DYSFUNCTIONS IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE: A CASE STUDY OF DECENTRALIZED ORGANIZATION

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Purpose: The aim of this article is to identify the management dysfunctions and the functioning dysfunctions of a decentralized public organization. The research question posed by the author is contained in the inquiry: what external and internal factors reduce the operational efficiency of a decentralized public organization?

Design/methodology/approach: The text is based on qualitative research. The researcher relied on 51 open interviews. The work was based on three main theoretical frameworks: the theory of organizational pathologies, the theory of organizational politics and the theory of bureaucracy.

Findings: The research identified endogenous and exogenous sources of dysfunctions of decentralized public organizations. These include financing, lack of trust, bureaucratic structure, communication, unification and coordination, dispersed leadership, work organization, lack of trust, finances, top-down philosophy, qualifications, and lack of collaboration.

Research limitations/implications: The limitations of qualitative research are the relatively small sample size and lack of representativeness. A natural continuation of the research may be the quantitative verification of identified dysfunctions and their sources.

Practical implications: The research allowed to identify sources of dysfunction in the analyzed organization. Some of them are endogenous, so they can be eliminated by the organization itself. Knowledge about exogenous sources can also be used to improve the functioning of the organization, but with the necessary participation of external entities.

Social implications: Understanding the sources of dysfunction and eliminating them can contribute to improving organizational efficiency, thereby enhancing customer service and the effective use of public resources.

Originality/value: Understanding dysfunctions and their sources is important for theorists and managers overseeing public organizations. Knowledge in this area is crucial for streamlining organizations and prioritizing the changes being implemented.

Keywords: dysfunctions, public organization, qualitative research, decentralization.

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

Organizational dysfunction refers to phenomena that negatively impact a specific social system—either part of an organization or the entire organization. According to Sudoł (1988), organizational dysfunction is the inadequate or improper fulfillment of organizing functions, leading to organizational inefficiency. Albrecht (2003) views dysfunctions as organizational disturbances. Dysfunctions can encompass processes, such as increasing centralization, and conditions like low morale (Cameron et al., 1987). Essentially, organizational dysfunctions are problems or irregularities in an organization's operation that can hinder its effectiveness, affect employee morale, and limit its ability to achieve goals. They constitute a significant problem faced by many companies in a dynamic and complex social environment. Organized human activity has always been accompanied by various kinds of problems. Ancient writers, such as Xenophon and Aristotle, were already interested in these problems (Pasieczny, 2017), observing dysfunctions in the relatively simple organizational forms of their time. The growth and development of organizations lead to an increased likelihood of various deviations from the desired state. Organizational dysfunctions are relatively rarely the exclusive subject of consideration; however, in practice, many studies and publications contain elements aimed at understanding deviations in organizational functioning. The areas of occurrence and the mechanisms behind dysfunctions have been studied to varying degrees. The mechanisms and symptoms of dysfunctions in bureaucratic organizations (Gouldner, 1954; Merton, 1940; Pasieczny, 2017; Pasieczny, Rosiak, 2023; Peeters et al., 2018) are well known, as the model assumptions of bureaucratic organizations are well established, and their functioning is generally not corrected by market feedback mechanisms. Such dysfunctions, which are not subject to ongoing corrections, deepen and become more difficult to remove, but easier to observe. Studying dysfunctions in business is more challenging for various reasons, including the corrective mechanisms of market feedback, as well as technical reasons—companies tend to limit information about any problems and difficulties. Nonetheless, numerous studies also encompass selected aspects of business problems. The aim of this article is to identify the management dysfunctions and the functioning dysfunctions of a decentralized public organization. The research question posed by the author is contained in the inquiry: what external and internal factors reduce the operational efficiency of a decentralized public organization? In particular, the author was interested in the systemic relationships between the analyzed phenomena and their mutual reinforcement and neutralization. The article is based on research aimed at, among other things.

- Identifying dysfunctions observed in the functioning of decentralized administrative units.
- Finding the sources of these dysfunctions—determining which are endogenous and which are exogenous.
- Establishing which dysfunctions are related to the decentralization of the organizational structure.

2. Literature review

2.1. Organizational dysfunctions

Some areas of emergence of organizational dysfunctions are quite well researched. A relatively well-studied area of organizational dysfunctions is the social domain (Lencioni, 2002; Samuel Yitzhak, 2010; Stocki, 2013). Issues such as burnout (Awa et al., 2010; Chan, 2011; Halbesleben et al., 2006), dysfunctions related to various organizational cultures (Fink et al., 2012), and micromanagement (White, 2010) are analyzed. One of the key and frequently examined organizational dysfunctions is the lack of effective communication. In organizations where communication is unclear or opaque, misunderstandings can arise, leading to frustration among employees. Inadequate transmission of information regarding goals, tasks, or expectations results in misinformation and chaos, which in turn affects team productivity. Employees who are not properly informed may feel lost and undervalued, which diminishes their engagement. The problem is not technical issues but rather a lack of knowledge and motivation to communicate among managers (Pasieczny, Glinka, 2016). A source of dysfunction can also be inappropriate communication between individuals and groups (Stohl, Schell, 1991). Communication problems can be fundamentally significant for organizations, as some authors suggest that we can consider parts as organized only when communication occurs between them (Ashby, 1962). Insufficient communication can therefore directly threaten the existence of an organization. A lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities is also a source of numerous problems. When employees do not know what is expected of them, conflicts within the team and difficulties in achieving goals can arise. Misunderstanding one's responsibilities leads to confusion, resulting in low efficiency and frustration for both employees and managers. It can also create a sense of threat among employees. A source of numerous problems, dysfunctions, and even pathologies is a lack of trust (Braswell, Edwards, 2008; Pasieczny, Glinka, 2016). In organizations where trust is low, employees may avoid open communication and sharing ideas or concerns. Such an atmosphere impacts teamwork, limiting innovation and creativity. Trust is crucial for the effective functioning of any organization, and its absence can lead to decreased morale and productivity. Dysfunctions can result from a mismatch between control instruments and intensity to the level of social trust (Braswell, Edwards, 2008). Leadership plays a key role in shaping organizational culture and team effectiveness. Weak leadership, characterized by a lack of vision, support, or inspiration, can lead to low employee morale. Leaders who cannot build trust and engage the team in decision-making may encounter resistance and disillusionment from employees. Some authors even argue that dysfunctional leadership is a cancer that affects many organizations (Dandira, 2012). Weak leadership, marked by a lack of vision, support, or inspiration, can lead to low employee morale. Leaders who fail to establish trust and do not involve the team in decision-making may face resistance and discouragement from employees (Van Fleet, Griffin, 2006). Leaders play

