

LEADERSHIP STYLES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE MEANING OF LIFE – AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

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Purpose: This article presents research into the interdependencies between leadership styles and the sense of meaning of life, perceived as a psychological category.

Design/methodology/approach: The aim was to either capture the relationship or reveal the lack of dependency between the leadership style preferred by managers – understood in a theoretical approach as a mental representation – and the experienced sense of the meaning of life. Two recognised and reliable research tools were deployed: the WERK Leadership Style Inventory, by U. Brzezińska and M. Rafalak, and the Purpose in Life Test, by J.C. Crumbaugh and L.T. Maholic.

Findings: The research demonstrates that the sense of meaning of life, as a psychological category, does not influence managers' preferences in terms of the adopted leadership style.

Research limitations/implications: Research continuation is advisable, but with a larger sampling group and additional breakdown into the organisation's levels and decision-making autonomy of the managers involved.

Practical implications: The lack of correlation between experiencing the sense of life and the declared leadership style – as demonstrated – may imply that such axiological alienation might affect efficiency and generate stress and dissatisfaction with one's vocational activities.

Social implications: This includes the axiological aspect, understood as the feeling of sense of life, in managerial behaviour schemes, which may effectively drive the organisation towards corporate social responsibility.

Originality/value: It was demonstrated that leadership style seems to be a construct from a different axiological category than sense of life and, therefore, is largely subject to the influence of situational contexts, such as corporate culture or standards.

Key words: leadership styles, sense of life, manager.

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

The way in which a manager performs their managerial role is of crucial importance to their organisation. Owing to technological progress, actual competition in the market is becoming less and less confined merely to products and their technical features. It is now connected more with the manner in which people are managed in organisations, as this shapes their engagement, activity and creativity and has an influence on whether or not they commit their full potential to the organisation. All of these are decisive factors for the future market success of their organisation. Therefore, research into leadership styles receives significant attention in literature covering management or organisational sociology. Psychology also has a part to play in acknowledging the importance of studies into leadership styles, for example, many works analyse personality determinants of leadership styles, the influence of situational context on leadership styles and the role of cognitive factors in the choice of a leadership style.

The objective of the article is to describe the relationship between leadership styles and the sense of meaning of life, with the latter understood as a psychological category. For the purpose of these considerations, the leadership styles have been defined in four dimensions: principledness – pragmatism, emotions – rationalism, control – freedom of action, liberalism – formalism. The meaning of life is understood as a very general and intimate conviction of the purposefulness and attractiveness of an individual's existence. The relationship in question seems to be particularly important nowadays given the dramatic changes in the goals organisations strive to reach. For many companies, profit is no longer the only or superior target in the assumed course of action, as it has recently been replaced or at least complemented with other purposes, such as care of the environment, employee satisfaction or work-life balance, all within a responsibly run business organisation.

The conducted empirical research attempts to take a closer insight into this fascinating subject which is also vital from a practical standpoint.

This article has been divided into parts which serve the following goals: familiarisation with the concept of leadership styles and the applied research tool, review of the matters related to the sense of meaning of life, description of the sample group used for the empirical research, presentation of the research findings.

2. Manager's leadership style in light of the WERK concept

A team of employees can be managed in a number of different ways. What managers try to achieve is their own efficiency in delivering basic managerial functions, which usually include work planning and organisation, motivating their subordinates and controlling the produced

results. The most common view found in literature on the subject is that in most cases, a superior has their own personal acting style, often described as a work style, which is characteristic for them and determines their behaviours in managerial situations – the so-called *leadership style* (Jadwiga, 2008; Roberts, 2006).

The idea of *leadership style* began to appear in descriptions of managerial behaviours in the 1930s (Kozusznik, 1985). In general, *leadership style* can be understood as a practical work tool applied by the manager in their daily work with their subordinates. However, if looked at in more detail, the concept's definitions presented by particular authors vary significantly. For instance, Strzelecki concludes that *leadership style* is “the way a superior influences their subordinates” (Strzelecki, 1995, p. 91). An equally capacious definition has been put forward by Szaban, who refers to *leadership style* as “the way a superior behaves on a daily basis and in extraordinary situations” (Szaban, 1978, p. 18). Kozusznik pays more attention to the pragmatic aspects of team management and defines *leadership style* as “the various means, ways and techniques of making people fulfil their organisational duties” (Kozusznik, 1985, p. 7). Penc depicts *leadership style* in a similar way, claiming it is “the entirety of the ways (methods, techniques, instruments) in which a superior influences their subordinates (remaining in a position of professional dependency) in order to trigger an appropriate attitude to their tasks and encourage them to aim for the best possible performance thereof” (Penc, 2010, p. 90). Encyclopaedia of Organisation and Management (1981) defines *leadership style* as “the totality of ways of influencing the subordinates by their superior so as to prompt them to fulfil their organisational roles”.

