

## Training process in a hierarchical organization

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**Abstract:** *Purpose:* This paper investigates the training process within a hierarchical organization, focusing on the effectiveness of professional training for officers in the Polish Prison Service. The primary purpose is to identify factors influencing training outcomes and propose directions for improvement, considering the concept of sustainable development. *Methodology:* The study employs a combination of survey data, interviews, and analysis of training participants, educational staff, and experts. By examining various elements, such as instructor knowledge, teaching methods, and curriculum content, the research aims to understand the determinants of practical training. *Results:* The study reveals that instructor expertise, active involvement in training, and the quality of teaching materials significantly impact training effectiveness. Additionally, the paper suggests several measures to enhance the training process, including increased instructional hours, revised organization and content, and active learning methods and simulations. *Theoretical Contribution:* This research contributes to the field by emphasizing the importance of sustainable development principles in shaping effective training practices. Organizations can better prepare their officers for professional challenges by aligning training processes with broader societal goals. *Practical Implications:* For practitioners, the findings offer helpful insights into optimizing training programs, fostering skill development, and ultimately enhancing the performance of officers within the hierarchical structure of the Prison Service.

**Keywords:** organization, training, sustainable development, improvement, Prison Service.

## 1. Introduction

The Prison Service (PS), a uniformed and armed formation subordinated to the Minister of Justice, plays a vital role in activities undertaken to ensure public order and safety (Act of Law, 2010). It is a hierarchical organization in which all its elements are strictly subordinated (Piotrkowski, 2018). The statutory tasks of PS include (Act of law, 2010):

- implementation of penitentiary and social rehabilitation activities addressed to persons sentenced to imprisonment in the form of work enabling the acquisition of professional qualifications, teaching, cultural and educational activities, physical culture and sports activities, and specialized therapeutic interventions,
- supervision of persons temporarily arrested,
- ensuring that the rights of persons temporarily arrested or sentenced are respected in terms of providing them with appropriate living conditions, health and religious care,
- treating persons humanely deprived of their liberty,
- protection of society against perpetrators of crimes,
- ensuring order and security in penitentiary units,
- cooperation with relevant formations of other countries and with organizations based on international agreements and arrangements,
- legal education of young people related to crime prevention.

The order of tasks adopted in the Act is noteworthy, as it clearly indicates the two basic functions to be performed by the PS. These are the social rehabilitation function and the isolation and protection function. Each of them is reflected in the concept of sustainable development. This is noticeable in many legal acts, especially in the most important one, the Constitution of the Republic of Poland. Article 5 assumes that "the Republic of Poland shall safeguard the independence and inviolability of its territory, ensure human and civil freedoms and rights as well as the security of citizens, safeguard the national heritage and ensure environmental protection, guided by the principle of sustainable development." All operational groups, including the Prison Service, are responsible for the safety of citizens. It is a formation that, through appropriate resocialization activities, serves the safety of citizens and implements goals enabling the return of people considered demoralized to life in society.

Due to the purpose of the PS, its specificity and its important role in the implementation of the discussed tasks, the PS staff plays an important role and should have appropriate general and professional preparation. The Prison Service should provide officers with the opportunity for professional development through vocational education. One of the forms of vocational education is professional training, which aims to equip PS employees with the necessary competencies to cope with the requirements of their positions. In such a specific place as a prison, the knowledge acquired may not be sufficient to fulfill the professional role of a Prison Service officer effectively. Due to the above, much attention should be paid to the process of training PS staff, which, thanks to the use of modern training methods and appropriate tools, will enable the preparation of qualified personnel with a high level of specialist knowledge and skills, enabling the implementation of entrusted tasks, resulting in ensuring the safety of Polish citizens. Therefore, continuous improvement of the training process for officers of this formation becomes so essential. Permanent transformations in the Prison Service environment (Bitkowska, 2021) also result in the need to improve the training process of Prison Service officers, which is subject to constant organizational and programmatic changes. It was possible to track these changes after the author of the article read the publications that concerned the educational process of PS staff (Szczepaniak, 2013; Strzelec, 2015; Poklek, 2016; Pich, 2014; Szczepaniak, 2015; Jędrzejak, 2009; Jędrzejak, 1998; Strzelec, 2016; Poklek, 2015; Kaczmarek, 1999; Poklek, 2014; Łapiński & Markuszewski, 2014). Some were concerned with the entire preparation of officers for service, and others focused only on selected professional and specialized training. The conclusions from the analysis of these studies and the changes that occurred in the professional training process of PS officers in 2017 prompted the author to take steps to assess the efficiency of this process. It should be noted that despite numerous studies on the process of training PS personnel, it was not possible to find research on professional training preparing officers to take up positions, both

