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Organizational psychological studies in a county of the Hungarian Police – comparison of two departments

Abstract

Organizational psychological studies deal with the assessment and interpretation of psychological processes taking place in an organization. In the organization of the Police, these studies are carried out by answering managerial questions which are composed using empirical experiences and theories of organizational psychology. The present study compares the results of organizational psychological surveys of two rural police departments, with an emphasis on social indicators. It attempts to present how McGregor's X and Y theory as the management's approach to their employees affect the working community of the Police. The results clearly indicate that in one department, the management's approach has a positive, while in the other department, it has a negative effect on the individuals and the whole organization unit. The comparison indicates that the management's approach can have a significant role in shaping the results of the organizational psychological study. Therefore, it is important to take the management's approach into consideration when dealing with organizational problems and establishing the organizational human strategy.

Keywords: police, organizational psychological survey, human strategy, human approach, management theory

Introduction

Organizational psychology studies the psychological processes that take place in organizations and affect their function, such as communication, co-operation and the mood of the co-workers. In the organization of the Hungarian Police,

organizational psychological studies are conducted by the associates of the field of psychology and are based on answering managerial questions. Managers are interested in the organizational psychological processes, because understanding the organizational psychological background of conflict situations, communication problems and fluctuation tendencies help them make proper arrangements.

Several studies explain the current organizational problems of the Police, describe their organizational psychological background, and offer possible solutions (Tegyey, 2018; Tózsér, Fridrich and Borbély, 2018; Borbély, 2019; Tózsér, 2019; Tózsér, 2020). Instead of focusing on the general attributes of the organization, the present study compares the results of the organizational psychological studies of two very similar local departments of the county police headquarters, in order to identify the social factors behind their differences. The two studies were conducted simultaneously in the autumn of 2019 (Tózsér – Törkenczi, 2019a; Tózsér – Törkenczi, 2019b). (Both studies were initiated by the Chief of the County Headquarters.) The later described differences and tendencies display what organizational psychological factors should be taken into consideration when investigating the operation and problems of an organization unit.

Theoretical background

There are some system-level problems (e.g. increased fluctuation tendencies) that almost every employee noticed and indicated in an interview situation, based on their own experiences and interests. As described in the former organizational psychological study, two major factors affect the mood of the Police employees. One is the feeling of organizational injustice which comes from the dissonance between organizational expectations and limitations, and from a relative deprivation feeling, mainly because of the differences in the access to resources among the groups of the organization. The other factor is the negative approach to employees which is enhanced by the error searching and statistical approach (Tózsér, 2019).

Manager's negative approach to employees was described by Douglas McGregor, university professor in his study titled 'The human side of Enterprise', in 1960. According to the 'X and Y' theory, the manager can have two approaches to the employees. Those who have the X approach, assume that the employees are inherently lazy and work-shy, they can only be motivated by money, and they need to be forced to work by threatening and punishment. Their management methods are based on precisely describing of tasks, strict control and punishing mistakes. This attitude in a work community facilitates developing

the condition of learned helplessness. According to Seligman's definition, this condition results from the individuals' experience that they have no influence on their environment, thus it does not matter whether they do their job well or bad, the result will be the same. As a result, they enter an unmotivated, apathetic state. This happens in a workplace with a manager who has the X approach, because he/ she assumes that his/her employees, who are lazy and always thinking about how to avoid work, would not do their jobs without his/her leading and control, and everything would turn into chaos. In this case, the employees feel that they are treated like robots, they have no influence on what is happening, and their opinions, experience, and knowledge do not matter. They feel infinite helplessness and burn out (Carney and Getz, 2010).

Managers with Y approach consider their employees ingenious, creative individuals who seek self-actualization in work and long for the experience of creation. According to them, people search for solutions to problems and the opportunity to take responsibility, and their main motivation is not money. Therefore, managers with Y approach encourage their employees to engage in different workflows and communicate openly. When assigning tasks, they focus on defining the aims, and they leave the method of accomplishing the task to the competent employees. In this way, employees feel that they can develop their abilities, their opinion and knowledge matter, and they experience a freer environment, where their motivation is maintained over time, and their commitment to the organization gets stronger (Carney and Getz, 2010).

