



# CHALLENGES FOR CONTEMPORARY NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS – THEORETICAL DELIBERATIONS

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**Abstract:** This article discusses theoretical deliberations about the challenges facing contemporary non-profit organizations and their managements. In these entities, the ability to make wise decisions and the way of putting them into practice are more and more important. This is important above all, due to the constant pressure oriented to the full use of resources and the increase in the effectiveness of the actions taken. A good manager enables an organization to adapt to the changes taking place in an environment despite its simultaneous variability, uncertainty, and complexity. The purpose of the article is to point out the most important challenges facing contemporary non-profit organizations.

**Keywords:** non-profit organizations, management professionalization, non-profit organization management.

## 1. Introduction

Contemporary non-profit organizations<sup>1</sup> are facing the need for management professionalization which consists in taking actions enabling the proper (effective) use of solutions appropriate to commercial organizations. The different nature of activity dictated by the stakeholders is emphasised, which means that different opinions about non-profit organization management professionalization are expressed in reference books. For example, T. Białas emphasises that non-profit organization management professionalization is continual and progressing in nature, which means that they should be organizations open to all innovations, perceiving problems from different perspectives, sensitive to signals and challenges of local communities and ready

to introduce changes [Marciszewska 2014, p. 57]. M. Ćwiklicki and T. Kafel point out that the process of professionalization of the non-profit sector may be an opportunity for its development, provided that the implementation of modern management methods and techniques will take account of individual predispositions of the discussed organizations to make use of professional management methods and the implementation will be carried out so that an organization still remains faithful to their mission, but does not disregard effectiveness, innovation, flexibility or functioning efficiency [Ćwiklicki, Kafel 2008, p. 167]. While E. Bogacz-Wojtanowska and M. Rymcza point out that this process “is not about choosing a homogeneous ‘option of managing an organization’, corresponding to a chosen, textbook and/or theoretical concept, or pursuing it consistently

<sup>1</sup> In the article, the term ‘non-profit organizations’ will be equated with the term ‘the third sector organizations’.

regardless of the circumstances, but rather about consciously making use of various professional management instruments, taking into account the real needs of internal and external stakeholders, and adjusting them to a phase of the life cycle of an organization” [Bogacz-Wojtanowska, Rymsza 2015, p. 6]. It is worth emphasising that it is indicated in the reference books that non-profit organization management professionalization should take account of the output of management sciences to date, at the same time taking into consideration the specificity of their functioning. Such an approach is acknowledged to be an opportunity for the development of the third sector.

The purpose of this article is to identify the challenges to be faced by contemporary non-profit organizations. For them, seeking new management solutions is becoming the greatest challenge. These organizations need new managing tools that will enable them to derive functioning social benefits. This concerns, above all, areas related to human resources, finance, and strategic management, taking into account being involved in lofty objectives (ideas) and the professionalism of actions. Theoretical deliberations in the indicated area are aimed at the scientific enrichment of the discussed issues, as well as pointing out the most important management areas and the role of leaders in the success of a non-profit organization.

## 2. Challenges facing non-profit organizations

In the reference books, it is indicated that non-profit organizations contribute both to a faster economic growth and better spending of public funds, which results in a more satisfied society. But this is possible by cooperating with this society and by applying clear management standards [Smith 2008, pp. 136-137]. This means that these organizations are faced with the necessity of continually adapting to new, external and internal conditions. It therefore seems that exactly the professionalization of their management enables, in the broadest context, to take account of all of these determinants so as to enable them to adjust the objectives being established as well as the forms of accomplishing them in present and future conditions. However, on the other hand, it is emphasised that this process may both lead to development, and cause that non-profit organizations will have trouble pursuing their statutory objectives [Marciszewska 2014, p. 61]. For this reason, it is worth giving some thought and identifying areas in which these organizations are experiencing difficulties. In the literature, it is pointed

out that the development of non-profit organizations is affected by the development of modern technologies, globalisation, intense competition, environmental problems, and an increase in the value of knowledge or cooperation [Hernik 2011, p. 8]. This variability of the environment means that contemporary non-profit organizations are being faced with many challenges which will affect their development as well as ‘force’ them to continually seek their own factors of success of the carried-out non-profit activities.

