
The Significance of Authority and Teamwork in Making Decisions during Covid-19 Pandemic in a Hierarchical University

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Abstract:

Purpose: The objective of the paper is to provide the consequences of long-term management decisions in a hierarchical university (as illustrated by the case of the Police Academy), as a learning organisation during Covid-19 pandemic.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Critical analysis of documents, participant observation.

Findings: Results of the conducted analysis will improve the system of managing the University and will be effectively used to meet future challenges.

Practical Implications: The article is devoted to the practical aspect of psychological and social aspects of making decisions.

Originality/value: The originality of described contents consists in depicting the issue of deciding understood as a management function in a hierarchical institution that is the Police. The analysis of this issue is extremely important and valuable through the social and psychological prism.

Keywords: Hierarchical university, making decisions in a crisis situation, authority, Covid-19.

JEL classification: D81, F52, I23, M12, M51.

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1. Introduction

In management of each organisation, including the Police, a basic issue is to solve arising problems and make courageous, yet very prudent decisions. Gościński (1978) believes that “management is a sequential, multistage process of making a decision.” Koziellecki (1995) states that “making a decision (...) consists in a person called a decision-maker choosing a specific action from a set of possible actions.”

In organisational reality, there will always occur problems related to various areas of functioning thereof. Diagnosing the existence and defining the problem creates a problematic situation which requires a solution. A problematic situation is described as a dynamic system of interactions among superiors and subordinates, and the environment. The problematic situation in a psychological sense covers the interaction of a mind and environment that is two strictly related spheres of the phenomenon: 1) stimuli, signals and information structures included in the impact of the environment; 2) conceptual thinking aimed at categorising impacts, formulating answers (the type) and purpose of an action (Nosal, 1993).

The type of organisation that is the Police, on the one hand, is subject to the rules typical for management of all organisations and, on the other hand, has its specific conditions typical for hierarchical institutions based on orders and professional subordination to superiors. This specific difference from non-uniformed organisations, often based on market rules, creates different circumstances accompanying making decisions (Gromek and Wojakowska, 2021; Mazza *et al.*, 2020; Viola *et al.*, 2021). The rules of management and making decisions are burdened with elements typical for this type of hierarchical organisation and different characteristics of work, which is called the service. An example of this difference is provided by activities undertaken by the Police Academy in Szczytno during Covid-19 pandemic lasting since 2020 and the necessity to maintain continuity of operations of a uniformed institution (when other universities suspended their direct activity).

Managing organisations in special (crisis) situations is broadly described in the literature on the subject matter. However, management of a hierarchical university in a crisis situation, which occurred in 2020, that is, Covid-19 pandemic – not at all. Therefore, undertaking a critical analysis of decisions made by the management of the Police Academy in Szczytno at such a crucial moment of its operations is extremely important and necessary.

The analysis of various aspects and long-term results of these decisions is of great significance in the context of the University’s functioning as a learning organisation. Presentation of activities undertaken by the senior and middle management of the university during Covid-19 pandemic constitutes a case study which can be used by this type of universities to improve management processes.

2. Making Decisions in a Uniformed Institution – Selected Aspects

In order to properly define the issue, first, one should properly formulate questions oriented to possible future actions. Questions should indicate the manner and scope of collecting information, which, as a result, should lead to activating the stage of making decisions, that is, analysis of problems (Tyszka, 1986).