The authors of the book, titled *Freedom Inc*, present McGregor's finding, that the subsistence of organizations with the X, negative approach is questionable, because, in fact, 97% of people function like the Y theory, and only 3% of them are real slackers. As a result, managers with X approach unnecessarily block and slow down the employees of their organizations with bureaucratic rules, and by this, they lay the foundations of a system of throwing the responsibility on others and create the atmosphere of learned helplessness (Carney – Getz, 2010).

Comparing the description of the theory with the given characteristics of the organizational culture of the Police (Kovács, 2009) (such as bureaucracy, strict sub- and superordinate relations, the triplet of assignment - execution – control... and so on) we get the impression that McGregor's X approach is an integral part of the organizational culture. This tendency is supported by the formerly mentioned error searching and statistical approach of the organization. Error searching operations are those organizational activities that aim to detect potential errors in the work processes and their perpetrators. These include the requirement of frequent inspections or the increase of administrative burdens, and constantly threatening with disciplinary action. These can have a negative

effect on direct relationships and can create distrust in the community (Tózsér, 2019). These factors indeed correspond to the characteristics of the X approach, but the mood of the given working community is strongly influenced by where the management takes place between the two endpoints of the dimension of the X and Y approach, and how they can communicate the organizational standards to the employees.

The surveys

The survey methodology is based on a questionnaire and an interview. This survey method was developed during a study of the whole staff of a police department of nearly 100 people, in 2018, where the interview was complemented with a questionnaire for every subject (Tózsér, 2019).

Questions of the interview:

1. How do you feel yourself at your division?
2. What is the strength of your division?
3. What is the weakness of your division?
4. How would you describe the communication at your division?
5. How would you describe the mood at the division?
6. How would you describe relationships and cooperation at the division? How much do you trust the majority of your colleagues?
7. How do you evaluate the achievements at the division?
8. How would you describe the most important values at your division? How much work is appreciated?
9. Is there anything that could improve this?
10. How would you describe your relationship with your manager (division and subdivision)? Can you cooperate with him/her? How much do you trust him/her?
11. How does he/she give you feedback? What kind of feedback did you get last time? (When was that?)
12. Would you like to tell us anything else? Do you have any comments about these questions and the topics?

Questions of the questionnaire

The first 25 questions of the questionnaire (figure 2.) were based on the topics of organizational psychology, in most cases distinguishing between the three

management levels (department, division, and subdivision). The subjects were asked to answer the questions regarding quality on a 10-point scale. 1 represented the most negative option (‘Very bad’ or ‘Not at all’) while 10 represented the most positive option (‘Very good’ or ‘Absolutely’). Questions number 26. and 27. concerned whether the subject considered leaving the department or the Police organization in the past year. In the case of ‘Yes’ answer, there was an opportunity to explain its reason. This was continued by the choices of values, regarding the strengths (question 28.) and weaknesses (question 29.) of their division. The last question, number 30. provided room for adding notes (Tózsér, 2019).

Results of the Surveys

Two police departments were surveyed. The total number of both departments are around 60 people. Those who were absent for some reasons (sick-leave, training) were excluded from the survey, thus 44 people from department I and 50 people from department II took part in the survey.

