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Management in Polish prison units – conclusion from a pilot study

Abstract: The aim of the article is to explore the field of prison management based on pilot studies carried out among the heads of selected prisons. The subject of the research is management styles and personality aspects of top-level managers in prisons, important in the context of efficient professional functioning. The authors conducted an interdisciplinary study using research tools and techniques applied to management sciences, legal sciences, and psychology, using in-depth interviews, the Bochum Inventory of Personality Determinants of Work by Rudiger Hossiep and Michael Paschen (BIP), elements of observation, and desk research. The greatest differences between the respondents were obtained in the areas of Social Sensitivity, Openness to Relationships, and Sociability, while the most consistent results were observed in the area of Assertiveness. It has been observed that most heads try to depart from the autocratic style of management towards a humanistic one, oriented at building interpersonal relations.

Key words: prison system, management styles, prison head, prison management, prison service.

Introduction

The penitentiary system is characterised by features such as paramilitarism (i.e. similarity to the military model, in areas such as armament, uniforms,

hierarchical structure, official ranks, fulfillment of official orders), depoliticisation (defining relations among internal and external actors), centralisation (one-sided dependence of subordinates on superiors – personal and official dependence), the statutory goal of operation as a complex system of the interests of society, and the status secured by law (securing society from perpetrators of crimes) (Kaczmarek 2010, pp. 98–100; Machel 2003, p. 92; Poklek 2015; Moran 2013; Mayr 2008; Kamiński 2003). The organisational units of the Prison Service are: Central Board of Prison Service, District Inspectorates of Prison Service, prisons and remand centres, Prison Service academy, Central Prison Service Training Center, and Prison Service training centres, as well as centres of personnel education of Prison Service (Prison Service Act 2010, Art. 8).

The aim of the article is to explore the field of management in prison based on pilot studies carried out on a sample of seven heads of selected prisons and remand centres in Poland. The subject of the research is management styles and personality aspects of top-level managers in prisons, important in the context of effective management. The authors conducted interdisciplinary research using research tools and techniques applied in management and quality sciences, legal sciences, and psychology, using the Bochum Inventory of Personality Determinants of Work (BIP), nondirective in-depth interviews, elements of observation, and desk research. Triangulation of research methods allowed for a multi-faceted and in-depth analysis of leadership in the prison system, as well as verification of the research problem posed in the form of the question: what management styles do prison heads prefer in the context of carrying out the statutory tasks of managing a prison unit? Because of the choice of inductive methodology based on empirical inference, no hypotheses but only research questions were formed (Kostera 2005, p. 12).

Polish literature contains publications referring to aspects of organisation and management in the prison service (Ambrozik, Stępniać 1999), however, these papers do not deal directly with the analysis of leadership and managerial roles in prisons. In foreign literature, however, researchers emphasise a relatively small number of studies despite the importance of this issue (Jacobs, Olitsky 2004, p. 479). In addition to its cognitive value, the study of prison management processes is also important in terms of an outside perspective, which enables the design of a process of constructive change. Janice Penrod, Susan J. Loeb, Robert A. Ladonne, and Lea M. Martin (2016), who conducted action research in six state prisons, emphasised that the development of a collaborative network between academic researchers and research subjects inside the prison unit allows for knowledge and understanding of organisational culture and management processes while building trust to create strategies for implementing organisational change.

In the context of this article, of particular importance is the work of Maciej Kaczmarek (2010), who analysed a prison unit from the systemic point of view, looking at it from the perspective of interpersonal relations in a systemically determined social space. It is worth noting that the papers in the mentioned

field usually concern problematic case studies based on analysis of the functioning of selected units of the prison service, e.g. branches of the Remand Prison in Białystok (Keller, 1999), or internal wards in Płock (Oleksiak 1999). A frequently discussed issue is that of stress and burnout in the work of prison service officers, which is a significant challenge for managers (Lizak 1999; Piotrowski 2010; Sygit-Kowalkowska et al. 2017; Sekułowicz 2019). The aspect of personal cognitive research in the context of administrative decisions and penitentiary and therapeutic measures also seems important. The above issue is taken up by Robert Poklek (2018) in relation to the sources of personal-cognitive information about the convict and the procedures taken by prison staff to conduct and document a penitentiary diagnosis. Also important in the context of this discussion is research on the link between personality and self-efficacy conducted among correctional staff. Beata Pastwa-Wojciechowska and Andrzej Piotrowski (2017, p. 81) presented the results obtained from a survey of 190 Prison Service officers from the security, penitentiary, and rehabilitation divisions. One area also addressed in the literature is the importance given to a penalty imposed on the person committing the crime in order to discourage further misbehaviour (Woźny 2018), as well as issues of social rehabilitation having a “corrective” nature and focusing primarily on the personality and behavioural deficits of the wards (Konopczyński 2018).

The prison head in the light of the subject literature

Maciej Kaczmarek (2010, p. 100) notes that prisons have a mechanistic power structure. In the management sciences, such a management model is characteristic of organisations operating in a stable external environment, with lack of exposure to fluctuations in fashion, the actions of competition, entanglement in the technological race (Bolesta-Kukułka, 1996, pp. 74–75), while maintaining financial stability through funding from the state budget. The mechanistic model is distinguished by the following features:

- hierarchical structure of leadership, authority, and communication,
- high specialisation of functions and tasks of individuals and units in the organisation,
- existence of detailed instructions and orders,
- coordination of activities based on hierarchical subordination, specified formal procedures, and communication channels,
- centralisation of power,
- high formalisation of the organisation, the presence of numerous, detailed procedures, rules – instructions and orders,
- linking the authority of individuals to their position in the chain of command,
- prioritising formal authority (resulting from one’s position) over personal authority (resulting from a person’s characteristics e.g. knowledge, competence),

— high degree of sustainability of the organisational structure (Stalker, Burns 1961; Bielski 1996; Modzelewska 2019, pp. 46–47).

