

PATHS TO THE PERSON

The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland
Faculty of Theology, Institute of Family Studies
Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Psychology

SERIES:

THE HUMAN PERSON AND HEALTH

Under the patronage of
The Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers

PATHS TO THE PERSON

COMMUNITY ASSIGNMENTS IN ACHIEVING
INDIVIDUAL PREVENTION GOALS

Editors

MIROŚLAW KALINOWSKI, IWONA NIEWIADOMSKA

Lublin-Rome 2010

Reviewer
Prof. Ryszard Maciejewski

Cover design
Patrycja Czerniak

English translators
Piotr Czyżewski, Natalia Szarzyńska, Anna Zagórna-Bartnik
Maksymilian Kobyłecki, Marylka Hawrylecka

English revision and proofreading
Jan Kobyłecki

Coordinator of cooperation with the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers
Rev. Dariusz Giers, PhD

© Copyright by Wydawnictwo KUL
& The Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers
Lublin–Rome 2010

ISBN 978-83-7702-127-9

Wydawnictwo KUL
ul. Zbożowa 61, 20-827 Lublin
tel. 81-740-93-40, fax 81-740-93-50
e-mail: wydawnictwo@kul.lublin.pl
<http://wydawnictwo.kul.lublin.pl>

The Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers
Via della Conciliazione, 3-00120 Vatican City
www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils

*To the Holy Father John Paul II
- Servant of the dignity of the human person -
the Founder of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers*

Chapter II

Competent Life Management

(IWONA NIEWIADOMSKA)

1. The Essence of Life Management

Among the currently popular theories underscoring not only individual processes connected with purposive behaviours but also their integration that contributes towards coherent life management, there is the following model (Baltes, Baltes 1990, pp. 1-34; Freund, Baltes 2000, pp. 35-58): **selection – optimization – compensation**.

Selection consists in biological, social, and personal goals forming a range of alternative dimensions of activity. The number of potential aims usually exceeds the individual's actual capabilities of achieving them. In the process of selection individual resources are concentrated on specific dimensions of activity (goals). Purposive behaviour is characterized by organization, orderliness, and adaptation to encountered situations.

The effectiveness of intentional behaviour largely depends on the degree of optimization, which manifests itself in the acquisition, practice, improvement, integration, coordination, and automatization of strategies serving to reach the represented goals.

The process of compensation consists, on the one hand, in concentrating one's resources on the most important aims and in adjusting internal standards to the intended effects; on the other hand, it serves to prevent losses connected with previously achieved results.

The integration model of life management is exemplified in the concept of sense of coherence. This concept is defined as the individual's global orientation, reflecting the degree to which that individual has a dominant and relatively lasting sense of certainty that (Antonovsky 1995, p. 34):

- 1) the stimuli coming, in the course of life, from the internal and external environment have an orderly, predictable, and explicable nature (the sense of comprehensibility);

2) resources are available that will allow the individual to meet the demands posed by these stimuli (the sense of manageability);

3) these expectations present a challenge which the individual believes to be worthy of effort and commitment (the sense of meaningfulness).

Owing to the factors listed above, the experience of coherence significantly affects life management – mainly by strengthening intentional motivation and increasing human resistance in stressful situations (Antonovsky, 1997, p. 211; Lipiński 2004, p. 88; Strelau et al. 2004, pp. 59-62).

Because the components contributing to the coherence of the individual's experiences (the sense of coherence) – comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness – are of significance in competent management of resources, it is worthwhile to characterize them in detail in further sections of this article.

2. Intentional Behaviours as Influenced by the Comprehension of Occurring Events

The sense of comprehensibility is a cognitive structure that comprises information about the surrounding world and about the attributes of the situations that individual has found themselves in. Based on this structure, it is possible to predict, to plan actions, and to devise coping strategies in a variety of life circumstances (Antonovsky 1997, p. 215).

Constructive coping with the demands of the surrounding reality is connected with a high level of comprehensibility, which comes as a result of searching for information, processing it creatively, and structuring it logically (Antonovsky 1995, pp. 33-34; Łuszczynska 2004, pp. 306-313).

Empirical analyses show that individuals exhibiting destructive behaviours (committing criminal acts) are characterized by a specific cognitive style which testifies to a low sense of comprehensibility. This conclusion rests on the following premises (McKay et al. 1996, pp. 63-75; Hollin et al. 2004, p. 42; Mills et al. 2004, p. 721):

- lack of reflection on the various consequences of one's actions, particularly the concentration on current benefits rather than on future losses resulting from destructive behaviour;
- preference for concrete over abstract thinking;
- a tendency to ascribe the causes of events to external factors rather than to one's own activity;

- difficulties in judging situations appropriately, especially from the perspective of others;

- problems with formulating, planning, and achieving goals;

The results of empirical analyses indicate that individuals engaging in deviant behaviours frequently describe the surrounding world as hostile and unjust, marked by aggression and indifference to the fate of other people (Ostrowska 1981, p. 262). Cognitive distortions also often lead to antisocial attitude, which is strongly connected with the repetition of destructive behaviours – above all, of aggressive acts (Vitaro et al. 2000, pp. 313-325). These regularities argue for the conclusion that individuals experiencing difficulties in managing their lives have problems with understanding the surrounding reality. Distortions in this sphere may consist in a failure to code important aspects of events, in problems with structuring the incoming stimuli, and/or in problems with processing information concerning specific facts.

An important aspect of the sense of comprehensibility is the proper functioning of the “personality-based temporal operator,” which consists in the ability to move at an appropriate frequency and at different time intervals – thanks to it, chains of events connected with the past, the present, and the future are formed in consciousness (Nosal 2004, pp. 181-183). The ability to take a full temporal perspective is strongly reflected in the formation of cognitive variables responsible for intentional motivation – including the valuation system, situational orientation, and self-efficacy (Nosal, Bajcar 1999, p. 60).

The motivational function of autobiographical memory consists in the events experienced (even seemingly unimportant ones) acting as orientation markers and reaction patterns that strongly affect current behaviours and planned goals.

The future exists in the mind in the form of visions, expectations, and ways of fulfilling them, but the form in which it is anticipated depends on the individual’s past as well as present experiences (Pervin, John 2002, p. 585).