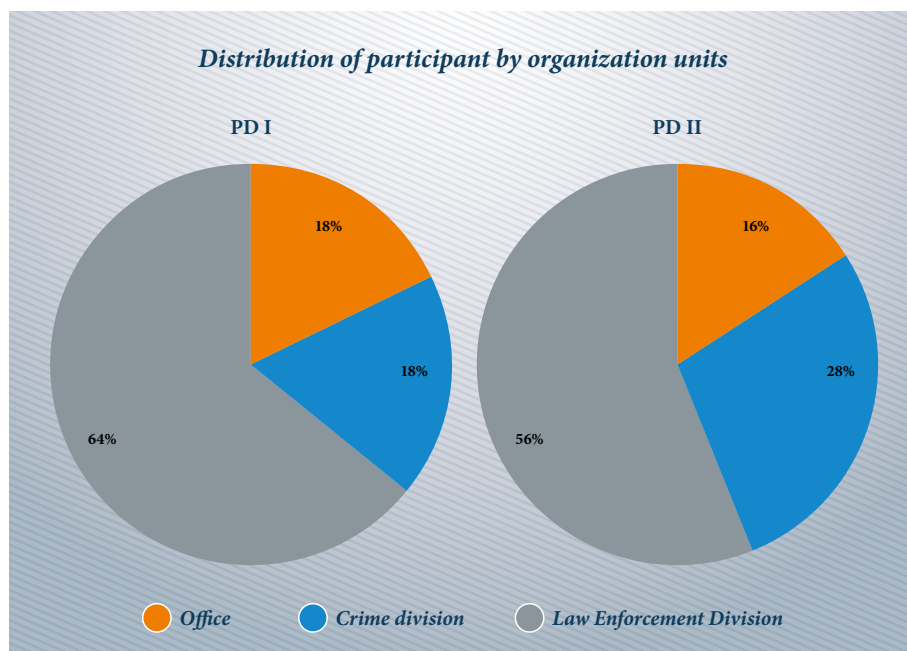


Figure 1: Distribution of participants by professional fields

It is clear that Law Enforcement employees made up the majority of the respondents. Besides the head of the department, there are 4 chiefs: the heads of the Crime and Law Enforcement divisions and the heads of the subdivisions of Law Enforcement. With these 5- 5 persons per unit a management interview was also recorded, in order to better understand the operation of the departments. In this, they were asked for the SWOT analysis of their organizational unit, and we asked about their relationship system, management operations, and the problems mentioned at the beginning of the survey, and potential suggestions.

When analyzing the questionnaire, we had to exclude 5 questions regarding the subdivision level (1., 5., 9., 13. and 16.), because the low number of people in the subdivisions (in some cases only 2-3 people), and the crime divisions working as one unit made the subdivision level uninterpretable in the survey. Therefore, the averages of the answers of the asked 20 questions can be seen in the opposite figure.

It is clearly visible that the department II has higher average values than the department I. The biggest difference between the two departments (2,48) can be seen in question 10. 'How much do you trust the head of the division?', then in question 12. 'How much do you think your leader trusts you?' (2,27), and in question 3. 'How would you describe the mood at your department?' (2,00). However, the smallest difference (0,73) was found in question 21. 'How disciplined do you consider yourself at work?', then in question 24. 'How do you see the quality of your work?' (0,81), and in question 22. 'How disciplined is your division?' (0,82).

So, the biggest differences were in mood and trust, and the smallest differences were in their own discipline and the quality of work. In the first survey with this questionnaire, we also found that the subjects tend to give a higher score to the questions regarding themselves. This can be considered as a distortion tendency towards our own positive self-esteem. This is the most similar aspect of the two departments. However, the subjective experience plays a much more important role in the interpretation of the abstract concepts of mood, trust, and cooperation, like how the given subject feels him/herself in the given environment in everyday life.

Analyzing the answers to question 3. 'How would you describe the mood at your department?', nearly 60% of the employees of department I gave an answer below 5 (1, 2, 3, and 4), while 64% of the employees of department II gave 6 or higher points to the question. So, there is not only a difference in the average, but the majority of the respondents of department II gave a higher score to the mood of the department. Respondents of department I were more likely to rate the mood of the department with a lower number.