In this context, it is worth mentioning that prison is a total institution within which a closed and formally controlled group of people live (Goffman 1961), creating a liminal space between the inside of the organisation and the outside world (Chomczyński 2013; Mayr 2008). In this view, it is a closed organisation where admission is involuntary and opportunities for advancement are difficult, as exemplified by prison units (Davies 1989; Pośluszny 2017). According to Erving Goffman's (2011) concept of a total institution, all activities in such an organisation take place in the same place and under the authority of the same people. In addition, activities are performed in the same group of people, treated as if they were similar. Tasks are planned and imposed by a system of explicit and formal rules creating a rational plan that serves the official goals of the institution (Goffman 2011, pp. 16–17).

The management in the prison system has formal authority, denoting a position derived from an appointment that constitutes authority (consistent with legal norms) to manage and dispose of the organisation's resources (Mintzberg 1975). The issue of management styles in the prison service is addressed indirectly in a paper by Jacek Pomiankiewicz (2010, pp. 54–55), which indicates the factors that cause stress in the employees of the Prison Service. According to the author, these include autocratic management, supervisors' focus on criticism and harsh evaluation, and lack of support from supervisors (Pomiankiewicz pp. 54–55). The above features of management are inherent to autocratic management style, which involves the manager setting group goals, assigning tasks, supervising and controlling work results, and distancing themselves from group members (Lewin et al. 1939, p. 273; Blake, Mouton 1964). In such a style, management is primarily oriented toward task accomplishment and control of task performance, regardless of the goals and expectations of the organisation's employees (Kostera, Kownacki 1996, pp. 426–427). According to Fred Fiedler's (1967) situational concept of styles, this style can be effective under conditions of structured task performance with a wide range of managerial authority.

Jan Galicki (1999, p. 21) recommends using management styles such as “bureaucrat” and “benevolent autocrat” in the structure of the prison service. As the author explains, a “bureaucrat” is neither task-oriented nor subordinate-oriented, but procedure-oriented. In contrast, a “benevolent autocrat” emphasises performing tasks with little interest in subordinates, but also without alienating staff (Galicki 1999, p. 21). According to Jan Galicki, these are the optimal styles in prison management to ensure management efficiency. However, it is worth noting that nowadays, according to the new leadership paradigm, there is a shift from such management styles to charismatic, relational, authentic, and distributed leadership, which is based on other premises than formal authority, e.g. on building relationships, emotional involvement, creating a vision, which

can arise independently of hierarchy (Ciuk 2008; Grint 2008, Northouse 2004; Harris, Spillane 2008).

Robert Poklek (2015) points out that the main objectives of the Prison Service are to implement the orders of courts or other authorities as regards the application of measures resulting in deprivation of liberty. Wiesław Ambrozik and Piotr Stępniaak (1999, p. 7) indicate three key objectives of the unit head's activity: social rehabilitation of convicts, ensuring the security of the facility and its external environment, and the rational management of personnel and material resources.

Boundaries are drawn by the formal affiliation of group members with prison staff and the place of service. The authorities of the Prison Service are the Director General, the district director, the director of the penitentiary unit, the commandant of the Central Prison Service Training Center, the commandant of the Prison Service Training Center. These authorities perform their tasks with the support of appropriate organizational units (Central Board of Prison Service, District Prison Service Inspectorate, Prison Service training center, prison or remand center). [...] The working relationship is therefore based on the superior/subordinate and junior/senior principle. (Poklek 2015, p. 42)

Considering the overall structure of the Prison Service, the head of the prison unit is a middle manager, but in the case of the prison service unit – a top-level manager.

In their paper on the relationship between leadership and prison reform, James B. Jacobs and Elana Olitsky (2004, p. 477) emphasise that professional leadership in social rehabilitation is key to humanitarian work in prisons. The researchers list a set of qualities they believe a prison leader should possess, including high motivation, energy, maturity, reflexivity, innovation, staff selection skills, communication and management skills, having a vision, knowledge of legal considerations, public relations, and a humanistic mindset (Jacobs, Olitsky 2004, pp. 478–481).

Józef Penc, in turn, draws attention to three areas that may be of key importance for the functioning of a professional manager, which is also substantiated by research on heads of prison service units:

1. Personality – with a focus on traits such as poise, self-confidence, resilience to stress, and others.
2. Leadership skills – such as interpersonal communication skills, inspiring trust, risk-taking ability and more.
3. Intellect – analysis and synthesis of information, attention shifting, abstract thinking, and others (2000, p. 275).

The above concept emphasises not only skills related to managerial abilities, but also personality traits, which, treated as fixed properties that influence human behavior, are no less important. In the present study, personality traits that were

found to be important from a management perspective in the Bochum Inventory of Personality Determinants of Work by Rudiger Hossiep and Michael Paschen (Jaworska, Brzezińska 2014) will be examined.