Among these challenges, for example, **strategic planning**, is pointed out, which is related to problems arising during the stage of planning the future and programming the development strategy [Kaczmarek 2014, p. 703]. Most non-profit organizations did not pay too much attention to this process, and the strategies designed relate, above all, to activities oriented to the selection of sources of financing their activities [Zielińska 2011, p. 103]. The modern literature indicates that there has been the need to adjust the concept of strategic management to the needs of non-profit organizations by continually seeking a model of the strategic planning process. Such models were proposed by John Bryson, Paul Nutt and Mary Hatten, but they do not differ in any considerable way from the models proposed for commercial entities. They only emphasize the role of analysing stakeholders and determining the values on which a non-profit organization should be based more strongly. J. Domański notices that there has been a dominating view among researchers that “non-profit organizations are not inclined to continually redefine their objectives as a result of changes taking place in an environment or to design their functioning strategy on this basis only” [Domański 2010, p. 346]. This conclusion arises from the practice which reveals that non-profit organizations are above all focused on functional strategies (e.g. financial, promotional, personnel ones, etc.), and the general strategy is the result of these partial activities. Therefore, there are questions from the point of view of the challenges facing non-profit organizations of how one can reconcile “the crucial role of an organization’s top management with the opposite, delegating their powers related to strategic planning” and if there is a strategic management school which would be the most appropriate for a non-profit organization? Currently, most researchers highlight the necessity of adjusting known concepts to include the specificity of the organizations discussed in them [Domański 2010, p. 347]. Non-profit organizations themselves indicate that currently strategic planning is “a permanently unfinished project” for them because the scope of actions taken under the strategy is dependent on

both on the stakeholders and the given organization environment, and both of these factors are nowadays characterised by both diversity and great variability. It is emphasised that acquiring the ability to modify a strategy depending on the market need may become one of the key abilities of non-profit organizations. However, an attempt to answer the question of how to first determine, and then measure the effectiveness of accomplishing social objectives still remains the biggest problem [Hernik 2011, p. 7]. Non-profit organizations should start planning for a period longer than one year and understand the importance of strategic planning. This has brought about positive effects to the organizations discussed in the form of the better understanding of an organization mission, together with ways of accomplishing the mission, opportunities to start cooperation outside one sphere, more effective decision-making processes, stakeholders' greater satisfaction or benefits for those directly involved in an organization's activity (e.g. competence improvement, uncertainty reduction, satisfaction increase, etc.) [Hernik 2011, p. 8]. For this reason it is so important that non-profit organizations plan strategically, rather than focus on current problems only.

Another challenge to which attention is paid is **branding**, being of cardinal importance for the activity of a non-profit organization. Wally Olins points out the third sector organizations' prejudice against treating 'branding' traditionally<sup>2</sup> which is acknowledged to be wrong and tasteless. It is recommended to use the expression 'reputation' or 'image'. It is also emphasized that the brand of a non-profit organization is built above all on emotions and publicity. This means the necessity of orienting oneself to an individual communication strategy, which is related to taking actions not arising out of strictly defined patterns. For this reason, a brand core is so important in this process which arouses the media's continuous interest without spending financial means for promotional activities (e.g. Caritas Polska – tradition or Orkiestra Świątecznej Pomocy [*Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity*] – a collection of the largest amount of money in one day). In the branding of a non-profit organisation, a powerful personality of the creator and initiator of an undertaking is also emphasised, which in the case of these entities becomes the key to success [Maruszewski 2005, p. 93]. However, it should be emphasized that branding in contemporary non-profit organizations is above all

related to the notion of 'co-branding'. In practice, this means undertaking joint promotional activities by a commercial entity (offering funds and a well-known brand) and a non-governmental organization (offering trust and renown). The UNICEF and SC Johnson cooperation may be an example of such activities under which it was assumed that profits from the sale of selected products would be allocated to the fight against malaria. Under co-branding, famous people are also involved, whose name is associated with the conducted campaign of a given organization and/or a non-profit organization itself. First of all, such an approach to branding provides the third sector organizations with a potential increase in interest in a given organization, popularisation of a given idea, savings on promotional activities, and also eventually an increase in diverse support. However, as J. Hernik observes aptly, it should be emphasized that the branding process needs to be based on a distinct mission, frankness, and on the communication of an actual involvement to an environment [Hernik 2011, pp. 3-4].

