

ANDRZEJ K. KOŹMIŃSKI  
Kozminski University

## **Bounded Leadership Empirical Study of the Polish Elite**

*Abstract:* This paper presents the results of qualitative research conducted by the method of in-depth interviews with Polish leaders. A very diversified group of high-level and considerably successful leaders were selected and interviewed. The typology (profiles) of the leaders, their constraints and strength are revealed and discussed. The leaders give much importance to their struggle for autonomy and overcoming constraints. They are familiar with the different models of “optimal leadership.” Their profiles and sources of leadership strength are examined within the framework of the “bounded leadership theory.”

*Keywords:* leaders, leadership, qualitative research, typology, leadership constraints, leadership strength.

### **Purpose and Method of Research**

The primary objective of the study was to gain knowledge about leadership from leaders who have achieved considerable success in Poland. The initial stage of the research consisted in selecting a diverse group of respondents who were willing to give a long (45–60 minutes) interview. Particular emphasis was put on experience in leadership, and therefore I decided not to avoid approaching those who no longer are, but used to be leaders at some point in their lives. I contacted twenty-nine individuals who together form a highly diversified group. The majority are rather mature, and for this reason I also decided to include a younger person in the study: a female student from the Kozminski University.

Many of my respondents have performed several functions simultaneously, e.g. of a lecturer or professor and a politician. Some of them are managers of large business organisations, but also cultural institutions; there are clergymen and religious activists, local government officials elected by their local community, social activists, heads of non-governmental organisations and a military commander.

All interviews were conducted between August 2012 and April 2013. The list of interviewees is as follows:

Leszek Balcerowicz, Professor of Economics and politician, former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (1989–1991 and 1997–2000), the Architect of “Shock Therapy” and early market reforms in Poland.

Jolanta Batycka-Wąsik, Chief (voyt) of the 18,000 commune of Lesznowola near Warsaw, democratically elected 7 times in a row.

Jan K. Bielecki, former Prime Minister of the Polish government (1991), presently Chairman of The Prime Minister's Advisory Council.

Henryka Bochniarz, CEO [Chief Executive Officer] of Boeing International for Central and Eastern Europe, President of "The Leviathan Confederation of Private Employers."

General Andrzej Ekiert, former Commander of the Multinational Division Central-South of the Polish Military Contingent in Iraq, former Deputy Commander of Land Forces.

Adam Góral, founder and President of Asseco Poland, the largest IT company and solutions provider in the region of CEE [Central and Eastern Europe] with a sales volume of app. EUR 1bn, operating in 16 countries.

Konrad Jaskóła, former President of Polimex-Mostostal—the largest construction company in Poland and CEO of Petrochemia Płock—the second largest petrochemical company in Poland.

Agata Kaczmarek, fifth-year student at the Kozminski University, elected President of the Student Government Board.

Emilian Kamiński, actor, director, head and owner of the private "Kamienica Theatre."

Andrzej Klesyk, President of PZU SA, the largest insurance group in the region of CEE.

Grzegorz Kołodko, Professor of Economics, former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (1994–1997 and 2002–2003), author of the "Strategy for Poland" economic plan launched in 1995.

Bogusław Kott, President and founder of Millennium Bank.

Piotr Krzystek, elected Mayor of the city of Szczecin.

Aleksander Kwaśniewski, former President of the Republic of Poland elected for two consecutive terms 1995–2000 and 2000–2005. Former communist, founder of Social Democratic Party (SLD).

Sławomir Lachowski, founder of mBank, former President of BRE Bank, promoter of e-banking in Poland.

Czesław Lang, former professional cyclist, creator and Director of Tour de Pologne.

Alberto Lozano Platonoff, Professor of Organization, Szczecin University, active member of Opus Dei with a leadership role.

Leszek Miller, former Prime Minister of the government of the Republic of Poland (2001–2004), former communist, presently Chairman of the Social Democratic Party [SLD].

Cardinal Kazimierz Nycz, Archbishop of Warsaw.

Jerzy Owskiak, founder, organiser and CEO of the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity since 22 years collecting 16m USD yearly for medical equipment designated for children's hospitals. Organiser of the yearly "Woodstock Stop Festival"—the largest rock festival in the world.

Grażyna Piotrowska-Oliwa, President of PGNiG, the largest gas company in the region of CEE.

Tomasz Sadowski, Chairman of the Board of the Mutual Assistance Foundation "Barka," a social entrepreneurship experiment.

Father Leszek Slipek—parish priest of St. Andrew the Martyr's Church in Warsaw.

Jerzy Szaflik, Professor of Medicine, Head of the Department of Ophthalmology, Medical University of Warsaw, Director of the Independent Public Clinical Hospital of Ophthalmology in Warsaw, Deputy Chairman of the Central Commission for Academic Degrees and Titles.

Tadeusz Tyszka, Professor of Psychology, Chair of the Department of Economic Psychology and Director of the Centre for Economic Psychology and Decision Research at the Kozminski University.

Lech Wałęsa, former President of the Republic of Poland (1995–2000), founder and leader of the "Solidarity" movement, created the Gdansk Shipyard in 1980.

Antoni Wit, conductor, Managing and Artistic Director of the National Philharmonic in Warsaw.

Maciej Witucki, President of Orange Polska, the largest telecom company in Poland.

Jerzy Woźnicki, Professor of Technical Sciences, former Rector of the Warsaw University of Technology, former Chairman of the Conference of Rectors of Polish Universities, President of the Polish Rectors Foundation and Director of the Institute of Knowledge Society.

I spoke to each of them personally. Our conversations, which were at least one hour long, were registered with a tape recorder, with the consent of my interviewees. They have agreed to reveal their identities and to use the interviews for scientific publication. However, no information on the identifiable respondents' opinions is revealed according to the rules of personal data protection. Given the small sample size and the considerable contextual value of the statements, I decided against resorting to a computer content analysis. Instead, I read the records of the interviews several times, striving to classify separate fragments in order to outline the views of my respondents. This exercise allowed me to identify the most important leadership types (profiles), leadership competencies and the types of constraints faced by leaders.

The research was conducted on a very diversified but small group of high-level leaders. It does not pretend to provide results that are representative of all possible leaders and even not of any large category of them. I adhere to the notion that qualitative research should first of all perform exploratory, explanatory/diagnostic and evaluative functions (Goodyear 1998). The first should bring background information about new and not well-known phenomena and to reveal the structure, values and dynamics of a culture—leadership culture in our case—but not their frequency, volume or intensity in the general population. The second should explain the investigated phenomena by answering questions about “why, how and in which combinations or sequences” these phenomena occur, but not assessing the strength of these combinations in terms of the general population. The third should reveal the way in which the respondents' values influence their evaluations of particular phenomena or processes, without assessing the distribution of these evaluations in a larger population. Denzin and Lincoln (2005: 4–5) compare qualitative data analysis to making bricolage or—better—to film editing (montage), i.e. selecting and assembling different pieces of material, which in sociological research reflect fragments of social reality, into coherent and logical larger images. A typology (classification, categorisation) of these fragments, naming the concepts of the created categories and analysing their conceptual relations constitute an indispensable element of the analysis (Mariampolski 2001: 257; Babbie 2009: 428–429). Such were my main aims.

The interviews were carried out on the basis of a scenario, but without recourse to a previously established questionnaire; to a certain extent, they were conducted spontaneously. All of them, however, addressed the following issues:

1. The definition, understanding and use of the concepts of “leader” and “leadership.”
2. Leadership and management—do leaders have to be managers and do managers have to be leaders?
3. Where does leadership come from? What are the sources of a leader's influence on his/her followers?

4. The evolution of leadership styles, methods and effectiveness.
5. Is it possible to teach leadership or train oneself to become a leader?
6. Expertise in a specific domain or broad horizons?
7. How much genuineness and how much acting and theatre is there in leadership and what are their respective roles?
8. Do leaders have to be ruthless?
9. Are leaders allowed more than other people? What criteria should be applied to evaluate them?
10. Is ethical leadership possible?
11. What is the role of risk, pressure and stress in leadership?
12. Passions of leaders.
13. Humiliation and insecurity as factors motivating leaders to act.
14. Failures, fiascos and defeats of the leader and of his/her subordinates.
15. Narcissistic leadership.