Literature on the subject also features definitions of *leadership style* referring to the manager's personality and the situation in which a superior engages in the process of influencing their subordinates (Roberts, 2006). A good example of such an interpretation is the definition proposed by Osmelak (1992, pp. 87-88), who understands this notion as “the aggregate of the relations between the manager and the managed team of employees, determined by the manager's personality and the leadership situation”. A similar approach is represented by Sikorski (1986, p. 113), who defines *leadership style* as “the way of exercising managerial power, i.e. a practically proven set of people-management methods closely related to the manager's personality traits”. The authors of the definitions mentioned above refer to the theory of managers' personality traits and underline their effect on the interactions which occur between people in the process of team management. Bartkowiak (1994) takes a similar viewpoint and even more explicitly stresses the importance of the manager's relations with their subordinates when managing a team of workers. This author defines *leadership style* as “a category which combines together all of the manager's behaviours and interactions with other people in a course of action” (Bartkowiak, 1997, p. 67). From this standpoint, a unique leadership style will vary depending on the manager's personality features and psychological predisposition, as well as their subordinates' psychological conditioning. Therefore, each and every manager creates a *leadership style*, which is characteristic of both the manager themselves

and the team they manage, determines the manager's behaviours, allowing it to be distinguished from other superiors' styles, and determines the specific set of methods and tools they use (Bartkowiak, 1994).

Literature on the subject is abundant in definitions of leadership styles, attempts to classify leadership styles and assessments of their efficiency. However, it is not the goal of this article to present in detail all the scientific classifications of leadership styles. Instead, its prime consideration will be confined to the presentation of the WERK concept, which provides the theoretical basis of the research tool applied in the conducted research project.

The WERK model is based on the theoretical concept of personality traits. In short, this doctrine claims that personality features are a relatively constant inclination of an individual to behave in a particular way. These traits are organised in a hierarchical way, ranging from very specific reactions to more general functioning styles. Additionally, they can be classified by means of a factor analysis (Brzezińska and Rafalak, 2015).

People's personality features play a significant role in shaping their behaviours, both personal and professional. The relationship between them are accurately described by Lord (2007), who says that a personality feature is a construct contained between the two ends of a continuum, ranging from low to high values – a person's exact place in this continuum depends on the diversification of the intensity level of a given trait, whereas the desired professional behaviours are the actions undertaken and the choices made by an individual aiming at maximum efficiency in fulfilling their job position's requirements.

Based on this distinction, it seems logical that in most cases, behaviours displayed at work originate from the individual's personality structure and traits. The outcome of the behaviours generated by the personality structure – positive or negative, effective or ineffective – influences the individual as a form of feedback. In such a manner, following a conditioning rule, this person learns the specific behaviours which, with time, perpetuate and create a role that becomes more and more internalised and is used in responding to variable environmental conditions (Brzezińska and Rafalak, 2015).

According to Pervin (2002), personal constructs such as behaviour styles undergo a continuous modification which is dependent on the individual interpretations formed by the given person. This approach to leadership styles is consistent with the interactive approach in which the leadership style, originally conditioned by personality features, is then subject to continuous reshaping as a consequence of environmental information.

The WERK model, which distinguishes four leadership styles – Cheerleader, Steward, Revolutionary and Captain, sources its theoretical assumptions from numerous psychological theories, concepts and management sciences. The most important worth mentioning here are C.G. Jung's theory of psychic energy and the mind's functions, Douglas McGregor's theory of motivation, M. Belbin's theory of team roles, M. Snyder's concept of self-monitoring and R. Tannenbaum and W. Schmidt's leadership behaviour continuum (in Brzezińska and Rafalak, 2015).

In the WERK model, the greatest significance is associated with:

- personality factors of Jung's theory of psychic energy and the concept of four psychological functions, i.e. Feeling, Sensing, Intuition and Thinking, which act as filters in the perception of reality;
- situational factors, understood as the experiences gained as a result of living and performing particular roles in a group, and the organisational context where managers perform their managerial roles (Dudek, 2006).

The four leadership styles of Cheerleader, Steward, Revolutionary and Captain have been identified by means of two four-field models. The first refers to personality features and consists of two scales crossing each other. One of them determines whether it is a pragmatic vs. principled type, and the other focuses on the emotional vs. rational type. The other four-field layout is a reference to the organisational context and other situational factors connected with the management situation. Here the axes describe supervision vs. vision and liberalism vs. formalism. As appears from the above, the WERK model combines the dimensions related to the values preferred in management of an organisation, i.e. liberalism vs. formalism and vision vs. supervision, with the personality conditioning of managerial behaviours, i.e. rational vs. emotional type and pragmatic vs. principled type (Brzezińska and Rafalak, 2015).