The existence of strong relations between intentional actions and cognitive representations of past situations is implied by the fact that people repeat behaviours which served to achieve a specific effect in the past. What is particularly important in predicting goal achievement is the frequency, precedence, and freshness of experiences. It may, therefore, be expected that, in managing their own behaviour, individuals will judge as more effective the pursuit of such outcomes that they have recently succeeded in achieving, and/or such that they successfully achieved in the

past, and/or such that they achieved at the very beginning of their life careers (Hołyst 2004, pp. 159-160).

Empirical studies also suggest the conclusion that an imbalance in the “personality-based temporal operator” in the form of excessively futuristic orientation leads to a lowering of the efficacy of purposive behaviours. This regularity often results from (Brunstein et al. 1998, pp. 494-508; Nosal, Bajcar 1999, pp. 64-65; Hołyst 2004, p. 163):

- a separation of planned aims from one’s actual capability of making things happen,
- a lack of confidence in actions taken,
- difficulties in predicting the results of these actions, and/or
- too distant reward for actions taken.

Individuals with a rational attitude towards the past try to manage purposive tasks when they perceive the probability of accomplishing them to be high, but they do not engage in behaviours with regard to which they have low self-efficacy (Oettingen 2000, pp. 101-129). Conversely, individuals who set themselves goals unlikely to be accomplished do little to effect their achievement. Similar relations were observed in studies of people exhibiting deviant behaviours – among subjective risk factors for recidivism, the ones most often listed are the lack of life plans and having goals characterized by low chances of achievement (Szymanowska 2003, p. 276).

Temporal orientation affects self-efficacy as well. There are several phases in purposive behaviours: the predecision phase, the decision phase, the action phase, and the period after its completion. Cognitive, emotional, and energetic processes interact at all these stages. The closing of an intentional behaviour consists, above all, in checking its effects in terms of goal achievement (Hacker 1993, pp. 157-169). Retrospective analysis of effects and their causes constitutes the basis for predicting one’s goal achievement capacity in the future time perspective (Pervin 2002, pp. 100-101). The results of empirical analyses indicate that mental representations of self-efficacy, being the effect of experiences recurring in various spheres of activity in the course of the entire life, constitute cognitive control over capacity for success, and the perception of the causes of future achievements resembles the attribution of effects achieved in the past. Personal control over the attainment of future goals increases when the expected result depends – in the individual’s subjective interpretation – on their internal and permanent traits (Zaleski 1988, p. 840; Försterling 2005, p. 97).

3. Life Management as Influenced by Manageability

The sense of manageability is a personality variable, responsible for disposing motivation and resistance resources because thanks to it the individual may effect a transformation of various life situations. This variable determines the perception of the number and types of strategies in one's coping repertoire as well as their flexible use, since the same way of coping may be either adaptive or dysfunctional, depending on the circumstances.

A high sense of manageability releases life skills and activity of the individual (Antonovsky 1995, pp. 133-144).

Thanks to high manageability, the individual's behaviour shows considerable flexibility in the context of occurring events. The individual creates subjective scenarios for adjusting their behaviours to the intended goal under current circumstances, and out of several possible activities they choose the one with the highest likelihood of success (Oleś 2005, pp. 182-183). The influence of manageability on life management manifests itself primarily in (Sęk 2006, pp. 110-111):

- summoning one's internal resources for coping with situational demands;
- taking actions of various kinds;
- the effort put into the performance of these actions;
- perseverance;
- the feelings that accompany purposive actions;
- coping with obstacles.

Manageability is significantly connected with competence development through social modelling, practicing specific behaviours in order to consolidate the desired skills, and employing these behaviours in everyday life (Bandura 1997, pp. 56-59).

Competence consists in recognizing the degree to which one has proved or believes they may prove effective in action (Bandura, Schunk 1981, pp. 586-598).

A very important kind of competence is coping skills shown in situations that involve high stress – mainly in task and problem circumstances. Stress coping is a function of the cognitive judgment of event – if a person classifies a situation as stressful, an adaptation process is triggered off in the form of coping. Its course depends on the secondary judgment of the problem, in which the individual estimates what can be done in order to meet the demands of circumstances. Coping options are judged in terms of two basic functions (Lazarus 1986, p. 24):

1) improvement of the situation (strategies orientated to problem solution);

2) such emotional self-regulation that will prevent a breakdown of psychic resistance or social functioning (strategies orientated to emotions).

There are four fundamental modes of coping with stress that perform both these functions (Terelak 2001, p. 358):

- search for information – a survey of the stressful situation, aimed at gaining the knowledge necessary for taking a rational coping decision or for redefining the circumstances;

- direct action – actions aimed at effecting a change in the causative subject or the environment, intended to deal with the problem;

- refraining from activity – in circumstances when no action is better than taking action;

- intrapsychic processes – cognitive mechanisms aimed at emotional regulation (among them, above all, defence mechanisms);

Coping methods that serve the improvement of the state of affairs may take a variety of forms – e.g. monitoring stress, organizing the situation, or seeking social support. In order for them to be effective, the cognitive system, which ensures a realistic perception of stressors and available coping resources, has to function normally.

If, as a result of cognitive judgment, the individual decides that they are unable to solve the encountered problem, they begin to initiate emotional coping strategies consisting in physical withdrawal from the situation or in the use of defence mechanisms (e.g. ignoring or rationalizing the problem). The risk of adjustment distortions occurs particularly when the two functions – change of the situation and emotional regulation – come into conflict; for instance, the self-appeasement effect produced by taking a psychoactive substance prevents from undertaking adaptation activities (Heszen-Niejodek 2003, p. 477).

The personality variable referred to as coping style is responsible for the fairly steady course of the coping process and for the individual-specific dispositions to reduce psychological stress. The existence of this dimension of personality is proved by the fact that people habitually follow permanent patterns of behaviour in situations sharing similar characteristics. Thus, it is coping style that determines the relative constancy of human behaviours in specific kinds of difficulties. What strategies the individual will use when solving a specific problem depends on two factors: the possibilities offered by the individual coping style and the demands of the current situation (Heszen-Niejodek 2003, pp. 484-485).

The process of coping may be considered effective if it leads to a constructive solution of a task or problem – and to positive emotions at the same time.

