

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
DOCTORAL SCHOOL IN COMMUNICATION SCIENCES

PH.D. THESIS SUMMARY
COMMUNICATION AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE PRISON
ENVIRONMENT

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Ph.D. Thesis Summary

The thesis aims to determine the level of emotional skills of employees in Romanian penitentiaries in relation to the work environment and its specific communication. The purpose of my work is to identify the main characteristics of the work environment specific to the prison institution that influence the communication skills of the employees and their emotional competences, but also to observe how the communication specific to the institution has an effect on the employees' lives. I chose to carry out this work because the specialized literature contains little data on employees, most of the existing studies approach the issue of prisoners from the perspective of the influence of the work environment on communication and emotional skills. Following these two variables, we customized the study by supplementing the existing information in the specialized literature with data related to the role of the work environment and the specifics of communication in relation to the level of self-reflection, interpersonal communication and non-verbal communication skills of employees in total institutions, in this case, of penitentiaries. The research also contributes to the deepening of the data regarding the positive personality characteristics of employees in total institutions, considering that most studies refer to the negative personality characteristics.

To carry out the research, we had four objectives in mind. The first one refers to the observation of the connection between the rules of the work environment, the particularities of the activity in a penitentiary and the skills of using non-verbal communication closely related to self-reflection. The second objective considers the influence of the work environment and specific prison communication on interpersonal communication skills and on the level at which positive personality traits appear. The third objective has two dimensions in mind. To describe the first dimension, I sought to find out if there are connections between the level of self-reflection and, on the one hand, interpersonal communication skills, and, on the other hand, positive personality traits. To describe the second dimension, we looked at the relationship between nonverbal communication skills and, on the one hand, interpersonal communication skills, and, on the other hand, the level of appearance of positive personality traits. The fourth objective seeks to capture how employees describe the influence of working conditions and communication restrictions on the ability to manage emotions.

The research methodology focuses on three quantitative researches and one qualitative research. We collected the data between December 2019 and March 2020. 111 people participated in the quantitative research, employees from the Bucharest-Jilava Penitentiary, the Bucharest-Jilava Hospital Penitentiary, the Bucharest-Rahova Penitentiary, the Bucharest-Rahova Hospital Penitentiary, the Giurgiu Penitentiary and the Supply, Management and Repairs, all being units within the National Penitentiary Administration. In order to collect data for these three studies, we administered a questionnaire that included four measurement scales, as follows: the self-assessment

scale (SRIS - Self-Reflection and Insight Scale), the test to measure the ability to recognize nonverbal emotions (DANVA 2 Diagnostic Analysis for Nonverbal Accuracy 2 - determination of nonverbal emotional skills in adults, face categories and body postures), the scale for measuring interpersonal communication skills (Interpersonal Communication Scale) and the scale indicating positive personality traits (Light Triad Scales). The results following the application of these measurement tools were correlated with variables related to seniority in the penitentiary system, the type of work performed (physical work compared to static work/intellectual effort), team work compared to individual work, direct work with inmates, the possibility of access with a personal mobile phone in the penitentiary, the department, age and gender. Regarding the qualitative research, I opted for a semi-structured interview with 23 questions. It was attended by 32 prison police officers from the same units listed above. Also, in order to obtain the most accurate picture, regarding the selection of people, we established as a condition that there should be a minimum number of 4 people from each seniority category, in this way, we also obtained a comparison in terms of looks at the effect of the work environment and the specifics of communication as employees spend more years in the system.

In the specialized literature section, I presented studies for the topic addressed regarding the work environment from the perspective of characterizing the penitentiary as a total institution. Total institutions, also known as closed institutions, are those bodies in which individuals live or work being isolated from society and continuously monitored, regardless of their willingness to submit to the mentioned conditions. The category of total institutions includes military academies, military units, psychiatric hospitals, foster care centers, monasteries and prisons. In such places, individuals carry out their activities within the limits of the same space and time, being isolated from society, from the outside world (Goffman, 1961/2004; Schifirnet, 2002/2004). The penitentiary institution has changed over time both its purpose and the means used. As far back as 1992, Farrington states that modern prisons no longer represent total institutions as defined by Goffman (1961/2004). In 2002, Florian raised the issue of a need for organizational evolution at the level of the main total institutions, including the penitentiary.

For this reason, I chose to study how the factors of the work environment have an influence on prison employees. Thus, we referred to theoretical aspects that underpin the work environment, its components and how they interact, such as the definitions of the concept given by Lambert et al. (2011), who defines it from the perspective of organizational structure and work characteristics, Jain & Kaur (2014), who argue that the work environment is composed of the physical environment (the appearance of the workplace) and the social environment (relations between employees), or Shahidi et al. (2021) who refers to the concept from the perspective of factors that generate stress.

The physical elements of the workplace are those that create a sense of belonging to it and influence aspects such as the ability to concentrate, distributive attention and the speed of adaptation

of the individual to the new status as claimed by Sander et al. (2018). The work environment is defined as being based on the relationships between employees and the atmosphere they create. The factors that contribute to the adaptation of prison police officers to the workplace may be related to its component elements, as Geppert & Pastuh (2017) claim, total institutions have a greater capacity to integrate employees compared to other types of institutions. Individuals tend to understand the surrounding aspects through the angle of the specific and ordinary in their lives, which is different for those who work in total institutions (Tracy, 2000). In private organizations, features specific to total institutions are not frequently encountered, and when they appear they are considered rather abusive (Clegg, 2016).