This broad and multipronged understanding of the genesis of managerial behaviours has allowed for the development of comprehensive descriptions of the particular leadership styles presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Leadership styles based on the WERK model

Cheerleader
Cheerleaders appreciate teamwork and believe the human factor to be of the greatest importance to the company's proper functioning. Cheerleaders are capable of arousing team spirit, easing tensions within the team and mitigating accompanying interpersonal conflicts. In social relations, however, Cheerleaders can prove insufficiently strict and might find it hard to keep discipline in their team. They also often lack conviction in maintaining their own opinions when faced with the refusal of others. Cheerleaders are heavily dependent on the opinions of those around them and show a clear inclination to build compromise. In contact with their subordinates, they demonstrate openness, a willingness to develop informal relationships and are keen to help others. The feedback they provide to their employees often proves superficial and their assessment too lenient.
Steward
Stewards pay great attention to the precise delivery of one's duties, and they value perfectionism. They make efforts to observe the agreed principles of hierarchy in their organisation. They tend to make decisions only after multiple analysis of the situation. They build and appreciate good order. If things do not go in line with the agreed arrangements, they become anxious and unkind. They expect their subordinates to be highly efficient, and since they also remain suspicious and critical of them, it is challenging to keep Stewards satisfied. Their contact with other people features very limited openness and is usually very formal.
Revolutionary
Revolutionaries focus on introducing changes and searching for new solutions and innovations. They are motivated by new, daring and unusual challenges. Revolutionaries think long-term, have their own concepts and demonstrate a tendency to impose these on their subordinates. They are highly self-confident, which at times might turn into arrogance and intolerance of objections. Revolutionaries are energetic and persistent and able to complete the ventures they have commenced, but they are more interested in general visions rather than operational details. They might prove a bit impractical in the actions they undertake. In their contact with other people, they strongly and firmly present their viewpoint and find it difficult to accept their opponents' arguments. Their assessment of subordinates lacks objectiveness, and what often matters more is whether a particular person supports their ideas rather than how they perform at work.

Cont. table 1.

Captain
Captains are people of action, and goal achievement is their ultimate priority. They approach their tasks in a pragmatic way. They are not really keen on lengthy theorising or thinking forward too much. They trust themselves and are convinced they are right. They prefer proven schemes and are not fond of innovation. Captains are emotionally stable and think logically. They can manage people and are good at planning and organising people's work. They set clear goals for their subordinates and always hold them accountable for their task completion. Captains monitor the development of their subordinates – notice their needs, efforts, successes and failures. They try to be fair with their subordinates, but avoid developing too familiar relationships.

Adapted from: "Inwentarz Stylów Kierowania Ludźmi WERK. Podręcznik" by U. Brzezińska and M. Rafalak. Copyright 2015 by Pracownia Testów Psychologicznych Polskiego Towarzystwa Psychologicznego.

Jung's personality concept distinguishes Feeling, Sensing, Intuition and Thinking as the functions which help achieve all an individual's needs and guarantee good relations with their surroundings and oneself. According to this concept, one of the functions dominates and controls analysis of the information received by the individual from the external and internal surroundings. However, to ensure a proper functioning of the personality, the other three supportive modalities are needed as well (Dudek, 2006; Jung, 1997).

In the WERK model, each of the four leadership styles has been assigned a specific modality. For Cheerleader, the dominant modality is Feeling; for Revolutionary, it is Intuition; for Captain, it is Thinking; for Steward, it is Sensing. The dominant psychic function is of utmost importance in the determination of an individual's specific perception of the world. It determines the way one reacts to events and experiences and, therefore, shapes the functional type of personality. The least visible personality function, in some way opposite to the dominating function, remains less developed, and its impact on the reactions and behaviours of the individual is negligible. The other two functions serve auxiliary and secondary purposes and are much less visible in one's reactions than the dominant function but is much more explicit than the weakest function. Jung divides functions into two categories: evaluative, which includes thinking and feeling, and perceptive, which includes intuition and sensing (Brzezińska and Rafalak, 2015; Dudek, 2006).

In the WERK Leadership Style Inventory, the model related to the personality factors corresponds to the pragmatic type, and the perceptive functions correspond to the principled type. Thus, it may be concluded that Cheerleader and Captain, who represent the **pragmatic** type of mind, will process other stimuli and in a different way than Revolutionary and Steward, who represent the **principled** type. These dependencies are presented in Figure 1.

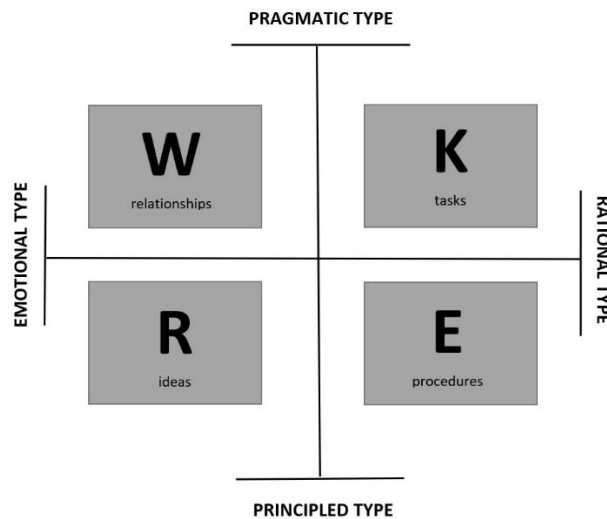


Figure 1. WERK Leadership Style Inventory. Model referring to personality factors. Adapted from: “Inwentarz Stylów Kierowania Ludźmi WERK. Podręcznik” by U. Brzezińska and M. Rafalak. Copyright 2015 by Pracownia Testów Psychologicznych Polskiego Towarzystwa Psychologicznego.