Empirical studies do not conclusively indicate what coping style is the most effective one in overcoming stress. The results of some studies encourage the conclusion that the efficacy of the coping style depends on the situational context, while the findings of others suggest that even if circumstances are taken into account the style orientated to problem solution has greater adaptive value than escape-avoidance or emotional styles (Pervin, John 2002, p. 549; Heszen-Niejodek 2003, pp. 488-489). Some authors express the opinion that overcoming difficulties by means of emotions is often connected with an ineffective way of managing internal coping resources, which increases the risk of tension growth in various types of circumstances (Strelau et al. 2004, pp. 49-51).

Behaviours serving to solve tasks and/or problems are more effective when they comprise the following elements (Sęk 1993, p. 492):

- confidence in oneself and in other people;
- active exploration of reality and search for information;
- division of the problem situation into fragments and gradual resolution of difficulties;
- constructive coping with emotions;
- help initiated by other people;
- recognizing and overcoming a tendency to tiredness and disorganization;
- readiness to make changes in oneself.

Empirical analyses indicate that prolonged psychic tension leads to reactions that increase the likelihood of destructive behaviours, such as uncontrolled outbursts of rage at the slightest provocation from the environment. Deviant behaviour may therefore be treated as an attempt to resolve a difficult situation or as a sign of adaptation difficulties experienced (Strelau et al. 2004, pp. 49-51). This regularity is confirmed by the findings of research, which established that the differences between individuals preferring criminal lifestyle and persons abiding by social norms do not stem from different value preferences but from greater difficulties that criminals experience in achieving personal goals (Szymanowski 1989, pp. 310-315).

The individual's sense of manageability is strictly related to self-efficacy with regard to specific tasks and situations in which the individual makes judgments concerning high possibilities of achieving success (Oleś 2005, pp. 216-217).

Self-efficacy beliefs are influenced by a variety of factors, deriving from four sources of information (Bandura 1997, pp. 215-216):

1) performance in action – successes achieved and failures suffered; experiences of this kind are of particular significance: successes strengthen self-efficacy, and experiencing failures or a lack of success undermines it;

2) helpful experiences – observations concerning other people that pertain to the efficacy of their behaviours in specific circumstances; ways of integrating one's own competences with the knowledge about the efficacy of other people, aimed at increasing one's agency;

3) verbal persuasion – instructions from the environment concerning valuable goals, ways of achieving them, and the costs of pursuits undertaken;

4) physiological states – the kinds of physiological and emotional experiences that accompany purposive activity; optimal stimulation leads to the increase of self-efficacy whereas excessive or insufficient stimulation undermines it.

Self-efficacy is described as a protective factor for motivation resources in life management (Skinner 1996, p. 556).

The protective effect of self-efficacy manifests itself in several aspects. Firstly, one's perceived agency serves to free oneself from alternative goals – the individual devalues alternative aims whose pursuit may end in failure and at the same time values higher those aims that they may succeed in achieving. Therefore (Elliot et al. 2000, pp. 789-791):

The human being is characterized by a tendency to define life aims in such a way as to make it possible to achieve success using the existing personal resources.

Secondly, human perseverance in life management depends on positive or negative reinforcements concerning the efficacy of successive steps in the activity performed.

When people make progress towards achieving their goals they feel happier, whereas difficulties in fulfilling their aims lead to low life satisfaction.

Research results prove that the strength of positive feedback between successes and the growth of motivation for subsequent actions is greater than that of negative feedback, which leads to a decrease of motivation as a result of failures experienced (Elliot et al. 2000, pp. 789-791).

Thirdly, the more the individual believes the desired goal to be achievable, the more persistently they pursue it.

Commitment to intentional activity increases when the individual is dissatisfied with their achievements but at the same time more aware of having the competences that make success possible.

A decrease of persistence in purposive actions is a consequence of situations that undermine one's perceived agency (Zaleski 1987, pp. 974-975). Circumstances of this kind include, above all (Oleś 2005, pp. 216-217):

- recurring failures, despite the effort put into the pursuit of aims;
- disbelief in the possibility of achieving one's aims;
- inadequate feedback concerning the confirmation of one's personal efficacy;
- unrealistic and barely achievable goals;

Fourthly, self-efficacy results in an internal locus of control, which consists in perceiving the relationship between one's actions and the effects ensuing from the activity undertaken. For this reason:

The most universal motivational tendencies are connected with careful observation of the environment and with attributing to oneself the final outcome of undertaken actions.

The essential result of personal control over events is such modification of the environment that makes it possible to carry out one's plans. Only when this is impossible do internal control processes lead to a cognitive transformation of aims – e.g. through a devaluation of unreachable goals or the use of defence mechanisms (Heckhausen 2000, pp. 1015-1029).

Empirical analyses indicate that individuals with an internal locus of control are characterized by (Skinner 1996, p. 556):

- greater commitment to intentional activity;
- independence of judgment;
- more constructive coping strategies in stressful situations;
- a higher self-acceptance index;
- a lower level of anxiety.

In this context it should be emphasized that the cause of destructive behaviours frequently lies in the belief that one is unable to control potentially threatening events and cope with them: "*I am not going to cope with this situation*" (Oleś 2005, pp. 225-226). This kind of belief leads to an increase of psychic tension; the more control the individual expects they should have over the event and the more responsible they feel for its course and effect, the higher and the more difficult to bear the tension grows (Ajzen 1991, pp. 179-211).

The mechanism presented finds confirmation in the findings of criminological research, in which it was observed that common offenses tend to be committed by young males who find themselves unable to achieve personal success because of economic and/or racial marginalization (Short 1998, pp. 3-6). Empirical analyses also indicate that most criminals have an external locus of control, which results in a failure to perceive the connection between their own activity and its consequences (Hollin et al.

2004, p. 42). This tendency is particularly characteristic of recidivists, who often serve isolation sentences and abuse psychoactive substances (Maruna, 2004, p. 195-197). At the same time, it is more frequent for offenders characterized by an internal locus of control than it is for those with external locus of control to (Blatier 2000, pp. 103-107):

- exhibit prosocial behaviour;
- see themselves as responsible for the committed crime;
- prefer life goals directed towards professional aspirations (rather than pleasures) and experience more successes.