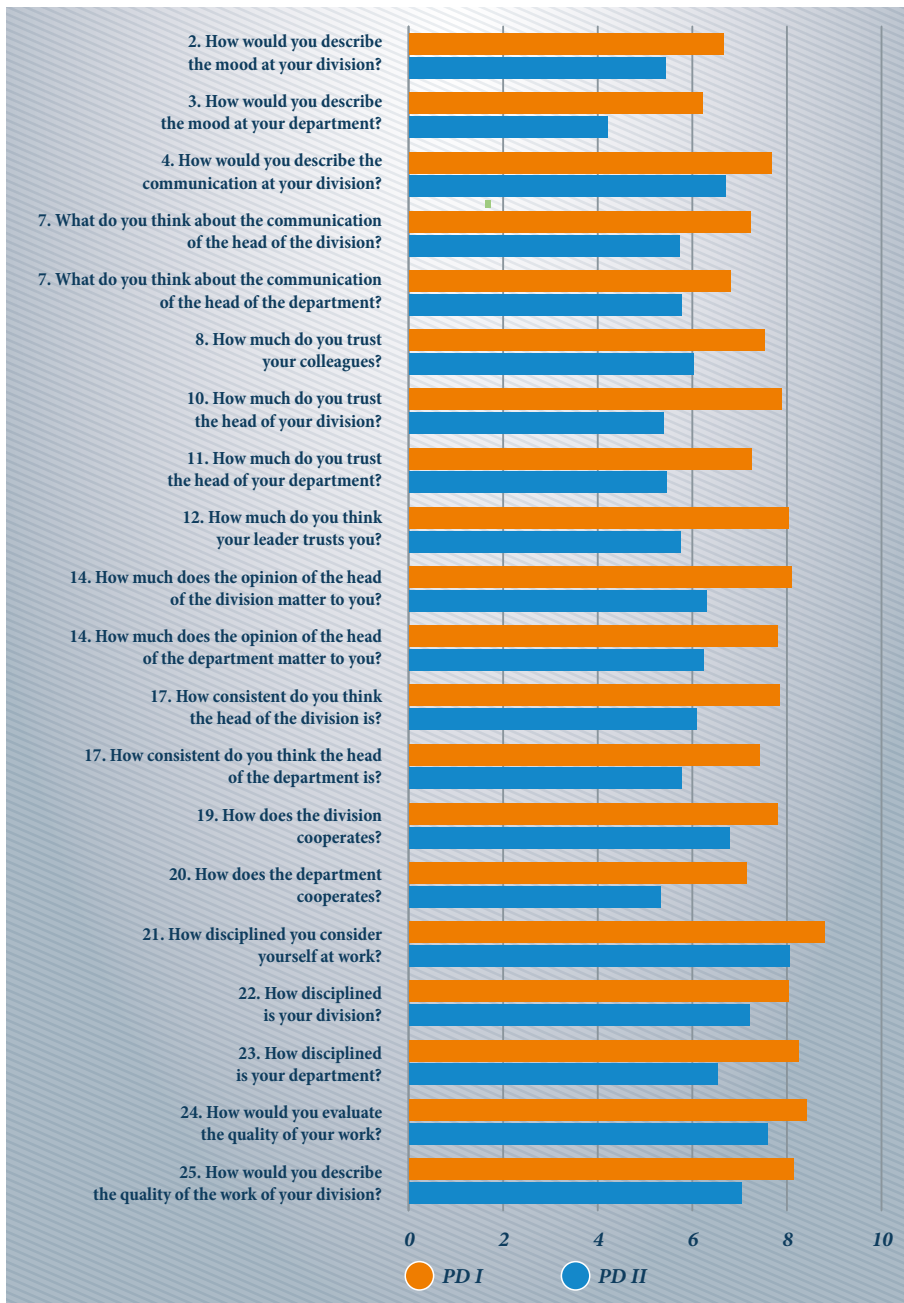


Figure 2: Averages of the 20 analyzed question from the first 25 questions

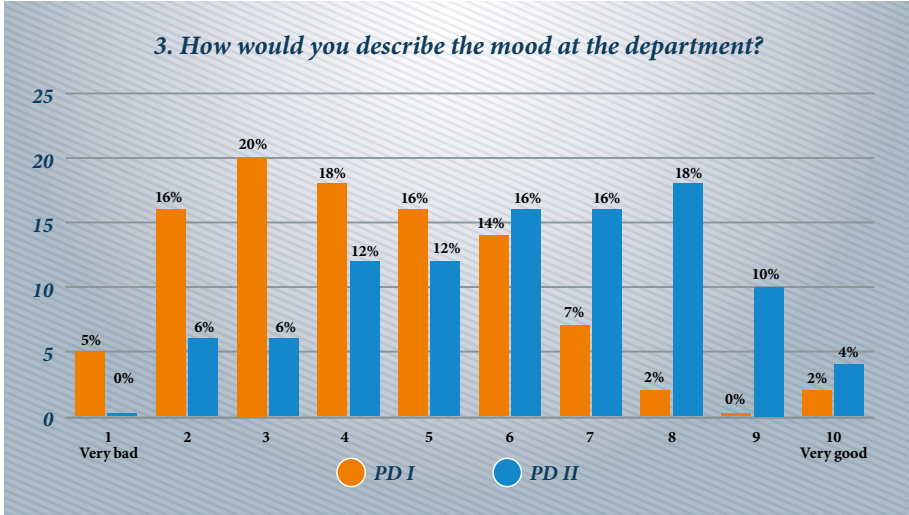


Figure 3: Frequency of the answers to question 3.

A similar tendency can be observed in the case of the answers for trust, since 62% of the respondents of department II gave 8 or higher score, while in the case of department I only 37% of them gave this score, so, at department II much more people experience workplace trust.