The respondents answered the questions willingly and candidly, although not all of them answered each question due to differences in the dynamics of each conversation. The discourse was vivid and the respondents sometimes turned to picturesque metaphors. In order to ensure complete sincerity of their statements, I committed myself to the anonymity of the material contained in the publication. This means that all quotes are referred to in an anonymous manner. The leadership profiles of the subsequent respondents and the analysis of the strength of their leadership are presented in the same way.

A number of quotes—those that exemplify more general thoughts—are repeated in different contexts. My objective was to gain access to some kind of “collective wisdom” of all the interviewed leaders, and not to present them as identified individuals, regardless of how fascinating they are.

### **Leadership Profiles**

The interviews create a highly heterogeneous picture from which it is difficult to draw any general conclusions relating both to the current theoretical knowledge about leadership and the predominant practice. Therefore, an attempt to distinguish a number of separate leadership profiles should rely on several criteria, which ought to be as precise and clear as possible. Following the content analysis of the interviews, two criteria were formulated:

- sources of leadership, i.e. a set of conditions that enable leaders to play their role in specific environments;
- leadership competencies, i.e. skills enabling leaders to achieve their objectives and to fulfil their mission.

The leadership of the respondents stems from five sources:

- First, there are political sources, or support of broadly defined constituencies and allies. This support may take the form of a secret ballot both within large populations (as in the case of politicians in the strict sense), and in organisations

where positions are filled on the basis of election results but also latent power games.

- Second, there are institutional sources, or leaderships that are formally legitimised in legal systems and different kinds of permanent statutes or regulations. It is, therefore, a matter of power of those who occupy certain formal positions.
- Third, there are entrepreneurial sources, created by the initiative of the leader him/herself. They spring from his/her personal resources, creativity, and are generated at his/her own risk.
- Fourth, expertise can be a source of leadership. It is a matter of mastery, which is widely regarded as an extraordinary proficiency in a particular field of science, technology, art or crafts.
- Fifth, there are spiritual sources of leadership, based on the values espoused by a group of supporters and a more or less literally understood “priesthood,” that is the role of a spokesman, sometimes the creator and guardian of certain values.

Cases of single-source leadership are not predominant. This type of leadership is represented by twelve of my respondents. In seven cases, leadership sources are political and in five cases—institutional.

Political leadership involves persons who have been selected following an election—including professional politicians operating at different levels—as well as those being elected to perform a specific function, for example in social organisations or universities. Institutional leadership encompasses professional managers and officers working within a formal institutional framework, usually in large structures. They owe their positions to an appointment, a promotion or a nomination.

In other cases, we are dealing with a double legitimisation of leadership. In the case of two respondents, it is a combination of institutional and expertise-based leadership; they are experts serving official functions in formal structures, such as universities or state cultural institutions, over longer or shorter periods of time. Three respondents represent expertise-based and entrepreneurial leadership. They create their own ventures and lead them. Two respondents are prominent experts operating within political structures: the source of their leadership is political, dependent upon political fluctuations. Two respondents base their leadership on both their own business initiative and politics. A combination of spiritual and entrepreneurial leadership was observed in three cases. This applies to persons who provide spiritual values based on their own initiative and entrepreneurship. In two cases spiritual leadership is combined with institutional leadership or a formal position in an organisation focused on the implementation of values. In three cases entrepreneurs are at the forefront of self-created formal institutions subject to more general rules and principles, and thus combine entrepreneurial and institutional leadership.

The sources of leadership represented by the respondents are as follows:

political—seven cases; institutional—five cases; entrepreneurial and institutional—three cases; entrepreneurial and spiritual—three cases; expertise-based and entrepreneurial—three cases; spiritual and institutional—two cases; expertise-based and institutional—two cases; expertise-based and political—two cases; political and entrepreneurial—two cases.

Each type of leadership classified on the basis of its source requires a slightly different configuration of the five types of leadership competencies: anticipatory, visionary, value-creating, mobilising and reflexive. The following description is based on the content of the interviews.

Anticipatory competence is the ability to look ahead to intercept the future and, more precisely, future circumstances and conditions influencing the leadership process. Very often it turns out that extrapolating current trends proves insufficient and instead it is necessary to replace this type of extrapolation with several scenarios based on qualitatively diverse assumptions, which are constantly upgraded depending on the variable assessment of the probability of significant events.

In the case of political leadership, the ability to anticipate changes of opinion, tastes and the battle of forces and interests that determine the level of future support is of utmost importance. Institutional leadership requires a realistic assessment of one's own causal capabilities, based on the formally held powers and on the informal game conducted on the basis thereof. This prediction should apply not only to one's own position, but also to the position of internal and external competitors. It is therefore a kind of simulation of a multi-stakeholder dynamic game, upon which the real power of an institutional leader depends.

In order to accurately anticipate the future, leaders-entrepreneurs must be able to correctly identify and interpret even weak signals coming from the environment, as they may be relevant to the pursued objectives. Signals of a latent demand or, more broadly, demand for goods, services or values that an entrepreneur offers or can offer, are particularly important. Entrepreneurs who base their position on expertise or mastery must be first and foremost able to predict the future evolution of knowledge or art, and to acquire, on this basis, certain "pre-emptive" skills or competencies. Both science and art are subject to the evolution of specific trends.

Finally, spiritual leadership requires a realistic assessment of the status and dynamics of value systems functioning in social groups that are important for the leader. It is all the more difficult given that value systems tend to be strongly underpinned by emotions, both on the part of the leader and the groups that he/she influences. This is certainly not conducive to a realistic evaluation. In the case of "large-scale" leadership, addressed to several groups, the leader's anticipatory competence tends to be generally supported by an appropriate analytical and expert background. It is, however, something more than support. An inalienable feature of a leader is the skill of *sniffing out the times*, as one of the respondents put it.

Visionary skills of a leader translate into the ability to create future visions for oneself and for one's followers, sufficiently distant and attractive to mobilise them to act, yet realistic enough to avoid the negative connotations of the concept of a vision associated with the lack of realism, daydreaming or a utopia. In the case of political leadership—regardless of whether it is based on larger or smaller social groups—visionary skills mean the ability to create attractive programmes for sufficiently numerous and influential groups over an adequately long period of time. Institutional leaders, in turn, must be able to develop tactics and strategies to ensure the implementation of programmes and putting visions into effect. In formal systems,

the ability to create and constantly update strategic plans (on the basis of the changing conditions and circumstances) is required. Entrepreneurs construct their success on innovation and the ability to surprise the market. Innovations come from visions, whose validity is confirmed by markets and time. It is therefore necessary to have intuition and a “sixth sense.” In the case of expertise-based leadership, intuition is enhanced by expert knowledge and analysis. Thus, leaders are able to propose innovative systems of development and use of knowledge. Therefore, the vision sort of becomes the leader’s own artistic or scientific programme. Its attractiveness determines the authority of the leader. In the case of spiritual leadership, the vision is a programme of spiritual repair or rebuilding, based on the existing system of values or proposing a new system, which better matches the challenges of time and the expectations of the social group or groups to whom the leader addresses his/her message.