a crucial role in creating a supportive organizational culture. Dysfunctional defensive styles significantly affect operational effectiveness and efficiency (Balthazard et al., 2006). Personnel management is a key element of effective organizational functioning. An appropriate approach to recruitment, training, employee evaluation, and workplace atmosphere can significantly impact company performance. However, in practice, dysfunctions often occur that can hinder organizational growth and lower team morale. One of the fundamental problems in personnel management may be the lack of clear recruitment criteria. Organizations often lack consistent and understandable standards that allow for effective candidate selection. As a result, they may hire individuals who do not fit the organizational culture or do not possess the required skills. This situation leads to increased employee turnover, which entails additional costs for recruiting and training new employees. On the other hand, the recruitment process may be excessively formalized, discouraging potential candidates from applying. Another issue is the lack of adequate training programs. Organizations that do not invest in their employees' development risk stagnation. Employees who do not have opportunities to enhance their skills may feel disheartened and disengaged. In the long term, a lack of development leads to reduced productivity and limited innovation within the organization. Insufficient and dysfunctional training creates a range of challenges and problems (Javdani Gandomani et al., 2015). An inadequate motivational system or ineffective control system can also lead to frustration among employees and a sense of injustice. Consequently, employees may lose motivation to work and engagement in the organization's development. Allowing dysfunctional conflict to develop can also pose a threat to the organization. This is fostered by phenomena such as organizational centralization and high communication barriers (Menon et al., 1996). A specific area of discussion regarding dysfunctions is the study of administration. Organizations in the administrative sector are often considered heavily bureaucratized, and excessive bureaucracy is another aspect that can paralyze an organization. Complex procedures and formalities can slow down decision-making processes and frustrate employees. As a result, organizations may lose flexibility and the ability to respond quickly to changing customer needs. In its ideal form, bureaucracy assumes consistency, loyalty, adaptation to the environment, and changing circumstances (Ntanos, Boulouta, 2012). However, in practice, bureaucratic systems are characterized by excessive complexity and consist of a vast number of relationships, actions, roles, and hierarchical dependencies (Ntanos, Boulouta, 2012). Theoretically, a formal, rationally organized social structure encompasses clearly defined patterns of activity in which, ideally, each series of actions is functionally linked to the organization's goals. Authority and power stemming from status reside in the office, not in the individual performing a specific role. Official actions usually occur within the previously established rules of the organization. In this way, predictable behavior and a stable set of mutual expectations are created. Moreover, formality facilitates interaction among individuals in office, despite their (possibly adversarial) private attitudes toward each other. In this way, subordinates are protected from the arbitrary actions of their superiors, as both parties are limited by a mutually recognized set of rules

(Merton, 1963). In practice, public administration makes mistakes, sometimes very serious ones. Even when recognized, they often go unaddressed, and critical voices are ignored or inadequately or belatedly responded to (Caiden, 1991). Bureaucratic organizations rely on documentation, where trust plays a minimal role. This applies to relationships with clients and other institutions. Meanwhile, according to Oomsels et al. (2019), the combination of "trust as a rule" and "distrust as a reasonable exception" is functional for interorganizational interactions, while "trust as a dogma" or "distrust as a rule" leads to dysfunctionality in interorganizational interactions. Hood (1974) sought to classify and explain some of the key mechanisms of dysfunctional operations. He identified factors such as excessive costs, counterproductivity—achieving results contrary to desired outcomes, inertia, inefficiency, and the pursuit of the same goals.

2.2. The Specificity of Decentralized Organizations

Decentralized organizational structures are characteristic of large business and administrative organizations. A decentralized organizational structure is marked by the dispersion of power and the autonomy of individuals or teams. According to the principles of New Public Management, local branches or groups of decentralized public institutions have greater freedom in decision-making, allowing them to better adapt to market specifics and customer needs. This structure also promotes flexibility and efficiency, enabling organizations to respond more quickly to changes in their environment. Decentralized systems positively influence innovative behaviors among employees (Darvishmotevali, 2019). Research indicates a relationship between the degree of delegated authority and increased organizational efficiency (Aubert, Bourdeau, 2012; Sun et al., 2022). Units that enjoy greater freedom in financial and human resources decisions have reported the greatest increases in productivity (Aubert, Bourdeau, 2012). Employees should also feel more engaged and responsible for their decisions, experiencing greater satisfaction as a result. However, according to Hales (1999), decentralization does not impact managerial behaviors if it only entails formal changes in managers' duties without accompanying changes in their selection, development, and compensation. Studies suggest that decentralized organizational decision-making structures influence role clarity, which in turn positively affects job satisfaction, although an alternative model indicates a direct relationship between decentralized decision-making structures and job satisfaction (Hansen, Høst, 2012). The size of the organization is significant in terms of the purpose of decentralization. According to Andrews (2017), there is a negative relationship between organizational size and social capital within the organization, contrasting with a positive relationship between decentralized decision-making and social capital. Decentralization of key decisions can thus overcome internal social dysfunctions associated with being a large organization. Decentralization also affects empowerment within the organization, even in units that do not have decision-making authority (Hempel et al., 2012). While decentralization is meant to allow for partially autonomous operation of units, this can

be difficult under excessive control and in conditions of a very strong culture that suppresses competing viewpoints (Willmott, 1993). A decentralized structure also presents challenges and is not always the optimal solution. According to Andrews et al. (2007), centralized decision-making works best when combined with defense, while decentralized decision-making operates most effectively in organizations that emphasize exploration. Another challenge is the difficulty in coordinating activities between different teams. Increased autonomy can lead to siloing of information, where individual teams do not share knowledge or best practices. The greater need for coordination improves horizontal communication but worsens vertical communication. As a result, decentralization can hinder coordination and communication with top management, even when coordination is critically important for the organization (Alonso et al., 2008; Fuhr, 2012).