Four criteria are crucial in such an analysis (Drucker, 1994):

1. *Risk*: The management should compare the risk related to a given variant with expected benefits. There are no activities free from risk or even free from the risk of inactivity. Nevertheless, what counts the most, is not the expected benefit or forecasted risk, but their mutual proportion. Therefore, each variant should include the assessment of its opportunities.
2. *Economy of efforts*: It should always be analysed which of the possible directions of activity will generate the biggest results with the smallest effort (e.g., costs) and allow obtaining desired change with the smallest, necessary disruption of the organisation's functioning.
3. *Timing*: In the situation of time pressure, it is worth choosing the manner of action which dramatizes the decision and gives a signal to the organisation that something important is happening. In other situations, slow start and gaining momentum should be chosen. In many cases, the feeling of a perspective should be changed; one should be ambitious and present the full vision, the complete programme, the final objective.
4. *Limitation of resources*: The most important resources, limitation of which should be considered, are employees. No decision can be better than people who are to execute it, since it will not generate the expected effect. The direction of actions adopted by the superiors can require more from subordinates than they are capable of at a given moment. Thus, one should develop their skills and knowledge and, if impossible, find new people with relevant knowledge and skills. No decision of a low quality should ever be accepted only because there are shortages of people and relevant competences.

A well solved problem should constitute a basis for making a decision, which will correspond to the needs of people it concerns, and the consequences of such a decision will include financial, social, time and other limitations occurring in a given situation (Bolesta-Kukułka, 2000). Making decisions means settlement, resolution, and selection (non-random) of one of the alternative solutions. The person making a decision should use his or her knowledge, inventiveness, creativity, and sometimes even intuition, to prepare it (Szczepańska-Woszczyzna, 2020). He or she should also very carefully analyse all external factors which may influence the quality of the decision being made, assess correlations of particular factors and the degree of their impact on solution variants.

In non-standard, complex solutions (for example, pandemic), a vast majority of decisions are made in conditions of uncertainty (Garbóczy *et al.*, 2021; Halevy, 2020; Hitt *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, the process of making decisions requires additional analyses and assessments. Thus, the management should be aware of the following requirements (Samuelson and Marks, 1998; Krahe, 2002; Atkinson-Clement and Pigalle, 2021):

1. One should be aware of the possibility of occurrence of uncertain events and be able to assess the impact thereof on the results of one's own actions. Moreover, after taking into account the factor of uncertainty, managers should also be able to assess the probability of results of selecting particular variants of actions.
2. While making risk-related decisions, one can additionally adopt the variant of proceeding which does not occur in the case of a decision made in conditions of certainty. This variant consists in obtaining additional information on the risk itself before making a final decision.
3. Managers have to make a diligent assessment of their own organisation's attitude to risk, that is, determine the criteria allowing specifying types and levels of risk acceptable by the organisation. This criterion may be then the basis for selecting from among various variants of action burdened with a risk.
4. Making a decision should take into consideration the criterion of rationality and ethics. Rationality understood as adjusting to the truth, means reasonable thinking, mental engagement, searching for optimal solutions or solutions close to optimal.

Rationality is an extremely broad term considering people's relations to the environment and various norms and criteria determining the boundaries of an activity. In the theory of organisation and management, various types and manners of understanding rationality are enumerated, which has an impact on the problem of people's orientation and shaping models of rational behaviour (Kiepas, 2000). In the process of making decisions, predominantly *the substantial reasonability* and *the methodological reasonability* are distinguished. In case the selection of measures corresponds to the actual, objectively occurring situation, that is, existing facts, rights and relations, we deal with *the substantial reasonability*. Whereas, when the selection of measures is proper in the light of the knowledge held by the person making a decision, that is, when the logical deduction deciding on the selection of measures is proper within the held knowledge, then, we deal with *the methodological reasonability*.

In order for an organisation to be effective in its actions, its management must learn the arts of making effective decisions very well (Szczepańska-Woszczyńska, 2013). They have to be able to interpret the structure of making a decision, which can be characterised from the point of view of *contents* (the decision-making problem), *procedure* (the decision-making situation) and *solution* (the decision-making process).