in the corps of non-commissioned officers, warrant officers and officers after the reorganization of this process in 2017 (Resolution no. 1/2017).

The article aims to determine the factors determining the efficiency of PS officers' professional training process and identify improvement activities that could improve the discussed process. The adopted goals allowed for the formulation of the following research hypotheses:

H1: The knowledge and experience of the teaching staff, their involvement in the training process and the teaching base largely determine the efficiency of the professional training process for PS officers.

H2: A change in the organization of professional training and the teaching process should improve the training process of PS officers.

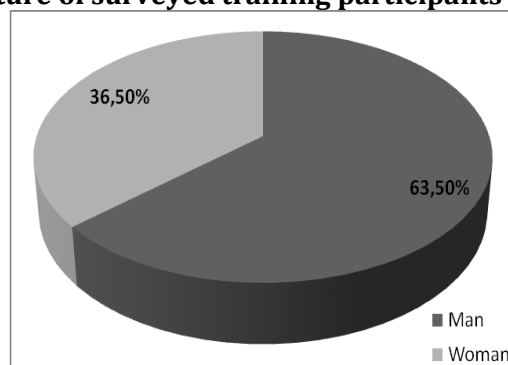
Empirical research was conducted among students and teaching staff of the Central Prison Service Training Center (CPSTC) in Kalisz, which in 2019 was the only facility in Poland preparing officers to take positions in the corps of warrant officers and officers. The article is empirical. It presents the research methodology, characterizes the study groups and presents selected results. The summary contains the most essential conclusions from the conducted considerations and identifies future research challenges. The statistical material presented in the article was developed based on computer programs intended for this purpose: the EXCEL spreadsheet and the STATISTICA v.13.3 program.

## 2. Research method

The study uses empirical research conducted in April, June and September 2019. They included participants of three types of professional training conducted in the Prison Service: training preparing for taking a position in the non-commissioned officer corps, training preparing for taking a position in the warrant officer corps, and training preparing for taking a position in the positions in the officer corps. The study involved 588 Prison Service professional training participants, and 97% of all participants in training conducted and completed at the Central Training Center of the Prison Service in Kalisz in 2019. After checking the questionnaires,  $n_1 = 578$  questionnaires were qualified for analysis. The conclusions from the collected statistical material were referred to the surveyed people because the group did not meet the conditions of representativeness for PS.

The variables that differentiated the respondents included sex, age, work experience, and the type of professional training they participated in. Due to the specificity of work in the prison service, the study involved mainly men (367 responses), who constituted almost 64% of all respondents (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Structure of surveyed training participants by sex (%)**



Source: own study

The collected data regarding the age of respondents took the form of a simple series or a detailed series. For further analysis, the data were sorted, and an interval-resolved statistical series was created. The assumed number of classes was  $k=7$ , and the length of the class interval was  $h=5$ . The series also precisely defines the lower and upper limits. Most training participants were 35 years old. The median had the same value. This means that half of the respondents in group I were under 35. The

youngest respondent was 23 years old, and the oldest was 50 years old. The average age of the respondents was 35.32 years.

The obtained result is a consequence of participating in the training primarily of people preparing to take positions in the officer corps and having several years of professional experience in PS. The analysis of respondents according to age also provided information about poor dispersion of the distribution of the studied variable. The standard deviation was 13.43% of the arithmetic mean, so the mean described the variable under study well. The value of the asymmetry coefficient  $W_s$  of 0.067 gave rise to the conclusion that there was a very weak right-sided asymmetry in the age distribution of the training participants (Figure 2). Therefore, most officers participating in the study were younger than the arithmetic mean.