3. Research Methodology

The research underpinning this article was conducted using open interviews, carried out by two researchers simultaneously. The interviews were partially standardized, reflected in the repeatability of questions within certain areas. This aimed to ensure relative comparability of results. Interview scenarios were prepared in advance, but it was assumed that they would serve as auxiliary guidelines, only prompting discussion of selected topics. The prepared list of questions allowed the researcher to expand on additional issues related to topics raised by the interviewees. The interviews were conducted with employees of the decentralized institution's branches, its headquarters, and its clients. The duration of the interviews ranged from 1 to 2 hours, with each interview recorded, transcribed, and coded. A total of 51 interviews were conducted. Participants were selected according to the principles of a maximum variation strategy (Miles et al., 2019). An interpretive perspective was adopted, focusing primarily on explaining and understanding the studied group (Burrell, Morgan, 2017). The study adhered to the principles of theoretical, methodological, and researcher triangulation (Denzin, 2012). Methodological triangulation was expressed through the application of three primary research methods: open interviews, analysis of internal documentation, and case studies. Theoretical triangulation involved applying different theoretical perspectives in data analysis. In particular, the theoretical basis consisted of organizational pathology theory, based on the concept of organizational equilibrium, organizational policy theory rooted in the new institutionalism school, and bureaucracy theory belonging to the administrative stream of the classical school. Researcher triangulation was achieved through the participation of two individuals in the interviews, with the entire research team comprising six researchers. Complementing the interviews were workshops conducted with employees of the organization. With participants'

consent, these were recorded and subjected to similar transcription and analysis as the interviews. The research aimed to answer the following questions:

- What dysfunctions are perceived in the functioning of decentralized administrative units?
- What are the sources of these dysfunctions— which are endogenous and which are exogenous?
- Which dysfunctions are attributed to the decentralization of the organizational structure?

The subject of the research was a decentralized organization of public administration focused on phytosanitary control. This organization consists of a central office and 16 regional units, some of which have been departmentalized geographically at lower levels, creating so-called local branches. Each regional unit has the freedom to shape its organizational structure, and they also differ in the personnel management systems they employ and the standards of technical equipment. Each regional unit is financed by the head of the central administration at the regional level (the voivode). This means that the level of funding for individual regional units varies, leading to differences in salary levels and technical equipment among the regional units. The head of the entire organization has fairly limited authority over the leaders of the regional units. His role is to coordinate the actions of the regional units, implement solutions, and oversee processes of national significance.

4. Results and discussion

Caption placed under figures should be justified, TNR 12 pt. font with single line spacing. Complex captions consisting of the main caption and explanatory notes for figure details should have the width equal to the text width. The literature indicates that serious **communication** problems can arise in decentralized organizations (Pasieczny, Glinka, 2016; Stohl, Schell, 1991). Statements from representatives of the organization and clients seem to confirm these claims.

Exactly. There is no official procedure; it's merely a matter of courtesy, so to speak. It should be that he writes an official email either to the main office according to the procedure or to me as the regional head. Otherwise, they just click to contact the manager [UNITK01].

Q. But there are no such recommendations? So these emails are simply a matter of courtesy? A. Yes [UNITK02].

Of course, at our level, because we have the names of all employees, one could theoretically send an email to anyone. However, this is not usually done; correspondence is typically shared with the relevant manager. But there should be a possibility that, for instance,

from the secretariat level, there's a connection through this system with another regional office [UNITW02].

They refer you to the website. They send you to the website where current information is posted, but you have to check that site regularly. The website is, let's say, moderately user-friendly; if someone uses it daily, they know where everything is, but sometimes you have to search [CL02].

I've also had instances where I called Biłgoraj, and either they didn't know, or they referred me elsewhere, or said they would call back, but tomorrow to Warsaw. So then I called Warsaw and had to listen to the fact that I shouldn't have called them but should have called Biłgoraj, and then they sent me back to their website. I hadn't been on it for a long time; maybe something has changed, but I doubt it [CL11].

Yes, yes, yes. But there should be some kind of publicly accessible database… [CL04].

In the analyzed organization, problems arise both in communicating with the external environment and in internal communication. While the decentralized units do not report issues with information flow within their units, communication with other decentralized units poses many challenges. This phenomenon is typical of large, decentralized organizations. Delegation can potentially lead to a loss of control and coordination due to discrepancies in information and incentives (Mookherjee, 2006). The flow of information between decentralized units mainly relies on informal, horizontal contacts. The formal route extends the communication process. Communication with clients is rated very critically by the latter. According to Prendergast (2003), communication problems with clients in public organizations stem from a lack of trust. In the case of the analyzed organization, this lack of trust is almost inherent in its activities, as it is involved in regulatory tasks, which inherently implies a contradiction between the organization and its clients.

An extremely undesirable effect of decentralization can be autonomy, which manifests as a shift in goals (Kieżun, 1971). In the case of the discussed organization, this is not possible because the goals are defined by legal regulations. However, there are noticeable actions requiring **unification** and a clear **lack of coordination**.