Depending on the impact on the structure of making a decision, decision making situations can be divided as follows (Radzikowski, 1995):

- deterministic decisions in which results are only influenced by completely defined parameters,
- unexpected situations, changes of which can be, in a sense, forecasted and thus, when parameters thereof have known probability separations, decisions are made in an unexpected situation (space),
- uncertain situations, when the results are impacted by uncertain parameters, the changes of which cannot be forecasted, and decisions are made in an uncertain situation (or space),
- conflict situations characterised with the fact that parameters influencing the results of a decision include parameters controlled (or parameters which can be controlled) by opponents; decisions are made in a conflict situation (or space).

In the process of making a decision, external variables embedded in a specific reality and variables resulting from the person making a decision, his or her hitherto experience, character features, leadership qualities, which will be the components of the broadly understood process of making a decision, are important.

3. The Significance of Authority and Teamwork in Making Decisions in Uniformed Institutions

Making a decision is a whole process, one of the most important human activities, which is both the cause and effect of the activity, influenced by a series of areas among which the following can be enumerated, emotions, motivations, needs, knowledge, leadership qualities, experience, resistance to stress, ability to manage a group, thinking, learning and both a situation of the person making a decision and a situation of the environment. Nevertheless, before a decision is made and one of the options chosen, a person making a decision activates pre-decision making actions. It consists in forecasting events after making a decision and value assessment of what is going to happen (Kozielecki, 1995). Forecasting consequences is necessary to achieve an objective in making decisions and estimating inputs and possible losses. Decisions, consequences of which are deferred in time, constitute an especially difficult, in terms of psychology, situation, since it causes a distance between a chosen action, made decision and effect.

Uniformed institutions established on the hierarchical division of correlations among members thereof base their functioning on a kind of power and related formula of management. A series of situations can be limited to giving orders without even attempting to convince the team of the validity of specific actions. This is an obvious case, a factor that may facilitate action in situations that require making quick decisions, but which may also be a hindrance and a kind of disturbance in the processes of managing and functioning of a team. In the case of an excessive belief of the superior in his or her own effectiveness, infallibility with simultaneous

conviction of a lack of competent subordinates and substantive experts, it is easy to make wrong and ineffective decisions detrimental for this type of institution and people. In uniformed institutions, the attribute of power is strong due to the aforementioned character of the institution based on hierarchy and execution of orders. A series of psychological experiments (Akert *et al.*, 1997) indicates that, whereas the scale of observed obedience varies, it is always surprisingly high and related to submissiveness to authority.

The significance of authority in making decisions and respecting them by a group was written about by Cialdini (1999). He underlined the enormous strength of this factor which determined respecting by the group the directions of action indicated by the recognised authority. While describing experiments on the strength of authority conducted by S. Milgram, Cialdini quoted that “the main result of research is stating an extreme inclination of adults to do almost everything to execute the authority’s order³” (Cialdini, 1999).

It explicitly shows that for the proper decision-making process it will be extremely important for decision making persons with formal authority in a group (and they have such an authority in institutions based on giving orders) they manage, to be aware of their power to create the reality with their own limitations and fallibility, which may influence making improper decisions. That is why the possibility of colliding own ideas with a reference group (e.g., an advisory team, which will play the role of a consultant indicating other alternative solutions and diagnosed difficulties or erroneous assumptions in deliberations) is so important. Such a situation allows bigger objectivism, colliding of many ideas and establishing the best solutions and, which is especially important in group functioning, making members of this group co-responsible for the success. By inviting group representatives recruited from employees who are experts in each field and have authority among colleagues to co-decide, the superior making a decision sends information to the team on mutual establishment of directions of actions and the role of a team.

Thus, he or she builds the reality of the organisation on the foundation of another technique described by R. Cialdini, the so-called commitment and consistency (Cialdini, 1999). Persons who will be engaged in an activity and convinced of its effectiveness, with time, will become a part of this project and consequently, engage in activities more and more. It will gradually become more difficult for them to make a decision on resigning from this activity due to the already devoted time, feeling of co-responsibility, their own role and sense of cooperation with others. Functioning of an individual is a consequence of the need to belong to a group, since, according to Aronson, a human is a social being and his or her existence in an existential sense is a result of many factors, including the role and activity in a group.