Legal bases for the activity of the head of a penitentiary unit

According to Article 13, Sec. 1 of the Act of 9 April 2010 on the Prison Service, prisons and remand centres are managed by the head. Pursuant to Article 66 Sec. 1 and 2 of the said act, heads of prisons and remand centres are appointed from among Prison Service officers and removed from office by the Director General at the request of the relevant District Director, while the deputy directors of prisons and remand centres are appointed from among Prison Service officers by the District Director at the request of the director of a given prison or a remand centre.

The scope of activity of heads of prisons and detention centres includes in particular:

- 1) coordination and supervision of penitentiary measures carried out in the subordinate organisational unit;
- 2) ensuring the proper and lawful serving of imprisonment and pre-trial detention sentences and ensuring safety and order in the subordinate organizational unit;
- 3) supervision over schools and therapeutic entities operating within the prison and detention centre;
- 4) rational use of funds;
- 5) ensuring appropriate selection and allocation of staff, continuous improvement of their skills, proper performance of their duties and discipline;
- 6) determining the number of posts in the subordinate organisational unit;
- 7) implementing tasks under other laws (Prison Service Act 2010, Art. 13).

In carrying out their tasks, heads of prisons and detention centres may issue orders, instructions or guidelines.

Table 1 presents the requirements for the Prison Service rank, length of service, and occupational classifications for holders of the post of a prison or detention centre director

Table 1. Requirements for holders of the post of a prison or detention centre director

No.	Corp	Top Prison Service rank assigned to the post	Official post		Professional qualifications in:	
				length of service in the Prison Service or length of service in general	the type of specific and professional training required for the position held	the type of education required for the post held
1	officer	colonel	the head of a detention center or prison with more than 600 inmates	10 years of service, including 3 years of service in a management position	– specialised training or postgraduate studies in human resources or organisational unit management, – postgraduate or second-cycle studies at a Prison Service academy or professional training	master's degree or equivalent
2	officer	lieutenant colonel	the head of a detention center or prison below 600 inmates	10 years of service, including 3 years of service in a management position	– specialised training or postgraduate studies in human resources or organisational unit management, – postgraduate or second-cycle studies at a Prison Service academy or professional training	master's degree or equivalent

Source: Regulation of the Minister of Justice of 23 November 2018 on Official Positions and Ranks of Prison Service Officers.

Research methodology and results

The study employed “mixed methods,” i.e., quantitative and qualitative methods were used to verify the research problem (Howe 2012; Hewson 2006; Clark, Creswell 2011; Mertens 2010; Bergman, 2010; Greene et al. 1989). The triangulation of research methods allowed for a multidimensional view of the problem under study and the elimination of potential errors of individual methods (Denzin 1978; Kostera 2010). Such an approach is used in the fields of management and quality sciences and psychology, as exemplified precisely by the implementation of a psychological questionnaire (quantitative method) followed by in-depth interviews (qualitative method) with the study participants, which allows for an in-depth understanding of the process generating the results obtained (Kawalec 2014; Jick 1979).

The research problem was formulated in the form of a question: what management styles do prison heads prefer in the context of carrying out the statutory tasks of managing a prison unit?

Specific research questions correspond with the research problem: What similarities and differences in terms of personality traits exist between the respondents? What are the specifics of unit management? How do heads understand unit management objectives? The study, for which the authors received permission from the Prison Service management, was conducted from July to October 2020 in seven prison units. The core study consisted of two parts:

- 1) conducting a survey using the Bochum Inventory of Personality Determinants of Work by Rudiger Hossiep and Michael Paschen (BIP) adapted by Aleksandra Jaworska and Urszula Brzezińska. A self-reported paper version was used;
- 2) carrying out nondirective in-depth interviews on a sample of seven heads.

Results of the Bochum Inventory of Personality Determinants of Work

The authors decided to use the BIP tool, even though it is not based on a specific comprehensive theoretical concept (it is based on Paul Costa's and Robert R. McCree's Five-Factor Model of Personality, motivation theory, and volitional control theory), it puts emphasis on those personality traits which seem to be the most important from the point of view of professional functioning.

The respondents make individual assessments of their own professional competences. On the basis of the results, it is possible to assess the respondents' functioning in the areas ranging from Professional Orientation understood as a source of values from which the respondents can derive professional satisfaction, through Professional Behavior which is understood as an attitude towards work, Social Competence which concerns the way of being in interpersonal relations, ending with Psychological Nature which deals with such elements as resistance to stress, self-confidence or control of emotions.

The questionnaire is a tool meeting psychometric values.

The respondents were men between 40 and 55 years of age who had served as heads for several months to several years at the time of the survey.

The results obtained from the BIP questionnaire are presented in Table 2.

The analysis of the results shows that in the area of Career Orientation, the greatest difference in the results obtained (from low to high) is observed in the criterion of Achievement Motivation, which means that the subjects differed significantly in terms of their readiness to deal with difficult situations and how much they demand from themselves. The greatest consistency is observed in the Leadership Motivation criterion (results oscillate from average – upper limit to high), which means that all respondents were characterised by the ability to influence the behaviour of others, authority, self-confidence, and deriving satisfaction from leading others.