We also considered relevant information about the role of the prison institution (King, 2009), the relationship between prison officers and prisoners (Tait, 2011) and about various ways of working that involve a constant physical and emotional effort on the part of employees (Ştefan, 2015; Shiloh, 1971/2017; Sander et al., 2018). Along with the changes in the role of the penitentiary institution and at the same time, with the alignment with the international requirements regarding the application of custodial sentences, the role of the prison police has changed, it being an increasingly complex one (King, 2009). The role of penitentiary police officers includes, first of all, the basic duties, those related to guarding the place of detention and carrying out security checks, and secondly, it considers ensuring the mental comfort of the prisoners, implementing reintegration strategies and facilitating the process by which they serve the sentence, accept and acknowledge the committed deed. Added to this is the importance of balance in the activities carried out, penitentiary police officers carry out activities with people of different ages, distinct level of education, coming from the most different cultural and social backgrounds and who display complex behaviors (Burton et al., 2018). Their role is also to manage specific behaviors by adapting to situations with high emotional charge, as argued by Needham et al. (2017). In addition to initial training and ongoing training on working with inmates, prison officers are trained in human rights (Rules 81.2, 81.3 and 81.4 Committee of Ministers – Council of Europe, 2006, 2020). We also discussed the types of employees in total institutions as described by Dobrică (2010), Tait (2011) and Liebling et al. (2011).

The penitentiary employee is characterized by obedience to strict regulations and the assert of authority towards the collective of inmates (Dobrică, 2010). The author describes in particular the adaptation of the prisoners to the prison environment, but he also refers to some aspects related to the attitude of the staff, in the sense that, as the people in custody adapt to the prison environment, they also have to adapt to the new behaviors of the prisoners. Prison staff are often subjected to and have to deal with verbal and physical abuse. Tait (2011) discusses the fact that in order to understand the typology of prison employees, it is necessary to relate to the objective of the correctional institution and the idea that two segments of employees start from here. On the one hand we are talking about

those who focus on the care of prisoners and often suffer from anxiety, fear and resentment, on the other hand we are talking about employees who are not dedicated to the re-education process and face constraints and shortcomings in regarding the implementation of the necessary measures for the rehabilitation of individuals.

With regard to the theoretical aspects related to communication, we have addressed on the one hand the role of verbal communication in the penitentiary institution, and on the other hand the role of non-verbal communication. As far the verbal communication is concerned, we had in mind in particular the audiences addressed by penitentiary police officers, the ways in which communication is carried out and its particularities, as well as the entire process of socialization between groups of employees and between employees and inmates (Mihăilescu, 2003; Dominick, 2009).

As Iacob et. al (2011), it is the public that appeals to the right to control, usually indirectly, the organization's decisions. The relationship between the organization and the public is usually built by referring to a common goal or a problem that is of interest to the two interlocutors (Iacob et al., 2011). Communication can take place in a context such as psychological, relational, situational, which depends on the environment and cultural background (Rubin & Martin, 1994; Martin & Anderson, 1998; Hullman 2007). The process of communication connects two variables, namely "freedom and equality" (Wolton, 2012, p. 45). The communication process increases in intensity, it multiplies in different forms and situations depending on the space of deployment (Iacob et al., 2011). Each individual carries certain linguistic maps according to which he constructs his speech. These maps are based on internal perceptions or certain own conceptions regarding different contexts, things or phenomena. For a conversation to be cursive and to achieve its goal, the linguistic maps of the interlocutors must be similar. Thus, the more people carry out activities together and spend more time in the same place, the more similar these maps become (Ștefan, 2015). Both, the code and, in certain cases, the channel through which information is transmitted at the penitentiary level are different from those in civilian life. They are not only distinct at the level of the inmate community, but also in the case of communication between penitentiary police officers. In prisons, the use of codes has evolved as part of communication between inmates (Freeman & Delorme, 1984). Noelle-Neumann (2009) argues that individuals prefer to observe the environment than to be marginalized by those around them or to be isolated. I associate this with the need for individuals to adapt to the groups they belong to and to learn languages and behaviors so that they are accepted by the community.

In a study, Ștefan (2015) divides prison language according to the mode of expression. It includes visual, olfactory, tactile, gestural and auditory language in the category of non-verbal communication. The way of perceiving situations in a similar way leads to the existence of a common language between employees and inmates, thus, the communication between the two interlocutors is difficult to understand for those outside the institution. In this way, two types of languages appear,

the official language, the one used at the institutional level, and the unofficial language, the one used inside the penitentiary, between employees or between employees and inmates (Ștefan, 2015). Most of the time, the associations are accentuated by a lack of understanding and a lack of trust. Communication from inmates to prison staff is channeled and controlled by execution staff with the knowledge and consent of management staff (Shiloh, 1971/ 2017). The activity is a continuous one considering the flow of staff and inmates, but also the different events and contexts. We believe that group inclusion involves learning the norms, roles, values, communication codes and behavior required by the majority.