In the context of life management issues, the relation between sense of control and future anxiety should be pointed out. Future time perspective is the area of planning, setting goals, and approaching them by performing appropriate steps towards their achievement. Thus understood, the future plays a creative and motivating function. Yet, beyond subjective certitude, there is the sphere of uncertainty where hopes and fears intertwine. Experiencing these states is a consequence of the fact that ambivalent experiences are typical for open-ended situations, exemplified by future time perspective.

Future anxiety denotes the sense of threat that appears accompanies the anticipation of unfavourable events in the more and/or less distant future (Zaleski 1989, p. 172).

The specificity of future anxiety is its cognitive basis, since it is an anxiety connected with current experiences but referring to content located in the future – the context of these experiences may concern the developmental unpredictability of microcosm and macrocosm, the loss of essential values, the responsibility for neglecting self-development, or failure to fulfil the goals set (Zaleski 1989, p. 172). The regulatory function of future anxiety may consist in (Niewiadomska 2000, pp. 161-163):

- inhibiting thought about the future;
- weakening the expectation of positive events;
- low estimation of the likelihood of success;
- defensive behaviours in the form of escape into the future;
- protection and maintenance of the *status quo*, as opposed to behaviours directed towards future goals, burdened with risk but creative at the same time.

Fifthly, perceived self-efficacy determines the individual's self-esteem. An increase of positive self-esteem in cases of high self-efficacy is a consequence of situations in which the person selects more difficult goals, shows more consistency and persistence in action, has a better mood when involved in the activity, and adopts a more optimistic attitude towards the future. Additionally, they are more flexible in their behaviour and, as a

result, better at coping with the problems and failures experienced (Pervin, John 2002, p. 483). By contrast, the relation between lowered self-esteem and the perception of one's agency is a consequence of the circumstances in which the individual experiences disbelief in their own capabilities, a sense of futility of actions taken because of the failures experienced, a fear of experiencing more failures, inability to control their own reactions in difficult situations, and a pessimistic attitude to the future (Pervin, John 2002, p. 484).

Individuals with positive self-esteem have a tendency to confirm themselves in the conviction that the decisions they take are right. Individuals with low self-esteem frequently exhibit the opposite tendency.

If an individual with negative self-esteem makes a decision, it is very likely that after a while they will begin to regret not having made a different choice. The rejected option begins to seem more attractive than the selected one because individuals with negative self-esteem usually process information according to the following scheme: *I am a hopeless person, and hopeless people make absurd decisions. I have just made an important choice. It will probably turn out to have been absurd, just like previous ones did... Some facts seem to show it already* (Mudyń 1998, p 72).

Individuals may show different degrees of awareness of the relations between self-esteem and self-efficacy. This awareness is usually higher for successes than it is for failures, since successes are often accompanied by a desire to confirm self-worth, while failures frequently go with self-protection (Steele, Aronson 1995, p. 797). For this reason, people show a tendency to ascribe greater significance to themselves when experiencing success, and tend to put the blame on external factors when experiencing failure (Zaleski 1987, pp. 969-970).

In people engaging in deviant behaviour, low self-efficacy and negative self-esteem tend to be related. For example, most of the studied offenders have difficulties in finding such facts in their life that could be considered successes. Imprisonment is most often interpreted in terms of failure, obscuring past achievements with the experience of helplessness, monotony, waste of time, and absence of the loved ones. Low self-efficacy also reflects the individual's attitude to the past; offenders typically set themselves unrealistic goals, behave carelessly, exhibit a prevalence of wishful thinking over the awareness of their actual capabilities, neglect to plan, and show a lack of perseverance in goal-directed behaviours (Steuden, Jaworowska 2004, pp. 300-305). Compared with those who serve one-time isolation sentences, individuals with a record of multiple convictions use more expressions that testify to their low self-efficacy in different kinds of social

relations as well as in specific life situations. Most frequently, it is penitentiary recidivists who perceive themselves as inadequate, finished, and/or disadvantaged by external factors – above all, by their past (e.g. unhappy childhood) and/or the circumstances (Maruna 2001, p. 9).

4. Undertaking Life Activities as Influenced by Meaningfulness

The sense of meaningfulness reflects the person's emotional-motivational attitude to the surrounding reality. The level of experience analyzed constitutes an effect of the individual's experiences, which is strictly connected with the person's perception, valuation, entering into interpersonal relationships, and achieving successes or suffering failures in the light of one's own expectations and the expectations of significant others (Ostrowska, Wójcik 1986, p. 218).

The experience of meaningfulness manifests itself in striving to define and achieve goals distributed over different stretches of time and, consequently, in finding the meaning of one's existence (Antonovsky 1997, pp. 217-219).

The sense of meaningfulness is precisely what the person regards as a "call to action" in a variety of circumstances as well as a good reason to preserve personal dignity in difficult situations, to bear failures, and to respect others, particularly weaker ones (Chlewiński, Zaleski 1989, p. 1232; Heckhausen, Schulz 1995, pp. 284-304).

Intentional motivation consists in the adoption of values and their implementation in the form of individual goals. In specific situations the individual believes they may achieve the intended effect by making concrete efforts. If this belief is strong enough, the intention emerges to perform specific behaviours, appropriate to the purpose of achieving the goal in given circumstances, in accordance with the subjective norm of behaviour, adjusted to the context and to the individual's competences (Hołyst 1990, p. 5) The mechanism described argues for the conclusion that the sense of meaningfulness strictly corresponds to the person's way of valuing.

The individual's system of values denotes the relatively permanent beliefs concerning the preferred ways of conduct or the ultimate states of existence, organized according to their relative importance (Stępień 1986, pp. 287-288).

Thanks to the system of internal values, choices made by the human being are directed towards such goals that, in the individual's subjective opinion, constitute a significant value and therefore give meaning to the behaviour that contributes to their achievement (Bielicki 1991, pp. 5-13; Stępień 1986, pp. 287-288).