Table 2. Results obtained in the BIP questionnaire

Area	Name	Min (raw score)	Max (raw score)	SD	Mean	Min (sten)	Max (sten)
Professional orientation	Achievement Motivation	51	68	6.21	60.29	4	8
	Power Motivation	45	61	6.39	51.29	5	10
	Leadership Motivation	53	74	7.06	60.71	6	9
Professional behaviour	Conscientiousness	50	79	11.84	63.57	4	10
	Flexibility	26	58	9.86	46.14	1	8
	Action-oriented	50	78	9.60	64.57	5	9
Social competences	Social Sensitivity	33	60	8.99	51.43	1	8
	Openness to Relationships	37	87	17.52	71.29	1	9
	Sociability	30	72	15.35	57.43	1	8
	Team-oriented	46	62	5.82	53.71	5	8
	Assertiveness	53	68	4.59	59.14	7	10
Psychological nature	Emotional Stability	50	73	7.89	62.57	5	9
	Working Under Pressure	48	68	6.84	58.14	5	9
	Self-confidence	57	84	8.24	69.43	5	9

Source: own research based on BIP.

The next area analysed is Professional Behavior. The widest range of results (from low to very high) is observed in the case of Flexibility, which means that some of the respondents are characterised by a very high openness to new experiences, while others show low readiness to change and are committed to maintaining the current rules. The relatively highest consistency is observed in the Action-oriented criterion, although scores also range from low to high. Such a spread indicates high variability within the trait under study, meaning that some respondents tend to be action-oriented and some tend to be state-oriented. Some heads tend to consider various options and consequences of actions without necessarily implementing them and some tend to react quickly and implement their decisions. A similar spread of results is observed in the area of Social Competence, across the three criteria: Social Sensitivity, Openness to Relationships, and Sociability scores range from very low to high.

The surveyed heads differ in their perceived empathy, their ability to perceive and respond to emotional states in others. Differences also exist in building social networks, developing interpersonal relationships for professional purposes. Respondents also differed in their cordiality toward other people, adapting to

their perspective. Despite such large differences in these three criteria, it should be noted that most of the scores fell within the average scores range; only a single score could be categorised as low. Apart from the greatest differences, the greatest consistency can be observed in this area. In the Assertiveness criterion, all respondents scored high, which means that they have the ability to force their solutions, appeal to formal authority. The respondents achieved average to high scores in the area of Psychological Nature, which means that in most cases they are able to control their emotions, especially in difficult situations. They are able to work well under pressure, they are characterised by psychophysical endurance and resilience in difficult situations.

Presentation of nondirective in-depth interviews results

Nondirective in-depth interviews were conducted with seven heads of detention centres and prisons. The selected form of interview is based on open-ended, unstructured, and non-standardised questions, which gives the interviewees the opportunity to speak freely, while the researcher gets more insight into the analysed issues (Gudkova 2012, p. 115). The authors compiled a list of issues that they then addressed during the interviews, without making a list of or determining the order of the questions. The interviews were conducted in September 2020. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. In accordance with the principles of qualitative research, anonymity was assured to the interviewees (Christians 2014, pp. 217–218). The interviews were analysed using coding and thematic categorisation procedures. The research material was coded in a traditional way, i.e. by dividing, analysing, comparing, conceptualising, and then categorising the data (Strauss, Corbin 1990, p. 61). Once the list of codes was established and verified, they were combined into categories to organise the research material. The codes were not quantitative in nature, they were used to analyse qualitative relationships between data (Kvale 2010). Taking into account the specificity of the Prison Service and of the functioning of individual units, it was decided to present the research material on the basis of indicating similarities and differences under separate categories, rather than case studies of individual units.

On the basis of the conducted nondirective in-depth interviews, three key thematic categories were distinguished, including: the specifics of management in prison units; the qualities and characteristics of the profile of a head of a prison unit; management styles in prison units, which organise the collected empirical material.

Specifics of management in penitentiary units

Each of the heads defined their understanding of the term ‘management’ differently, but what they had in common in their approach to the process was the issue of being task-oriented. The practical aspect of management was primarily

important to the respondents, although they emphasised that knowledge of management procedures and theory is also essential in their daily work.

Management is all about practice. It is like driving – no two moments on the road are the same, just as no two work and management situations are the same. Mere knowledge of the regulations is not enough, practice is paramount. [Head No. 2]

Management in the prison service is more like administration, as specific tasks and orders are performed. To me, management is both about knowledge and practice. Both of these issues are equally important. I try to learn all the time and learn lessons. [Head No. 1]

To me, management is all about practice, experience and knowledge. [...] My first job was that of a warden, and I have worked my way up through the various levels. [Head No. 6]

To me, management is a combination of theory and practice. One must possess theoretical basis, while practice verifies everything. [Head No. 4]

Management is a combination of theory and practice. 40% theory and 60% practice. [Head No. 3]

In management, there are different ways to reach a goal. Different people have different methods. [...] Management is a bit of authority, the name itself already indicates “managing”, i.e. controlling someone, however, to me it is more like directing administrative actions. Someone is imposing a course of action. To me, management is a conglomeration of different concepts – a system, administration and authority. It is also the ability to make decisions and take responsibility for them. [Head No. 2]

Management is about choosing the right resources, actions that build the work atmosphere and motivate the team at every level. It is also about performing tasks and leading. [Head No. 6]

The most important thing is character, theoretical knowledge is important, because you need to be up to date with the regulations, which unfortunately change very often. The practice, the ability to manage people, is invaluable. We function in a specific structure, an order is an order and there is no discussion about it. Many may not like it, but it keeps us safe. [Head No. 7]

The heads also referred to the nature of prison management, which differs from the management of other organisations. They mainly stressed the issues of having to follow orders, specific working conditions and hierarchical structure of the organisation. Interlocutors discussed the issue of hierarchy in the organisational structure of the Prison Service, as well as individual units, treating it as a natural feature.