Florian (2001) discusses the spatial and temporal dimensions of sentencing, taking into account variables such as the overcrowding of detention facilities and the conditions imposed by the facilities. The latter involve the formation of informal groups, the use of codes, symbols and rituals. In the penitentiary environment, prisoners build and use sets of symbols that signify either resistance to adaptation to the environment or acceptance of the re-education process (Ștefan, 2005). Added to these space limits and isolation in communication are codes in verbal communication and a non-verbal language specific to the work environment.

Nonverbal sensitivity represent the second important factor in determining the total level of emotional skills, next to that represented by verbal communication (Chelcea et al., p.189). Nonverbal communication is classified according to the ways in which the signals of those around are received. The different decoding and encoding of emotions is also carried out depending on the individual's profession, the field in which they work or the place of work. The way of socialization in the profession contributes to the fluctuation of the level of emotion recognition (Nowicki & Duke, 2001; Ivan, 2013; Mangra et al., 2022). In professions such as therapist, doctor, lawyer, teacher, actor or those with military specifics, the control of emotions, especially non-verbally expressed emotions, is important to be achieved at the highest possible level in order to clearly convey the message, but and not to spoil the dialogue (Andersen, 1999). The non-verbal language used in military professions is supported by the wearing of uniforms. The uniforms, accompanied by the practice of a specific military gait, translate the desire to impose, to emphasize the social position. In the case of penitentiary police officers, they have the role of highlighting the power of status in front of the inmate community. Leaving such roles usually attracts sanctions (Ștefan, 2015), because both necessary and mandatory expectations appear in the exercise of roles. Once employed as prison officers, individuals go through two types of socialization, namely continuous and resocialization. I considered these aspects important because the personality of individuals changes through the need to adapt to the new rules and the new way of life, but also involves a continuous process of learning and perpetuating some cultural and normative models during the entire career (Cristea & Constantinescu, 1998; Schifirneț, 2004).

We considered the emotions in the penitentiary environment as generative factors in shaping of penitentiary employees. Therefore, a part of the specialized literature studied considered the concept of emotion and the importance of emotions in the professional fields. The APA Dictionary of Psychology (2023) defines emotion as the concept that involves the generation of physical behaviors and reactions as a result of a personally significant event. Individual interaction with the social environment creates emotions (App et al., 2001). Hsieh & Guy (2009) talk about jobs where the expression of emotions is controlled, such as police or social workers. Gilmartin (2001) argues that events that carry a high emotional charge or even trauma are part of the everyday life of the workplace, which translates into an immunity to the personal life of individuals. The suppression and surveillance of emotions is not only done for the main audience, i.e. the inmates, but also for oneself (Needham et al., 2017). Rugulies (2019) talks about the fact that aspects external to the institution, along with the physical and organizational components of the work environment, influence the individual's ability to think and manage emotions. Stoeber (2021) argues that prison employees exert both physical and emotional effort in working with inmates. They are the ones who monitor the state of health of the prisoners, implement and develop support plans for them, methods of therapy and psychosocial education, which can also have an effect on their personality. Prison officers, especially those working in holding sections, follow certain gestures and general body postures characteristic of the group of inmates who use codes, symbols and have different rituals (Florian, 2001). There are general sensors for identifying nonverbally expressed emotions, especially those related to facial expressions (Ekman et al., 1972/1982).

At the same time, we also considered the fact that, on the one hand, workers in military systems are encouraged not to show their emotions, but to hide their fear (Fischer et al., 2004), and on the other hand, the way the staff in the penitentiary environment exercise their authority can create an emotional climate distinct from other work environments. I can also generate emotions towards inmates (Liebling, 2014). In my opinion, the ceremonies that take place in the penitentiary generate a high degree of manifestation of emotions. Emotions generated by the work environment such as fear, anxiety or hope contribute to the fluctuation of the level of probability in which a person chooses to carry out activities with a high degree of emotional content or that generate emotions to a greater extent than others (Steigenberger, 2015), and working in prisons requires a high degree of emotional control (Crawley, 2004). The effort to maintain the work environment within the appropriate limits required by the job description involves, on the one hand, the suppression of inappropriate emotions and, on the other hand, the generation of emotions, both for oneself and for the interlocutors, so as to lead to the results required by the workplace (Needham, et al., 2017). Also, as Gilmartin (2001) says, we considered that the negative events that take place in the penitentiary are part of the daily routine, which prevents a continuous negative effect on the prison officers. Impulses, emotional signals and

changes in the activity of the individual's nervous system reside largely in the evolutionary process, which in turn imposes a period of analysis in order to interpret the world in a way compatible with the felt emotion (Ekman, 2003).

We also followed the theoretical aspects related to gender differences that indicate a higher level of emotional competences and interpersonal communication skills in the case of women (Ireland & Quinn, 2007; Beijersbergen et al., 2013). There are a multitude of factors that influence an individual's ability to encode or decode emotions. Multiple studies on the role of gender identity in increasing or decreasing nonverbal emotion decoding skills have shown that women have better emotion decoding skills than men (Ivan, 2012; Fernandez-Abscal & Martin-Diaz, 2019).