In the model referring to organisational conditioning, the WERK theory stems from the classic management theories of E. Mayo and D. McGregor and the contemporary organisation theories developed by such researchers as A. Etzioni and P. Blau. The proposed dimension of vision-supervision refers to the organisation culture preferred by managers – either a subject approach to the employee (supervision) or a more objectified treatment (vision). Cheerleader and Captain styles assume the subjectivity of the employee team and its particular members and joint agreements on the goals and tasks, as the team members’ involvement is a prerequisite of success. On the other hand, Revolutionary and Steward are prone to believe the teams are there to deliver the appointed organisational tasks without co-deciding or having any major engagement in the decision-making process (in Brzezińska and Rafalak, 2015).

The other dimension referring to organisational conditioning is based on the leadership theories developed by researchers such as Robbins, DeCenzo, Stoner and Wankel, and it creates a scale of liberalism-formalism (Robbins and DeCenzo, 2002; Stoner and Wankel, 1994). In this approach, Captain and Steward fulfil their managerial roles with precise instructions defining the way the organisation functions and ensuring tasks are implemented. They appreciate order and procedures, thanks to which they can execute strict control over the timing and effectiveness of the duties performed by their subordinates. The teams they manage are characterised by formal interpersonal relationships and distance between the employees. The core element of management is precise accountability for the achieved outcome and work quality. Liberal leadership styles, represented by Cheerleader and Revolutionary, are focused on people or realisation of the company’s mission accordingly. Managers who behave according to these styles do not provide strict definitions of the rules and principles to be obeyed by their subordinates while working to perform their tasks and achieve goals. On the contrary, they leave their employees considerable freedom and room to make their own decisions and choose the most convenient ways of doing things. Such managers support the development of

interpersonal relationships and create a workplace atmosphere which allows their employees to engage in their professional duties with satisfaction and choose actions which will prove the most effective and guarantee the highest quality performance. These dependencies are illustrated in Figure 2.

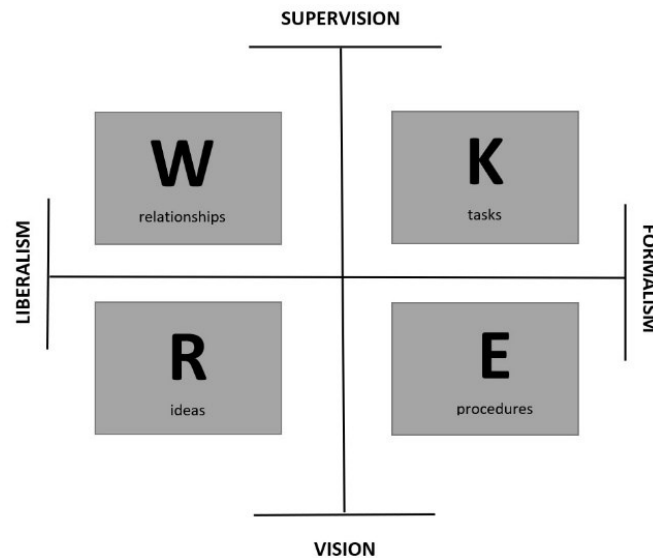


Figure 2. WERK Leadership Style Inventory. Model referring to situational factors and organisational context. Adapted from “Inwentarz Stylów Kierowania Ludźmi WERK. Podręcznik” by U. Brzezińska and M. Rafalak. Copyright 2015 by Pracownia Testów Psychologicznych Polskiego Towarzystwa Psychologicznego.

The WERK model presented above is an example of an approach assuming that the demonstrated leadership style is shaped through a constant interaction between the personality and situational factors connected with the roles performed in teams, as well as the conditioning of the situational context.

3. Sense of meaning of life as an important subjective human feature

The sense of meaning of life helps people cope with various difficult situations they happen to find themselves in. There is no doubt that those managers who are fully aware of meaningfulness of life can find it easier to manage their subordinates in a way which is compliant with their individual axiological system and, therefore, act more consequently, coherently and with a stronger belief in the undertaken actions.

The sense of meaning of life is a highly complex and multipronged category, and it may be looked at from many different perspectives. It is connected with an individual’s personality and the situation variables in which a given person lives and works and, to a large extent, determines the decisions and choices made, including those related to their people-management style (Kraczla and Porczyńska-Ciszewska, 2018).

The sense of meaning of life relates to the whole of an individual's life – professional and outside working hours – and it is shaped by a unique specificity for every person, a set of individual predispositions and life experiences. This individual context of the sense of meaning of life was pointed to and strongly emphasised, for instance, by V.E. Frankl (2011). Nonetheless, despite this undoubtedly vital individuality in shaping and conditioning of the sense of meaning of life, it is also possible to take a more general view allowing for the identification of certain regularities between the experienced meaningfulness of life and behaviours, including – particularly important in this article – managerial behaviours visible in leadership styles.