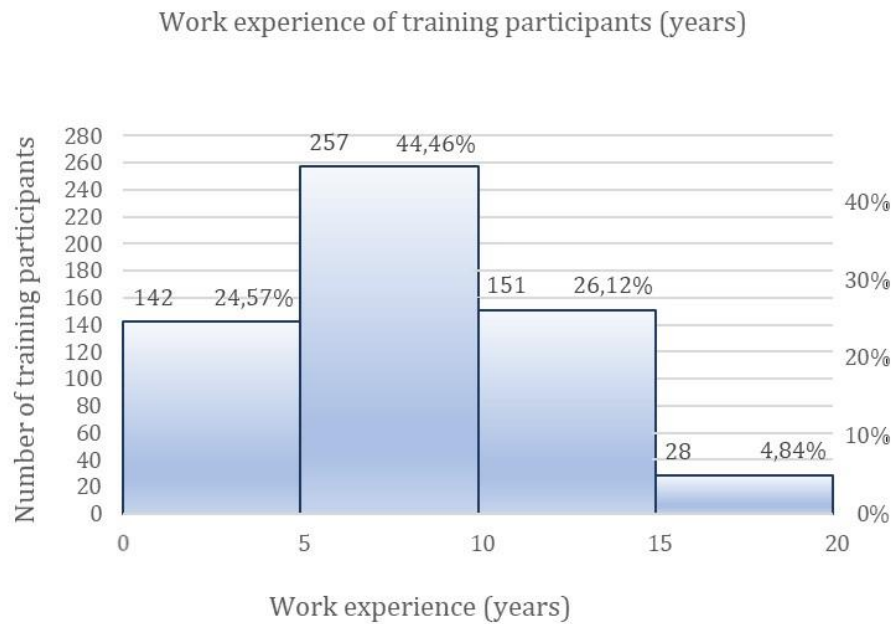
**Figure 2: Histogram and descriptive statistics of participant age distribution training**



Note: Age: N=578; Average=35.32; Stand. Dev.=4.74; Max=50; Min=23  
 Source: own study

Another variable describing the officers who participated in the study was seniority, equated with the length of Prison Service. The analysis of respondents according to the indicated characteristics provided information that almost half (approximately 45%) of the study participants, 257 people, indicated that they had been working in the formation for 5–10 years. The surveyed officers most often served for 10 years. The average length of service was 8.5 years. The smallest group were respondents with 15-20 years of work experience (almost 5%). From the presented research results, it can be concluded that officers with the shortest and longest work experience constituted the smallest group of respondents. The characteristics of the respondents in terms of the studied variable are presented in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Histogram and descriptive statistics of the distribution of work experience of training participants**



Note: Work experience: N=578; Average=8.54; Stand. Dev.=4.26; Max=20; Min=1  
Source: own study

The type of professional training was the fourth criterion that differentiated the respondents. The respondents were dominated by participants in professional training who were preparing for positions in the officer corps. They constituted almost half of all respondents (284 responses). The fewest participants were participating in the training, preparing to take positions in the non-commissioned officer corps - 68 people, 11.76% of the total respondents.

Employees of this formation were a significant source of information on the training process of Prison Service officers. A survey using a survey technique among the scientific and teaching staff of CPSTC in Kalisz was carried out in April 2019 and covered approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the professional group employed at the indicated institution. Some of the 31 respondents did not complete the form. Therefore, the collected research material was divided into two groups. The first group (group IIa) included 20 survey questionnaires with completed data (64.5% of all scientific and teaching staff). The second group (group IIb) consists of survey questionnaires without completed information. The features that differentiated the scientific and teaching staff employed at CPSTC in Kalisz were work experience at PS and experience in teaching work in the discussed formation.