Value-creating skills mean the ability to propose norms, values and patterns of behaviour to ensure an effective impact of the leader on his/her supporters and on the public. The strength of this interaction depends on the extent to which the proposed values are internalised. In the case of political leadership, the trick is to appeal to the generally accepted meta-values or values acceptable by the so-called “influential majority.” The idea is to build on this basis a subordinate system of values, and activate a socialisation mechanism that will ensure its authentic acceptance as a spontaneous regulator of behaviour. It may take the form of various kinds of more or less formal “codes of good practice.” Institutional leadership refers to the value of cooperation through the formation of coalitions around common interests and goals. In formal organisations, such coalitions enhance the effects of processes and structures provided for in statutes. One of the measures of the quality of leadership is the ability to use these formal instruments. Leaders-entrepreneurs create a new value for consumers (recipients of innovation) and business partners. Leadership involves both the creation of these values and the ability to effectively communicate. Expertise-based leadership refers to the values of professionalism and professional perfection. On the one hand, a leader sets standards and on the other hand, he/she ensures that they are complied with. Spiritual leadership requires sanctioning the mission that is carried out, the vision pursued and strategies implemented through reference to a higher-level value system. The task of the leader is to convincingly demonstrate the consistency of actions with values or, in other words, to demonstrate that both goals and measures are in line with the proclaimed value system. This legitimises the leader’s actions in relation to his/her supporters as well as the external environment.

Mobilisation skills refer to the leader’s energising impact on his/her followers, generating an extraordinary degree of commitment—to the point of personal sacrifice, as well as a particular spirit of initiative and ingenuity. Political leaders mobilise groups of activists, as well as a broader community. Apart from enthusiasm for the implementation of a vision, challenges are linked to competition and the sense of danger in the form of the victory of opponents: the “black scenario.” Here, too, the element of competition and rivalry can prove important, as well as the prospect of “dark scenarios” as a result of a defeat of the leader and his/her team. In formal organisations, widely understood rewards and sanctions applied on an on-going basis

during the execution of tasks and after their completion are of great importance. In this regard, however, an emotional element in the form of personal involvement is necessary. Otherwise, the “team” can effectively try to “cheat” the leader to maximise rewards and minimise sanctions, for instance by providing false information. Entrepreneurs mobilise their teams by clearly outlining the stakes in the game. The promise of a share in the winnings is implicitly or explicitly formulated. In doing so, a leader must be credible, which usually means that he/she must have proven to have acted in a reliable manner in the past. Leaders-experts, stimulating their teams to take action, refer to standards of professionalism, professional achievements and their team members’ opportunities to build their own professional careers and reputation. Spiritual leaders, in turn, mobilise their teams through appealing to higher values and norms, as well as the ethos of contributing to their accomplishment, which sometimes takes the form of helping those in need.

Self-reflection competencies are linked to the leader’s ability to learn from successes and failures, in other words—to absorb knowledge and improve performance. This is quite a delicate matter. The majority of leaders have an extremely powerful ego and are reluctant to accept any critical opinions about themselves. In the case of political or quasi-political leaders, it is all about a realistic assessment of one’s attractiveness in the eyes of those who determine their success and the ability to boost this appeal. Similarly, institutional leaders must be capable of conducting a realistic assessment of their impact on groups and centres of influence, both inside and outside of an organisation. In both cases, overestimating one’s own capabilities can lead to displays of irrational bravado. The most important thing, however, is to realise what diminishes one’s ability to influence. This is difficult for those who believe too deeply in their own “special powers.”

Entrepreneurs must be aware of their own limitations, namely insufficient financial, intellectual and social capital. Such awareness paralyses a weak person, but mobilises those who are strong; it also triggers their creativity. Expertise-based leadership refers to high (mostly international) standards of knowledge and art. This should lead to a realistic self-assessment of one’s potential and help develop a plan aimed at boosting it. Also in this case, potential obstacles include the leader’s overpowering ego and closing the environment to any external comparison. In the case of spiritual leadership, the problem is a realistic assessment of opportunities for the accomplishment of values, limits of moral compromise and its justification in one’s own conscience, with respect to the leader’s entourage—both immediate and remote. This means manoeuvring between the Scylla of a lack of realism and detachment from reality, and the Charybdis of hypocrisy.

A typological framework of leadership as described above and derived from the empirical material available to me is presented in a simplified manner in [Table 1](#).

Leadership competencies can serve as criteria for evaluating the strength of leadership. I made such an attempt on the basis of my interviews, by assigning to each of the respondents a rating ranging from 5 (very high) to 1 (very poor) in relation to each of the five competencies: anticipatory, visionary, value-creating, mobilising and self-reflexive. This is obviously a subjective assessment, but it could be objecti-

Table 1  
Leadership Typology

COMPETENCIES LEADER- SHIP SOURCES	Anticipatory	Visionary	Value-creating	Mobilising	Self-reflective
Political	Anticipating changes of opinion, collision of forces and interests	Creating visions and programmes ensuring support	Referring to and developing values accepted by the influential "majority"	Ability to spark enthusiasm, engage and create sense of insecurity	Assessing one's own attractiveness and influence
Institutional	Forecasting one's own causal abilities, as well as internal and external competition	Creating strategies and updating strategic plans	Building coalitions around common interests, goals and values	Making the team aware of opportunities and threats	Assessing one's own causal abilities within the organisation and outside of it
Entrepreneurial	Understanding "weak signals," identifying opportunities	Ability to generate innovation and surprising markets	New values for consumers, recipients and partners	Defining and communicating the stakes accurately	Correctly evaluating one's own intellectual, financial and social limits
Expertise-based	Forecasting the evolution of knowledge and art	Designing innovative creation systems, applying knowledge and art	Referring to professionalism and professional excellence	Referring to individual and collective professional ambitions	Referring to highest standards and designing a "gap-closing" programme
Spiritual	Assessing the state and dynamics of values in the environment and their consequences	Proposing a programme of spiritual repair or rebuilding	Legitimising missions, strategies and actions in the framework of the value system	Referring to higher goals and values and the ethos of service	Assessing the probability of realising ideals and values

fied with the help of a panel of experts. I decided against this solutions given the uniqueness of my group of respondents and accepted the obligation to preserve their anonymity. The results of this assessment are illustrated in Table 2. It outlines the number of respondents who achieved particular ratings in each category of leadership competencies.

Table 2  
Leadership Strength: Number of Respondents

STRENGTH OF LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES	Very strong	Strong	Average	Sufficient	Minimal
Anticipatory	5	6	8	8	2
Visionary	9	4	6	6	4
Value-creating	11	5	8	3	2
Mobilising	10	7	8	4	—
Self-reflective	4	8	7	4	6

These numbers are not presented to describe the “dominating competencies of Polish leaders,” since this is impossible in such kind of research. Their function is to show that sources of leadership strength are more dispersed than concentrated. There is a lack of dominant competencies. The number of respondents who could be placed at the respective ends of the spectrum of all competencies is very limited. In the majority of cases, we are dealing with mixtures of individual competencies, in which a lower rating on one scale is compensated by a higher rating on another scale. It is difficult to discern a dominant leadership profile—perhaps except for the fact that the majority of respondents have highly developed value-creating and mobilising competencies, which means that they are able to effectively interact with their followers or subordinates.

The assessment of the strength of leadership is somehow different when we take into consideration the leadership sources discussed above.

Generalisations are very risky due to the size of the sample and the manner of sampling, as well as the subjective assessment of the strength of leadership. However, one might be tempted to make a few observations:

- First, in terms of the overall strength of leadership, two (albeit not very numerous) groups come to the fore: entrepreneurs managing businesses and social organisations that they have founded, based on spiritual leadership and values. Institutional leaders have the strongest anticipatory, visionary and mobilising competencies, while value-creating and self-reflective skills are most frequently found among “spiritual” entrepreneurs. On this basis, one can hypothesise that entrepreneurship adds strength to leadership.
- Second, the strength of political leadership in its “pure” form or in conjunction with expertise-based, or even entrepreneurial leadership, fails to impress.