The sense of meaning of life has always been the subject of consideration of philosophers and theologians. Traditionally, the problem of experiencing the sense of life was a typically philosophical issue. However, contemporary psychology specialisations, especially those with an anthropological or existential inclination, are dedicating more attention to this subject, as they see the growing role of a more holistic view from people in the workplace. The approaches which stress the importance of the balance between professional and private life – the so-called work-life balance, or the feeling of wellbeing in professional and private life – the so-called wellbeing policy, cannot prescind from the existential conditioning of an individual's existence. Although it is not easy to explicitly and precisely address the subject of meaning of life owing to the deep-rooted conditioning in an individual, its uniqueness and the various situations a given person operates in, its importance for understanding managerial behaviours seems to be unquestionable (Kraczla and Porczyńska-Ciszewska, 2018).

The psychological approach to the subject of meaning in life is closely related to the hereditary predispositions of a person and their individual psychological needs. The target area of psychological research includes the relationships between the sense of meaning in life, personality features and the mechanisms of how an individual's sense of life is achieved considering the integration or disintegration of their personality (Porczyńska-Ciszewska, 2013). Another interesting psychological research perspective is the attempt to analyse the behaviours and decisions of a given person in connection with their own internalised, conscious or unconscious, values. The need for meaning of life is just as important for an individual as their cognitive or emotional needs, all of these being the main drives of human behaviour. Therefore, it is indispensably connected with acting on one's skills and interests to ultimately reach self-fulfilment in life (Popielski, 1982).

What has to be clearly underlined though is the fact that in psychology, there are a number of different definitions of meaning of life (Porczyńska-Ciszewska, 2013). According to Obuchowski (1990), one can talk about both the need for meaning and everyone's right to feel meaning in every important life situation at any point in their life. Popielski (1996) defines meaning of life as the most general and yet most intimate and individualised need of every human. Nejmark claims it is a paramount motivating tendency, whereas Leontiew believes meaning of life is the most basic sense-creating and meaningful motive (in Mariański, 1990).

Emmons (2005) draws attention to the interdependency between meaning of life and values and refers to meaning in life as a pursuit of one's important goals and observance of one's valued principles, which contributes to the perceived quality of life. Therefore, it appears that the concept of meaning of life relates more to the eudemonistic rather than hedonistic approach to people's psychological well-being, and thus it may be referred to as one of the multi-dimensional concepts of a good life (Ryff and Singer, 1998; Seligman, 2011; Kossakowska, 2013). Furthermore, literature on the subject distinguishes a static and dynamic understanding of meaning of life. The former defines meaning of life as a "subjective psychological condition of a particular person associated with experiencing satisfaction with life" (Życińska and Januszek, 2011, p. 1), whereas the latter describes meaning of life as a changeable need dependent on situational conditioning (Życińska and Januszek, 2011).

Psychological literature places emphasis on meaning of life as one of the most vital personality traits which plays a fundamental role in one's development. Therefore, the sense of meaning of life is deeply rooted in every human's existence. External situations, particularly those of greater importance to a person's existence – disease, loss of a loved one – arouse reflections about the meaning of life and trigger efforts aimed at its clear identification. On the other hand, a conscious or unconscious reference to one's experienced sense of meaning of life significantly impacts on one's choice of how they cope with adverse situations. What is more, the sense of meaning of life correlates, to a large degree, with such personality features as hierarchy of needs, sense of locus of control and self-esteem and, therefore, determines the choice of one's response to variable situations and, of course, influences their leadership style (Porczyńska-Ciszewska, 2013; Kraczlą and Porczyńska-Ciszewska, 2018).

Although the relations between personality features and the sense of meaning in life are not the most popular subject of psychological and scientific studies, there are numerous accounts of their recognised interdependencies (Halama, 2005). Many researchers have identified the correlations between meaning of life and an individual's personality traits, such as locus of control, constructive action skills, level of self-acceptance, neuroticism and creative activity (see Gaś, 1986; Stokłosa, 1986; Wood et al., 1969; in Pufal-Struzik, 1994; Kościelak, 1995; Porczyńska-Ciszewska, 2013). Literature on this subject also includes works pointing to the positive relationship between meaning in life and psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989; Porczyńska-Ciszewska, 2013).

Given the goals of this article, a particularly compelling study was undertaken by Gaś (1986). In his empirical research, Gaś carried out qualitative and quantitative analyses of the dependencies between the ability to act constructively and the sense of meaning in life and identified a powerful and positive correlation. Constructive action is defined by him as the ability to reach assumed goals and fulfil one's needs, which, in fact, is somewhat very similar to the actual essence of a manager's influence. The research concluded that people experiencing an appropriately intense sense of meaning in life, i.e. having clear goals and aspirations, recognising the meaningfulness of their existence and being convinced of the attractiveness of

their everyday life, tend to undertake constructive actions more frequently than people with a lower intensity of the perceived meaning of life. As a result, these findings allow for a highly likely assumption to be put forward that the stronger a manager perceives meaning of life, the more constructive their actions will be, which in turn will translate into higher efficiency in reaching goals and satisfying needs.