For registration or for records. Of course, they all contain similar information, but they differ. For example, when I tell someone, "When you see the map of the country, please click on the Greater Poland Voivodeship and then on the forms". If there's an application established in the regulation, there is a degree of freedom. But that's what the Chief Inspectorate is for—to design something like that and standardize it so that everyone has the same information. What's the problem? [UNITP03].

I know it feels awkward for me to say this, but coordination in the delegation seems to be…
I try to do my best, but I know that without direct coordination between the Voivodeship Inspectorate and the department, it leads to differing opinions. Depending on the situation, sometimes the departments have one perspective, and sometimes we have another, while most likely the Voivodeship Inspectorate has its own view. There's this directness,

and sometimes we are the link that might distort things; maybe that direct contact is better [UNITŁ05].

Could something be expedited? Probably not, because with the current structure, that path must be maintained. If the structure were slightly different, then maybe many things would be expedited [UNITŁ03].

But I'm saying that in some departments, there are very few people and a lot of work, so some departments might feel they don't know enough or… [UNITŁ02].

The Chief says the regional office conducts training. Great. But, dear colleagues, if we start from my twelve years of observation here, everyone training in their own way on these legal nuances will lead to misunderstandings, and we'll diverge. The chief once said that if we go in different directions, it will lead to confusion. There should be one instructor in a given field. Another issue is that not every regional inspector can afford or has the opportunity to find the right expert in a given area [UNITK03].

During the research, no signs of dysfunctional autonomy were recorded, though this does not mean it does not occur in such a large organization. However, there are undoubtedly problems with coordination and unification of actions. Different procedures apply in decentralized units, as indicated by the respondents; even some of the forms used in the organization are not standardized and differ among units. There is also an issue with the interpretation of regulations in different parts of the organization, which, in the context of imperfect information flow, creates a number of problems when handling client matters. The conducted research confirms previous studies showing that decentralization can hinder coordination and communication with top management, even when coordination is extremely important for the organization (Alonso et al., 2008; Fuhr, 2012). In this context, it is understandable that some respondents suggest that certain functions should be centralized. This would enable simpler communication and, above all, a uniform interpretation of regulations. The specific structure of the organization also means that decentralized units cannot assist each other, for example, by delegating employees, as each is funded from a different regional budget. This creates a specific rigidity within the organization, which contradicts the idea of decentralization, as it is theoretically supposed to provide greater flexibility (Mookherjee, 2006). The relatively mild criticism of the lack of coordination is not surprising, as the principle of official hierarchy applies in each of the decentralized units, causing lower-level employees to be reserved in expressing criticism of the organization.

Trust is a key element forming the foundation of organizational and societal development (Cook, 2001) as well as a basis for desirable ethical behaviors (Pučėtaitė et al., 2010). The organization does not enjoy a high level of trust from its clients. In clients' statements, a clear lack of trust in the organization is evident.

When it's difficult, it means that this office is so important, and everyone goes there with such stress—oh God, will I get the phytosanitary certificate, or not? It's just, you know, everyone at the management level, the officials like to feel very important, very needed [CL04].

Q. Wouldn't it be better to issue it remotely?

A. Exactly. That's why it could be done remotely. That's what I mentioned about trusted exporters. We presumably send out between two hundred and five hundred trucks a year, and we've been doing this for, I don't know, twenty-something years; why aren't we… [CL04].

The statements from clients clearly highlight a lack of trust in the organization. They perceive a lack of trust from the organization towards them and a certain bureaucratic mentality that gives them a sense of importance (Merton, 1963). This attitude of the organization and its employees towards clients can be partly explained by the mission of the organization itself. It is responsible for regulatory actions, which places it in a confrontational position with clients. At the same time, despite the decentralized structure, there is a lack of operational flexibility, especially in situations involving inspections of large, established clients. This is clearly at odds with the postulate (Oomsels et al., 2019) that the combination of "trust as the rule" and "distrust as a reasonable exception" should be the standard in relationships. It is also important to remember that public administration organizations operate as bureaucracies based on formalization and documentation. Therefore, the postulate of increased trust could only be realized through changes in external and internal regulations that would allow for less emphasis on formalizing controls over selected clients.

Leadership plays a crucial role in public organizations as well. Issues with distributed leadership in the studied organization are perceived by clients.

It only requires the will to act. Frankly speaking, the most important factor will be political decisions. It's not a small structure either; it's quite a large service. Well, it's certainly not as large as the police, but let's say a few thousand people work there, right? So, as the old wise saying goes, "A fish rots from the head". When the higher-ups command, that's how it will be at the lower levels. If the chief isn't overseeing the organization, if they aren't managing the operations, well, you know how often that ends up, right? [CL13].

The analyzed organization is characterized by weak leadership, and this phenomenon is structural. The powers of the Chief Inspector, who heads the organization, are limited and mainly consist of coordinating the activities of decentralized units. The head of the organization initiates and takes integrative and coordinating actions; however, in practice, the leaders of decentralized units feel more dependent on regional representatives of the central authorities (voivodes), as they decide on the budget allocations for those units. Such structurally weak leadership can lead to resistance and discouragement among employees (Van Fleet, Griffin, 2006). On the other hand, any attempts by the organization's leader to strengthen their power

would likely meet with resistance from the heads of decentralized units, especially those who can count on support from local representatives of the central administration.

Working in the analyzed institution requires high **qualifications**. Employees in inspector positions must have completed specialized (demanding) studies and passed a state examination. However, the development of staff faces several challenges.

> I mean, if neither the manager nor I were there, it would be tough in the department because these girls are new. They need to be taught everything… They have no experience at all; you have to dictate even the letters to them. They are really trying; they are eager to learn, but it will take some more time for everything to come together… [UNITŁ02].