Of course, there is a hierarchy at Prison Service Units. Sometimes I have to make a decision that is mine and mine alone. Sometimes these are difficult cases and it happens that I am blackmailed that there will be complaints against me to the District Director. However, these are not common situations. [Head No. 4]

Hierarchy is important in the service. [Head No. 5]

Decisions come from the top. I may disagree, but I must obey. In the uniformed services, hierarchy is the key aspect. Sometimes, when someone new is hired and tries to be on first name terms with me, I say: hold on, that is not how it works here. Order and safety must first and foremost be preserved. [...] In our profession, however, most of the cases are conditioned by regulations, there are procedures to be followed. [Head no. 1]

Most of the respondents indicated that despite the hierarchical management and high level of authority over officers, they care about good relations and try to be friendly to the employees. Some of the heads said they spend a lot of time talking and interacting interpersonally. They pointed out that, in their opinion, management should not be based only on the current administration of the unit, but also on building a sense of community and implementation of the vision, i.e. the process of making strategic decisions of the desired future state of the organisation (Kozłowski, Jemielniak, 2011, p. 336).

Management in prison is specific; it is a closed environment. Hard to access, therefore not easy to study either [Head No. 2]

Management is not just about administration, team building and tasking are important. A team is built through a community of purpose that has something to accomplish. In addition, vision is the foundation; it is important that people identify with the community. I present tasks, but I have a vision first and foremost. [...]. [Head No. 5]

To me, management is about building a sense of community, infecting people with my vision. I often talk to managers at work, trying to convince them of the vision. [Head No. 3]

Management is about building community and building relationships, working efficiently under control. [...] The specificity of management at Prison Service Units is putting the safety of the unit and officers first. Observing the regulations that standardise the operation of the remand centre. Conflict resolution is also important. [Head No. 4]

Respondents are aware that management is a team activity, therefore they find it important to build a good atmosphere and trust between officers within the unit. The issue of building good team relationships, getting to know their staff, and trusting each other emerged as important in each of the interviews.

It is impossible to manage alone. You must know the strengths and weaknesses of employees, their skills, have trusted people by your side [Head No. 1]

The atmosphere influences the building of trust. [Head No. 6]

Atmosphere is important, it is easier to work. If the atmosphere is bad then it's hard to enforce people to perform tasks and their duties. [Head No. 3]

We are specific, of course. The most important thing is trust, knowing that your colleague will take the bullet for you, total trust is needed. A sense of security that neither I nor the colleague next to me will succumb to pressure (tears in the eyes). [Head No. 7]

The heads indicated that feeling confident in managerial decisions makes it easier to assign and enforce tasks.

Trust in the manager's decisions is also important. We are working with difficult people, if we don't trust each other, then the work is pointless. [Head No. 3]

The respondents associated trust with the issue of high competence of employees, knowledge and experience in specific areas, such as security. Interviewees indicated two categories in relation to trust – trust in employees and trust in one's own knowledge, providing a sense of security.

What was particularly important to me [after taking the office] was to have a security specialist. [...] If someone is an expert in a particular field, e.g. security, then of course their opinion is important to me. [Head No. 1]

First and foremost, experience is important in a head's job. Going through all levels at work gives you the opportunity to thoroughly analyse your actions and be aware of appropriate procedures. [Head No. 4]

Throughout my 25 years of service, I have changed units, gathered various experiences and perspectives. I refer to experience. I have been in different units, so if I am telling my staff about something, I know it from my own experience. I know the ins and outs of working at different levels. I started as a warden then I was a supervisor, but I also held other positions. [Head No. 5]

The issue of resolving existing disputes and conflicts quickly, after hearing each side, is important to most heads in managing the unit. Moreover, during the interviews, interlocutors indicated that an important aspect of their work is also building the image of the unit and the Prison Service. Directors no. 4, 5, and 6 are oriented at building the image and relationship outside the unit.

Our PR strategy includes showing what we do in a positive way, e.g. prisoners undertaking charity work or officers donating blood. [...] The image is very important, what we show to the outside world, how we are perceived. It is all a testament to our work. [Head No. 4]

We are not liked by the public. People often think that police officers work in prisons. You hear about prisons most often when things are bad, when something bad happens. [...] An important task for the Prison Service is also image building. [...] Image: The units have press officers. We organise actions at schools, such as “prison – lost time”, cooperate with NGOs, but also implement tasks involving convicts. [...] Festivals and activities with children are also organised so that the local community can gain more knowledge about how the prison works. [Head No. 6]

Similarly, head no. 5 emphasised the importance of the image of both the officer and the unit, which are the hallmarks of the service.

It is important to care for the image, to build an ethos and lead by example. The unit is supposed to be clean and neat, and the uniform is supposed to look good, too. The look and aesthetics of a place matter. Each unit is different, sometimes they are old historic buildings where renovations are not easy. So modernity is not always possible. It can be poor, but it has to be clean. I detest dirt and disorder. As we demand discipline from inmates, so must we from ourselves. [...] It is a common good, everybody cares about it. It is not enough to just do something, the challenge is to maintain the level afterwards. [Head No. 5]

Respondents identified the following as management problems: staff stress and burnout, staff turnover, and the unit’s inability to recruit staff (the district level has this competency). They define management effectiveness mostly in two aspects: positive evaluation of superiors and number of incidents within the unit.