In analyzing valuation, the distinction should be observed between the existence of values at the level of declaration and at the level of implementation. An object representing a value to a person is perceived to be attractive, but the perceived (declared) value may be either recognized (which involves its internalization) or rejected. Only internalized values perform behaviour-regulating functions (Bielicki 1991, p. 130). This regularity is confirmed by empirical studies on axiological orientation in individuals breaking penal law. Based on those studies, we may say that declarative values in this group are similar to those chosen by the whole of society (Kościuch 1984, pp. 174-179). What criminals value most is family life, physical strength and fitness, education, stability in life, various social support networks, material goods, financial independence, and the satisfaction of hedonistic needs – such as the strong desire to obtain immediate pleasures and/or gains (Kościuch 1984, pp. 174-179; Szymanowski 1989, pp. 310-315; Bielicki 1991, pp. 117-123; Ziomek-Michalak 2005, pp. 84-91). As regards the differences, individuals experiencing adaptation difficulties show a considerably lower preference for values connected with seeking the meaning of their lives with reference to transcendence (salvation) and in high quality of interpersonal relations (true friendship, mature love, or social recognition). When it comes to instrumental values (i.e. those connected with goal achievement), socially maladjusted individuals significantly more often prefer those associated with self-sufficiency (independence, courage), and considerably less often opt for those based on interpersonal cooperation (honesty, frankness, truthfulness, solidity, responsibility, cheerful disposition). It should, then, be clearly emphasized that the overwhelming majority of individuals exhibiting destructive behaviours pursue generally accepted goals. Only some multiple offenders do not feel bound with the common system of values. This mostly refers to marginalized people, whose antisocial aims result from the powerful influence of the prison subculture, supporting the cult of violence, brutality, and cunning (Bałandynowicz 1996, pp. 19-20).

In every person's life the same questions concerning the meaning of life appear many times. Issues of this kind take on special importance when the person has no valuable goals and/or when the goals being fulfilled turn out to be illusory in the face of traumatic accidents (e.g. death of a loved

person, illness). Lowered sense of meaningfulness may manifest itself in (Oleś 1989, pp. 169-172):

- increased psychic tension;
- heightened anxiety;
- a sense of guilt;
- difficulties with the achievement of goals and life aims;
- lowered effectiveness of actions;
- lowered self-esteem.

The relations presented are illustrated by the results of studies carried out on individuals exhibiting destructive behaviours. The fundamental problem of corrupt young people as regards their experience of the feeling of meaning in life consists in difficulties with taking responsibility for their own behaviour. Socially maladjusted adolescents have difficulties also with defining their life goals. This kind of deficiency largely contributes to the initiation of destructive behaviour – among other things, to defensive behaviours such as: resignation attitude, the use of psychoactive substances, active protesting, absolutisation of the “have” attitude, or suicide thoughts and attempts. Corrupt young people also experience problems with making life decisions. The individual is unwilling or unable to make various choices when they feel incompetent to implement on their own the behaviours following from the decision taken. Thus, young people usually imitate the behaviour of others or unreflectively comply with their decisions, succumbing especially to peer pressure. Lack of life goals, difficulties in making decisions, and problems with taking responsibility for behaviour lead to a situation in which socially maladjusted adolescents are orientated exclusively to the present on the one hand and act on immediate impulses on the other (Niewiadomska 2007, pp. 90-91).

The comparison of prisoners’ lifestyles with those of individuals without criminal record indicates that the condemned experience a significantly lower sense of meaningfulness of their own existence. The differences observed are a consequence of greater difficulties that convicted individuals have with specifying life goals and of their low motivation to take up intentional activity. It has also been observed that a higher level of existential frustration co-occurs with recidivism. This is suggested by a significantly lower feeling of meaning in life in penitentiary recidivists compared to the corresponding feeling in one-time convicts.

Analysis of the meaning of life in three categories of criminals sentenced to isolation – prison inmates, prisoners released early, and those with suspended sentences – supports the conclusion that it is inmates who exhibit significantly lower meaningfulness than members of the other groups (Szafański 1998, pp. 159-162).

However, studies carried out among recidivists serving isolation penalties allowed to identify groups of prison inmates with high feeling of meaning life (Steuden, Jaworowska 2004, pp. 308-312). It turned out that this variable is of considerable importance for intentional motivation. What argues for such a conclusion is the fact that these inmates exhibit a significantly higher level of subjectivity, agency, and power, as well as the fact that they are more orientated towards the future time perspective, which they judge as optimistic on account of the possibilities it offers of undertaking various forms of activity. By contrast, prisoners exhibiting a low meaning in life are characterized by a significantly higher sense of hopelessness and a pessimistic attitude to the future on account of the perceived lack of adequate reasons for taking actions directed towards goal achievement.

5. The Regulatory Function of Coherence of Experiences (the Sense of Coherence)

The regulatory influence of high sense of coherence on life management manifests itself in several important dimensions (Antonovsky 1995, pp. 133-143; Kubacka-Jasiecka 2005, pp. 74-75).

Dimension I: High tendency to engage in task and/or problem situations.

The most important factor in the process of mobilization of resources is the strong experience of meaningfulness of the actions initiated – a high level of this factor makes the individual seek constructive solutions even in unfavourable circumstances and treat failures experienced in terms challenge rather than defeat.

Dimension II: Attempts to understand the task and/or problem.

Individuals with high coherence apply strategies directed to problem solution significantly more often, considerably less often preferring those that involve escape reactions. By contrast, individuals with a low level of this variable concentrate mainly on forms of emotional coping.

Dimension III: Correct identification of the causes of the situation.

The difference between individuals with low coherence and those with high coherence lies also in the tendency of the former to ascribe difficulties to external factors – e.g. other people or “bad luck” – as opposed to the tendency of the latter to see internal (subjective) factors as determinants of events.

Dimension IV: Emotions accompanying high psychic tension.

Highly coherent individuals more often experience emotions that are subject to regulation (e.g. anger rather than rage); they also tend to be more aware of the feelings they experience and find it easier to express them.

Dimension V: Choice of coping strategies appropriate to the circumstances.

High coherence favours the flexibility of human behaviour in the face of the demands of the environment, which in turn contributes to the individual's high adaptation capabilities and to satisfaction from the life activities undertaken.

The regularities listed above lead to the conclusion that individuals characterized by high coherence exhibit better emotional regulation in psychic tension situations and find it easier to take purposive or coping actions, which results in efficient functioning of the selection-optimization-compensation mechanisms in life management.