> Q. What does the process of teaching people look like? Because when you say a year, do you send them to training, or do they learn more alongside someone?

> A. Well, they have their own mentor, a guardian angel who teaches them. Unfortunately, they sit next to them and we say, "Listen, here is the EZD, to create a folder, you do this. To add a case to it, you choose here and here. If you want to share it, do it like this; if you want to pass it on, do it like that". If you want to create a report, you have to make a report, check if everything matches, and so on. We teach them step by step [UNITP03].

> Recently, there was training for managers, and there was one manager and one employee. I was there, let's say from my area of expertise. And it was a discussion. There was a lawyer from the Chief Inspectorate, and there were substantive employees from various offices, and that's how it looked. And then, of course… [UNITL03].

> Yes, the Standards of Effective Supervision were there. I'll say this: how much time did we waste on that? The gains are what they are. I'm not negatively inclined, because every meeting brings something. I just wish someone would finally come up with something that would actually… I don't know… [UNITW05].

Insufficient and dysfunctional training leads to a number of challenges and problems (Javdani Gandomani et al., 2015). In the studied organization, training cannot be classified as dysfunctional, but it is insufficient and sometimes too general. Most training focuses on regulatory changes, but as the respondents point out, they are often not specific enough, and employees frequently still do not know how to apply new regulations after training. Additionally, due to financial constraints, not all employees undergo training; only selected individuals receive training and are then expected to pass on their knowledge to others. Considering the unsatisfactory quality of training, these solutions should be viewed as dysfunctional, as they do not ensure an adequate level of professional competence. Given the relative weakness of the training programs, the importance of onboarding and training by more experienced colleagues increases. This training model is considered effective and represents a real, cost-effective alternative to the traditional training model (Farris, Stancliffe, 2001; Gaylord-Ross et al., 1995). However, considering the significant workload faced by some employees, especially during peak seasons, peer training could impact the efficiency of those providing the training.

Complex processes and ineffective procedures can lead to frustration and slow down operations, which restricts the flexibility of the organization. The studied organization is built on a **bureaucratic model**, characterized by numerous dysfunctions.

I need to have everything on paper as well, so in addition to having it electronically, I have to print everything, stamp it, describe it. But, well, that's just how it is here; it's probably a matter of habit [UNITW03].

In line with the times, you know. Instead of issuing a receipt, they could, I don't know, have it recorded in the system and issue a monthly invoice.

Q. An electronic invoice, too?

A. Exactly, an electronic one. That would be more convenient for us, but instead, we have to deal with three copies: two for them, one for us, and then there's that mountain of papers [CL04].

In the end, they have about three times more work because of the import certificates and translations they imposed on themselves. It used to be three pages, but now there are at least seven pages for a single application, and they have to review and compile everything. They need to sign everything, which naturally takes longer [CL04].

Q. What do the service users say they would like to change about you?

A. Bureaucracy.

Q. And in what way...?

A. They don't want to have to bring in all those papers and so on. Well, obviously, but that's just how it is [UNITP03].

No, this is a bit absurd. For example, I'm an exporter, but I buy from a company that supplies me with packaged apples, right? I'm not physically buying those pallets because I don't need to. But I had to buy those pallets just for paperwork's sake, so to speak, to show that I'm buying the pallets, which is absurd because I'm buying from a company [CL04].

The analyzed organization is bureaucratized, and this is noticeable both to employees and clients. As Caiden (1991) claims, even when errors and dysfunctions of bureaucracy are observed, they often go unaddressed, and critical voices are ignored or met with insufficient or delayed responses. Such phenomena can also be observed in this case. Employees see that their work is excessively formalized, and even the introduction of an electronic document flow does not eliminate paper documentation. They perceive an excessive burden from bureaucratic tasks and wish for this situation to change. At the same time, they exhibit a fatalistic attitude and a lack of hope that improvement will be possible. Clients express criticism more openly, providing examples of absurd behaviors from the organization that sometimes incur additional costs for them. They also recognize proposals for simple improvements that could be implemented in the organization. However, as previously noted, communication between the organization and its clients is not satisfactory.

When an organization lacks clearly defined values or when its values, goals, and implemented solutions are inconsistent, employees may feel confused and disengaged (Flieger, 2018). Despite decentralization, employees perceive **top-down** actions imposed on decentralized units from above.

Q. So, is the direction simply top-down?

A. Yes, that's how it is supposed to be, and that's it. There are many such things in the country, such regulations; it has to be that way, even though it's not necessarily good.

Q. Is anyone asking for your opinion? I mean within the organization.

A. No [UNITL03].

The decentralization of the organization is intended to bring it closer to clients, increase its flexibility, and empower employees. In this case, structural decentralization is profound, also encompassing financial issues and the shaping of internal structures of individual units. However, many solutions are imposed by the central authority, and in many instances, no one asks for employees' opinions. It is likely that this is partly a result of changes imposed by legislation, including those mandated by international institutions. On the other hand, those in charge of the entire institution can introduce certain changes arbitrarily due to the potentially prolonged response time of a decentralized organization to changes that are implemented more democratically and from the bottom up.

In the functioning of any organization, whether it provides public services or business services, close **cooperation** with surrounding institutions is essential for effectiveness.

Q. Are there any joint inspections, like with the Sanitary Inspection, or...?

A. So far, there have been no such joint inspections. They operate with their methods; we operate with ours. They have their procedures, and we have our procedures [UNITL02].

The specificity of the activities carried out means that the analyzed organization should collaborate with other institutions involved in food safety. Such institutions include the State Sanitary Inspection (Sanepid), border guard, road transport inspection, police, and customs services. Conducted interviews indicate that cooperation with other public institutions is occasional, and there is no ongoing exchange of information among them. Such problems have been known for many years and limit the effectiveness of the public sector (Wilkins et al., 2016). Each of these organizations has its statutory goals and lacks motivation to carry out tasks that do not directly stem from their statutory provisions. Furthermore, a consequence of the siloed structure of many of them is that the initiative for cooperation must come from the top. Meanwhile, the decentralization of the analyzed structure results, as previously indicated, in a rather weak position for the top management, which complicates the initiation of joint ventures with other public entities. Financial conditions, which are presented in the next section, are also significant.