Table 3  
**Profiles of Leadership Strength: Average Values**

LEADERSHIP SOURCE (NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS)	Political (7)	Institutional (5)	Entrepre- neurial and institutional (3)	Entrepre- neurial and spiritual (3)	Expertise- based and entrepre- neurial (3)	Spiritual and institutional (2)	Expertise- based and institutional (2)	Political and expertise- based (2)	Political and entrepre- neurial (2)	Average evaluation of compet- encies
Anticipatory	3.42	2.60	4.33	2.33	3.33	2.50	3.00	4.0	2.50	3.11
Visionary	3.0	1.60	4.66	4.33	4.00	3.50	2.00	5.00	3.00	3.45
Value-creating	3.14	2.80	4.66	5.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	3.50	2.50	3.84
Mobilising	4.28	4.20	5.0	3.66	3.66	4.00	3.50	2.00	2.50	3.64
Self-reflective	2.85	3.40	3.66	4.00	2.33	3.00	3.50	1.00	3.50	3.02
Average strength of leader- ship types	3.33	2.92	4.52	3.85	3.46	3.60	3.20	3.10	2.80	3.42

- Third, anticipatory and self-reflective competencies are rated the lowest. This suggests a kind of intellectual uneasiness of the leaders.
- Fourth, value-creating and mobilising competencies are the most esteemed. They are rated the highest for all types of leaders, with the exception of political experts and entrepreneurs. This means that in the majority of cases the most important competence of a leader is the ability to influence his/her followers and subordinates. It is essential to be able to control their system of values and emotions, and to use them skilfully.
- Fifth, the average level of leadership competence does not exceed 3.5 on a scale of one to five, despite the participation of several individuals with outstanding leadership potential, who received very high ratings overall. From this one can draw the conclusion about the existence of a certain leadership deficit. This deficit stems more from the type of leadership, or the nature of the role that is played and its constraints, rather than from the personal qualities of the leaders. Institutional and political constraints are especially strong in this respect. They appear to inhibit predicting the future, visionary skills and self-reflection.

A full development of leadership potential depends on whether or not a high level of autonomy is achieved. Without autonomy and sovereignty in thought and action, leadership is impossible. Entrepreneurship is the way that leads towards autonomy. It provides for the ability to overcome limitations on the basis of actions taken on one's own initiative and with the use of personal resources. It is difficult to rely on the blooming of such powers in large formal structures and stable political systems the operation of which is driven by polls or quasi-political games, or various kinds of standards of political or bureaucratic correctness.

### Theoretical References

At the core of the modern social sciences lies the theory of bounded rationality, formulated back in the late 1950s by Herbert Simon (1957). The author was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1978 for this theory. He opposes the maximalist vision of fully rational or even optimal decisions and suggests that policy-makers are subject to many restrictions in formulating and solving complex problems, as well as in acquiring and processing the necessary information (Augier, March 2008). Rationality is also limited by emotional and irrational factors (March 1994; Gigerenzer, Selton 2002). It seems that the current state of academic knowledge about leadership resembles the decision theory before the Simonian revolution. Therefore, it seems that the answer to the question asked by Spender in the title of his article published in "Leadership" in 2008: "Can Simon's Notion of 'Bounded Rationality' Give Us New Ideas About Leadership?" is positive. For it is rare to come across a more sceptical and realistic approach, such as presented in the article entitled "In Praise of the Incomplete Leader" (Ancona et al. 2007), which nevertheless has a "happy ending," pointing to the fact that the skills of team members make up for the areas of leader incompetence.

Numerous leadership concepts outlined in the literature are based on maximalist assumptions, which boil down to the fact that leaders are and should be able to achieve the maximum effectiveness of leadership and fully exploit their potential. Authors of numerous academic papers and mainstream articles explain how this can be achieved. These works are located at the intersection of social science, consultancy and managerial education, and therefore resemble postulates, or even guidebooks. Experts in the matter (Youkl 1994; Heller 1996; Kouzes, Posner 2007) list several types of such postulate leadership models.

“Theories of great men,” based on analyses of military leadership that have been conducted for centuries, stem from the assumption that leaders capable of extraordinary and heroic deeds are blessed with extraordinary innate abilities and capabilities. This concept has a feeble scientific foundation. It is impossible to intersubjectively determine a list of characteristics represented by “great men.” Nevertheless, echoes of the romantic concept of “maximum leadership” resonate to this day in various scientific studies (Smith, Peterson 1988) and popular books presenting famous business leaders. It is also present in the interviews conducted for the purpose of this study. My interlocutors repeatedly referred to examples of historical figures such as Kennedy, de Gaulle or Pilsudski—on the “bright” side, or to Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini—on the “dark” side.

Theories of leadership related to the concept of “great men.” are based on the assumption that some people have innate qualities that naturally predispose them to leadership. The following have been mentioned most often: intelligence, social maturity and interpersonal skills, strong motivation for achievement, etc. (Davis 1967). Against this background, questions arise whether and to what extent these qualities can be consciously shaped and developed? What is the role of situational factors? Is there a list of characteristics that allow a “maximisation” or “optimisation” of leadership strength? The leadership theory seems to provide a positive answer at least to the last question (Heifetz 1994).

It is significant that similar concerns are shared also by my respondents when reflecting on the “divine spark” and related topics. One respondent stated: *I don't really believe in it, to be honest. I doubt that people are really capable of building this kind of potential, even though they don't have it initially.*

Situational theories focus on external conditions that make a specific style of leadership most efficient. The secret lies in the “normal” (optimal?) choice of leadership style given the situation—and success is guaranteed! Against this background, an extremely rich and diverse stream of empirical research and theories regarding leadership styles has developed. The process was initiated by White and Lippitt (1960), who singled out three basic leadership styles: authoritarian, democratic and *laissez-faire*. The following factors were listed as situational variables: the relationship between the leader and the team members, the degree of structuring, a clear formulation of a task or a right; in other words, the strength of the leader's power. After 22 years of research conducted among hundreds of teams (including sports, army, industrial, etc.), Fiedler (1972) was able to determine the most appropriate situational leadership style given the specific circumstances. Vroom (1977) and his followers (e.g. Lawler 1986; Rooney

1993), following in the footsteps of Fiedler, built empirically underpinned models of democratic and participatory leadership. It is relatively clear that such arrangements are not suitable for large, highly complex organisations operating in a more intricate, dynamic environment. Demands for flexible and “smart” leadership, capable of swift adaptation, began to appear. Consultants (e.g. Joiner and Josephs 2007) therefore propose competence models, providing the necessary flexibility, which can be mastered through appropriate training promising a complete leadership success.

Functional leadership theories focus on the leading role of a leader as the guarantor of the coherence and effectiveness of the actions undertaken by the team entrusted to him. The list of related features includes: environmental monitoring, organisation of teamwork, coaching, training and teaching, encouraging the team and participating actively in its work (Kozłowski et al. 1996; Hackman, Wageman 2005). One cannot help but think about the analogy to Fayol’s classical concept from the early twentieth century on management functions such as planning, organisation, control, etc. They are linked with certain skills that can and should be mastered to ensure success in leadership.

Behavioural theories assume that leadership can be shaped through an appropriate modelling of behaviour, i.e. by training and observation. Therefore, they focus on examples of behaviour instead of characteristics, abilities and competencies of leaders. On the basis of a study of the behaviour of prominent leaders, House and Podsakoff (1994) drew up a list of the ten most desirable patterns of behaviour of leaders:

- to articulate ideological visions of a better future in accordance with deeply rooted beliefs and values of their team members;
- to demonstrate a deep conviction of the rightness of their vision and passion in the process of its implementation;
- to demonstrate self-confidence, determination and perseverance in the implementation of tasks that change the *status quo*;
- to care about their own and the team’s image, highlighting such features as competence, integrity and credibility;
- to activate effective mechanisms for performing certain roles by team members through setting an example that can be used as a model;
- to represent their organisations and teams in contacts with external bodies, ensuring the protection of their interests;
- to have high expectations in relation to their supporters (team members); when communicating these expectations, leaders should stress that they believe in the ability of the team members to meet them;
- to address selective and individualised motivations of team members who are capable of ensuring that the vision is realised and mission accomplished to the greatest possible extent;
- to ensure a reconciliation between their own mental “frames of reference” and those of their supporters;
- to demonstrate proficiency in communication addressed to both their supporters and a wider social environment.

Another example of a behavioural concept of leadership is the theory of the three masks of a leader: manager, artist and priest, based on interviews conducted with 30 global business leaders and published in the 1990s by the “Harvard Business Review” (Hatch, Kostera, Kozminski 2005).

