdependencies between the analyzed system and other systems,
- contain the necessary provisions, i.e., have a tolerable degree of risk.

A unique feature of the design phase is the use of creativity inherent in the human psyche. It takes place by activating minds through various types of techniques that stimulate creative thinking. It is not only about proposals of solutions that would allow for the introduction of changes as well as the elimination of existing distortions and irregularities in the functioning of the system at present. It is also vital that particular suggestions rationalize the existing state and influence the strategy of future actions so as to avoid the possibility of irregularities and maintain equality in the functioning of all safety subsystems (elements) and their relations with the environment. It is also essential to identify possible reactions of people (local communities) and, accordingly, specify the necessary activities. Their main aim should be to activate all of them and to remove any threat of losses and deterioration of the current situation. It necessitates creating a real vision of the future with a more favorable picture of what will be [17, p. 127-8]. A climate of faith in a safe future must be provided by putting the vision of a potential threat aside.

Many phenomena, not only around safety, cannot be clearly defined. Therefore, it is essential to create a scenario of unfavorable events and their consequences. The identification of variants that may take place concerning a specific threat, the environment of its occurrence, or the impact on a given community is the basis for answering three basic questions:

1. What will the effects of the implementation of each of the specified variants be?
2. What will the probability of occurrence of the noticed and probable effects of events (developments) threatening people or the environment be?
3. What are the possibilities of counteracting potential threats?

During the design phase, alternative solutions to the decision problem are sought, and selection criteria defined. This phase should pre-evaluate and select the significant variants of the concepts that can be implemented, organize the variants according to the criteria adopted for making decisions, and solve the problems arising from the predicted development of the safety situation.

The design phase is the most difficult since it requires the highest qualifications, excellent knowledge of the environment, and interdisciplinary knowledge. Proposals resulting from this stage of the decision-making process form the basis for further decisions that are already of an implementation nature.

The analyses carried out show one more critical premise – the directive on the rules of procedure during the creation of variants. The directive recommends that it is essential to remember about the praxiological principle specifying a maximum and a minimum acceptable postponement of the so-called decisive moment, namely the moment when a specific choice is finally made when generating and analyzing variants. Adhering to this principle is even more crucial when solving a problem requires numerous solutions that are realized gradually over time. That is because postponing decisions, the resolution of which is not necessary at the current stage of constructing a solution, gives a chance to make the best possible choice in the future. In line with the rule, the haste makes waste, because, as a rule, it is not a good counselor to the decision-maker.

5. Decision phase

The two previous phases can be considered as preparation of the basis for decision making. The very act of decision making consists in selecting one of the estimated solution variants and then designing it in detail or translating the idea into the language of the practical design and implementation procedure. The transition to realization, i.e., launching the selected variant, requires a decision to accept it and another decision to have it implemented.

In decision-making theory, there is a conviction that a decision-maker when selecting one of the possible variants must deal with three categories of problems, which boil down to the necessity of choosing between:

- two equally attractive alternatives,
- two unsatisfactory alternatives,
- solutions, each of which involves simultaneous achievement of the desired objective and negative effects.

When making an assessment, an option that will guarantee the best solution to the decision problem needs to be chosen. It is difficult to present the so-called golden mean or the best or universal method. This is impossible, mainly because each situation is unique and involves a great many question marks to which it is difficult to give an unambiguous answer. In a way, when having these doubts removed, certain decision criteria can be submitted, which cannot always be fulfilled but can be taken into consideration. Such criteria, of fundamental importance, may include:

- speed, i.e., the choice of a solution that can be implemented in the near future,
- legality, i.e., compliance of the chosen option with the applicable legislation,
- limited risk, i.e., elimination of uncertain solutions.

Commentary regarding the specified suggestions (recommendations) is essential. There are several reasons for its validity. Thus, speed is of paramount importance in addressing any security situation. Extending the time to resolve and delaying the use of resources that may counteract possible threats and (or) minimize the adverse effects of the situation that has arisen, the exposure of people or the environment has inevitable consequences that cannot be reversed.

Time is a critical factor in the decision-making process. However, there are many arguments in favor of its not being a fundamental premise for action. The main reason to be cautious about the speed of decisions is the fact that the made decision, a settlement that results in the activation of the potential, cannot be changed in the short term. At this point, one of the well-known sayings can be explained: *the troops that went to counterattack cannot be turned back*.

When making an act of choice, at least one of the two options, one must respect the law. In a nutshell, that can be put in the following terms. If a dangerous event, threatening health, life or the environment, has its unfavorable dimension for a given person or community, e.g., resulting from water poisoning, then lawyers, who often do not notice specific social nuances, but represent the interest of a given person – the principal, enter the “scene” of the conducted deliberations. As a rule, there is no room for sentiment in such a situation, but only for the interpretation of the legal provisions in relation to a specific event.