Regarding the influence of communication skills on the personality traits of individuals, we started from the theory of Daly & Bippus (1998), which considers the fact that communication skills play an important role in maintaining an optimal level of positive mood of individuals and influence their personality. Another aspect that led the research in this direction was the fact that, as Mayer et al. (2000) and Petrides et al. (2016), emotional intelligence can be considered a personality trait. Leung and Bond (2001) argue that communication skills contribute to the development and maintenance of personality traits. About the influence of the work environment on personality change, we referred to theoretical notions such as "Work environment and distal environment scheme for personality change" (Wang & Wu, 2021, p. 37). In order to indicate the reasons that were the basis of the choice of research of the penitentiary police officers' positive personality traits, we compared the established models for identifying personality traits, but we also discussed the scale used, namely the Light Triad (Kaufman et al., 2019), in antithesis with the model that led to its development, namely the Dark Triad (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Next, I will briefly present the results obtained from the research associated with the doctoral thesis.

The first research deals with the first objective, namely tracing the connection between the rules of the work environment, the particularities of the activity in a penitentiary and the skills of using non-verbal communication closely related to self-reflection. This indicated that there is a partial connection between the time worked in the penitentiary system and the level of emotional competences of prison police officers, exposed by a significant correlation only in the case of decoding facially expressed emotions, not in the case of emotions expressed through body postures. We also noticed that this inversely proportional relationship is also maintained in the case of the ability to identify the emotion of *fear*, this initially having an upward trend for the first five years of the career, the years in which the individual becomes familiar with the work environment, after which marks a considerable decline until near the end of the career, when it rises again. Thus, the longer employees work in the prison system, the more their ability to identify nonverbally expressed emotions decreases, indicating that long-term socialization in the profession leads to a lack of

accuracy in the ability to recognize emotions. The results indicate the experience of individuals in recognizing some common gestures, used recurrently in the penitentiary environment, which leads to the routine of individual observations, a fact that differs from facially expressed emotions, a situation in which the biological factor intervenes, respectively the uniqueness of each person's facial features. The *need* for self-reflection is more pronounced with increasing seniority in the penitentiary system. Considering the process of self-reflection taken as a whole, respondents with more than 15 years of experience manifested this process to a greater extent, which suggests that with the years spent in the prison system, employees have a higher level of self-reflection. If in the case of age there is no increase in one of the averages, namely the *insight* of self-reflection, the engagement to it or the involvement, with advancing age, when it comes to seniority in the penitentiary system, a slight increase in the average can be observed which it represents the *engagement* to self-evaluation. Also, the variable that is distinguished by higher means is the one that measures the *insight* by which individuals employed in the prison administration system self-assess self-reflection, regardless of the participant's seniority or age.

Correctional officers have better skills in identifying facially expressed emotions than in the case of emotions expressed through body postures. The weighting is maintained in the case of all tested variables, which shows that there are certain elements that help to identify non-verbally expressed emotions on the face. We also observed that as corrections officers' skill in decoding facially expressed emotions increases, so does the ability to identify emotions expressed through body postures.

In terms of how emotional competencies are influenced by working with inmates a partial connection emerged. At the level of self-reflection, prison officers who do not work directly with inmates showed a lower level than those who work directly with them. The situation is inversely proportional in the case of the identification of emotions expressed by body postures, where prison officers who work directly with prisoners have a lower ability to identify emotions expressed non-verbally. I believe that these things are caused by the fact that the prison officers who work on the detention wards have the most contact with the depth of the work environment.

The analysis of the results regarding the decoding of each emotion separately showed that prison officers have better skills for decoding the emotion of *happiness* compared to the identification of the other emotions. The emotion of *happiness* was identified to a greater extent by female respondents, by those who do not work directly with inmates, and by those who have can keep their personal mobile phone at work. Penitentiary police officers who have office activities identified the emotion of *happiness* to a greater extent, but also those who work especially individually and carry out their activity in the administrative sector. The next emotions, in order of correct identification, were the ones of *sadness*, *fear* and *anger*. While the ability to decode the emotion of *happiness*

increases with age, the ability to identify the emotion of *fear* decreases proportionally with age. Respondents younger than five years show an upward trend in decoding the emotion of *fear*. After five years, the ability to decode this emotion drops a lot, with a slight increase occurring only for employees with more than 20 years of experience. In my opinion, this is influenced by the fact that negative emotions such as sadness, fear, anger, anxiety and frustration are the most common in working in the prison work environment.

Regarding the influence of gender on emotional skills, we noticed that it influences both nonverbal communication skills and the level of self-reflection. In this regard, female prison officers have better emotional competence than male prison officers. Women have a greater ability to identify nonverbally expressed emotions in face-to-face communication. Emotions expressed through body postures were decoded almost equally by both men and women. Women also scored better on the self-reflection scale than men. Thus, the two elements, the ability to identify nonverbally expressed emotions and the level of self-reflection confirm the link between gender and emotional competences also at the level of employees in total institutions.

We noticed a significant connection between the type of activity carried out and the level of emotional skills. In this sense, the research showed a higher level of the ability to decode nonverbally expressed emotions by prison officers who carry out mainly intellectual work, as opposed to those who carry out mainly physical activities. An important aspect is that correctional officers who work in the office, decoded to a greater extent low-intensity emotions, which are harder to recognize. The same is true for the level of self-reflection, where office-based prison employees have a higher level.