Insufficient **funding** is a common problem for many public organizations. The organization under analysis also faces serious financial issues.

I'll say this: many things would be easier to handle, starting with salaries. If salaries were higher, we could acquire even better staff, but really, during our recent recruitment, I was nervous just hoping that at least one person would apply. Sometimes there are recruitments where no one shows up, and that's very difficult because it leaves one feeling... [UNITŁ05].

Q. What's missing?

A. Money.

Q. For what?

A. For better salaries [UNITK04].

Our incentive system, yes, if there's any money left, the director simply divides it among the inspectors. If there's any left. But when a lot of people are retiring, there's nothing left because we have to pay out benefits, and there's not much to distribute. So, well, the inspector does what he can with what he has. But the voivode doesn't add money for us because we have a lot of tasks… Well, he can compare us among the inspections... But how can he compare? He doesn't compare anything. We have a fixed budget, and we work with that budget. There's nothing... Well, that's how it is with the combined service. And I say that in other voivodeships it may be that the inspection is important for the voivode. But you can see, for Mazowieckie, it's hard for him to care about us, right? When there are so many strategic things happening in Warsaw. For the Mazowieckie voivode, I'm not saying he wouldn't want to, but there are more pressing matters, right? [UNITW05].

Well, standardly, because we have 4 inspectors working in the branch, we have 1 company car, and each inspector is responsible for a different area of work [UNITŁ01].

The organization under analysis is underfunded. Salaries, although varied across different units, are generally very low. In some units, they may be slightly higher due to additional funds provided by regional heads of government administration, but they are not attractive for highly qualified employees. This leads to low interest from potential employees and problems with recruitment. Consequently, the workforce is aging, which may cause future issues with the succession of organizational know-how. Units located in larger urban centers must compete for employees with companies in the agricultural production and export sector, which offer significantly more attractive salaries. This also results in high turnover rates in these units. Salary issues were repeatedly raised in the interviews—respondents expressed expectations for salary increases. This aligns with research showing a positive impact of salary increases on the well-being of public sector employees (Ryu, 2016). An inadequate salary level is among the factors that precede dissatisfaction with the organization and a low level of attachment to it (Boles et al., 2012). Opportunities for employee participation in courses and training are also limited. Funding problems also lead to a lack of necessary work equipment. Employees do not always have access to transportation for client visits and do not always possess mobile equipment that facilitates their tasks. Furthermore, the varying levels of funding for individual

units result in differing rates of investment and, consequently, issues with the compatibility of systems used across different units.

Interviews indicate serious problems with **work organization**.

Q. How do these laboratories differ?

A. That one is private. So it's obviously possible [UNITK02].

Can this process be expedited? There was a recent audit, and they criticized the length of testing because it took three and a half months. They explain that it's not feasible. But something doesn't add up to me because with PNG, there's a certifying body for organic farming, and this year, I learned from a friend at that organization that he gets results within a week, so something seems off here [UNITK01].

We have established rules regarding cooperation, informing each other about who makes decisions, and who participates in the consultation process. We have those rules in place.

Q. And do you also specify what went wrong and why?

A. That's usually analyzed afterward. We have meetings with department heads, typically once a year [UNITKL01].

And there's also the issue of duty, because, like I said, on Saturdays there's not even a duty at the border. There is a theoretical duty at the border, say, with Belarus, but it's only… They only have duty just before holidays. It's not that... For example, when we send something on the twenty-third, right? Or Christmas Eve is a working day. On Christmas Eve, they only work with a partial team, not a full one [CL04].

Well, currently, it's happening. That car has ready goods, and the one on the left also has ready goods. We have 3:35 PM. Sorry, 2:35 PM. They could have left at 8 AM. But no, because Ania just went to pick up the certificate, and certificates are collected from 1:30 PM to 3:30 PM. I think the main issue is working hours and the lack of weekend duties, for instance, right? Because it often happens that, I don't know, numbers change at the last minute, or cars... [CL04].

So for me, the fact that officials leave at 3 PM—sorry, they go home then, and Saturday and Sunday are off days, and they only start again on Monday at 8 AM—is a disaster [CL09].

I don't know. You know what, it's... Everything is just difficult. There's a multitude of tasks, and they keep piling them on us. Maybe the regulations will change now. Because should an inspector go and collect soil, dragging it through the fields? Well, the producer should be doing that [UNITW03].

Sometimes some inspectors are so complacent that they even provide us with the protocol to fill out. Inspectors, you know, the protocol they should write. That's absurd. I write that a sample of seven kilograms was taken, according to the regulations, and no quarantined items were detected. It's truly ridiculous. Everyone knows this; no matter who you visit, the people receiving phytosanitary certificates are familiar with that form [CL12].

Yes, yes. Would you be willing to pay extra to have certain samples tested faster? I think every producer would be willing to do that, no problem. Especially a large producer, representative, breeder—everyone cares about time. We pay a lot; it's really substantial money. But if it's just about that, then the money doesn't matter at that moment, right? There's a simple rule: whoever arrives first gets tested first, just a regular queue, right? I bring samples; they are taken out and placed on the windowsill. Once the windowsill is full, all the others wait in line as well. The period when a plant grows on the windowsill is four to six weeks, so that's how long we wait. However, the throughput is limited. And now, let's say someone got sick... I had such a situation. A person got sick and can't read, and I say, don't you have a backup plan? Well, we have a young one, but she's still in training and doesn't have experience yet [CL16].