The head’s effectiveness is assessed by external audits from authorised/supervisory institutions, as well as the number of incidents within the unit. [Head No. 1]

Effectiveness – time perspective, we evaluate the effects, whether the atmosphere has improved, whether the established investment processes have been implemented. [Head No. 5]

In a penitentiary unit, the most important thing is that there is peace and there are no security incidents. We have had a string of various mishaps here lately that were beyond our control – every month a suicide attempt, a death, a suicide – the audit team said there was no misconduct on our part. This causes stress and nerves; people dwell on these situations. [...] My focus is on order, to prevent crises. We have had a series of unpleasant events recently, but most of those things were out of our control. After a crisis there is always an audit, we wait for the results, we have to refer to the results. We also analyse the situation ourselves and draw conclusions. [Head No. 3]

We check the effects of tasks, we conduct constant monitoring. I believe that the effectiveness is also evidenced by the number of dismissals and absenteeism at work. If it is high, it signals a problem. [...] Each prison unit is of different nature, the buildings are from different times. Not all of them are easy to renovate. Modern prisons are being built now, they are completely different. [Head No. 6]

Effective management is when an individual is not heard of negatively outside. It is not good when situations like this happen. [Head No. 4]

The above indicates that practice and experience both in terms of their own capabilities and activities, as well as the ability to rely on the competence of staff, is of particular importance to the surveyed directors of penitentiary units when it comes to management. Respondents are aware that management should not only be based on the administration of day-to-day affairs, but also on building community, relationships and a good working atmosphere. In addition, each unit has distinct goals to achieve, such as those resulting from its unique characteristics (e.g., prison, open facility), which affects the manner and specificity of management.

The qualities and characteristics of the profile of a head of a penitentiary unit

The respondents, referring to their own experiences, indicated specific qualities that, in their opinion, a head in the Prison Service should have. Considering the specific working conditions and organisational goals, they mainly indicated decision-making, leading by example, fairness, motivating employees, high qualifications and knowledge, relevant education, and experience.

The qualities of a head in the Prison Service are first and foremost being professional and expert. Competence matters. [Head No. 5]

A head should be fair, lead by example, but also be consistent in their decisions, be quick and accurate. [...] It is better to make a decision quickly and change it later than to make no decision at all. The decision can be corrected later. [Head No. 6]

The interviewees emphasised that they make decisions on their own, but if possible, they consult with employees specialising in the given task areas. They saw decisiveness, defined as the ability to make decisions quickly and appropriately, as one of the most important skills of a head.

It is important not to be afraid to make a decision. People expect decisions and indications as to how they should perform a task. I often know what decision I will make, but still want to talk to people to reassure myself. A lot depends on the situation, but I am able to change my decision. [Head No. 2]

Interlocutors emphasised that the decision-making process is based on regulations, but they are willing to listen to the advice of their colleagues.

I draw on my own and my colleagues' experience, but my decision is final. In the uniformed services, orders are not discussed. [...] Regulations – the Prison Service Act, ordinances, set the framework for our work. We often hold meetings of managerial staff, talk and look for solutions. It is me who makes the final decision, of course. [Head No. 1]

I try to make decisions after review and not to make them authoritatively. [Head No. 4]

Some of the respondents emphasised that despite having a large amount of decision-making power, they are able to change the decision when presented with rational arguments.

I can also admit when I am wrong. I do not go into denial when I know I am wrong. [Head No. 1]

They indicated issues of goal and task setting as another important area of work. The heads indicated that most of their time is taken up by day-to-day activities.

At work, I focus on tasks, the current ones. Strategies emerge, some goals are pursued quickly, others are pursued long-term. I work with the spokesperson – we discuss ideas, choose projects, the spokesperson coordinates. [Head No. 4]

Service is subordinate to performance. Goals depend on tasks, and these are often ongoing issues. Such main purpose of the Prison Service is to protect the public from offenders. [Head No. 6]

Tasks vary. Investment processes, staffing issues, and the threat of rebellion. Tasks are determined by the situation. In Prison Service units, tasks come from the top. [Head No. 2]

Each unit also has smaller goals/tasks. [...] People need to understand the mission and goal, because it is hard to demand commitment when people do not understand the goal. The goals change often. [...] Of course, social rehabilitation is also a goal – there are more and more support programmes in this area. [...] We are trying to get the inmates employed outside of prison so as to prepare them for life after they are released. Learning, working, and social rehabilitation. [Head No. 6]

First and foremost, a head should be able to delegate tasks. I cannot deal with situations such as when Mr. Zdzisio does not want to be in the cell with Mr. Stasio, I have a deputy to take care of it. I have distributed the tasks precisely. Every one of my deputies knows what to do, I trust them. I would not be able to take on everything. [Head No. 7]

In Lublin, I had experiences ranging from near rebellion, suicides, deaths to escapes. [Head No. 3]

Respondents also referred to the issue of appropriate education and training. They indicated that they had taken postgraduate studies and specialised courses in management, but varied in their assessment of their usefulness.