Many of the above and similar patterns of leader behaviour can be found in the records of the interviews conducted for the purposes of this study. They are, however, devoid of the naive belief that this could be a recipe for success.

Transactional leadership theories, sometimes referred to as managerial leadership theories (Burns 1978, Bass 1985), are based on the following assumptions:

- most people carry out their tasks better if the lines of professional subordination are clearly defined and widely known;
- employees are motivated by rewards and punishments;
- executing the orders of the leader and implementing tasks defined by him/her are the primary goals of a team member;
- subordinates must be subject to careful monitoring in order to ensure that they behave in accordance with the leader’s expectations.

The “path-goal” theory of leadership (House 1971) is founded on a similar basis. It assumes that humans engage in activities that, as they believe, will allow them to reach the desired goal. The task of the leader is to ensure that his/her team members hold such beliefs without any ambiguities.

Successful leadership is thus ensured if the system of expectations, rewards, sanctions and monitoring functions smoothly. Transactional theories do not address situations in which supporters and subordinates are trying to dodge the leader. Research conducted in the 1970s showed that in such situations, not only does the system of sanctions and rewards function contrary to the assumptions, but it even remains fundamentally contradictory to them. This happens particularly often in large, complex and highly formal (bureaucratic) organisations where resources are gambled for (e.g. Pfeffer, Salancik 1978; Kozminski, Tropea 1982; Meyer, Zucker 1989).

Relational leadership theories are focused on the relationship between the leader and his/her followers. According to several researchers, this is what charisma, or a leader’s ability to inspire love and admiration among his/her followers, is based on (Parry, Kempster 2013). Transformational leadership (Bass, Avolio 1994; Bass 1998) is based on four elements ensured by the leader:

- the leader’s individualised care for his/her followers, tailored to the needs and aspirations of individuals;
- intellectual stimulation of the creativity of team members through a constant questioning of the predominant ideas and through encouraging the search for unconventional solutions;
- inspirational motivation based on a vision which is communicated in a manner that stimulates maximum involvement, or even enthusiasm;
- instilling idealistic patterns that conjure pride, respect and trust.

Such an emotional pattern of leadership enables fundamental change, but it is certainly rare and difficult to achieve, especially in situations defined as “normal.” Despite this, it was brought up by my respondents on several occasions and treated as

a kind of complement to other relationships. Real revolutions are sporadic and they tend to be rarely controlled by leaders, slipping out of their control.

Numerous managerial leadership concepts have been outlined in management literature. The ones published by “Harvard Business Review” are rated as the best. A large part of them are attempts at describing and explaining examples of leadership success, such as curbing crime by the legendary New York police chief William Bratton (Kim, Mauborgne 2003), the settlement of social conflict in the Synthetic Fuels Division of Westinghouse (Peace 1991), or the achievements of a selected group of prominent leaders (Farson, Keyes 2002). Some of them are more or less explicitly presented training products (e.g. Collins 2001; Heifetz, Linsky 2002). Most of them contain empirically proven and valuable leadership postulates, such as tolerance for the failures of subordinates (Manzoni, Barsoux 1998; Farson, Keyes 2002), humility, passion and fearless determination (Collins 2001), or control over narcissistic impulses (Maccoby 2000). All of them, however, are based on the assumption that “the search for excellence” can and should lead to success.

### **Limitations to Leadership in the Light of the Research**

Nearly all of the topics discussed in the literature were brought up by my interlocutors. The tone, however, was different: there was a dominating sense of constraints, or the sense of being unable to achieve the maximalist standards of leadership, often treated in the spirit of the above leadership theories, and the conviction of the need to gradually overcome these limitations. Statements about the manners of and strategies aimed at overcoming limitations to leadership are particularly valuable. The theory of bounded leadership emerges from the research, named this way based on the analogy to the theory of bounded rationality. It provides explanations for both the phenomenon of bounded leadership and the dynamics of overcoming it by leaders (Koźmiński 2013). A similar line of reasoning is presented by political scientists analysing the constraints and limitations of contemporary power. The idea of “the end of power” stems from such analysis (Naim 2013).

The awareness of restrictions and a certain degree of pessimism are common among the respondents. *In order to be a leader, one must first and foremost have the possibility to act. If you exist within the corporate world, not to mention the political system, it is very difficult to be a leader, as the area of freedom is very narrow. In political organisations, levelling down is commonplace. There is a wall, or a ceiling, which does not allow a leader to reach a certain level. We demand that the new leader departs from this point and recognises the culture. Leadership in business, as opposed to leadership in politics, does not have to lead to a disaster, but the possibility of defeat seems to be omnipresent. If it turns out that a decision is risky, everybody tries to minimise the risk. But it has to be taken. I used to give up when something appeared to be too difficult.* Many respondents emphasised the fact that *leaders are allowed less. Undoubtedly, the ego often suffers when I find myself incapable of dealing with something*; this generates aggression which, in turn, enhances the problem. *In Poland, this kind of skilful mutual*

*disparagement, fighting against each other is often observed. Hence the feeling that I have been punished, even though I did nothing wrong. We are talking about the freedom of leaders, but never about the freedom of subordinates. This is a very dangerous line.* Sometimes the leader's failure is a condition for the success of the project. *We are always so focused that it creates schizophrenia or paranoia.* Some admit that despite the humiliation suffered, they would do the same thing again. Unawareness of one's own limitations results in leaders steering their teams towards disaster. *It is a certain mystery which cannot be comprehended and which has not been fully explored.* It is noteworthy that the sense of limitation and pessimism is relatively less frequent among the leaders whose role encompasses a strong entrepreneurial component and those with limited self-reflection capacity.

In order to explain the phenomenon of bounded leadership, we are forced to look into its causes. The conducted analysis has allowed me to identify the following constraints to leadership:

- political constraints must be interpreted broadly; it is not only a matter of strictly political mechanisms, but it is also about the fight for power and resources (e.g. information or material resources), in which almost all leaders are involved. External and internal “systems” understood in this manner restrict leaders' freedom of action;
- ethical constraints arise from systems of standards and values represented by leaders and their entourage. They form specific barriers and exclude acts that are in stark conflict with those standards, even when referring to “the greater good” clause;
- cultural constraints are inherent to organisational cultures that a leader deals with and within which he/she operates. These include patterns of behaviour, rituals but also commonly observed standards that go beyond codes of ethics;
- emotional constraints result from an emotional approach to certain issues, people and institutions of both the leader and his/her entourage;
- incentive constraints are associated with the level of motivation and aspirations of both the leader and his/her entourage. It is a matter of “positive” motivations—what to want, as well as “negative”—what to avoid;
- institutional and competence constraints are formally associated with the power held;
- information constraints are associated with access to information and the possibilities of acquiring, storing, retrieving, processing and using information.

I shall now attempt to discuss all types of constraints and manners in which leaders overcome them by referring to the interviews and, where possible, directly quoting the statements of the respondents.