Another challenge facing non-profit organizations is an increase in the importance of **social media**. The ICT revolution offered access to more efficient and effective methods of communication with the environment. This resulted in the need for the gradual modification and modernisation of non-profit organizations' actions in the area of new communication technologies. As M. Pacut notices, more and more non-profit organisations are perceiving the benefits from making use of the good points of a hypermedia model of communication. This ensures passing on information about their identity (mission, vision, value, organizational culture) to the environment easily and 'cheaply' along with an explanation of the objectives and ways of accomplishing them. The following are listed among the basic good points of using social media by contemporary non-profit organizations [Pacut 2016, p. 240; Iwankiewicz-Rak 2011, p. 72]:

- an interactive exchange of contents that enables to build and continue relationships with different groups of stakeholders, which fosters continuing relationships and establishing strong ties enabling to create communities around organizations and the ideas propagated by them, along with creating the so-called bottom-up 'advocates' organizations, being a natural bridge between the organization and their environment;

<sup>2</sup> Branding: the purpose of branding is creating and consolidating the positive image of a specific brand. In a broader sense, branding is simply marketing whose purpose is to emphasise the good points of a specific brand, product and/or service. In a narrower sense, 'branding' is creating a brand, i.e. the process of creating a product, brand and/or a service.

- an opportunity of very precisely addressing diversified messages and contents to individual target groups, while at the same time retaining the mass scale of influence. This property is becoming very important for non-profit organizations above all from the point of view of their needs as far as communication with an environment (providing social services, propagating ideas and behaviour patterns, raising donations, recruiting volunteers, etc.) is concerned;
- low costs of using digital equivalents enable non-profit organizations to depart from traditional, costly forms of mass communication. This is important due to the need for the rationalization of the costs borne in connection with the activity carried out and is an attractive alternative, particularly because of the global range of the new media enabling to launch large-scale campaigns even by not too 'rich' organizations.

The social media is not a very popular online communication tool in non-profit organizations – used by only 25% of the organizations [Przewłocka et al. 2013]. However, it should be emphasized that the method of communication of these organizations with an environment has been changing all the time. The social media is a tool which to a considerable extent takes into account the needs and specificity of the functioning of non-profit organizations, which causes an increase in their role among the marketing communication tools of contemporary non-profit organizations.

Understanding the importance of **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)**<sup>3</sup> is another challenge for the discussed organizations. CSR is today becoming an opportunity for better cooperation between business entities and non-profit organizations. An equal partnership should be the basis for these relationships, without treating business as the main source of access to financial means [Duda 2017, p. 1]. To accomplish this, this process should be carried out in a conscious, knowledge-based manner, preceded with research identifying how the activity of a non-profit organization is related to social responsibility. Such an approach will enable to determine the key action area related to social responsibility and will aid the identification of an organization's stakeholders. However, it should be emphasized that a non-profit organization should pay attention to the effectiveness and efficiency of implementing the concept being discussed, which is related to the need to constantly monitor the current progress of completion of

actions [Krodkiewska-Skoczylas, Żarlicka 2015, p. 288]. Those managing non-profit organizations who understand the need for the implementation of the CSR concept have the opportunity to both acquire permanent financial backup and to establish a long-term partnership with business. Such an approach translates into direct contact with the community and its needs. Non-profit organizations acquire also the ability to establish cooperation with representatives of other sectors, and this in practice means accomplishing objectives requiring cross-sectoral cooperation. CSR based on a strong partnership and trust will bring profits to both parties and may be used as an example for other organizations and companies [Duda 2017, p. 1].

An **increase in the importance of intellectual capital** is no less essential. In non-profit organizations, which is above all related to the necessity of acquiring the ability to use possessed knowledge for own development, as well as developing the so-called knowledge distribution channels that will enable to share both it and the experiences with other employees or co-workers. Such an approach will mean that a higher level of knowledge will be achieved which should become the non-profit organization's most valuable resource. Furthermore, having the ability to use the effects of learning for the benefit of accomplishing social objectives is becoming significant. However, this is a complex process that requires great involvement of employees/volunteers along with changing an approach to their own development, improving the qualifications or acquiring knowledge [Łobejko 2009, pp. 11-12].

However, for non-profit organizations to be able to meet the aforementioned challenges they should be managed by people who on the one hand know well the specificity of functioning of the third sector organisations, and have the ability to make effective decisions which will enable an organization to adapt to the changes taking place in their environment on the other. For this reason it is more and more often referred to as the challenges facing non-profit organization leaders and their effect on the efficiency of the functioning of the discussed organizations.