Regarding the connection between emotional skills and having a personal means of communication during work hours, through which prison officers can maintain contact with the outside environment, we found that those who have a personal mobile phone during work hours have better emotional skills. Penitentiary police officers who can communicate with the outside environment during work hours have better skills in identifying emotions expressed non-verbally, unlike those who do not have this possibility. This is best seen in facially expressed emotions. Likewise, prison officers who have personal mobile phone access in the institution demonstrated a higher level of self-reflection. The biggest differences appear in the manifestation of the *need* for self-reflection and the engage to this process.

There is a significant difference between prison officers who have an increased level of *need* for self-reflection and *engagement* to this process in terms of identifying the emotion of *anger*. Individuals who identify highly with the emotion of *anger* have an increased level of the two components of the scale that measure the degree of self-reflection. However, in the case of the other two negative emotions this does not happen, moreover, in the case of the emotion of *sadness*, its identification is easily achieved by those who have a low level of *engagement*. In analyzing the results

of the study, we noticed that there is a direct relationship between the ability of penitentiary police officers to identify the emotion of *happiness* to a very small extent and the increased level of self-reflection. This, in my opinion, can be caused by the lack of identification of such an emotion most of the time, and the *engagement* to the process of self-reflection leads to the detailed analysis of the recognized emotions and the inability to identify the positive ones.

The previously mentioned are also partially confirmed in terms of the general level of emotion recognition. The research showed that prison officers who have an increased level of *insight* in which they perform self-reflection also have an increased level of emotion identification. Thus, prison officers are helped in the process of decoding emotions by the existence of a high level of *insight* in which self-reflection is carried out. Moreover, the *insight* of self-reflection helps individuals to have better skills in recognizing low-intensity emotions. We also observed that an increased level of the *need* for self-reflection and its *insight* leads to a high degree of recognition of the emotions of *anger* and *fear*.

We thus observed that the level of emotional skills is influenced by seniority in the penitentiary system, by working with inmates, by gender, by the type of activity carried out and by the possibility of communication with the environment outside the penitentiary. Also, the research showed that prison officers decode facially expressed emotions better than the ones expressed through the body postures and the best identified emotion was the one of *happiness*. Last but not least, we noticed the influence of self-reflection on the skills to identify emotions, where an increased level of it contributes to increasing the probability of recognizing negative emotions in particular, and a high degree of *insight* of self-reflection increases the individual's ability to identify emotions of low intensity.

In the study dedicated to the second objective, we observed the characteristics of the work environment that influence the interpersonal communication skills of penitentiary police officers. We were also able to analyze the factors that intervene on the level of appearance of positive personality traits, but also which is the most common such characteristic. The last important aspect is that we followed to what extent interpersonal communication skills are correlated with the degree of appearance of positive personality traits.

The results of the research showed that there is no interdependence between the level of interpersonal communication skills of penitentiary police officers and the number of years they work in the profession, they have a high level of these skills regardless of the number of career years. The situation was also maintained in the case of the correlation between the two subscales and seniority in the penitentiary system. However, we observed a difference in the scope of *external perception* of interpersonal communication skills. Prison officers with more seniority in the prison administration system have better interpersonal communication skills on the dimension that measures the individual's perception of their own skills, unlike those with less seniority. The results indicate a

constant effort in personal training to face the influences of the work environment and its requirements, but also a great capacity to adapt to the new role of the penitentiary. Regarding the relationship between the number of years working in the penitentiary administration system and the level of appearance of positive personality traits, it turned out that, as they spend more years as employees in this system, individuals have a higher degree of manifestation of these traits. In this case, while accumulating more years of work in the system, *Kantianism* and *faith in humanity* appear to a greater extent. The results indicate a direct relationship between the defining factors of the work environment and the degree of appearance of positive personality traits, the latter being dependent on environmental conditions.

We noticed that the *external perception* of interpersonal communication skills is closely related to the penitentiary police officers' desire to eliminate distances in communication with interlocutors. As correctional officers have a higher level of interpersonal communication skills that indicate a high degree of *internal disconnection*, the better *external perception* they have of their own communication skills. In my opinion, one of the factors that determine this directly proportional relationship is the way of interaction that prison officers develop in the workplace.

The degree of emergence of positive personality traits is interconnected with the level of their interpersonal communication skills. From this it follows that as prison police officers have better interpersonal communication skills, they manifest positive personality traits to a greater extent. While *humanism* and *Kantianism* were positively correlated with *internal disconnection*, *faith in humanity* had a direct relationship with *external perception* of one's communication skills. The results confirm that the optimal exploitation of communication skills leads to the development and preservation of personality traits, all the more so since the communication is different from the perspective of the main public, in the case of total institutions compared to other types of institutions or organizations.

The present research shows that there is no direct connection between the interpersonal communication skills of prison police officers and the way they interact with inmates. This indicates the relationship that employees have with the prison environment, a relationship that does not particularly relate to interaction with inmates. In this way, another point of novelty brought by the present study is that the type of interaction with inmates neither influences the degree of appearance of positive personality traits nor favors the development of such a trait at the expense of another. I emphasize that the research results do not indicate a direct connection between the depth of the work environment, i.e. the direct relationship with inmates, work in the detention wards, and the level of occurrence of positive personality traits, as it happens in the case of negative personality traits.