³[Translator’s note] Quote retranslated from the translation provided in the source text.

Therefore, it is crucial that, while making a decision even in institutions based on hierarchy and order, a group, with regard to which these measures are taken, has a sense of being a part of the whole process, important both in the area of making the decision and its later execution. It is extremely important that the group has a feeling of integration with the idea and interiorization being the internalisation of the idea. The ability to interiorise external activities is necessary to internalise social norms such as e.g., rules, requirements, or privileges.

4. Research Method

The objective of the paper is to provide the analysis of selected aspects and consequences of long-term management decisions in a crisis situation in a hierarchical university (as illustrated by the case of the Police Academy), as a learning organisation during Covid-19 pandemic. The method of direct observation and case study were used in the research. The scope of the research covered management decisions made at the Police Academy in Szczytno aimed at ensuring continuity of operations and at the same time safety of participants (students, teachers, stakeholders) during Covid-19 pandemic. The observation was conducted in the period between March and December 2020. The following research questions were asked: what mode of making decisions is relevant in a crisis situation in a hierarchical university? What significance does the authority of persons making decisions have? What significance does teamwork have in the process of making decisions in a crisis situation in a hierarchical university?

The scientific observation constituting a component of observation methods being a type of scientific methods of work and resulting in scientific reflections, is a process of careful and purposeful reflection constituting a component of scientific research methods. Observation methods constitute a manner of conducting research in which the observation activity does not entail any changes to the studied phenomenon (Pieter, 1967, quoted as in: Piórkowska, 2014).

5. Making Decisions during Covid-19 Pandemic in a Hierarchical University – Case Study of the Police Academy

The Police Academy is both the Police School for apprentices coming to the service and the University providing education not only to civil students, but also to Police students at the faculty “Police Science”. The main area which was discussed in these difficult times was the structure of making decisions mainly based on uncertain situations additionally disturbed by guidelines obtained from senior superiors and recommendations concerning expected directions of actions in the scope of the school’s functioning and estimating results of decisions made. Decisions made at the Police Academy with regard to Covid-19 pandemic forced the University environment to undertake radical measures re-formulating the hitherto operations of units and the whole employee community.

Re-formulating all the hitherto operations of the University/Police Academy required, on the one hand, systemic measures (as far as forecasting the future was possible in difficult and uncertain times) and, on the other hand, reacting to suddenly occurring changes and obstacles resulting from the changing pandemic reality. The situation of this range is undoubtedly a situation without precedence, to which no hitherto established procedures and algorithms existing both in the Police and e.g., in the epidemiological area binding in the territory of the country and even world, apply. As of the beginning of the pandemic until present times, we cannot speak of even partial predictability or knowledge of repeated factors. Thus, it is equally difficult to manage an organisation in a holistic understanding in times of the lack of stability of environment and predictability of the future, and to manage making decisions.

In the first quarter of 2020 after stating the first case of Covid-19 in Poland, the society faced the necessity of undertaking protective measures, but simultaneously allowing further functioning (as far as possible) in all social spheres. At the Police Academy, the management decided on the necessity of appointing a full-time team for quick response, monitoring of the situation, and reacting to changing restrictions.

Under Order no. 34/2020 of the Commandant – Rector of the Police Academy in Szczytno of 16 March 2020 (Order no. 34/2020) the team was appointed and gathered specialists including university employees, whose knowledge was necessary to develop plans of quick reaction to a threat in the case of suspecting Covid-19 infection and preventing such situations (OSH specialist, head command, head of rescue service at the University). The functioning of the whole University had to change, and its consecutive areas of activity had to be adjusted to arising needs or occurring negative situations.