The analysis of the surveyed people in terms of the distinguished variables allowed us to notice that the respondents (group IIa) had professional experience at work in the PS, which they obtained outside the training center. Table 1 presents the characteristics of the PS staff in the study, employed in a teaching position at CPSTC in Kalisz.

**Table 1:** Characteristics of officers employed in a teaching position at CPSTC, in Kalisz, according to the length of service in the PS and the length of service in a teaching position in the PS

Statistical parameters	Independent variable	
	Work experience in PS	Work experience in a teaching position in PS
Arithmetic average	16,2 years	9,9 years
Dominant	multiple	10 years
Median	15,5 years	9,5 years
Minimum	10 years	2 years
Maximum	29 years	24 years
Standard deviation	5,11 years	5,51 years
Coefficient of variation	31,51%	55,70%

Source: own study

The research process also used a diagnostic survey method and the interview technique. The material collected using an interview questionnaire was qualitative. When selecting experts, the focus was primarily on epistemic authority (Bocheński, 1993), in other words, the appraiser's authority. Therefore, the expert group included four people with experience in organising PS officers' training process. Due to their tasks, complete characteristics were not provided in PS.

### 3. Discussion of results

It should be noted that each organization will be as efficient as its processes (Kowalczyk, 2018). Therefore, it becomes essential to identify factors that significantly influence their fitness level. This also applies to the training process. The research goal of this study was to determine the factors that determine the efficiency of the training process of PS officers. For this purpose, experts were asked to indicate which elements and to what extent, in their opinion, determine the efficiency of the professional training process of PS officers. According to the fourth expert, the most crucial factor was the selection of training content and methods, especially active ones based on simulations. The second and third experts argued similarly. The experts also agreed that the factors that largely implicate the efficiency of the examined process are the teaching staff, their qualifications, and their professionalism. Therefore, the indicated factors were the most frequently mentioned elements by experts. The following were also mentioned: criteria for recruiting an officer for training, motivation for training, training in penitentiary units, internationalization of the teaching process. Participants of vocational training and scientific and teaching staff were also asked to express their opinion on the extent to which organization of the training process, proper selection of program content, didactic base, duration of training, knowledge and professional experience of the staff conducting classes, involvement of teaching staff, motivation of training participants to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes, as well as an adequately planned lesson plan, influence the efficiency of the examined process. Respondents marked their preferences on a five-point scale (very little influence, small, medium, large, very large influence). Analyzing the empirical material (Table 2) it was noticed that, according to the respondents, a significant factor influencing the efficiency of the training process of PS officers is the involvement of the teaching staff (the sum of responses to high and very high 91.6%) and the knowledge and professional experience of the staff conducting classes (analogously 88.4%). The didactic base and the appropriate program content selection are other factors the training participants rated highly. The sum of indications to a large and very large extent is approximately 79% of the total responses.

**Table 2:** Distribution of answers of professional training participants to the question, in your opinion, to what extent do the elements mentioned above influence the efficiency of the professional the training process of PS officers

In your opinion, to what extent do the above-mentioned elements influence the efficiency of the professional training process for PS officers?	influences the efficiency of training to a degree:					$\Sigma$	
	very small	small	medium	large	very large		
Organization of the training process	$n_i$	6	26	142	284	120	578
	$w_i$	1,04	4,5	24,57	49,13	20,76	100
Proper selection of program content	$n_i$	5	22	94	242	215	578
	$w_i$	0,87	3,81	16,26	41,87	37,2	100
Teaching base	$n_i$	2	16	101	300	159	578
	$w_i$	0,35	2,77	17,47	51,9	27,51	100
Training duration	$n_i$	30	59	166	223	100	578
	$w_i$	5,19	10,21	28,72	38,58	17,3	100
Knowledge and professional experience of the teaching staff	$n_i$	6	16	45	173	338	578
	$w_i$	1,04	2,77	7,79	29,93	58,48	100
Involvement of teaching staff	$n_i$	2	6	23	156	180	578
	$w_i$	0,54	1,63	6,27	42,51	49,05	100
Motivation of training participants to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes	$n_i$	5	30	99	286	158	578
	$w_i$	0,87	5,19	17,13	49,48	27,34	100
Properly planned lesson plan	$n_i$	12	32	126	275	133	578
	$w_i$	2,08	5,54	21,8	47,58	23,01	100