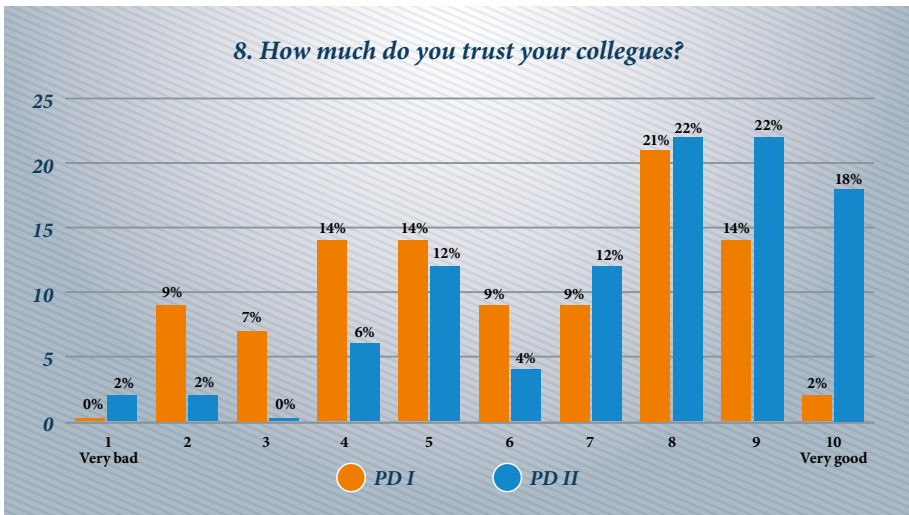


Figure 4: Frequency of the answers to question 8.

Then, we analyzed cooperation (20. 'How would you describe cooperation at your department?') and after comparing answer frequencies we can see that while 70% of department I gave a score between 1 and 6, 70% of department II evaluated the cooperation with a score of 7 or higher. Thus, it seems like the majority of department II experiences good cooperation, in contrast, the evaluation of the cooperation is not uniform at department I, and it tends to a medium score.

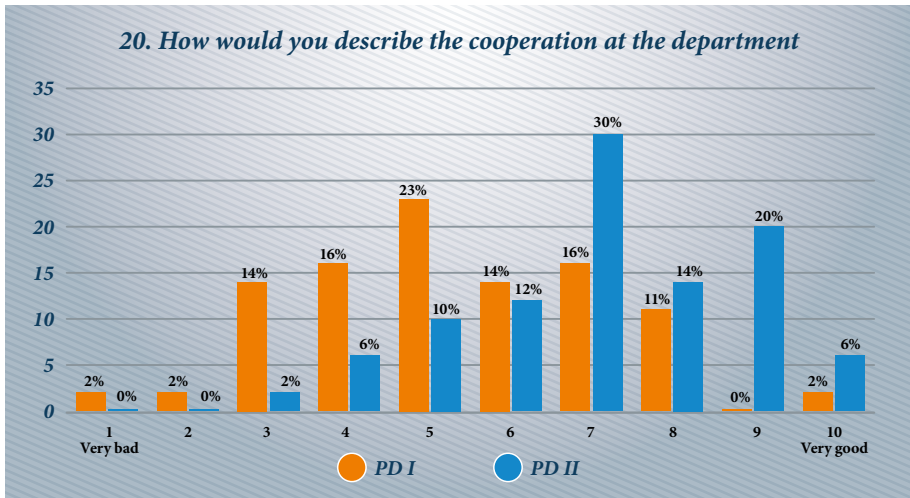


Figure 5: Frequency of the answers to question 20.

The answers to question 26. 'Have you considered leaving the department in the past year?' and 27. 'Have you considered leaving the Police in the past year?' by departments can be seen in the below figure.