Political constraints are most strongly associated with the struggle for power and the need to get rid of one's rivals in a more or less ruthless manner. *Competition simply gets knocked about.* In order to achieve this, *you sometimes have to swindle a little*, for instance by exchanging available resources for support and by forming coalitions, which reduces the freedom of action in many important fields. External and internal pressure leads to compromises. *It is very difficult to cheat hundreds or*

*thousands of people over an extended period of time. The greater the competition—both “inside” and “outside”—the greater the need for ruthlessness also in relation to their environment and the stronger the constraints, as one needs to pay dearly for support. I have fond memories of some ministers, but others have to be haggled with, and this is costly. An apolitical attitude is a guarantee of success, but it is often impossible to adopt. A leader must be vigilant and understand whether something is malignant or mean. Such vigilance diverts attention from substantive issues. Sometimes, however, the lack of political vigilance pays off: as young people, we underestimated all these missiles, tanks, and we just went for it... Often political dilemmas are intertwined with moral issues and in crisis situations, the famous principle of the lesser evil appears. True success can be achieved only when the leader is tough. At the same time, leaders must be capable of “small gestures” that guarantee them the sympathy of supporters, albeit without preventing them from taking tough action, facing complicated situations and assuming the responsibility for difficult decisions that may be against the interests of many people. To a very large extent, these decisions have a bearing on personal matters and relationships with people inside and outside of an organisation. The scale of political risk should, however, be predictable. The fact that it often is not, constitutes an additional constraint for the leader’s freedom.*

Ethics must be based on two pillars: ethos and logos. *The idea of sustainable development applies to leadership as well. Ethical limitation lies in the fact that as a leader, I cannot do something that is not compatible with my axiology, with my system of values. There are limits to pragmatic compromise. The leader assumes responsibility for it and he/she cannot shift it on anyone else. If a leader wants to remain honest and be perceived as such, he/she must not evade responsibility. Thus, he/she avoids a black legend. A master must be somehow intolerant towards whatever is contrary to his/her beliefs. Therefore, he/she must avoid spurious and dishonest compromises. Double standards are particularly dangerous: for both the leader and the team. Restrictions of freedom of action are the price to pay for avoiding embarrassment associated with it. When a leader takes risks and exposes others to danger, he/she must remember that these risks may turn out not to be morally justified. However, humans are no saints. Ruthlessness is regarded as a necessity, but one should not indulge in heartless leadership. Ruthlessness has its limits defined by human conscience and morality. A leader should not think in terms of a potential threat from his/her top teammates. It is in his/her own best interest to take care of the interests of colleagues, who must not be sacrificed for immediate benefits. At the same time, however, without hypocrisy, a leader must realise that if it is necessary to put pressure, crush, get rid of something, or someone, he/she must be able to do so. The role of a leader encompasses commitment to a wider community—for example, his/her responsibility of convincing people that entrepreneurship makes sense.*

A leader must be able to create cultural norms that on the one hand are a source of constraints, and on the other hand create the image of the leader him/herself. An example is a declaration that *once someone fails me, they will never regain my trust*. Cultural norms and standards instilled in one’s family home are very important: they are simple rules. A leader must realise and take responsibility for the further development

*of this culture.* He/she must be able to merge different teams, should be *able to win over a majority to support his/her ideas.* This naturally rules out any extreme attitudes, even if they correspond to the leader's personal preferences. Particular constraints are imposed by toxic "court" cultures of the "unreal world," built around leaders who suffer from complexes. They are cut off from reliable information, especially regarding potential dangers. In turn, in cultures based on open communication, keeping secrets is difficult or even impossible. Humility is an important element of the culture of leadership, even though it is a source of constraints to prestige, as it builds a dam of self-gratification. Another constraint, or rather self-imposed constraint, is the principle of simplicity. *If you have a lot of people around you, you won't be able to get a hold of all of them. 2 + 2 is 4, not 22.* Similarly, self-restraint is required in order to mitigate conflicts from the position of an impartial arbitrator. Curbing one's own selfishness and the egoism of others requires *the establishment of a community, which is to serve the world.* Also, in order to create the most productive *win-win culture,* one must suppress one's own selfishness and greed. Just as in the case of a culture in which certain standards of elegance apply, it requires self-restraint in relation to certain instincts and reflexes. Avoiding temptation should therefore be part of the culture of leadership. The temptation to evade and shift responsibility is particularly dangerous. Only culture can curb it. The standard according to which a leader takes responsibility for others (his/her subordinates) is very constraining, because it is difficult: it requires self-confidence and courage. Not everyone is able to live up to this standard, or the standards of truth and absolute truthfulness towards one's company. This requires a culture of self-restraint. It is easy to succumb to the temptation of cynicism, hypocrisy or duplicity: *Enron had a code of ethics that was the exact opposite of the company's reality.*

Emotional constraints are associated with the personal and emotional attitude of the leader him/herself and the team members towards the vision, mission and organisation, as well as the emotional relationship between them. It is important to ensure that *our common ties consist not only of legal obligations, mutual self-interest, but faithfulness in relation to real values, which we share with others in order to serve the world.* In a more mundane perspective, it is about *the employees buying into the company's strategy,* or about the emotional commitment to a course of action, which is in the common interest of everyone, *good and thrilling at the same time.* At the core of such emotions, there is a sense of common threat: *awareness that the tiger is lurking behind one's back,* or the emotional need for *acting in accordance with the professed value system* for an important, or even grand purpose, *towards a great future.* Such emotions, sometimes bordering on fanaticism, generate certain constraints, such as one's denial of any arguments contradicting the vision that one believes in, or of competing visions. In this context, an emotional attitude of supporters towards the leader is essential; thus, the leader *is not indifferent,* but he/she may even be perceived as *extraordinary.* On the one hand, such an attitude mobilises to act and, on the other hand, it minimises the chances of behaviour that is contrary to the will of the leader. This results in the supporters' adherence to the actual, and sometimes even to the alleged, intentions of the leader. Confidence, trust, authority, or the belief that

the leader *is right, that he/she knows what he/she is doing, that he/she can make you win*, that he/she wants and is capable of *leading one to the Promised Land*, are all at stake. This kind of trust in the leader reduces the chances of any competition in the struggle for “the rule over people’s hearts and minds” and stimulates “informational isolation.” Obviously, until the time comes when disappointment is felt. In this case, any positive emotions in relation to the leader can be transformed into equally intense negative feelings. The attitude of the leader towards its followers or subordinates is equally important. One respondent even confessed: *I feel responsible for them and ... sometimes it is exaggerated*. Such an emotional attitude prevents leaders from acting contrary to the interests of their supporters, even when the success of the mission requires it.

Motivational constraints must be considered with regard to both the leader him/herself and different groups that are affected and interacting with the leader. The degree of commitment and the leader’s willingness to make sacrifices is not always the same. Not everyone can bring him/herself to declare: *I am 100 per cent committed, no wife, no children, nothing else matters*. An important source of self-motivation is patriotism and the ambitions associated with it. *I just love this country. I know that we are not perceived as equals and that we have been pitied for years. We do not want pity; we want to defend ourselves with facts*. A great number of leaders regard their role as a “way of life,” related to a lesser or greater extent to a mission. This is naturally a constraint: cases in which a leader sacrifices the interests of his/her family or his/her own ambitions and aspirations are relatively rare and unlikely, even in the case of spiritual leaders. *I just repeat to myself almost every day that there will come a time when I will have to do something else. It also gives me peace of mind*. This peace of mind is greater when the personal situation and independence of the leader, measured by the relation of personal resources (including qualifications, professional titles or reputation) to one’s needs, is significant. Hence the following declarations: *I am in the process of writing a doctoral dissertation, or, maintaining a certain post at all costs will never be my absolute priority in life, I prefer to act freely and follow my intuition*. The sincerity of such declarations depends on the level of career development. It is important to correctly understand one’s own interests in the context of the interests of one’s followers or subordinates. *If I acted against my colleagues, I would never be successful, as their attitude is also quite selfish*. A leader must know how to reconcile the interests of his/her subordinates or followers. Hence the often emphasised sense of responsibility for the team. The respondents repeatedly refer to creating a sense of security—within reasonable limits—for their subordinates: *the conviction that they have a boss who is demanding, but will not sack them for a minor oversight*. It is important to correctly decipher ambitions, motivation and “weaknesses,” especially among one’s closest associates. *A leader should remember that people have their own ambitions, which must not be disregarded. Things that are seemingly trivial to the leader may be important to the interested person*. This creates the possibility of overcoming the motivational constraints of colleagues and may be achieved, to some extent, “in advance,” provided one has credibility, which is hard to build, but easy to lose. *If you are reliable, if you have never deceived anyone, you always keep your promises. Ex-*

*treme situations are the litmus test for leadership.* This kind of “credit” is enhanced by personal, individualised care for team members, with a small dose of spectacle and acting.