Regarding the relationship between the possibility to communicate with the outside environment of the penitentiary during working hours and the level of positive personality traits, we identified that this is a direct one. Penitentiary police officers who have the right to have a personal

mobile phone on them during duty are more likely to have positive personality traits. There is a significant difference between the mean obtained by prison officers on the scale that measures the degree of occurrence of *Kantianism*, this being higher in the case of those who have access to the workplace with their personal mobile phone, in contrast to those who do not benefit from this right. We encountered the same situation in the case of the emergence of *humanism*, but also of *faith in humanity*, where prison officers who have access to this device obtained a significantly higher average. This is another aspect that contributes to the conclusion that the work environment is an active factor in the development and maintenance of positive personality traits. The same does not happen in the case of the relationship between the possibility of owning a means of personal communication during working hours and the interpersonal communication skills of individuals. In this regard, the research showed that there are no significant differences related the communication skills of prison officers who have such a means of communication at work and those who are prohibited to having it. The ban does not affect the communication skills of prison officers, which shows that the depth of the working environment, the strict rules and requirements do not come into play.

Female prison officers have better interpersonal communication skills than male prison officers in terms of their *internal dis severance*, to remove communication barriers between the sender and the audience they are addressing. The same happens with the level of occurrence of positive personality traits, especially *Kantianism* and *humanism*. Thus, it can be observed that the gender of penitentiary police officers is a variable that dictates both the skills of interpersonal communication skills and the probability of the appearance of positive personality traits, regardless of whether the work environment is a closed one, as in the case of total institutions.

Considering the results obtained by the respondents regarding the influence of seniority in the penitentiary administration system on interpersonal communication skills and the level of appearance of positive personality traits, we also tested the influence of the age variable, and in its case several significant differences appear. Thus, as individuals get older, they possess a higher level of positive personality traits, but there is no statistical evidence that interpersonal communication skills are influenced by this. Regarding the differences between the level of intensity of positive personality traits for penitentiary police officers of different seniority, we concluded that they are significant, in the sense that, with the years spent in the penitentiary system, the degree of appearance of positive traits increases of personality. But, I think this also has to do with age. The same is not true of interpersonal communication skills. *External perception* of interpersonal communication skills occurs to a greater extent in prison officers who have more years of experience in the system, but this is strictly related to the influence of the work environment, not to the age of the individuals.

The most common positive personality trait in the case of prison officers was *humanism*. This appeared as a dominant feature regardless of gender, age, way of working, type of activity, the type of relationship that employees have with inmates, the possibility or impossibility of maintaining contact with the outside environment of the penitentiary through a mobile device staff, department or their seniority in the penitentiary administration system. In this last case, there is only one exception, namely penitentiary police officers with between 15 and 20 years of experience.

We observed that the *external perception* of the individual's interpersonal communication skills is influenced by seniority in the prison system, and female prison officers have better interpersonal communication skills. The level of appearance of positive personality traits of penitentiary police officers is influenced by the number of years that individuals spend in this profession, by the possibility of maintaining communication with the environment outside the penitentiary and by their gender. I also noticed that the level of interpersonal communication skills and the degree of emergence of positive personality traits influence each other.

Following the results obtained in the correlations presented in the sub-chapter dedicated to the third objective of the doctoral research, I will further detail the relationships I found in terms of non-verbal communication skills, interpersonal communication skills, the level of self-reflection and the degree of emergence of positive personality traits of penitentiary police officers.

Regarding the relationship between nonverbal communication skills and interpersonal communication skills, we did not identify it as statistically significant. Basically, the study shows that individuals' ability to decode emotions is not influenced by their ability to communicate. Moreover, the results partially contradict the specialized literature, which indicates a link between the two types of skills and bring a new element, in the sense that the ability to decode emotions is based rather on the individual's experience and exposure to factors of medium than in other skills, such as in this case, the ability to communicate interpersonally.

In the case of prison officers, the level of self-reflection and interpersonal communication skills they possess are interdependent, in the sense that, as the level of self-reflection is higher, they have better interpersonal communication skills. Thus, as individuals have a higher level of self-reflection, they also have a higher degree of interpersonal communication skills. The results indicate the relationship with the interpretation of stimuli received from the work environment and the consequent reaction through communication, according to national and international standards recommended for prison workers.

Interconnected with what I described previously, there is also a direct relationship between the level of self-reflection and the desire of individuals to communicate, to remove barriers to communication. Thus, as the level of self-reflection increases, so does the willingness of individuals

to communicate. Better self-reflection leads to a more thorough analysis of institutional symbols that facilitate adaptation to the environment while ensuring the rigor of self and social behavior.

The level of self-reflection is also directly related to positive personality traits. In this way, as the level of self-reflection increases, the likelihood of positive personality traits also increases. Employees' feelings about the work they do influence their attitude and behavior towards it. In this regard, I conclude that the level of self-reflection, implicitly on the environmental factors and experiences that affect the individual converge in shaping or modifying personality traits.