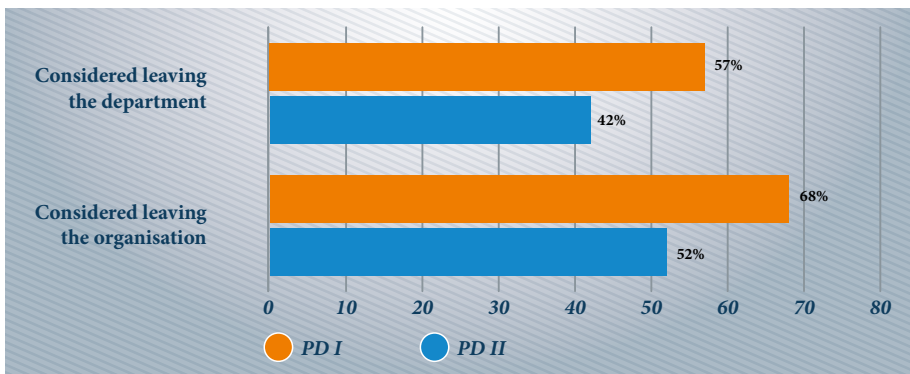


Figure 6: Frequency of considering leaving

The intent of leaving displays very high proportions. The tendencies behind this have been described in a study from 2018 (Tózsér, 2019) where this method of survey was first used, therefore, the present study does not explain it. It can be clearly seen that in the case of department I these values are 15% and 16% higher, than in the responses of department II. As an explanation, the lack of appreciation, being overwrought, disappointment in the system, and the uncertainty of the future of the organization were mentioned in a similar proportion in the two departments. However, the communication and attitude of the leader only appeared in the case of department I. One or two people from both departments indicated unpredictability, burnout and mood as well.

In questions 28. and 29. the subjects were asked to choose from 10 values, which ones they consider as the strengths and the weaknesses of the departments. The responses from the two departments can be seen in the below figure.

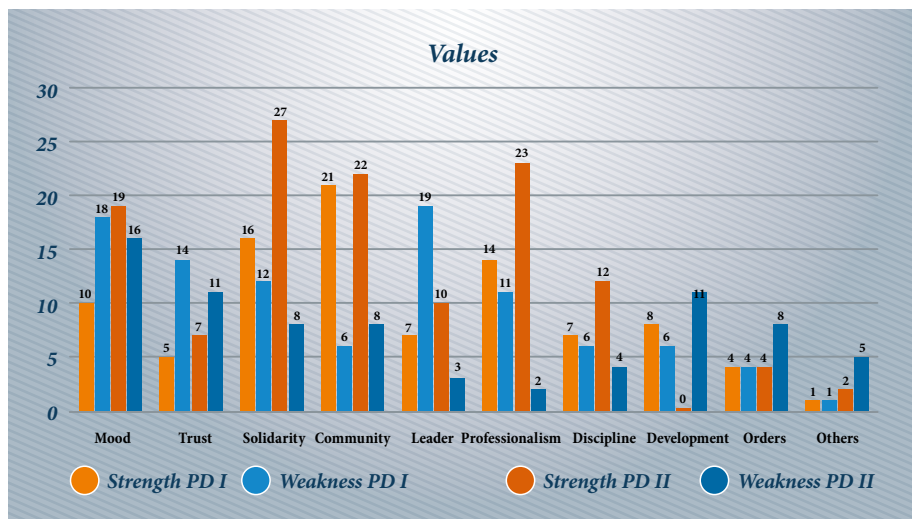


Figure 7: Frequency of identifying values as strengths or weaknesses

In the case of department I, community (21 people), then solidarity (16 people), and professionalism (14 people) were considered as strengths. As weaknesses, most of the respondents chose the leader (19 people), then mood (18 people), and trust (14 people). As can be seen, mood was indicated by 10 people as strength, and nearly twice as many people (18) indicated it as weakness. The tendency is the same in the case of trust, where 5 people considered it as strength, and 14 people as it is missing from the department. The case of the leader is also similar, since 7 people indicated it as strength and 19 as weakness. The commu-

nity had an opposite tendency, 21 people considered it as strength, and only 6 people as weakness. In the case of department II, solidarity was considered as strength by most of the people (27 people), then it was followed by professionalism (23 people), and community (22 people). As weaknesses, most respondents choose mood (16 people), then trust and development (11-11 people), and solidarity, community and order (8-8 people). It can be observed that 27 people chose solidarity as strength, and only 8 people as weakness. This is the tendency in the case of community (strength: 22 people, weakness: 8 people), the leader (strength: 10 people, weakness: 3 people), professionalism (strength: 23 people, weakness: 2 people) and discipline (strength: 12 people, weakness: 4 people) as well. So, more people consider these as strengths of the department, than as weaknesses. Development was only indicated as weakness, by 11 people. Thus, the lack of opportunities to develop can be strongly felt in such a small department. In the present figure the number of indicated strengths and weaknesses can be seen by departments.