Legend:  $n_i$  – number of a given response variant;  $w_i$  – structure index for a given answer variant

Source: own study

Respondents rated the impact of training participants' motivation to acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes slightly worse, at only two percentage points. According to the training participants, the duration of the training has the most negligible impact on the efficiency of the examined process; 55.9% of all respondents chose the answer large and very large. Significantly, 15.4% indicated the variants were minimal. The factors listed above were not the only ones assessed by the training participants. Respondents also indicated the attitude of lecturers towards students (3 indications), the need to visit management staff during classes (1 indication), the number of people in groups (2 indications), the atmosphere in the center (5 indications) and the activities organized in free time (5 indications) as elements that determine the efficiency of training in PS to a large and very large extent.

The scientific and teaching staff in both groups IIa and IIb assessed the factors influencing the efficiency of the process in a very similar way for each PS staff. Therefore, this variable does not differentiate the answers given by the respondents. Noticeable differences in assessment (in %) concern opinions between groups IIa and IIb.

In conclusion, the respondents from group IIa included the knowledge and professional experience of the teaching staff (80%, 75%, 75% of all indications for a given PS staff), the involvement of the teaching staff (respectively, 70%, 65%, 65%) and the appropriate selection of program content (65%, 60%, 60%). Respondents in group IIb, choosing the very large option, rated the highest: knowledge and professional experience of the staff conducting classes (63.4%; 63.6%; 72.7%); involvement of teaching staff (72.3%; 72.3%; 81.8%); motivation of training participants to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes (72.7%; 72.8%; 81.8%). Notably, the structure of the indicators mentioned above is also dominant.

The analysis of the impact of individual factors on the efficiency of the training process for PS officers, taking into account independent variables characterizing the training participants, allowed for the following conclusions to be drawn. Both women and men assessed the factors as mentioned above similarly. The dominant answer option was high impact; only in the case of knowledge and

professional experience of the staff conducting classes, respondents most often assessed the impact of this factor to a very large extent (dominant for women 60.6% and for men 57.2%). Both women and men rated the involvement of the teaching staff very highly (the sum of the variants: large and very large, over 90% of responses). Respondents rated the duration of the training much worse. Approximately 58% of all officers indicated a large and very large impact of this factor on the efficiency of training, while almost 16% indicated a very small and small impact. On the other hand, female officers chose the large and very large variants, approximately 52% of all responses, compared to approximately 14% of the responses, very small and small.

Another independent variable describing the respondents was their age. The analysis took into account 6 age groups. Training participants aged 25-30 and 35-40 rated the following elements as highly and very highly as influencing the efficiency of the training process: commitment of the teaching staff (93%; 91.1%), knowledge and professional experience of the staff conducting the classes (88.4%; 89.5%) and teaching base (81.4%; 84.3%). For the youngest respondents, the most important things were the teaching base, the proper selection of content, and the involvement of the teaching staff. The oldest students decided that the effectiveness of the training depends primarily on the knowledge and professional experience of the staff conducting the classes, their commitment and a properly planned lesson plan (100% large and very large variants). Respondents aged 30-35 and 40-45 indicated the same elements: the involvement of teaching staff (87.6%; 98.2%) and their knowledge (85.4%; 92.7%) as elements influencing the efficiency of the discussed process to a large and very high extent.

Considering the length of service in the analysis did not significantly change the respondents' preferences. Officers with more than 5 years of experience indicated the same elements: the teaching staff's commitment to knowledge and professional experience. It should be noted, however, that as the length of service increased, the share of large and very large responses assigned to the indicated factors increased, respectively, from 89.5% to 100% for the first factor and from 86.0% to 89.3% for the second. For respondents with the shortest experience in working at PS, the most important factor was the knowledge and experience of the staff conducting classes; 92.3% of all respondents from this group indicated the answer as large and very large, the involvement of the staff is 89.4% of all indications and the didactic base 85.2%. The last factor was also given quite high marks, about 80%, by respondents with 10-15 years of work experience. For respondents with 5-10 years of work experience, the correct selection of program content was also important (approximately 78%), and for those with the longest experience, the motivation of training participants to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes (approximately 86%). Respondents classified the duration of training as factors with very little and little influence.