Dysfunctions related to work organization manifest as inflexibility and prolonged response times. Their causes are complex and not immediately obvious. On one hand, clients notice that institution employees prioritize their convenience; on the other hand, employees complain about inadequate work equipment and complicated procedures. These problems are also recognized by clients. The nature of the work at the analyzed organization requires quick action, as the quality of controlled goods often depends on it. However, as interviewees indicate, this swift action is often lacking. There's also a lack of adjustment of working hours and schedules to meet client needs. The previously mentioned funding issues contribute to the institution operating without reserves in human resources. Young employees, with little experience, often lack the necessary skills for independent work, and after gaining experience, they frequently leave the organization. This results in staffing shortages, bottlenecks, and backlogs. It seems that many dysfunctions related to work organization stem from the public nature of the organization and its bureaucratic structure, despite decentralization. This organization is a monopoly and is not subject to automatic market-correcting mechanisms. Where such a market does appear, as one interviewee mentioned regarding laboratories, it turns out that faster and more convenient actions from the client's perspective are indeed possible. As Caiden (1991) states, public administration makes mistakes, sometimes very serious ones. Even when these mistakes are recognized, they often go unaddressed, and criticism is ignored or responded to insufficiently or too late. In this case, the signals coming from clients seem easy to identify, but there's a lack of motivation, resources, and willingness to analyze and change the situation.

However, the organization under analysis also demonstrates notable strengths which, although not the central focus of this discussion, merit attention due to their potential to mitigate the adverse effects of the identified dysfunctions and to serve as a foundation for prospective restructuring initiatives. These strengths include a high level of public service motivation (PSM) among employees, substantial engagement in organizational improvement efforts initiated by management, as well as the accumulation of experience, knowledge, and well-established routines developed over the years (Pasieczny et al., 2024). An additional

opportunity lies in the considerable benchmarking potential. Analogous institutions exist across all European Union member states, with some offering exemplary practices that may serve as reference points. For instance, the Dutch National Plant Protection Organization, established in 1899, underwent a structural transformation in 2012 through its merger with other governmental agencies, resulting in the formation of the Nederlandse Voedselen Warenautoriteit (NVWA; www5), or the Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority. This institution holds responsibility for a broad spectrum of food and consumer product safety. In practice, tasks related to crop monitoring and export certification in the Netherlands are carried out by four entities, categorized according to the type of crops. The Dutch system is significantly more centralized than its Polish counterpart, with a single agency overseeing a wide array of food safety domains, encompassing both plant- and animal-based products. The flexibility of procedures and the regulatory opportunities afforded by EU legislation have positioned the Netherlands as a major intermediary in the trade and re-export of foreign food products, including those originating from Poland. Research conducted by Kłobukowska et al. (2024) indicates that the Dutch equivalent of polish phytosanitary inspection is considerably more oriented toward supporting commercial activity. Its operational model resembles that of a business entity more than a regulatory authority. In France, responsibility for agricultural oversight is vested in the Regional Directorates for Food, Agriculture and Forestry (Directions Régionales de l'Alimentation, de l'Agriculture et de la Forêt – DRAAF), which report both to the Ministry of Agriculture and Food and to regional prefects. Unlike in Poland, French farmers and exporters of plants and plant-based products benefit from information bulletins aimed at enterprises seeking international market expansion. Furthermore, agricultural export advisors play a pivotal role by conducting economic missions in numerous countries. French authorities also provide stakeholders with extensive access to digital solutions. In Germany, plant health protection is managed by various entities whose organizational structure depends on the federal state. Nonetheless, harmonized procedures for the notification of plant exports are implemented nationwide. According to Kłobukowska et al. (2024), the German inspection system is characterized by a lower degree of formalism and is more focused on facilitating export activities than on strict regulatory enforcement. In Spain, companies intending to export plant products are required to submit an application via a dedicated platform to obtain a phytosanitary certificate. This application must specify the designated border control post, seaport, airport of departure, or a certified inspection center authorized by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, where the goods will be subject to physical inspection. The phytosanitary certificate is issued if required by the destination country's regulations. Notably, specialized control centers for freight trucks are allocated exclusively for export inspections. In contrast to the Polish model, Spanish sanitary services operate continuously (24/7) and maintain close collaboration with customs and quality inspection authorities (Kłobukowska et al., 2024). It appears that many of the solutions described above could be feasibly adopted within the Polish context. While most of them would

require some financial investment, these expenditures are not necessarily substantial. What is primarily needed is conceptual clarity and organizational commitment.