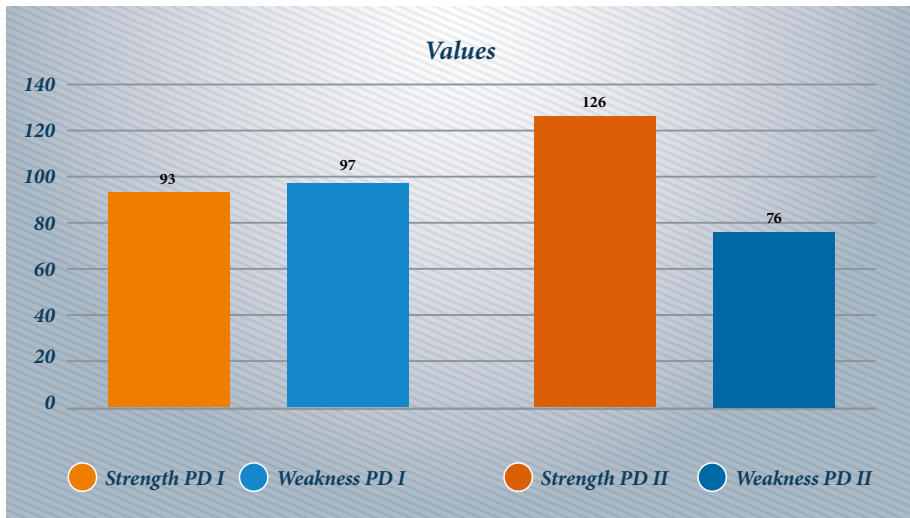


Figure 8: The values classified as strengths and weaknesses by departments

It can be clearly seen, that in the case of department I there were 93 answers as strength, and 97 as weakness, so people indicated roughly the same amount of values as the strengths and weaknesses of their department. At the same time, in the case of department II, 76 answers were given as weakness, and 126 as strength, showing a much more positive attitude. Although there was a difference of 6 people in the number of respondents (department I: 44 people, de-

partment II: 50 people), the higher number of elements cannot explain the upper described tendency.

Observations of the interviews

In the case of department I, the majority of the interviews focused on the tense atmosphere, which is related to the arrival of a new division leader, one year ago. The attitude of the management was perceived very negatively. The reports gave the impression of a split department, where communication between the leaders and the employees became almost hostile. The interviews of department II were focused on the systematic problems (low salary, high fluctuation, lack of recruitment) and the uncertainty of the future of the organization. Besides these, the majority had a positive opinion about the community of the particular department, and they described the leaders as humane and democratic. The organizational problems – such as low salaries in the executive area, increasing and changing of work tasks, increased fluctuation tendencies, and the difficulties of the new generation to fit in the organization – are mentioned by almost every subject, however, the emphasis can be different, based on their position, age, and personal experiences.

Comparison

The opposite table compares the results of the organizational psychological study of the two departments.

It can be clearly seen that in the case of the first 20 questions, the employees of department II gave a better evaluation of their organization unit, while 15% and 16% fewer people answered that they considered leaving in the past year. So, an inverse tendency can be seen between the two parts of the questionnaire. 15% fewer people considered leaving the department and the organization where the employees valued the mood, trust, communication, relationships, and cooperation better. It can also be noticed that for the explanation of the idea of leaving (question 26. and 27.), department I mentioned the ‘attitude and communication of the management’, which did not show up at the questionnaires of department II. There were differences in determining the strengths and weaknesses of the departments as well, that indicates that the employees of department II have a more positive opinion on their department, since they marked

	Police Department I	Police Department II
3. How would you describe the mood at your department?	4,20	6,20
8. How much do you trust your colleagues?	6,02	7,52
20. How does the department cooperate?	5,32	7,14
Average of the first 20 questions	6,16	7,64
Considered leaving the department (26.)	57%	42%
Considered leaving the organization (27.)	68%	52%
Explanations for question 26. and 27.	low salary	
	being overwrought	
	disappointment in the system and uncertain organization future	
	management attitude and communication	
	unpredictability	
	burn-out	
	mood	
Strengths	community (21)	solidarity (27)
	solidarity (16)	professionalism (23)
	professionalism (14)	community (22)
Weaknesses	management (19)	mood (16)
	mood (18)	trust, development (11)
		solidarity, community and order (8)
Number of strengths	93	126
Number of weaknesses	97	76
Observations of the interviews	autocratic management	democratic management
	hostile mood	humane management
	tense atmosphere	good community
	autocratic management	democratic management
	hostile mood	humane management
	tense atmosphere	good community
	systematic problems: low salary, fluctuation, lack of recruitment	
	few constructive suggestions	many constructive suggestions