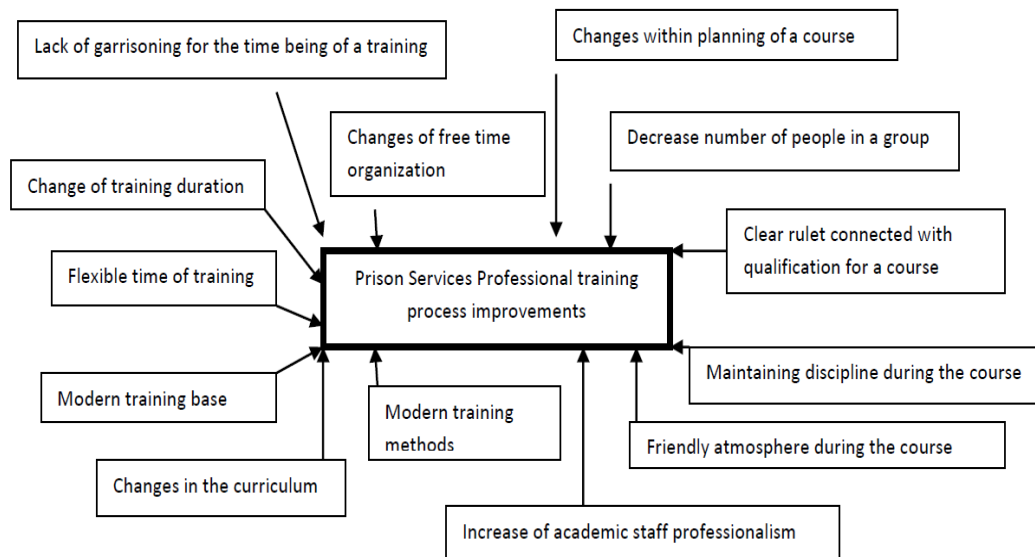
The type of training preparing for a position in a given personnel corps differentiates respondents' opinions on the impact of specific factors on the efficiency of the discussed process. The factors for which it was noticed that the sum of large and very large variants increases with the change of the PS personnel corps include organization of the training process (respectively 66.2% share of the indicated variants for the non-commissioned officer corps, 67.3% for warrant officers, 72.9% for future officers); motivation of training participants to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes (70.6%; 77.0%; 78.2%), properly planned lesson plan (61.8%; 70.8%; 72.5%). The involvement of teaching staff is a factor whose sum of large and very large variants decreases with the corpus change (92.7%; 91.6%; 90.5%) compared to the increasing share of very small and small answers (1.5%; 2.7%; 2.8%). Participants of the training preparing to take up a position in the corps:

- non-commissioned officers were rated best by the knowledge and professional experience of the staff conducting classes (95.6% of all indications for the large and very large variants), the involvement of the teaching staff (92.8%) and the didactic base (83.8%),
- warrant officers: involvement of teaching staff (91.6%), knowledge and professional experience of the staff conducting classes (86.3%), motivation of training participants to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes (77.0%),
- officers: commitment of the teaching staff (90.5%), knowledge and professional experience of the staff conducting classes (88.4%), appropriate selection of content (81.3%).

Based on the presented analysis results, the adopted hypothesis was verified, according to which the knowledge and experience of the teaching staff, their involvement in the training process and the teaching base largely determine the efficiency of the training process for PS officers.

In the survey questionnaire addressed to PS professional training participants, respondents were asked to indicate the three most important factors that, in their opinion, would improve the analyzed process. The need to organize the obtained responses according to their number (1,013 responses) resulted in the information obtained being presented in a variant arrangement. Below is a set of factors proposed by the PS officers' training participants that, in the respondents' opinion, would improve the process in question (Figure 4.).