5. Summary

Organizational dysfunctions can have serious consequences, including high employee turnover, reduced work quality, financial losses, and a negative impact on the company's reputation. It is crucial for organizations to identify and address these issues to create an environment conducive to efficiency, collaboration, and innovation. A decentralized organizational structure offers many benefits, such as increased flexibility, better employee motivation, and the promotion of innovation. However, organizations must be aware of potential challenges, such as inconsistent decision-making, difficulties in coordination, and rising costs. The key to success in such a structure is effective management that balances the autonomy of units with the need for coordinated actions across the organization. Only by doing so can the full potential of a decentralized structure be realized, leading to long-term success. The dysfunctions identified in this analysis are largely typical of large public organizations. Bureaucracy, weak material motivation systems, low levels of collaboration with the external environment, and resistance to change are symptoms of dysfunctions found in most large public organizations, regardless of their power structures. At the same time, the organization under analysis faces challenges characteristic of decentralized organizations: coordination issues, system diversity, differences in technical equipment levels, and information flow problems. These are not atypical phenomena. Decentralization is one of the most common reforms in the public sector worldwide. Over the past few decades, many countries have taken formal steps to strengthen local authorities, pledging to accelerate development and improve management. Decentralization has also affected certain public institutions, as seen in this case study. Although decentralization attracts much attention, systematic practical knowledge about it remains limited and often falls short of expectations (Smoke, 2015). Therefore, decisions regarding potential decentralization of a bureaucratic organization should be made after thoroughly examining the unique characteristics of that organization (Porter, Olsen, 1976). The sources of dysfunction identified during the analysis of the studied organization are schematically presented in Figure 1. These include problems in the following areas: financing, lack of trust, bureaucratic structure, communication, unification and coordination, dispersed leadership, work organization, lack of trust, finances, top-down philosophy, human resources, and lack of collaboration.
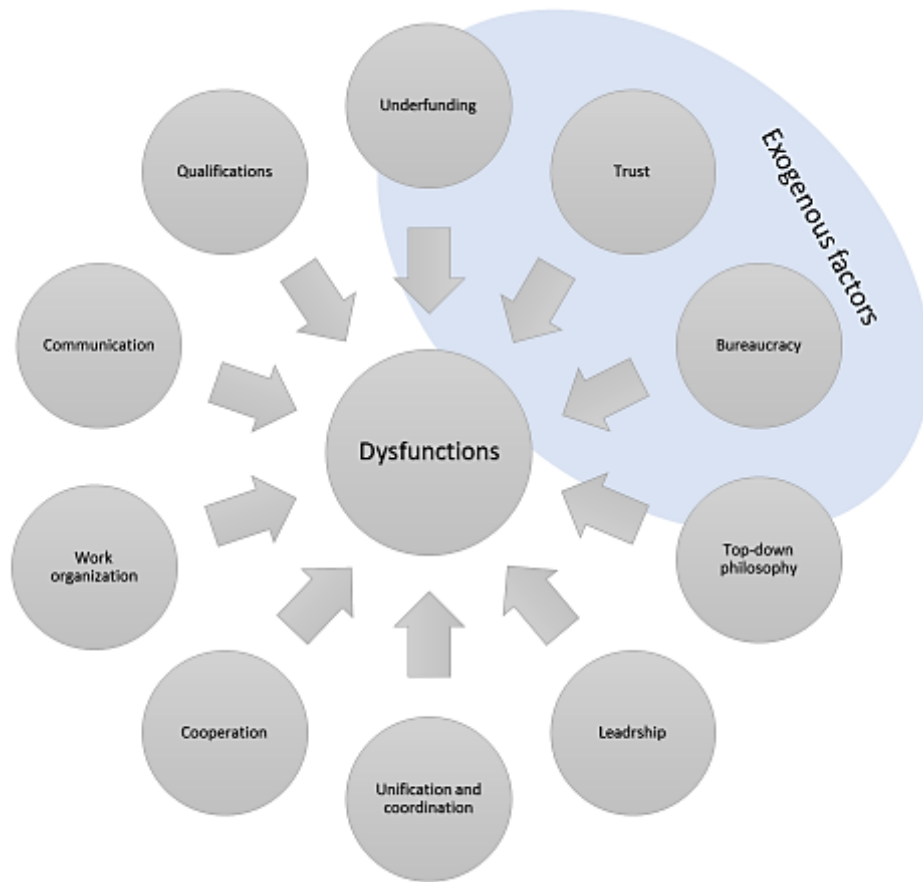
Figure 1. Sources of dysfunction in the examined organization.

Source: own work.

The analyzed case indicates that a significant portion of the dysfunctions present are endogenic in nature. While they are typical for bureaucratic organizations, their roots lie in the adopted organizational solutions. Endogenic dysfunctions include poor internal communication and communication with the external environment, insufficient unification and coordination, dispersed leadership, inadequate personnel management, lack of collaboration with the environment, dysfunctional work organization, and a partially top-down philosophy. Exogenic factors include insufficient funding, lack of trust, and the bureaucratic structure and philosophy of the organization. It is important to note the systemic nature of the identified factors. Exogenic factors particularly affect the organization as they inherently possess dysfunctional characteristics and further contribute to the emergence of additional dysfunctions. However, there are more interdependencies among these dysfunctional factors. This pertains to, for example, the relationship between the lack of trust and the top-down philosophy, the bureaucratic structure and work organization, as well as general trust issues. Limited funding, in turn, has a strong impact on staffing problems and work organization. Eliminating or mitigating many of the discussed dysfunctions would be aided by a professional human resources development department, which potentially plays a key role in managing and/or preventing dysfunctional behaviors, such as: developing employee awareness and skills;

effectively managing practices, structures, and operational mechanisms; and fostering an ethical culture and management climate (MacKenzie et al., 2011). However, such a department is lacking in the organization under analysis. The context in which the organization operates is also significant. The most important exogenic source of dysfunction in the studied organization is undoubtedly the excessively low level of funding. As a result, there is an unsatisfactory level of salaries, leading to difficulties in recruiting new employees and an overall aging of the organization. The consequence of low funding is also insufficient and often outdated equipment within the institution. Compared to the financial resources, salary levels, and equipment of many clients of this organization, there is a significant gap. Alongside the obvious inconveniences associated with performing work, this also contributes to a decline in the prestige of the institution and its employees. Only some of the identified dysfunctions appear to be closely related to the decentralized structure. A typical dysfunction is the weak flow of information and communication problems within such a structure. Communication is effective within decentralized units; however, on an organizational scale, it is highly formalized. The communication between the organization and its clients is also weak. A serious issue is the dispersed leadership, which does not support mobilization and efficient coordinated actions that extend beyond the decision-making areas of decentralized units. At the same time, a paradoxical situation can be observed. Decentralization, which aims to enhance flexibility, empower employees, and democratize the decision-making process, tends to lead to top-down actions due to problems with unification and coordination. This may be related to the limited controllability of such an organization. It seems that eliminating some of these dysfunctions does not have to be difficult. The analyzed institution also has its strengths, which, however, were not the focus of this article. It is on these strengths that the recovery process can be based.

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