This conclusion is confirmed by the results of empirical analyses. It has been observed that what favours proper psychic functioning, measured by the significantly lower number of stress, depressive, and aggressive reaction symptoms is the fairly stable system of three variables: high sense of coherence, a high level of task coping style, and a low level of emotional coping style. Additionally, if this triad co-occurs with the individual's engagement in various kinds of actions, the individual's level of life activity and kindness towards others increase as well (Jelonkiewicz, Kosińska-Dec 2001, pp. 337-347).

The regularities presented are also confirmed by the results of research conducted on a sample of individuals exhibiting destructive behaviours. High level of sense of coherence in criminals serving prison sentences correlates negatively with stress coping strategies such as abandonment of resolving a difficult situation, ruthlessness (instrumental treatment of others, lack of empathy, refusal to consider moral norms), shedding responsibility, committing acts of self-mutilation, or using alcohol less often and in smaller quantities (Szymanowska 2003, pp. 176-179).

At the same time, high level of coherence is a strong predictor of positive social readaptation of criminals punished with isolation penalties – irrespective of the place of detention (non-detention settings and prison conditions), recidivist status (one-time and repeated imprisonment), and the type of crime committed (aggressive and non-aggressive punishable acts); high coherence results in high reformatory potential, and a low level of this variable contributes to small adaptation capabilities (Niewiadomska 2007, p. 525).

It should also be emphasized in this connection that the components constituting coherence – comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness – are the outcome of the individual's life experiences, especially those from early developmental stages (Lipiński 2004, p. 88). The influence of the individual's experiences on coherence building manifests itself in three aspects: stability, balance of overburdening and underburdening, and participation in decision-making (Antonovsky 1984, p. 4).

Stability refers to the extent to which the person's current experiences match the previous ones in terms of information conveyed. The more stable the incoming stimuli are over the course of life, the more predictable they become to the individual. Therefore, the stability of experiences builds the sense of comprehensibility, one of the components of coherence (Antonovsky 1984, pp. 6-7).

The formation of the sense of manageability is influenced by the balance of overburdening/underburdening processes. From birth the person has to face up to the demands of external and internal environment. Appropriate requirements, ensuring a balance between overburdening and underburdening, create the possibilities of constructive task fulfilment and, consequently, favour success achievement. Excessive expectations (overburdening) lead to difficulties in fulfilling obligations and high likelihood of failure. Negative consequences are also brought about by the presence of "underburdening" in the individual's life experiences, which consists in a lack of demands from the external and/or internal environment. In such a situation, disintegration of personal identity results, particularly as regards social roles (Antonovsky 1984, p. 9).

Participation in decision-making is of considerable significance to the shaping of the third component of coherence – the sense of meaningfulness. The individual should decide about the kind of tasks they perform and take responsibility for their outcomes (Antonovsky 1984, p. 12). This leaves the person broad autonomy and at the same time teaches the values and norms of behaviour accepted in society.

Bibliography:

- Ajzen, I. (1991). The Theory of Planned Behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50, 179-211.
- Antonovsky A. (1997). Poczucie koherencji jako determinanta zdrowia [The Sense of Coherence as a Determinant of Health]. In: I. Heszen-Niejodek & H. Sęk (Eds.), *Psychologia zdrowia* [Health Psychology] (pp. 206-231). Warszawa: PWN.
- Antonovsky, A. (1984). The Sense of Coherence as a Determinant of Health. In: J. Matarazzo, S. Weiss, J. Herd, & N. Miller (Eds.), *Behavioral Health: A Hand-*

- book of Health Enhancement and Disease Prevention* (pp. 1-15). New York: Wiley.
- Antonovsky, A. (1995). *Rozwikłanie tajemnicy zdrowia* [Unravelling the Mystery of Health]. Warszawa: Fundacja IPN.
- Bałandynowicz, A. (1996). *Probacja. Wychowanie do wolności* [Probation: Upbringing to Freedom]. Grodzisk Mazowiecki: Primus.
- Baltes, P., & Baltes, M. (1990). Psychological Perspectives on Successful Aging: The Model of Selective Optimization with Compensation. In: P. Baltes & M. Baltes (Eds.), *Successful Aging: Perspectives from the Behavioral Sciences* (pp. 1-34). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control*. New York: WH Freeman.
- Bandura, A., & Schunk, D. (1981). Cultivating Competence, Self-Efficacy, and Intrinsic Interest through Proximal Self-Motivation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 41, 586-598.
- Bielicki, E. (1991). *Młodociani przestępcy, ich wartości i orientacja wartościująca* [Juvenile Offenders, Their Values and Valuing Orientation]. Bydgoszcz: BTN.
- Blatier, B. (2000). Control and Self-Esteem, Locus of Control, Causal Attributions, and Self-Esteem: A Comparison between Prisoners. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 1, 97-110.
- Brunstein, J., Schultheiss, O., & Grässmann, R. (1998). Personal Goals and Emotional Well-Being: The Moderating Role of Motive Dispositions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75, 494-508.
- Chlewiński, Z., & Zaleski, Z. (1989). Godność [Dignity]. In: L. Bieńkowski, P. Hemperek, S. Kamiński, J. Misiurek, K. Stawęcka, A. Stępień, A. Szafranski, J. Szlaga, & A. Weiss (Eds.), *Encyklopedia Katolicka*, t. 5 [The Catholic Encyclopaedia, vol. 5] (pp. 1231-1232). Lublin: TN KUL.
- Elliot, A., Faler, J., McGregor, H., Campbell, K., Sedikides, C., & Harackiewicz, J. (2000). Competence Valuation as a Strategic Intrinsic Motivation Process. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 7, 780-794.
- Försterling, F. (2005). *Atrybucje. Podstawowe teorie, badania i zastosowanie* [Attribution: An Introduction to Theories, Research and Applications]. Gdańsk: GWP.
- Freund, A., & Baltes, P. (2000). Selection, Optimization, and Compensation: An Action-Theoretical Conceptualization of Processes of Developmental Regulation. In: W. Perrig & A. Grob (Eds.), *Control of Human Behavior: Mental Processes and Consciousness* (pp. 35-58). Mahwah: Erlbaum.
- Hacker, W. (1993). Occupational Psychology between Basic and Applied Orientation – Some Methodological Issues. *Le Travail Humain*, 56, 157-169.
- Heckhausen, J. (2000). Evolutionary Perspectives on Human Motivation. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 43, 1015-1029.
- Heckhausen, J., & Schulz, R. (1995). A Life-Span Theory of Control. *Psychological Review*, 102, 284-304.
- Heszen-Niejedek, I. (2003). Teoria stresu psychologicznego i radzenia sobie [The Theory of Psychological Stress and Coping]. In: J. Strelau (Ed.), *Psychologia*.