There is no direct relationship between prison officers' abilities to decode nonverbally expressed emotions and the weight of positive personality traits. I also mention that individuals in whom *faith in humanity* appears as a dominant trait have poor skills in decoding emotions, except for the emotion of *anger*, where increasing the degree to which this trait is manifested leads to an increase in the individual's ability to recognize the emotion of *anger*. I believe that the positive personality trait is the antithesis of this emotion, *faith in humanity* representing the belief in the fundamental goodness of human nature, which is why the emotion of *anger* is easier to identify.

The ability to recognize the emotion of *sadness* is affected by the extent to which positive personality traits are manifested. Thus, a low degree of *humanism* leads to an increased level of identification of this emotion. In this way, the present research brings results that are contrary to the specialized literature, in the sense that the level of appearance of positive personality traits inversely proportionally influences the ability of individuals to recognize negative emotions. The results of the research, on the one hand, partially confirm those stated by Goleman, in the sense that the ability to identify the emotion of *anger* is determined by the increase in the level in which the traits of *humanism* and *Kantianism* appear, and on the other hand they disprove, through the existence of some connections inversely proportional to *faith in humanity* and the total level of occurrence of positive personality traits. This result rather indicates that the inability to decode emotions is caused by the two relationships.

From the present study, on the one hand, information has emerged that confirms the results of other authors' studies, thus validating the connections between self-reflection, interpersonal communication skills, individuals' desire to communicate and the level of appearance of positive personality traits and for prison employees. I believe that an explanation in this sense is related to the adaptation of the individual to environmental conditions, regardless of their type. Thus, the more the individual acquires more of the specific features of the work environment, the easier he adapts to it, perceives restrictions as normal and modifies his behavior according to institutional demands. On the other hand, new data have emerged regarding the fact that there is no direct relationship between nonverbal communication skills and interpersonal communication skills. It also resulted that a high

level of positive personality traits leads to low performance of individuals to decode emotions, especially negative emotions.

In the fourth research I aimed to achieve the fourth objective, namely I wanted to capture the image that penitentiary police have towards the work environment and towards the communication used. In this way I thought I could identify the factors that lead to the formation of emotions and what helps individuals manage them. As a result of this study, we obtained answers for the three research questions, mainly related to the emotions generated by the work environment, of a total institution, and the specifics of communication and restrictions regarding this process.

For an overview of the profile of penitentiary employees, I will present the main reasons why they chose the occupation of penitentiary police. Thus, the most frequently stated reason was stability, followed by: continuation of family tradition, influence of family members, invoking the financial aspect, passion for the military uniform and curiosity about the field. In their statements regarding the choice of job, they invoked values such as: fairness, order and discipline. They associated them as defining characteristics that are consistent with what the prison environment conveys. When prison officers define the work environment, they particularly refer to it as a military environment, based on organization, discipline and compliance with regulations. They also described the workplace as stressful, a world full of challenges.

Regarding the factors that contributed to the adaptation of employees to the specific environment of a total institution, and whether communication was one of them, the results were partially delimited by seniority. Thus, their opinion is divided into two perspectives. While some of the employees did not indicate any problems in adapting to the conditions of the work environment and the restrictions imposed, another part considered that all aspects were accepted from the moment of employment. The time of adaptation to the work environment and specific activities varied from one week to three years. The factors that contributed to the adaptation of the new employees to the work environment in the penitentiary were mainly the work relations, through communication with the hierarchical bosses (their advice and involvement), colleagues (the help offered by them) and the imposition of rules and limits in the relations with the prisoners.

Although at the beginning of their career they said that they were reserved, especially in their relations with prisoners, over time these things became part of their daily activities and they no longer perceive them as something different, a fact also caused by the change of the prison institution compared to the original concept defined by Goffman (1961/2004). They have also changed from the point of view of the role they play in society, moving from the role of an institution that punishes deviant behavior to the role of an institution that contributes to the transformation of the individual and his reintegration into society. In most cases, those who noticed a change in the prison environment were employees with more than 10 years of service in the system.

The results of the research show that prison officers define emotion as a state, a feeling or as a process determined by situations or events. Most of the prison officers who defined emotion as a state had less than or equal to 10 years of service. The experience related to the specific rules of the penitentiary institution was described in the interviews through the angle of their own experiences in comparison to private life, but also in relation to internal rules, confirming that total institutions exercise a high level of control over the lives of inmates, but also over the lives of employees. Also, both the definition of the concept of emotion and the subsequent reports were with references or mentions about the family or important events in the lives of the penitentiary police officers.

As for the emotions generated by the constraints at work, most employees do not perceive them as constraints, they state that with the passage of time the rules have become familiar and no longer create different states or emotions, an idea that I have encountered, in particular, for individuals with over 20 years of experience in the system. Participants with less than 10 years of experience in the prison administration system believe that they feel constrained or that they see this as strictness. During their careers, the interviewees stated that they felt fear, anxiety or tension, especially in relationships with prisoners and most often when there were tense moments such as riots or violent situations such as self-harm. But, even in this situation, the emotions diminish as an impact on the penitentiary police officers with the passage of time. Other emotions or states invoked were joy, empathy, understanding, pity, care and compassion. I believe that those cited by the prison officers interviewed are related to personal experience and the tendency to compare what happens at work with what they experience in private life.