Table 1. Summary of the results of the organizational psychological survey of the two departments

much more values as strengths (126), than weaknesses (76). The observations of the interviews also display a significant difference between the employees of the two departments, regarding how they see the attitude and communication

of the management. While the employees of department I experienced hostile communication and autocratic management style, department II described a democratic leader, humane atmosphere and most of the time good communication. In department I the majority of the interviews consisted of venting and complaining about the tense atmosphere and bad mood. However, in the case of department II this focused on the organizational (systematic) problems, and they gave much more suggestions at organizational level, and in connection with their daily work as well.

Conclusions

The incorporation of the X approach, described in the introduction, to the organizational culture of the Police cannot be doubted, however, the hypothesis that local management has a great impact on the question, whether the employees experience an X or Y workplace environment in their daily life, is proven by the results of the survey. The destructive effect the X approach can be identified analyzing the results and interviews of department I, because in the first 20 questions they evaluated their organizational unit with lower values and 15% more people answered that they have considered leaving. In addition, they marked approximately the same amount of values as strengths and as weaknesses, and their interviews were characterized by passive complaining and fewer suggestions and ideas. In contrast, the negative effect of the X approach that is fundamentally present in the organization, cannot be seen in the results of department II. The employees gave higher average scores to the first 20 questions and fewer people have considered the idea of leaving the police or the department. At the same time, they identified much more values as strengths than organizational weaknesses, and during the interviews they complained about organizational, systematic problems, but with a more active attitude, besides they gave more ideas and suggestions. Based on the interviews, regarding the local management, in department I the X approach, in department II the Y approach is more prevalent. The conflict situation with the management, and mentioning it as a reason for leaving, only emerged in the case of department I. The interviews also reflect a passive attitude in the case of department I, which supports the presence of the learned helplessness, as a negative outcome of the X approach. According to these, it is eligible to assume that this management attitude is the factor that correlates with the differences in the values, possibly at a causal level. The two organizational units have very similar parameters, there is a minimal difference in numbers, and there is no significant difference

in the social environment, moreover the data were collected in parallel. There are some differences in the physical working environment between the two departments, but this was not emphasized in any of the departments during the investigations. However, we have to take this into account, because department I has worse environmental parameters, and this could strengthen the passive, negative attitude and the state of learned helplessness. Organizational commitment and identification with the goals of the organization is related to the quality of the relationship with the direct leader, so if it is conflicting, then it will also be reflected in the indicators of satisfaction, and lower commitment to the organization will be seen (Kovács és Tózsér, 2017). The most worrying problems of the Police are recently the increase of fluctuation tendencies and the difficulties of retaining and recruiting human resources. These problems may be explained by the altered functioning of the new generations (Y, Z and later the Alpha), which can cause communication difficulties between the representatives of the generations in the organization as well. Two tendencies that are present in the way of thinking of the new generations play a role in this. One is that, for them, the importance of seniority and authoritarianism has decreased, while level of awareness and representation of their interests has significantly increased. These are the two tendencies why their communication could be unacceptable for the older generations (Tózsér, 2020). Because of these factors it is more important to take the managerial attitude into account when thinking about solutions for organizational problems. The younger generations are even more interested to have opportunities for development and self-actualization at work, so they can only integrate easily into a workplace environment where they mostly experience the Y approach on a daily level, regardless of the basic characteristics of the organization. Therefore, good workplace relationships can have a retaining ability in the organization of the Police as well (Lövei és Nadkarni, 2003). Although there is a need for numerous organizational actions that aim to treat the above-described problems, we should not forget about the local problem management. In the case of an organizational unit, a department, the well-functioning social relationships, the proper management of conflicts and the positive management attitude towards the employees are never the results of central actions, they can only be achieved locally by individual management decisions. The strengthening of social relationships and maintaining (forming, developing) the Y, positive, approach is always a local management task that has immediate effect on the workplace-related well-being of the affected people and on the indicators measured by organizational psychology.

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