- Podręcznik akademicki. Jednostka w społeczeństwie i elementy psychologii stosowanej*, t. 3 [Psychology. An Academic Handbook. The Individual in Society and Elements of Applied Psychology, vol. 3] (pp. 466-492). Gdańsk: GWP.
- Hollin, C., Browne, D., & Palmer, E. (2004). *Przestępczość wśród młodzieży. Rozpoznanie zjawiska, diagnozowanie i profilaktyka* [Delinquency and Young Offenders. Parent, Adolescent, and Child Training Skills]. Gdańsk: GWP.
- Hołyst, B. (1990). *System wartości a zdrowie psychiczne* [The System of Values and Psychic Health]. Warszawa: UW.
- Hołyst, B. (2004). *Psychologia kryminalistyczna* [Criminalistic Psychology]. Warszawa: LexisNexis.
- Jelonkiewicz, I., & Kosińska-Dec, K. (2001). Poczucie koherencji a style radzenia sobie ze stresem: empiryczna analiza kierunku zależności [Sense of Coherence and Coping Styles: An Empirical Attempt to Define the Direction of Relationship]. *Przegląd Psychologiczny*, 3, 337-347.
- Kościuch, J. (1984). *Hierarchie wartości w nerwicach i psychopatii oraz ich zmiany pod wpływem psychoterapii* [Hierarchies of Values in Neuroses and Psychopathy and Their Change in Psychotherapy]. Warszawa: ATK.
- Kubacka-Jasiecka D. (2005). Kryzys emocjonalny i interwencja kryzysowa – spojrzenie z perspektywy zagrożenia ja i poczucia tożsamości [Emotional Crisis and Crisis Intervention from the Perspective of Threat to “Self” and Self-Identity]. In: D. Kubacka-Jasiecka & T. Ostrowski (Eds.), *Psychologiczny wymiar zdrowia, kryzysu i choroby*. [The Psychological Dimension of Health, Crisis, and Disease] (pp. 57-85). Kraków: Wyd. UJ.
- Lazarus, R. (1986). Paradygmat stresu i radzenia sobie [The Stress and Coping Paradigm]. *Nowiny Psychologiczne*, 3-4, 2-39.
- Lipiński, S. (2004). Poziom koherencji a syndrom agresji u nieletnich przestępców [The Level of Coherence and the Aggression Syndrome in Juvenile Offenders]. In: B. Urban (Ed.), *Profilaktyka społeczna a resocjalizacja młodzieży* [Social Prevention and the Rehabilitation of Young People] (pp. 85-94). Mysłowice: Wyd. Górnośląskiej WSP.
- Łuszczynska, A. (2004). Czy poczucie koherencji i style radzenia sobie ze stresem sprzyjają adaptacji w sytuacji doświadczenia gwałtu i przemocy fizycznej [Do Sense of Coherence and Styles of Coping with Stress Favour Adaptation in a Situation of Rape and Physical Violence]. In: J. Strelau (Ed.), *Osobowość a ekstremalny stres* [Personality and Extreme Stress] (pp. 299-316). Gdańsk: GWP.
- Maruna, S. (2001). *Making Good*. Washington: APA Press.
- Maruna, S. (2004). Desistance from Crime and Explanatory Style. A New Direction in the Psychology of Reform. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 2, 184-200.
- McKay, M., Chapman, J., & Long, N. (1996). Causal Attributions for Criminal Offending and Sexual Arousal: Comparison of Child Sex Offenders with Other Offenders. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology* 35, 63-75.

- Mills, J., Kroner, D., & Hemmati, T. (2004). The Measures of Criminal Attitudes and Associates (MCAA): The Prediction of General and Violent Recidivism. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 6, 717-733.
- Mudyń, K. (1998). Dysonans poznawczy [Cognitive Dissonance]. In: W. Szewczuk (Ed.), *Encyklopedia psychologii* [Encyclopaedia of Psychology] (pp. 69-73). Warszawa: Fundacja Innowacja.
- Niewiadomska, I. (2000). Człowiek przełomu tysiąclecia. Problematyka lęku przed przyszłością u młodzieży [Man at the Turn of the Millennium. The Issue of Future Anxiety in Young People]. In: J. Makselon & B. Soiński (Eds.), *Człowiek przełomu tysiącleci. Problemy psychologiczne*. [Man at the Turn of the Millennium: Psychological Problems] (pp. 153-165). Kraków: WN PAT.
- Niewiadomska, I. (2007). Analiza poczucia sensu życia jako wymiaru doświadczenia własnej godności przez nieletnich [An Analysis of the Feeling of the Meaning of Life as a Dimension in which Juveniles Experience Their Dignity]. In: A. Królikowska & Z. Marek (Eds.), *Refleksje nad godnością człowieka* [Reflections on Human Dignity] (pp. 75-92). Kraków: WSFP „Ignatianum”, Wyd. WAM.
- Niewiadomska, I. (2007). *Osobowościowe uwarunkowania skuteczności kary pozbawienia wolności* [Personality Determinants of the Effectiveness of Prison Sentence]. Lublin: Wyd. KUL.
- Nosal, C. (2004). Neuropsychologia kodowania temporalnego i poczucia czasu [Neuropsychology of Temporal Coding and the Sense of Time]. *Przegląd Psychologiczny*, 2, 175-190.
- Nosal, C., & Bajcar, B. (1999). Czas w umyśle stratega: perspektywa temporalna a wskaźniki zachowań strategicznych [Time in the Strategist's Mind: The Temporal Perspective and the Indexes of Strategic Behaviours]. *Czasopismo Psychologiczne*, 1, 55-68.
- Nowak, P. (1998). Analiza poczucia sensu życia u osadzonych w zakładach karnych [An Analysis of the Feeling of the Meaning of Life in Prison Inmates]. In: J. Szałański (Ed.), *Wina - Kara - Nadzieja - Przemiana* [Guilt - Punishment - Hope - Change] (pp. 409-417). Łódź-Warszawa-Kalisz: COSSW.
- Oettingen, G. (2000). Expectancy Effects on Behavior Depend on Self-Regulatory Thought. *Social Cognition*, 18, 101-129.
- Oleś, P. (1989). *Wartościowanie a osobowość* [Valuation and Personality]. Lublin: RW KUL.
- Oleś, P. (2005). *Wprowadzenie do psychologii osobowości* [Introduction to Personality Psychology]. Warszawa: Wyd. Nauk. "Scholar."
- Ostrowska, K. (1981). *Psychologiczne determinanty przestępczości młodocianych. Analiza kryminologiczna* [Psychological Determinants of Juvenile Delinquency. A Criminological Analysis]. Warszawa: PWN.
- Ostrowska, K., & Wójcik, D. (1986). *Teorie kryminologiczne* [Criminological Theories]. Warszawa: ATK.
- Pervin, L. (2002). *Psychologia osobowości*. [Personality Psychology]. Gdańsk: GWP.
- Pervin, L., & John, O. (2002). *Osobowość. Teoria i badania*. [Personality: Theory and Research]. Kraków: Wyd. UJ.