My academic studies did not prepare me for the work at all. I took a postgraduate course in management where there were a lot of participants from the uniformed services, we exchanged experiences. It was not a course profiled for the uniformed services, but rather a general one in management. [Head No. 1]

I took postgraduate courses – learning theory, workshops, classes on psychology, self-presentation, how to manage time and people effectively. [Head No. 2]

Postgraduate studies – general, but I think I got something out of it. [Head No. 6]

I took a postgraduate course in human resource management and it was useful in a general sense. [Head No. 4]

Postgraduate studies in management did not give me much – just theory. [Head No. 3]

I think it is worth listening and getting a different perspective. I pursued my postgraduate studies in management at a university unrelated to the uniformed services. That was my assumption, to listen to people from other backgrounds. The same issues look differently from different perspectives, and I was interested to see how it looks in other organisations. [Head No. 5]

Directors emphasised that an important factor influencing their informal authority with subordinates is their experience at various posts. They indicated that it was very important for them to have a working knowledge of different positions, which translates into their management style.

In management, experience is of key importance. Changing units taught me a lot, in Unit A, I went through the school of life. I learned a lot then and tried to transfer that to Unit B. [In Unit A] there was a lot going on, I had a good mentor who made quick and accurate decisions – organised quick briefings and consultations. [Head No. 3]

Leadership consists in that some people have an aptitude for management, while others are specialists who lack qualities that are important in the service. It is not only the formal authority that is important, but also the informal one, i.e. obedience. [Head No. 6]

To me, leadership means being assertive, knowing what to do. This is a situation where someone is not afraid to make difficult decisions. He/she is not submissive and

knows how to deal with pressures from within and without. [...] A leader is someone who is not afraid, who will take responsibility. Leadership is the whole system, the machinery that makes an institution work. [Head No. 7]

I went through the entire career path, from the supervisor to the director, it took a dozen years. I started working right after graduation. Each stage gives new experience, as does the change of unit [workplace]. [Head No. 1]

The front-line experience – in security, in the correctional division – was of a key importance to me; if you have the knowledge and experience, you can be an authority figure. I have learned a lot in different positions. [Head No. 3]

A good manager knows all the levels and should be aware of the [level-specific] issues. [Head No. 4]

Most of the respondents indicated that authority figures in the persons of experienced officers, including superiors with whom they had worked at various stages of their careers, were important to them.

I learned something from each of my superiors, observed them at work and learned lessons. [Head No. 1]

The district director is my authority figure, he never got upset, I tried to model myself [*on him – translator's note*]. [Head No. 3]

I had many superiors, I learned something from each of them, they were people who had authority. [Head No. 6]

I learned a lot from previous heads when I was a subordinate. I drew conclusions about what was good about each style. I prefer to learn from other people's mistakes. [Head No. 2]

I try to learn from my mistakes, I refer to experiences. I explain, I predict the outcomes. [Head No. 3]

Respondents cited promotion to a managerial position in the unit in which they worked as a difficult experience, noting that it was easier to move to a management position in another unit. In such a situation, they were building relationships with co-workers from scratch.

I had this work experience where I was promoted and suddenly had to manage colleagues that I had worked with before. It was difficult, I was one of them, and then the relationship changed. When you become a head, you stop being a colleague. It often happens that chatting stops when you enter the room. It was definitely easier to manage in a new place where I was just getting to know people and was building relationships with them, setting boundaries from scratch. [Head No. 1]

Most of the heads emphasised that they try to remember not only to follow orders, but also to attend to the well-being and needs of the employees.

The human factor is very important, especially tapping into the experience of specific individuals. There are times when difficult situations arise where a solution must be sought. [...] The good of the service also means a duty to take care of the employees, and to understand them. [...] The human approach is important. There are several hundred employees in the unit who have different problems, different financial situations. I try to understand them, talk to them. [Head No. 1]

I find it important to listen to people. I take their opinion into account. [Head No. 2]

Interlocutors also noted that it was important for them to resolve disputes between employees, talk about needs, and foster positive motivation.

They can come and talk, but obviously not with every single issue. Once an employee came to me to complain that his colleague did not do something, so he had to do it. I said that they must settle such matters between themselves, because it was such a minor matter that I should not know about it at all. However, there was once a person who spoiled the atmosphere, created problems, and said he did not want to work. I called him to my office, handed him a white sheet of paper and said: – if you do not want to work, write a request to be relieved of duty. He then rethought his behavior and changed his attitude. [Head No. 1]

The commands are sometimes difficult to follow, I try to further motivate. I prefer positive motivation and support. If this is not possible, then [*I have to deal with it through – translator's note*] official channels and disciplinary proceedings. This is not a large scale problem. [Head No. 4]

The respondents use both positive and negative motivation in their work, using a system of rewards and punishments. In addition, some heads emphasised that in the work of a director in a Prison Service organisational unit it is important to have a specific motivation and to separate work life from private life, in such a way as to seek balance between the stress of working in difficult conditions and family life. The problem of emotional strain and burnout also affects officers, which was emphasised by the interviewed heads. They also mentioned the issues of communication channels, noting that direct communication is important to them in addition to formal modes of communication.

Management styles in penitentiary units

Each head assessed their management style differently, but none indicated that it was purely autocratic. Respondents emphasised the importance of the human factor in the decision-making process, as well as teamwork.