The results underline the idea that in military professions employees tend to hide their emotions in order to manage the situations they are subjected to. The previously stated indicate an increased capacity to tolerate the emotions generated by the work environment, but also an adoption of them as part of the daily activity. On the transposition of emotions from the workplace beyond the borders of the penitentiary, the majority stated that they manage to draw a line between the two roles and keep work-related problems and emotional states at work. However, a third of those interviewed considered that they manifest the emotions they felt at work and at home, a fact that conveys the idea that the specific work environment of the penitentiary influences both emotions and the ability to manage them. The results of this research show that including occupations in total institutions, such as prison police, are organized according to the criterion of hiding emotions and increasing their control during the career.

Prison officers were asked whether the work environment in which they operate, compared to the private environment, makes them think more about their own lives and what they want to do. On the one hand, the respondents believe that they knew from the beginning what such a work environment entails and that they assumed the situation. On the other hand, they believe that there

are no major differences between the two types of work environment. Other aspects important to be specified are those related to the fact that the work environment in the penitentiary is seen from the outside as a closed, dangerous work environment that imposes several restrictions.

The interviewed people associate the emotions rather with the violent events in the penitentiary, especially with the violence manifested between the inmates and with those cases of self-violence, self-mutilation. In this case we noticed a major difference in terms of the weight of genders, respectively, of the penitentiary police officers who said they were affected by the events in the penitentiary, most were male. To a lesser extent they are affected by the stories and experiences that prisoners have while serving their sentences. However, most of those interviewed stated that they are not affected by the relationship with the prisoners, by their stories or by the events in the penitentiary, and that this was achieved over time and they became immune. In the accounts of the penitentiary police officers we observed that they relate experiences with prisoners and describe prison work in relation to values such as humanism and empathy. Their responses revealed that the work environment, including the imposed restrictions, generated the most emotions compared to working with prisoners.

During the research, I noticed that the penitentiary police interviewed, with more than 10 years of experience, tend to take from the language specific to the institution, both from the vocabulary of the inmate community and from the military language. The respondents formulated as the main reasons for taking over the language the long time spent with the prisoners and the need to communicate in the same way in order to be able to establish a relationship and a balance of forces that would allow them to control them. Also, the research points out that prison officers with less than 6 years of experience manage to maintain a boundary between the roles at work and those in private life, so that the language specific to the institution is not used beyond the borders of the prison. Concerning the use of means of communication, the opinions of the prison officers regarding their use for the purpose of reducing emotions were divided into two categories, in the sense that one part considered that they would be useful and that they help to disconnect from states or emotions, while the other side considered that it does not exercise such a role. The results obtained are closely related to the components of the working environment. Of those who emphasized their usefulness, they referred to past experiences and communication with family. In this sense, a relevant variable is the statements of the interviewees regarding the influence of maintaining the possibility to communicate with the family as an important factor in establishing the level of self-esteem. They reported feeling anxious, preoccupied, agitated, tense, restless, nervous, or frustrated by the time of contact with outsiders. I also emphasize their reference to the values, principles and desire to maintain privacy protected from access to personal information of inmates, ex-inmates or colleagues when interacting online.

Thus, the work environment is part of everyday life, which ultimately ends up influencing personality variables. The emotions generated by the absence of means of communication, mainly those related to maintaining communication with the family, are more related to the restrictions of the work environment and the space limitations imposed by the penitentiary institution.

The present work presents a number of four researches that combine concepts related to the effects of the work environment and the specifics of communication in total institutions on the emotional skills of employees in Romanian penitentiaries. Thus, the originality of the work is given, on the one hand, by the approach to the issue in the case of employees, and on the other hand, by the combination of some research tools in which we included methodologies such as the Light Triad scale. The relevance of the theme is centered around the relationship between communication specific to the work environment and its other components and the emotional competencies of employees. The subject is approached from multiple perspectives in the specialized literature, the interest in this area of research being constantly growing. Here, I would like to mention the permanent development of different research tools to capture as deeply as possible the way specific communication and the work environment act on the emotional skills of individuals.

Also, in this sense, we added an element of novelty, namely the connection between communication skills, emotional skills and positive personality traits encountered in the case of prison police officers. At the time of the completion of the data collection, i.e. in 2020, there were no studies in the specialized literature considering the study of positive personality traits by applying the Light Triad Scale in the case of employees in total institutions, even less in the case of prison police officers. Also specific is the fact that most studies focus on studying the problem of communication in prisons, emotional skills and how personality traits change in the case of prisoners and much less in the case of employees.

Another element that I did not find in the specialized literature was that the studies did not address variables such as the type of activity that the employees carry out (physical work or office activity), the way of working (if they work in a team or individual) and the relationship with the depth of the work environment (direct or indirect work with prisoners). Also, I have not identified in the specialized literature another element that I consider very important in a society whose mode of interaction is increasingly based on mediated communication, namely the possibility for employees to maintain contact with the external environment the penitentiary during working hours.

The present research confirms aspects from the specialized literature related to the understanding of emotions, their decoding and how to manage them for employees in total institutions. At the same time, it brings arguments contrary to previous research regarding the influence of interpersonal communication skills on the skills of understanding emotions. The work is also an innovation by presenting the influence of specific communication and environmental factors

on the level of appearance of positive personality traits. It also provides an overview of the experience of individuals as prison officers, as workers in a total institution from an emotional perspective, that of the effects of communication and the impact of the work environment.

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