- Sęk, H. (1993). Wybrane zagadnienia z psychoprofilaktyki [Selected Issues of Psychoprevention]. In: H. Sęk (Ed.), *Społeczna psychologia kliniczna*. [Social Clinical Psychology] (pp. 472-503). Warszawa: Wyd. Nauk. PWN.
- Sęk, H. (2006). Kierunki behawioralne i podejście poznawcze w psychologii klinicznej [Behavioural Directions and the Cognitive Approach in Clinical Psychology]. In: H. Sęk (Ed.), *Psychologia kliniczna*, t. 1 [Clinical Psychology, vol. 1] (pp. 105-118). Warszawa: Wyd. Nauk. PWN.
- Short, J. (1998). The Level of Explanation Problem Revisited. *Criminology*, 36, 3-36.
- Skinner, E. (1996). A Guide to Constructs of Control. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71, 549-570.
- Steele, C., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype Threat and the Intellectual Test Performance of African-Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69, 797-811.
- Stępień, E. (1986). System wartości a zachowanie aspołeczne młodzieży przestępczej i nieprzestępczej [The System of Values and Asocial Behaviour in Delinquent and Non-Delinquent Young People]. In: A. Frączek (Ed.), *Studia nad uwarunkowaniami i regulacją agresji interpersonalnej* [Studies on the Determinants and Regulation of Interpersonal Aggression] (pp. 287-311). Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków-Gdańsk-Łódź: Ossolineum.
- Studen, S., & Jaworowska, K. (2004). Egzystencjalny wymiar doświadczania izolacji więziennej przez osoby skazane na karę pozbawienia wolności [The Existential Dimension of Prison Isolation as Experienced by Individuals Sentenced to Prison]. In: M. Kuć & I. Niewiadomska (Eds.), *Kara kryminalna. Analiza psychologiczno-prawna* [Criminal Punishment. Psycho-Legal Analysis] (pp. 291-315). Lublin: TN KUL.
- Strelau, J., Zawadzki, B., Oniszczenko, W., Sobolewski, A., & Pawłowski, P. (2004). Temperament i style radzenia sobie ze stresem jako moderatory zespołu stresu pourazowego w następstwie przeżytej katastrofy [Temperament and Styles of Coping with Stress as Moderators of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Following a Catastrophe Experience]. In: J. Strelau (Ed.), *Osobowość a ekstremalny stres* [Personality and Extreme Stress] (pp. 48-64). Gdańsk: GWP.
- Szałański, J. (1998). Poczucie sensu życia u mężczyzn skazanych osadzonych w zakładach karnych i poddanych probacji [The Feeling of the Meaning of Life in Condemned Males Sentenced to Prison and Subjected to Probation]. In: J. Szałański (Ed.), *Wina - Kara - Nadzieja - Przemiana* [Guilt - Punishment - Hope - Change] (pp. 159-162). Łódź-Warszawa-Kalisz: COSSW.
- Szymanowska, A. (2003). *Więzienie i co dalej* [Prison - and What Next?]. Warszawa: Wyd. Akadem. "Żak."
- Szymanowski, T. (1989). *Powrót skazanych do społeczeństwa* [Return of the Condemned to Society]. Warszawa: Wyd. Prawnicze.
- Terelak, J. (2001). *Psychologia stresu* [The Psychology of Stress]. Bydgoszcz: Oficyna Wydawnicza "Branta."

- Vitaro, F., Brendgen, M., & Tremblay, R. (2000). Influence of Deviant Friends on Delinquency: Searching for Moderator Variables. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 28, 313-325.
- Zaleski, Z. (1987). Atrybucyjna analiza kontynuacji i rezygnacji z celów zawodowych [Attributive Analysis of Continuation and Abandonment of Professional Goals]. *Przegląd Psychologiczny*, 4, 969-977.
- Zaleski, Z. (1988). Spostrzeganie przyczyn przyszłych sukcesów i niepowodzeń w realizacji celów osobistych. Ujęcie atrybucyjne [The Perception of the Causes of Future Successes and Failures in Fulfilling Personal Goals: An Attributive Perspective]. *Przegląd Psychologiczny*, 3, 827-845.
- Zaleski, Z. (1989). Lęk przed przyszłością. Ramy teoretyczne i wstępne dane empiryczne [Future Anxiety. Theoretical Framework and Preliminary Empirical Data]. In: A. Januszewski, Z. Uchnast, & T. Witkowski (Eds.), *Wykłady z psychologii w Katolickim Uniwersytecie Lubelskim w roku akademickim 1987/88* [Lectures in Psychology at the Catholic University of Lublin in the 1987/88 Academic Year] (pp. 167-184). Lublin: RW KUL.
- Ziomek-Michalak, K. (2005). System wartości osadzonych w świetle badań pilotażowych [Inmates' System of Values in the Light of Pilot Studies]. *Zamojskie Studia i Materiały. Pedagogika*, 1, 84-91.