First diagnosing activities (pre-decision making) focused on recognising needs and establishing a necessary direction of action. While describing the decision-making process A. Einstein stated that in the case of stating a problem on which his life would depend and having only one hour to solve it, he would spend next 40 minutes to analyse it, 15 minutes to re-study it and the last 5 minutes to solve it. This policy of analysing the reality and making decisions was adopted at the Police Academy.

First, diagnosis and verification of possible solutions and forecasting possible consequences. It became necessary to ensure the continuity of the teaching process, safety of students and university staff, equipping the process of transferring knowledge, as well as ensuring functioning of the logistics department without which education would not be possible. The enumerated platforms comprised the functioning of the University and forced creating each of them anew. A difficulty in making consecutive decisions was the lack of permanence in the already functioning reality and a lack of data confirmed with research results due to the novelty of the situation regarding predictions for the future. It only remained to base on observation and draw conclusions from hitherto activities.

In over a year of the team's operations, over 26 procedures and algorithms were developed determining particular spheres of the university's functioning with adjustment of epidemiological requirements (procedures concerning, among others, conducting the qualification procedure to service in the Police, organisation of diploma exams with the use of distance learning methods and techniques, organisation of public defence of a doctoral thesis, organisation of a shooting training and shooting tests, organisation of a local training in the scope of qualified first aid, principles of rendering premises available to external entities related to business activity (or in other scope) at the Police Academy in Szczytno, proceeding in the case of resuming basic professional training, conducting the blood donation action within the premises of the Police Academy in Szczytno, general principles of operation of the Police Academy in Szczytno in the announced state of epidemic, organisation of a training for prosecutors of the Department of Internal Affairs of the National Public Prosecutor's Office, general principles of conducting an officer's exam, etc.). Activities informing employees of consecutive changes were systematically conducted. All academic teachers were covered with training on remote learning system on a new programme with which the whole University was equipped.

The whole working system was reformulated by introducing shifts and teleworking. The new reality was equipped with new legal acts putting in order the university's operations during the pandemic. Furthermore, because of decisions made, the number of restrictions causing additional obstacles to employees and students in everyday functioning and following recommendations, increased.

Employees and students were periodically subjected to screening tests. Moreover, restrictive rules related to training and the related recruitment process were introduced. After arriving and taking the first test on Covid-19, apprentices spent another 7 days in their rooms, where they awaited the results at the same time attending classes online. On the 7th day another test was taken and, if both results were negative, further study was continued in a direct contact, but in compliance with the principle of barrack conditions, which meant the possibility to move around only within the University's premises.

Persons, who at any time tested positively, were isolated and treated. So far over 5,000 thousand of tests were conducted, out of which over 3,900 among students and over 1,100 among employees (internal data of the Police Academy, 2021). It was one of the most difficult decisions forcing several hundred people to stay only within the premises of the campus throughout the whole period of the training. It was undoubtedly a decision requiring an in-depth analysis and information action among students, which was based by the university management on studies conducted by epidemiologists and WHO guidelines concerning forecasts in the scope of disease spreading.

Everyday verification of the health condition of employees by medics, weekly interviews on the health condition and avoiding direct contact resulted in minimization of disease outbreaks in such a numerous community. The feedback on the consequences of previous decisions made at the Police Academy contributed to raising awareness for the future and better, fuller and more aware making of consecutive decisions.

6. Conclusion

From the perspective of almost half a year of functioning in these unusual conditions, it can be stated that managing and making decisions in a situation requiring high solidarity of the whole team, sacrifices and re-developing all rules, is possible only when the whole team understands the gravity of the situation, is convinced of the validity of decisions made and engaged in the implementation and application thereof.

Mutual care for following the rules is the only way to achieve the intended effect. The formal (external) authority itself resulting from the managerial position is not enough in order to maintain necessary epidemiological requirements for such a long period of time. Both, cooperation with the team and personal authority of the leader causing the team to recognise his or her knowledge and experience, which is possible only as a result of cooperation and learning his or her plans, are necessary. Undoubtedly, good management requires acts of power to be recognised by subordinates.

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