Institutional and competence constraints are associated with the formal and legal system in which the leader operates, as well as his/her formal powers. It is the question, for example, of the *pressure from a reference shareholder, of legal leadership or leadership sanctioned with procedures, of functioning in the jungle of Polish law.* Virtually all respondents seem to have an anarchist streak in them: they are often aware of the irrationality of the formal framework and its impact on acting in an effective and efficient manner for the sake of public interest. Examples of “praise of the rule of law” are few and far between in the statements made by the interviewed leaders. One respondent refers to *Polish conditions and various phobias, volatility of regulations, inhuman and contradictory legal provisions, which seem to want to burden and oppress.* The respondents point to the countless and endless bureaucratic controls in a system where “everything must be in order.” Given the circumstances, the only rational behaviour consists in *circumventing regulations; you simply have to be able to skilfully manoeuvre around them.* One of the respondents said: *I have lawyers to advise me on how to handle irrational regulations and make sure I run no risk. A true leader must always be able to find an alternative solution.* However, nobody mentions recourse to illegal measures. On the contrary, the need to *comply with the law* was repeatedly emphasised. Nevertheless, any loopholes in the complex and inconsistent legal system are taken advantage of. The respondents have an equally flexible and expansive attitude towards their rights and opportunities: they try to maximise them, for example through gaining the status of celebrities who “are allowed more,” or by using a network of personal contacts and acquaintances, that is, activating one’s social capital. A specific, though sometimes costly, manner of increasing one’s actual powers is decisiveness, or the willingness to make decisions and take all the associated risks. Contrary to appearances, those who are more willing to delegate tasks tend to have more actual power, as they *assume the role of advisers to people who have responsibilities.* Such a position, supported by authority, and in particular by ownership rights, provides more opportunities in the borderland between formal and informal relationships. In the case of expertise-based leadership, a source of additional powers is the exclusive knowledge of the leader, as well as the loyalty of a qualified team that helps the leader put this knowledge into use. *If I hadn’t had a well-prepared team, I would never have had the courage*—said one of the respondents. For leaders, their formal powers and positions are a means to achieving other goals, and not goals in themselves. In any case, they are not treated as a privilege or a reward. Leaders do not formulate their ambitions in life in terms of the position held.

Information allows one to deal with risk and uncertainty. Meanwhile, *a vast majority of really important decisions must be made when the total sum of information, knowledge and analyses available is very limited. An imperfect decision, though taken at the right time, is better than no decision at all. In order to be the head of a large company, you have to know something about everything and everything about something.* In other words, expertise in a certain field should be combined with sound general knowledge.

This creates a basis for an active search and correct interpretation of information. Leaders tend to be cut off from important (especially negative) information by their submissive “courts,” which they have inadvertently created around themselves. *For this reason, good leaders would regularly change the people in their immediate environment.* Informational constraints often result from a lack of knowledge that would enable the correct use of inflowing information. *In Poland, we are only now discovering the meaning of PR and product marketing.* Hence the need for cooperation with experts and advisers—even though they may also end up forming the “court”—and be subject to the abovementioned “staff rotation.” It pays off to seek information and suggestions from unconventional sources. Apparently, when directing a play Andrzej Wajda, a famous theatre and film director, once asked the opinion of a cleaner present in the room during a rehearsal. The suggestion proved constructive and was taken into consideration by Wajda.

**Table 4** outlines the constraints associated with the different types of leadership, classified according to their source.

It is difficult to assess these constraints without the context of a specific situation. Some of them, such as ethical or cultural constraints, “civilise” leadership and make it more ethical—provided, however, that they did not grow out of particular interests pursued at the expense of the public good. They often operate as the leader’s “internalised” and accepted self-restraint. Political or competence constraints may have a positive or a negative character. In the majority of cases, leaders perceive them as external factors and as obstacles that must be overcome. Emotional and motivational constraints are embedded in the feelings of leaders and their entourage. A conscious control over these emotions, which means overcoming constraints, represents the highest level of the art of leadership, as it is not a matter of any sort of science or knowledge. Finally, cognitive constraints are typically internal: they refer to the intelligence, level of information, knowledge and intellectual potential of the leader and his/her team. Becoming aware of these constraints, however, is difficult, as it strongly affects one’s self-esteem. Hence the importance of “humility”—a characteristic that the respondents mentioned repeatedly.

The above analysis clearly shows that the essence of bounded leadership is precisely the ability to overcome or “stretch” the constraints faced by leaders; it is a sort of game or fight for autonomy. One of the respondents put it very vividly: *you must impose bearable burdens on yourself and gradually increase them.* This method is called “the tactics of a trainer.” Similar conclusions were drawn in another interview: *I have upgraded these objectives. I have upgraded them taking into account the capabilities of my team.* Therefore, it seems necessary to surpass constraints to leadership in a gradual, systematic and planned manner. Different people manage to do this to different degrees, and this best explains the phenomenon of the varying strength of leadership. We must, however, keep in mind that it would be difficult to accept “unlimited freedom” of a leader. It would mean getting rid of any constraints and limitations, both ethical and cultural. This kind of boundless autonomy characterises leaders who are criminals. Constraints are, in fact, double-edged: on the one hand, they channel the actions of leaders and protect them from excesses and, on the other hand, they reduce

Table 4  
**Constraints to Leadership**

CON- STRAINTS	Political	Ethical	Cultural	Emotional	Motivational	Competence-related	Cognitive
LEAD- ERSHIP SOURCES							
Political	Political fight for internal and external power	Level of acceptance of the ethical price to pay for a political success	Political culture within an organisation and outside of it	Involvement in a "cause" bordering on fanaticism	Fascination with power, fearing the loss of one's position	System of power and the constraints stemming the reform	Ability to predict the fight between political forces
Institutional	Internal and external competition between representatives of positions and divisions, fight for resources	mEthical frame work of the game conducted within an organisation	Culture of a formal organisation, symbols, rituals	Commitment, loyalty towards institutions and their leaders	Striving for material gains and prestige, fear of losing them	Legal and regulatory constraints	Knowledge about the mechanisms according to which an institution and its environment function
Entrepreneurial	Political environment of the organisation, internal fight for control	Reliability principles of the entrepreneur-leader	Culture of entrepreneurship, initiative and open communication	Optimism, willingness to take risks, passion for innovation	Pursuit of opportunities and of the mission	Legal environment of business	Ability to read and use "weak signals"
Expertise-based	Internal and external fight for credibility	Professional ethics	Respect for "good practice," knowledge, empiricism and debate	Respect for science craft, recognition of role models	Striving for excellence, recognition of prestige of one's peers	The leader's and the team's expertise and skills, ability to work in networks	Limits to the leader's and the team knowledge and competencies, ability to expand them
Spiritual	Internal and external fight for acceptance	Ethical values rooted in one's philosophy of life and ideology	Spiritual culture	Faith in the leader as the "priest" of the system of values	Devotion to an idea and a system of values	Position in the spiritual hierarchy, force of one's convictions	Comprehension of the dynamics of a system of values and beliefs

Table 5

**The Ability to Overcome Leadership Constraints: Number of Respondents**

CONSTRAINTS \ ABILITY TO OVERCOME	Political	Ethical	Cultural	Emotional	Motivational	Competence-related	Cognitive
Very strong	4	1	3	9	12	11	7
Strong	11	9	9	7	9	5	6
Average	7	15	8	8	5	7	9
Sufficient	3	4	7	5	3	4	6
Minimal	4	—	2	—	—	2	1

their freedom of choice, discourage them from more radical, unconventional actions that are needed especially in periods of “trial and breakthrough.”

The ability to overcome different types of constraints to leadership in the group of respondents is outlined in [Table 5](#). It indicates that the respondents find it relatively easy to deal with motivational constraints. The general impression left by the interviews is that leaders are multilaterally limited and, consequently, cannot fully exploit their potential. At the same time, the leadership skills that contribute to the previously analysed strength of leadership and held by all the respondents allow them to defy these constraints. Therefore, the main result of the research is the concept of bounded leadership, to be implemented by a particular person in specific circumstances, depending on the competence held by him/her.