What is often emphasised in literature on management is the role of self-reliance, independence and the sense of influence – in a psychological understanding – of managers who effectively perform their leadership roles (Bacon, 2013; Kaplan, 2013; Kraczlá, 2016; Wziątek-Staško, 2016). Research into the locus of control indicates that there is a positive relation between the internal locus of control and the individual's appropriate sense of meaning of life. It was also concluded that an internal locus of control correlates positively with satisfaction in life and acceptance of one's role in life. Outer containment, on the other hand, tends to be associated with depression or dissatisfaction with life (Kościelak, 1995). Stokłosa (1986) came to a similar conclusion in her studies. She showed that people with inner containment tend to demonstrate a stronger sense of meaning of life, whereas those with an external locus of control experience a lesser sense of meaning of life. This author's research findings also indicate that people who attribute causativeness to themselves display a higher level of optimism and a more positive approach to reality and their own capabilities. A review of the outcome produced by Stokłosa's studies may lead to the conclusion that the experienced sense of meaning of life is a primary psychological category which determines one's behaviour. Assuming this perspective, a hypothesis claiming that the experienced sense of meaning in life will also determine the behaviour of people in managerial positions seems to be fully justified. It is also worth referring to research demonstrating that the pursuit of the feeling of happiness and the release of one's positive emotions might actually lead to a persistent change of one's social attitude (Sheldon and Lyubomirsky, 2006).

Literature on the subject frequently refers to the studies of the relations between experiencing the sense of meaning of life and the perception of oneself, including development and acceptance of this perception. Research carried out by Nizankowską-Półtorak (1986) revealed that people with a distorted self-image and low self-esteem are characterised by a poor sense of meaning of life. This is in stark contrast to people with high self-esteem who take a positive look at and affirm their life, goals, plans and aspirations (Nizankowska-Półtorak, 1986). Similar research findings were presented by Kościelak (1995), who also confirmed the occurrence of a positive correlation between self-esteem and the perceived sense of meaning of life. He empirically proved that the growth of one's self-esteem is accompanied by a growing sense of meaning of life. It is worth emphasising that high self-esteem appears to broaden people's choice of values, goals and ways of life, all of which help them shape their future. This is also the reason why people with higher self-esteem have a stronger sense of meaning of life as opposed to those with lower self-esteem (Porczyńska-Ciszewska, 2013).

A particularly compelling study of the connection between the sense of meaning of life and personality traits was conducted by Płużek (1996), who focused on the personality consequences of the loss of meaning of life. She analysed two groups of people who had been saved after attempting suicide: one with an extremely strong and the other one with an extremely weak sense of meaning of life. The findings generated by this research clearly indicated that individuals with a low sense of meaning of life demonstrated a pathological personality profile – typical of people who suffer from depression, feel alienated or rejected by their environment, have lost social contacts, experience uncertainty and internal anxiety. Additionally, such people usually faced difficulties in adapting to society and demonstrated visibly intensified conflicts in the four areas measured by Sacks and Sidney's test: attitude to family, attitude to other people, anxiety and unrest, little respect for oneself (Płużek, 1996). The connections between a neurotic personality and that of experiencing a sense of existence was the subject of research carried out by Kulpa (1983), who confirmed the tendency of neurotic people to lack the feeling of meaning of life. He believes his analysis supports the presumption that individuals who highly rate their life – thanks to the goals they have and the values they abide by – are mentally healthy and well-balanced, while those who see their lives as empty and valueless tend to fall into neurotic states more frequently. It transpires that neuroticism exerts a negative influence on the right definition and then pursuit of one's key values and goals which would otherwise give sense and meaning to their life.

To summarise, it may be concluded that relevant literature confirms the existence of vital dependencies between the sense of meaning of life and a number of one's personality traits, which can directly influence their performance in leadership positions. Particularly important relationships are those between meaning of life on one side and neuroticism, locus of control, self-image, constructivism of undertaken actions and creative activity on the other. Apart from this, what might greatly affect how managerial roles are fulfilled is the correlation between the sense of meaning of life and the frictions within one's realm of fears, attitudes to family and other people, self-respect and the resulting ease of falling into depression.

4. Leadership styles and the sense of meaning of life – analysis of research findings

The findings presented below come from a research project conducted on a group of 65 managers diversified in terms of gender and age. The group consisted of 27 women and 38 men. The project was carried out between the years 2017-2019.

The research participants included people who met the criterion of holding a leadership position, i.e. managing a group of subordinates directly, which, in practical terms, meant working within various management levels at a number of organisations.

Research was undertaken in the form of group and individual meetings. In order to meet the credibility criterion and ensure the research participants had the optimal conditions in which to provide genuine and unrestrained answers, their involvement in the project was voluntary and anonymous.

4.1. Characteristics of the research group

As regards *gender*, the research group included both women and men, with more of the latter. The number of women was 27, whereas the number of men was 38, which means the total number of the research participants was 65. Considering the percentage proportions, women accounted for 42% of the group, whereas men constituted 58% (Table 2).

Table 2.