### 3. Challenges for non-profit organization leaders

For the development of a non-profit organization to be successful taking into account the process of professionalization and challenges related to it, it is

<sup>3</sup> A concept under which enterprises based on freedom of choice combine commitment for social and environmental issues under a business activity as well as under relationships with the stakeholders.

necessary to provide properly prepared personnel. It is emphasised today that work in the organizations being discussed is not only for 'amateurs', it also requires employing people with professional skills [Leś et al. 2000, p. 9]. As aptly observed by J. Przybysz, not too much attention has been paid in non-profit organizations to the issue of human resource management. This is a result above all of focusing on an organization's finances which are treated as a scarce resource. While there has always been access to an organization's employees, volunteers or members, which means that the leaders are not fully aware that they need to care about them and coordinate their work [Przybysz 2015, p. 14]. In an attempt to point out the challenges facing non-profit organization leaders, attention should be paid to a few aspects related to these entities. Firstly, the specificity of human resources management in non-profit organizations has to be emphasised. This specificity is related to the sense of mission of those involved in an organization's activity, the dominance of informal organizational structures, the organizational culture based on friendly relations or to the varying level of competence of the people working for the organization who could be counted among both people disadvantaged on the labour market, volunteers or professionals [Bogacz-Wojtanowska 2005, p. 8]. Secondly, it is worth pointing out the nature of challenges that non-profit organizations are facing more and more often, among which there are the following [Przybysz 2015, p. 15]:

- responding to the expectations/needs of beneficiaries, funders, and of an environment more flexibly,
- managing resources more effectively,
- acting responsibly,
- honestly providing high quality services with less and less financial means.

The aforementioned challenges make it necessary to pose the question of in which direction personnel management in non-profit organizations should 'move' for it to be a condition for these entities' success and development. It is implied that the basis for accomplishing the objectives of the discussed organisations is non-financial motivation (a result of the limited means allocated for personnel management) and improving employees' qualifications [Ridder et al. 2012 according to: Przybysz 2015, p. 18]. Managing people in third sector organizations is a highly complex process. This is a result of difficulty of standardising and regularising it, and J. Przybysz emphasizes that this is more of an art than a science [Przybysz 2015, p. 18]. Those managing people in non-profit organizations, despite financed constraints, have most

often at their disposal such incentive instruments as flexitime, freedom in setting working hours, working in a friendly atmosphere, membership of a group, clear promotion criteria and efficient communication. Such an approach to the employees means that they become loyal, committed to their work and involved in creative thinking. Furthermore, as emphasised by E. Bogacz-Wojtanowska, for people working in the third sector, also the issues they are dealing with, the opportunity to take on challenges at work, freedom, autonomy, responsibility and the opportunity to make decisions matter to them [Bogacz-Wojtanowska 2005, p. 8]. Contrary to the views that the internal motivation of the employees of a non-profit organization may harmonise with the organization's objectives and affect the organization's development, one must not give up personnel management completely. The issue itself has not been analysed thoroughly by leaders of the organizations discussed who often think that it is enough for people working in the third sector to have a sense of mission to be satisfied with their work. This is the reason for no discussions on work and pay conditions in non-profit organizations and treating the issues related to personnel management of the third sector organizations as not important.

In connection with underestimating the human resource management process in third sector organizations, J. Przybysz [2015, pp. 16-20] refers to five symptoms indicating the possibility of a crisis in Polish non-profit organizations. *Firstly*, he points out the hazard related to treating cooperation with the public sector as the iron cage of bureaucracy. This cooperation enables non-profit organizations to employ paid personnel. This, to a large degree, concerns the leaders' decision related to carrying out EU projects and to the risk related to a change of the rules once a project is underway. The result of it is a situation in which the administration as money management deprives the third sector entities of such features as independence and orientation to serving the citizens. *Secondly*, he refers to the misunderstood principle of efficiency. This is related to the need to create a stable team for carrying out public tasks requiring high quality services, which means the necessity of paying higher wages. However, in practice we are dealing with a situation where it is the funders who decide on the amount of wages, often not taking into account the geographical diversification of the costs of the provision of services or the specificity of expertise. This puts non-profit organization leaders in a difficult situation and forces them to seek other sources of financing such an undertaking or to transfer an employee who agrees to provide a given service for lower wages (this is often a person with lower