On the basis of the analysis of the interviews, a subjective assessment of the autonomy of the individuals can be conducted, including an evaluation of their capability to overcome individual constraints. It is difficult to determine the optimum level of autonomy of a leader, as this autonomy certainly should not be “total.” The interviews suggest that the problem rather lies in an insufficient level of autonomy. The results of the assessment of the respondents’ ability to overcome various leadership constraints, classified according to leadership source, are outlined in [Table 6](#).

This is, naturally, a subjective assessment, just as the rating of leadership strength presented above. I realise that these results would require objectification through reference to a panel of experts. As I have mentioned, this was impossible given my commitment to preserving the anonymity of the statements made by my respondents. The results seem relatively consistent with the profiles of leadership strength presented above.

[Table 3](#) indicates the existence of different leadership strengths among groups of leaders classified according to the source of leadership. The greatest strength was assigned to those whose leadership is partly based on entrepreneurship, namely: entrepreneurial and institutional; entrepreneurial and expertise-based; entrepreneurial and spiritual leadership. The same groups of leaders ranked highest in the evaluation of their ability to overcome constraints presented in [Table 6](#). Similarly, the lowest rat-

Table 6  
The Ability to Overcome Leadership Constraints: Average Values

LEADERSHIP SOURCE (NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS)	Political (7)	Institutional (5)	Entrepre- neurial and institutional (3)	Entrepre- neurial and spiritual (3)	Expertise- based and entrepre- neurial (3)	Spiritual and institutional (2)	Expertise- based and institutional (2)	Political and expertise- based (2)	Political and en- trepreneurial (2)
ASSESSMENT OF OVERCOMING CONSTRAINTS									
Political	4.00	2.00	4.00	3.66	4.33	3.00	3.00	2.50	2.50
Ethical	3.28	3.60	3.66	2.66	3.00	2.50	3.00	3.50	3.50
Cultural	2.85	2.60	4.00	3.33	3.66	3.00	2.50	4.00	2.50
Emotional	3.28	3.40	4.66	4.00	4.00	5.00	2.50	4.00	2.50
Motivational	3.57	4.20	4.66	4.33	4.66	5.00	3.50	3.00	2.50
Competence-related	3.28	2.20	4.66	4.00	4.66	5.00	4.50	2.50	3.50
Cognitive	2.57	2.60	4.66	3.33	5.00	4.00	5.00	2.50	3.50
Average for leadership types	2.69	2.94	4.32	3.61	4.18	3.92	3.42	3.14	2.92

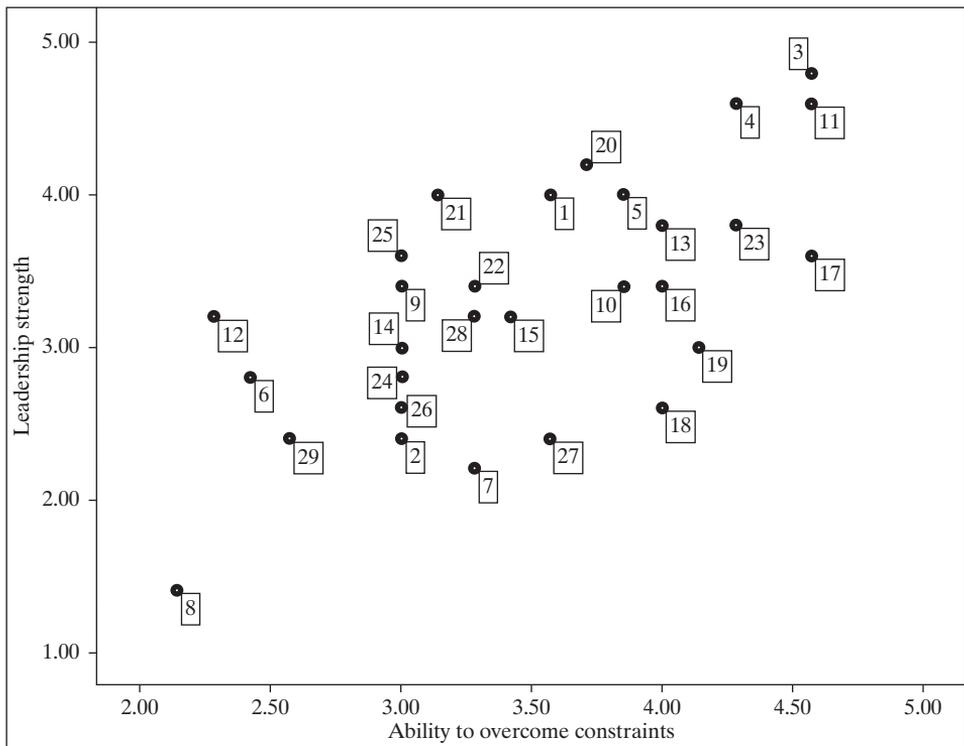
ings were recorded in the case of respondents whose leadership has political, political and institutional, as well as entrepreneurial bases. One can assume that certain types of leadership attract stronger leaders, while othrt types attract weaker leaders. None of these hypotheses find confirmation in the material gathered within the framework of this study.

Even if we leave aside leadership sources, it is worth having a closer look at the relationship between leadership strength measured by the force of skills and the ability to overcome constraints.

I conducted a subjective assessment of the leadership competencies of my respondents using a scale of 1 to 5. In a similar manner, I assessed their ability to overcome constraints. No detailed values are presented here due to the specific sampling and the subjectivity of assessment. However, if we rank the respondents by their strength of leadership and ability to overcome constrains, three conclusions are striking. The first concerns very large differences in both the leadership strength and the ability to overcome constrains. The second is the strong convergence of ratings in these two respects, as shown in **Figure 1**. The third is close to normal distribution of both variables, confirmed by a statistical test.

Figure 1

**Graph Illustrating the Dispersion in the Assessment of Leadership Strength and the Ability to Overcome Constraints (Points represent the respondents)**



In the studied group, Pearson's correlation coefficient between leadership strength and overcoming constraints is 0.657. This is a strong positive correlation even if we pay no attention to its exact value. In the light of the results of the study, leadership means "stretching" constraints, or fighting for one's autonomy. This is what the theory of bounded leadership boils down to.

### Conclusions

Any interpretation of the conclusions resulting from the study must be prudent. First, the study involved a relatively small group of leaders, who cannot be described otherwise than as remarkable. Second, the assessment on the basis of which specific values were attributed to subsequent indicators is subjective. Both of these imperfections can be erased in the future if we regard the results of the study as a hypothesis, adopt a similar approach and conduct similar research on a much larger group of respondents that would be representative of a certain population. Objective judgments based on an expert panel can be used in such a case. It should also be noted that all of the respondents operate in the Polish cultural context and are strongly rooted in it, so no international generalizations are possible.

The theme of struggle for autonomy and overcoming constraints reappears frequently and is strongly emphasised by interviewed leaders. They are familiar with different models of "optimal leadership." They are also aware of being subject to constraints that prevent them from implementing unrestrained leadership models, especially under the pressure of time and emotions, or when confronted with their own systems of values. Therefore, they focus on *going against the current*, as one of the respondents put it, on overcoming constraints and adapting the leadership model to their own scope of autonomy. This seems to be the reason why the general approach to *learning leadership* in various education or training institutions is rather doubtful. The leadership models that they offer tend to be excessively idealised, with patterns that are not individualised enough. In the opinion of the respondents, leadership models must be made-to-measure, tailored to the individual and the specific constraints that the leader is subject to. As one of the interviewees said, *it is all a matter of practice*.

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*Biographical Note:* Andrzej K. Koźmiński, Professor of Sociology, the founder, the first Rector (1993–2011) and now the President of Kozminski University has received his academic degrees in economics and sociology. He is the President of the Board of the International Business School in Warsaw. He is a corresponding member of the Polish Academy of Sciences. His research interests include among others: theory of organization and management, international management, management in post-socialist countries and economic sociology. Andrzej Koźmiński has published over 400 scientific papers and 47 books on organization and management as well as economic sociology in Poland and abroad.

E-mail: [kozmin@kozminski.edu.pl](mailto:kozmin@kozminski.edu.pl)