Characteristics of the analysed group based on the variable: gender

Gender	No.	%
Women	27	42%
Men	38	58%
Total:	65	100%

Source: own adaptation.

In terms of the variables of age, the analysed group of managers were in the range of 21 to 55 years of age. The average figures recorded for research participants were $M = 37.94$; $SD = 7.51$.

4.2. Analysis of the research findings

Two research tools were utilised in the project. The tool used to measure leadership style was the WERK Leadership Style Inventory, developed by U. Brzezińska and M. Rafalak. The tool used to measure the sense of meaning of life was the Purpose in Life Test (PIL), by J.C. Crumbaugh and L.T. Maholic (Polish version translated by Z. Płużek).

The research aimed to either capture a potential relationship between the managers' preferred leadership style (understood in a theoretical assumption as a mental representation) and their experienced sense of purpose in life or demonstrate that one's leadership style does not depend on the level of experienced meaning of life.

The reliability of the measurement from the analysed scales was verified by means of Cronbach's alfa method. This analysis showed that the measurements were at an appropriate reliability level of $\alpha = 0.70 - 0.82$. To verify the distribution shape of the analysed variables, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was applied. Comparison between the distribution of the analysed measurements with the standard normal distribution proved the measurements' variability to be compliant with normal distribution. The outcome of the analysis can be found in Table 3.

Table 3.
Statistics of performed tests

Measures	Reliability statistics		N	K-S Test		M	SD
	α	Number of test items		Test statistics	P		
PIL	-	-	65	.12	.028	117.15	9.34
E	.74	15	65	.11	.066	32.37	6.80
K	.70	15	65	.10	.200	44.78	6.09
R	.82	15	65	.08	.200	35.78	8.20
W	.79	15	65	.12	.028	39.12	7.66

where:

α = Cronbach's alpha (desired factor value $\alpha > 0.70$),

p = statistical probability value,

M = arithmetic mean,

SD = standard deviation.

Analysis of the data presented in Table 3 leads to the conclusion that the tools used in the examination were of sufficient reliability, and the distribution of the analysed variables is similar to normal distribution and, therefore, allows for the application of standard statistics for its description.

Analysis of the results generated by the tests completed by women and men implies there are no significant statistical differences between the two. Therefore, it may be concluded that within the analysed group, neither the sense of purpose in life nor the declared leadership style depended on the respondents' gender. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4.
Differences between generated outcomes depending on gender

	Men		Women	
	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation
PIL	117.50	1.53	116.67	1.81
Scale E	32.16	1.11	32.67	1.32
Scale K	44.45	0.99	45.26	1.18
Scale R	36.03	1.34	35.44	1.59
Scale W	39.13	1.25	39.11	1.49

The conducted examination revealed that in the analysed group – irrespective of the respondents' gender – there is no correlation between the experienced sense of purpose in life and the declared leadership style. The Pearson's test results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5.
Correlation between the experienced purpose in life and leadership style

	PIL scale of purpose in life
Scale E	0.08
Scale K	0.04
Scale R	-0.05
Scale W	-0.08

The achieved results are not statistically significant for $p < 0.01$.

The performed research did not reveal any significant correlation between the experienced sense of purpose in life and the respondents' age. The correlation value, calculated by means of the Pearson's test, is -0.023, and it is also not statistically significant for $p < 0.01$.

Results generated in the scale of leadership styles look very compelling and are presented in Table 5.

Table 5.
Results in WERK scales

	Scale E		Scale K		Scale R		Scale W	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Low	22	33.8	9	13.8	11	16.9	32	49.2
Average	25	38.5	21	32.3	19	29.2	32	49.2
High	18	27.7	35	53.9	36	53.9	1	1.6
Total	65	100	65	100	65	100	65	100

The most consistent results are visible in Scale E, where the frequencies of occurrence within low, average and high intensities were relatively comparable. On the other hand, the distribution of intensity in Scales K and R looks extremely skewed – the highest scores occur most often here and considerably dominate the average and low scores. As regards Scale W, the low and average frequencies are equinumerous, and the high level of this style, as a matter of fact, does not occur at all.

4.3. Research conclusions

Based on the performed tests, it may be concluded that the analysed group of 65 managers did not confirm the hypothesis that there is a dependency between the strength of the sense of purpose in life and the adopted style of managing one's subordinates. Thus, it transpires that the sense of meaning of life, as a psychological category, does not influence the way such people think about effective leadership.

It seems that leadership practice still depends, to a larger extent, on situational variables – the need to achieve the “here and now” goals, prompt decision-making due to short time, interventions in crisis situations – rather than on the more general universal values.

The conducted research leads to the conclusion that in everyday management practice, decisions regarding how exactly leadership appear, what principles are followed by the manager and what tools are used depend more on down-to-earth values directly linked to practical outcomes rather than the sense of meaning of life.

Taking into account the above considerations, it may be assumed that the conducted research portrays meaning of life as a universal metaphysical category whose meaning should not be understated, as it exerts a significant influence on a manager's life on the whole. However, this is a general impact which is not directly linked to how a particular manager performs their role in everyday work practice.