**Figure 4: Factors that will improve the training process of PS officers according to the opinions of its participants**



Source: own study

The scientific and teaching staff also indicated the most important factors that, in their opinion, could improve the professional training process in a given PS personnel corps. Please note that the following improvements apply to all PS personnel corps.

These are increasing the number of teaching hours without specifying the exact thematic areas, increasing the share of practical classes in the training, replacing the training with the so-called classroom, training in conditions imitating prison conditions, equal workload of lecturers, shortening training time by, for example, increasing the number of hours of classes per day, partial replacement of "burned out" staff. In the corps of warrant officers and officers, the scientific and teaching staff proposed setting the group size at 12-15 people and allowing officers to participate in training during the first 3 years of service in the formation. During the research process, there were also voices about replacing the initial training for non-commissioned officers with vocational training preparing for a position in the non-commissioned officer corps. The research and teaching staff, who did not specify either their length of service or experience in teaching, instead indicated other factors, noting primarily the need for improvement in the following areas: increasing discipline in the professional training of PS officers, increasing the involvement of participants in the teaching process, the need to use methods training programs, such as instructional videos, increasing the number of hours in the training program in thematic areas: self-defence with elements of health-promoting physical activity, intervention activities and shooting training for all corps, and drill for non-commissioned officers. She also proposed focusing on improving professional practice quality, which should occur in several PS organizational departments. In the opinion of the scientific and teaching staff, it is also worth considering introducing a greater financial reward for completing the training with an excellent result about participants of the training for warrant officers and officers. Experts also expressed their opinion on activities that would improve the professional training process of PS officers. The first expert drew attention to the need for training to be conducted by professional scientific and teaching staff, who should be recruited from among officers with experience of service in basic units. For the

second expert, developing the so-called soft skills is essential. In the opinion of the third expert, it is also worth considering establishing the number of training hours that the trainer could use for meetings of participants students with high-class specialists in the penitentiary field. The third and fourth experts believed that shooting training should only be addressed to security officers. According to the fourth expert, such a solution would be possible once the PS moves away from its paramilitary character. The above action would result in a fundamental change in the professional training process of PS officers.

The conducted research allows us to conclude that changes in the organization of professional training for PS staff in terms of the number of training hours, its duration, planning of classes, the number of people in a group and changes in the teaching process regarding the content implemented may contribute to improving the process of professional training of PS officers.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The presented issues of training Prison Service officers are significant from the point of view of the proper functioning of this formation and the effective implementation of its tasks, which involve responsibility for the life and health of other people. The Prison Service as a public institution is inextricably linked with the state's and its citizens' functioning. It works to protect the safety of citizens. Its primary role is not only to isolate perpetrators but also to influence inmates in a way that will significantly influence the process of their social rehabilitation and return to life in society.

Therefore, preparing officers to perform their official duties professionally and adequately becomes essential. It should be noted that every modern organization, including PS, exists thanks to the knowledge of its staff, obtained both from the environment and generated internally (Romaniuk, 2017; Tomaszewski, 2014).

Therefore, by participating in training, PS staff contribute to the creation of its resources, and the creation of knowledge and related innovations are the result of PS learning. Learning processes, among others, oblige employees to invest in employee training, research and development, and acquiring new technologies (Urbanek, 2011).

As a result of the considerations, it was established that the knowledge and experience of the teaching staff, their involvement in the training process and the teaching base largely determine the efficiency of the training process for PS officers. The results of the conducted research supported the adoption of these elements. The formulated conclusions do not differ from the solutions presented in teaching and human resources management publications. The use of the diagnostic survey method among training participants, scientific and teaching staff and experts also showed that the training process of PS officers requires improvements in various areas of all PS personnel corps. The presented results of empirical research can constitute comparative material for analyzes conducted on the presented problem. The Polish Prison Service has its own staff training model, which is constantly evolving and being reorganized. It can be assumed that the purpose of these changes is the pursuit of "excellence" by the characterized dispositional group by taking actions to achieve a high level of professionalization.

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#### **Conflicts of Interest**

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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