In light of the above, not entirely legal discussions, it is perfectly reasonable to aim to eliminate uncertain solutions. After all, it is these solutions that dominate the system of the occurrence of danger. Thus, this state of affairs is another argument, so we do not forget about the legal rules when perceiving the situation’s nuances.

Economic efficiency, namely the choice of the variant that is most efficient or the most economical, is quite often emphasized in the theory of making decisions and matters concerning the functioning of contemporary organizations. That is understandable since concerning economic entities; it is a fundamental factor. However, should this argument be taken into account when resolving issues related to people’s health and even life? When asking this question, I do not want to make a total negation of this factor – arguably probably not only me – I am convinced that it cannot be as crucial as about business activities, where economic efficiency is one of the top places.

As regards decision-making conditions – in terms of safety management – the objective should be to eliminate uncertain solutions. In practice, we can consider two cases, as the

state of certainty in relation to security threats seems unlikely. The same cannot be said of risk-based decision-making, i.e., a situation where the availability of individual options and the potential benefits and costs of each option are known with some estimated probability. Concerning the issues raised, it will be predominant to make decisions under conditions of uncertainty, where the decision-maker does not know all the choices, the risks associated with each of them, and their possible consequences.

The art of making decisions in situations threatening health, life, or the environment is not straightforward. A decision-maker is never able to gather all the information he/she should obtain, so decisions are made based on incomplete knowledge, subject to some risk. It, in turn, accentuates the need (reasonableness) to reduce information to such an extent that it can be controlled, and to make generalizations, which in contrast will absorb uncertainty.

Conclusion

In any case, when decisions are taken in a situation of non-military emergency, the existence of a precedent regarding “normal” operating conditions, that is a specific economic operator, is burdened by a variety of circumstances. They are difficult to define unambiguously, if only because each security situation is specific, even inimitable.

The complexity of the decision-making process and the variety of potential security threats makes it impossible to specify the recommended model thoroughly. Sometimes, due to the nature of the problem and how the management (command) functions are carried out, certain phases of the process may be simplified, while others may be more extensive.

By having a well-functioning information system, uncertainty and risk of decisions can be reduced. However, the system must continuously operate so that the set of information necessary to make decisions is possible, reasonably up-to-date, and reliable.

Security decisions are to be made prudently and quickly enough and must be effective, which can and is often interpreted subjectively.

Each decision-maker should strive to be methodologically rational, acting based on calculations, following the applicable procedures, and the art of decision making.

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The author declared no conflict of interests.

Author contributions

The author contributed to the interpretation of results and writing of the paper. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Ethical statement

The research complies with all national and international ethical requirements.

ORCID

Zbigniew Ścibiorek  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7408-4302>

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Biographical note

Zbigniew Ścibiorek – Colonel (Ret.), Prof. Dr. hab. Eng. – former long-time employee of the National De-fence Academy. Dean of the Faculty of Management and Command of the Academy. Academic teacher at several universities, including the Military University of Land Forces in Wrocław. For years in the scientific and didactic orbit of the State security issues. He is the author of numerous studies in the field of external and internal security, as well as books on the issue of making managerial (commanding) decisions, and people in public organizations.

Decyzje w zarządzaniu bezpieczeństwem

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł akcentuje, że bezpieczeństwo jest najistotniejszą wartością dla każdego człowieka. Współcześnie w obliczu szeregu zagrożeń jego poziom i interpretacja ulega zmianom. Uwarunkowania szeregu zjawisk generują również przesłanki i możliwości zaistnienia sytuacji zagrażających zdrowiu, życiu, środowisku czy infrastrukturze określonego obszaru. Prawdopodobieństwo zaistnienia niemilitarnych zdarzeń nadzwyczajnych jest stosunkowo wysokie. Dlatego należy umiejętnie wykorzystywać wszelkie okoliczności, aby oddalać mogące się pojawić zagrożenia, a ewentualne skutki zminimalizować. Trzeba podejmować działania, które stan bezpieczeństwa pozwolą utrzymać możliwie jak najdłużej. Nieodzowne są rozwiązania systemowe i włączenie do podejmowanych działań wiele instytucji (organizacji) publicznych oraz społeczeństwa. Zarządzanie bezpieczeństwem stanowi bowiem jedną z podstawowych funkcji wszystkich organów władzy i administracji publicznej, zarówno szczebla rządowego, jak i samorządowego. Stanu raz osiągniętego nie da się utrzymać zbyt długo. W każdym przypadku procedura postępowania będzie inna. Artykuł przedstawia wybrane zasady procesu decyzyjnego, postępowania ukierunkowanego na to, aby poziom bezpieczeństwa był akceptowalny.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE bezpieczeństwo, zagrożenia, zarządzanie, decyzja

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