While developing our interpretations, however, we should remember that for the purpose of the conducted research, it was assumed that one's preference in the adopted leadership style comes from a mental representation of the construct "Me as a leader". Therefore, the adoption of a given leadership style is based on the assumption that people continuously verify their personal perceptions of themselves and the surroundings. Personal constructs, often referred to as mental representations, are subject to constant modification conditioned by the personal interpretations of one's activities in a managerial role. The schemes of "Me" may alter with time, but they may also show an inclination to confirm and maintain the previously shaped way of thinking of oneself. This personal "truth about oneself" may, in turn, manifest as preferred managerial behaviours. Therefore, the research outcome – particularly the proven lack of correlation between the sense of meaning of life and the declared leadership styles – may also imply that at work, managers do not attempt to adhere to superior values constituting their sense of life, but instead rely on those values which are close to their organisation's culture and the professional challenges they face. Such values drive the mental sphere of the manager's considerations and pave the direction of the undertaken managerial activities. This axiological alienation of employees, and not only those in managerial positions, is visible in numerous organisations and results in an intensification of psychological games, lack of efficiency and then stress and finally dissatisfaction with one's professional life.

It is also worth applying the analysis and interpretation of the research findings to the point of view of a middle level manager working for a contemporary Polish organisation. More often than not, the manager's role, the tools they use and the principles they comply with, are not as a result of their sole independent decision, but they are subject to influence from the imposed organisational culture and choices of the senior managers. The resulting duality a manager must tackle as an individual may lead to a situation when the sense of meaning of life and the underlying principles and convictions do not constitute the same axiological line as the values and attitudes connected with the professional role. Unfortunately, many Polish employees, including managers, work for organisations which they identify with to various extents.

Looking at the research findings, it is also worth analysing the ways in which managers are formed and are prepared to deliver their roles. By means of dedicated training courses, organisations frequently shape and then execute and control desired behaviours and attitudes. Adherence and application thereof are often necessary preconditions required for a positive rating, for instance, in periodical assessments held by the organisation. If the company's standards do not overlap with the values and attitudes creating the purpose in life of a given individual, the only way they can retain their professional position is to draw a line between how they perform their role at work and the sense of meaning of life they apply when looking at their life as a whole. What is also interesting is that the research findings point to a lack of significant diversification of results in relation to the respondents' age. The apparent lack of influence of age on the declared leadership style seems to reinforce the theory about the impact of current and situational conditions on the realisation of the leadership tasks.

The interpretation of the research findings presented above still requires further confirmatory work on a larger group of managers. While continuing inquiries into this area, it would be advisable to extend the research and split its focus to pay more attention to the organisational sphere and the decision-making independence of the analysed managers and treat those two areas as separate variables.

5. Summary

This article has presented an attempt to draw conclusions with regard to the probable dependencies between managerial behaviours and their existential background, referred to as the sense of purpose in life or meaning of life.

The findings of the conducted research explicitly demonstrated that when choosing a leadership style, the managers' decision is not linked to their sense of purpose in life, which, in other words, means that their perceived sense of meaning of life does not significantly influence the adopted leadership style. Therefore, leadership style appears to be a construct from an axiological category which is other than that of purpose in life. As a result, it tends to be subject to situational contexts, such as the organisation's culture or standards, rather than anything else. This creates an unfavourable situation for companies, as it gives rise to an opportunistic choice of leadership style aimed at the achievement of a good assessment of one's work efforts, but remaining in conflict with one's superior principles, including the sense of meaning of life. Obviously, such dissonance is bound to generate stress and psychological tension experienced by people holding managerial roles, which in turn might lead to lesser engagement and weaker identification with the role and loss of efficiency. In a worst case scenario, this situation might mean job resignation or, which is even worse for the organisation, passiveness and inaction at work.

It seems that it is well worth continuing the search for factors influencing the choice and development of leadership styles. This knowledge may contribute remarkably to the development of conscious personnel policies and organisational cultures which help to achieve the desired effects and adhere to clearly specified principles.

As regards managerial positions, it would also be worthwhile investigating how the sense of meaning of life correlates and the ways in which it is manifested in managerial work. It seems justified to assume that the development of an organisation and the extension of its goal range – not confined to a narrow economic sense – will be accompanied by a closer and more visible relationship between the experienced sense of purpose in life and the type of work performed by a given individual, which is an interesting dependency to be addressed through research.

Changes in the labour market – the increasing mobility of job-seekers, positions in foreign countries and different cultures, a wider range of available jobs, etc. – and the deepening awareness of employees when choosing their employers, position and career path will all facilitate making conscious decisions to take on positions which allow for the preservation of full integrity of one's personality and compliance with one's preferred axiological systems. Therefore, it would seem advisable to conduct research into companies where the relations of power – which can significantly restrict a spontaneous choice on how one performs professional duties, including leadership styles – are very weak or do not exist at all, as happens in so-called “turquoise” companies. In such companies, thanks to the lack of the superior-subordinate relationship, there could be more room for the possible spontaneous development of one's leadership style corresponding to one's deeper individual personality and axiological conditions.

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