qualifications). This also causes situations in which organization leaders use means from other projects being carried out when seeking other sources, which means that the scope of responsibilities of a given employee is considerably above the scope of regular employment. Being burdened with too many tasks and responsibilities may negatively affect the functioning of the entire organization. *Thirdly*, he points out the misunderstanding of the idea of voluntary service. Non-profit organization leaders do not know how to prepare 'paid' personnel for cooperation with volunteers who are treated as less valuable employees. There is no willingness to get the volunteers involved in the life of the organization. They are told to carry out small tasks arising out of immediate needs. These people often feel underestimated. Such a situation is a result of a lack of professionalism in the area of volunteer management, and this does not do any good to a non-profit organization. *Fourthly*, J. Przybysz writes about the lack of coherence of the image with reality. Non-profit organizations are perceived as entities acting above all for others, and one of the main reasons for undertaking work in these organizations is the willingness to carry out work in a place where a social aspect, mission, adopted values or beneficiaries' interests are of significance. This image attracts many people for placements and traineeship, young people in particular. Unfortunately, these people in many cases feel disappointment, have a sense of wasted time because their work was not planned, they did not have a supervisor and no one was interested in them on a daily basis. Therefore, the question arises is this how an offer of placements and traineeship offered by non-profit organizations should look like? The last, *fifth* symptom concerns the lack of professionalization conditions which hinders personnel development and organization's professionalization. This to a considerable extent concerns young employees who at their workplace expect above all opportunities for personal fulfilment and building a career. In the case when there are no such opportunities, they look for a new place of work. In order to prevent this, non-profit organization leaders should plan their employees' career development. Unfortunately, in most of the third sector organizations, those managing do not have suitable competence in this respect or the financial means. Otherwise the projects being carried out do not consider the costs of training courses improving employees' qualifications because it has been commonly thought that the means allocated to public tasks should to the greatest possible extent cover the direct costs of a project and the project's recipients. This makes many employees treat non-profit organizations as a temporary place of work.

#### 4. Conclusion

The challenges discussed in the article should bring appropriate reactions from non-profit organizations. The task of those managing these entities is to meet these challenges, as well as – what is more important, to transform them competently, which will translate into an increase in the functioning efficiency of the third sector organizations. It is also necessary to promote and reinforce the role of voluntary service (an inherent feature of non-profit organizations) because owing to this activity and the citizens' involvement we are dealing with the public benefit activity. An essential area which needs to be reinforced is the range of financial backup which individuals as well as donors from the commercial sector give to non-profit organizations. This makes it necessary to build relationships of equal partners between non-profit organizations and the private sector [Leś et al. 2000, p. 9]. Attention should also be paid to one of the main resources of non-profit organizations, i.e. human capital as well as the potential for development in it. These are exactly the human resources that have the greatest influence on the future of the entire third sector. Lacking the ability to manage employees has been acknowledged to be one of the more costly mistakes in running non-profit organizations [Przybysz 2015, p. 14].

The above deliberations are the basis for identifying areas that may become a point of departure for in-depth research concerning non-profit organizations in Poland. The research should concern:

- possible paths of development of contemporary non-profit organizations,
- employment in the third sector from the point of view of problems emerging within an organization and with their relationships with an environment,
- areas of activity of leaders and their influence on the success of an organization,
- influence of the technological development on functioning of the third sector,
- common areas of management, of both small and large-sized non-profit organizations,
- non-profit organization management professionalization.

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## WYZWANIA DLA WSPÓŁCZESNYCH ORGANIZACJI NON PROFIT – ROZWAŻANIA TEORETYCZNE

**Streszczenie:** Prezentowany artykuł zawiera rozważania teoretyczne dotyczące wyzwań, przed którymi stoją współczesne organizacje *non profit* oraz kadra nimi zarządzająca. W podmiotach tych coraz większe znaczenie ma umiejętność podejmowania rozsądnych decyzji i sposób wprowadzania ich w życie. Jest to ważne przede wszystkim ze względu na ciągłą presję ukierunkowaną na pełne wykorzystanie zasobów i wzrost efektywności podejmowanych działań. To dobry menedżer umożliwia organizacji dostosowanie się do zmian zachodzących w otoczeniu, mimo równoczesnej jego zmienności, niepewności i złożoności. Celem artykułu jest wskazanie najważniejszych wyzwań, przed którymi stoją współczesne organizacje *non profit*.

**Słowa kluczowe:** organizacje *non profit*, profesjonalizacja zarządzania, zarządzanie organizacjami *non profit*.