I think my management style is open – I give instructions, but I also listen to people. However, you have to set limits. [...] I have an open room. Employees can come in to talk. I like my job and I like people. I do not dwell on situations or revisit closed issues. Sometimes the employees themselves try to revisit the issue, apologise, but I say I had long forgotten and it did not matter. [...] There is no room for negotiation in the prison unit. I do not negotiate, I give orders. It is rather the case that the employees come and try to negotiate with me, but on matters of little importance. [Head No. 1]

To me, management is associated with the medieval military. You can fight together side by side with the soldiers, or you can stand on top and command. I prefer team action and the first style. [...] I think my qualities are patience, conversation and refraining from extreme emotions. [Head No. 2]

What is my style? People say I am calm, I'm composed, and I try to de-escalate conflicts. [Head No. 3]

I developed my own management style from my own experiences. I watched others, of course, there are different styles. [Head No. 4]

In my opinion, an autocratic style is not possible today, in my case I am task-oriented but in a democratic way. I try to listen to people and choose the best solution, and I am able to change a decision if I have to. [Head No. 6]

My style is liberal autocrat – I do not allow discussion, I am not afraid to make decisions. The superior sets the goals, but also should listen to subordinates. [...] I am task-oriented, I do not think much about what other people say. [Head No. 5]

The above indicates that in their management, heads try to take into account the employees and their needs in the decision-making process. Even if they make decisions on their own, they try to create the impression of a participatory model of management by discussion and consultation. In contrast, one respondent is clearly task- and performance-oriented only.

Discussion

The papers to date indicate that management styles based on independent decision making on the basis on one's own judgment are preferred in correctional units (Jędrzejak 1999, p. 117). All the respondents are characterised by a high level of Assertiveness, understood as the readiness to maintain one's own position despite external pressure and the use of formal authority as a means of enforcing one's orders. Most differences were observed in other social competencies. Data analysis indicates that for most of the respondents, good interpersonal relationships and openness to another person in management play an important

role. The surveys have shown that most heads are trying to depart from the autocratic management style towards the one oriented at employees, their needs, and their well-being in the organisation. This approach is in line with humanistic management, where human beings are a key value (Nierenberg et al. 2015; Kociatkiewicz, Kostera 2013; Kimakowitz et al. 2011). Kristie M. Rogers, Kevin G. Corley, and Blake E. Ashforth (2017) indicated that showing respect can serve as a powerful lever for positive transformation of self-awareness in the context of prison unit functioning. The showing of respect is a key factor in one's self-perception and degree of adjustment to the job and organisation (Rogers et al. 2017, p. 260). The surveyed directors also emphasised respect for employees as an important element of management.

It is also important for heads to set an example for employees through their own actions and behaviour patterns, which is in line with the trend of authentic leadership (Ciuk 2008, pp. 337–338). It is especially important to build a positive atmosphere, interpersonal relationships based on trust, and a sense of community. Interpersonal relationships, trust, and mutual respect are especially important in a prison setting to successfully implement organisational change (Brown et al. 2010, p. 4). In addition, respondents identified the area of proactive communication, tailored to specific situations, needs, and contexts, as important. This corresponds with the research of Marta Szeluga-Romańska (2016, pp. 25–28; 2014, pp. 85–93), indicating that the relationships built by a manager are crucial to the quality of communication.

In the context of management in the Prison Service, the issue of image management not only in the context of crisis situations, but also in building a conscious strategy aimed at creating the positive message about the functioning of the Prison Service is also important (Piotrowski 2010, pp. 85–86). The heads emphasised that it is important for them to build a positive image of the service and prison units in their environment. There were references in the surveys to building an ethos of service, i.e., an officer proud of the mission entrusted to them. This approach means an officer motivated to serve by realising the role of the Prison Service protecting society on the one hand, and on the other hand providing support to those deprived of liberty, ready to change their lives in the future (Piotrowski 2010, p. 55).

Summary

The issue of prison management has not been exhaustively presented in the literature, either in domestic or foreign publications (Jacobs, Olitsky 2004, p. 479). The reason behind that, in part, is that conducting research in a prison setting is an organisational challenge (Wysocka-Pleczyk et al. 2020), as well as that this area is most often addressed by specialists in pedagogy and social

rehabilitation (Konopczyński 2007; Konopczyński 2014; Poklek 2015; Kowalski, Magda 2020). The aim of this article was to explore issues in prison management, especially management styles and personality traits of the heads of detention centres and prisons. The authors conducted the interdisciplinary pilot study using qualitative and quantitative methods, which provided a multi-faceted view of the issue of management styles in a prison setting. The study was conducted in seven units, and the authors are aware of the limitations of the conclusions. However, it is worth noting that theoretical saturation occurred during the research process, consisting in occurrence of similar cases and examples during the collection and analysis of empirical data from the interviews (Glaser, Strauss 1967, p. 61), meaning that the stated cognitive goals were achieved. However, it would be valuable and expedient to include all directors of prisons and remand centres in the study, so that conclusions can be drawn and regularities demonstrated throughout the Prison Service system.

Based on the Bochum Inventory of Personality Determinants of Work by Rudiger Hossiep and Michael Paschen (BIP), nondirective in-depth interviews, elements of observation, and desk research, key similarities and differences between the heads were identified. It has been observed that most heads try to depart from the autocratic style of management towards a humanistic one, oriented at building interpersonal relations. Despite the hierarchical structure and the high degree of decision-making authority, heads try to take into account the needs and opinions of employees. An important area of their work is communication and interpersonal relations, as well as conflict resolution. Management is seen by them not only as administration and management of the unit, but above all as building a community based on trust, respect and good working atmosphere. Heads are also aware of the need to build the positive image of the unit, as well as the ethos of the service, and conduct long-term public relations activities to this end. The greatest differences between the respondents were found in the area of Social Sensitivity, Openness to Relationships, and Sociability, with the most consistent results observed in the area of Assertiveness.

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