

## Dynamic Meaning Systems of Consciousness of a Criminal Personality

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### ABSTRACT

The importance of the studied problem is determined by the fact that in contemporary Russian society, along with social, political and economic problems, there is a significant crime rate growth, which in its turn leads to an increase in the number of people convicted of various crimes. The current penitentiary system in the country, despite a great accumulated experience of correction and reforming the personality of a criminal, is generally focused on traditional punitive methods of work with convicts and does not prove to be effective enough. The analysis of studies on this issue, suggests that the ineffectiveness of penal institutions is explained by the acquisition of such negative traits as the propensity for violence, greed, disrespect for society, etc. by convicts while serving their sentences. The methods aimed at reforming an offender do not cause any productive changes in the deformed personality. In this context, this article aims to study the personality of a convict while serving a sentence. The leading approach to the study of this problem should be a holistic, a systemic and dialectical approaches, which ensures the integrity and comprehensive of the study, based on a holistic personal development, taking into account the history of the personality. The article deals with the results of empirical studies of dynamic semantic systems of consciousness and structures of the subjective reality of a convict. The results of the study of semantic systems through their reflection in the individual personality outlook of a convict have been presented in the article. The materials of this article are of practical value to staff members of the Penitentiary Service, psychologists and social workers of penitentiary institutions.

### KEYWORDS

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## Introduction

The main specific features of contemporary Russian society are its social polarization, division into a majority of the poor and minority of the rich. There is a conflict between the essence of conducted economic reforms and

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expectations, aspirations of a considerable majority of people. The space of social stratification is reduced to almost one indicator - property (capital, property, income) (according to the Center for the study of social structure and social stratification, Moscow). In addition, there are economic and political changes that are also negative: the fall of the Russian economy, a difficult political situation in the world arena (the imposition of sanctions, international isolation of Russia, the Russian embargo, etc.). These changes lead to the fact that there is an increasing wave of discontent in society, an increasing number of the unemployed, a decline in the standard of living of population is observed, as well as the increase in crime and the number of convicted people of various crimes. The magnitude of the crime rate and the number of convicted persons who are in custody, is directly proportional to the level of the system of values, moral and ethical and morality development of society. But if the growth of crime depends on the social, political and economic situation of the society, then the question arises: why do we see the rise of the crimes repetition? The aim of the penitentiary legislation is to correct convicted persons and to prevent new crimes both by convicts and other persons (Ribak, 2001). However, the penitentiary system, developed in Russia, as a rule, does not provide a required reformation of a convict, and serves to isolate a criminal from society (Bebenin & Bagdasaryan, 2008; Zhuleva, 2000; Povarenkov, 2014; Mikhlin, 1991; Myasishev, 1966; Alferov, 1990; Antsyferova, 1993; Ratinov, 1979; Antsyferova, 1993; Alferov, 1990).

The problem of correction and reforming an offender should touch upon the study of the individual specificity of the inner life, reconstruction of a subjective picture of the world of the personality, its value-semantic sphere (Salakhova, 2016, Kalinina et al., 2016; Antonyan, 1996; Gernet, 1905; Debol'skii, 1995). Taking into account the fact that the value-semantic sphere is a central, nuclear formation of the personality, and, acting as a whole on a person's behavior in a given situation, determines the general direction of his life (Asmolov, 1990; Lomov, 1984; Vygotsky, 2000; Antonyan, 1996). The system of value orientations and related orientation of the personality are a central link, ultimately determining a law-abiding character or wrongfulness of human behavior (Leontiev, 1977; Predov; 1980; Platonov, 1980). As A.N. Leontiev (1977) points out, "to understand human behavior, it is necessary to disclose its nature."

### **Methodological Framework**

In order to study the systems of meaning through their reflection in the personality outlook, we used a technique of ultimate meanings (TUM). From our point of view, this technique carries a significant informative load in the context of the problem, as the individual assessment in the subjects' philosophical views is enlarged to the scale of a universal significance, which implies their projections of the deep meaning structure of a personality. In this context, we can discuss the projective nature of philosophical generalizations, reflecting rather a deep and intimate value and meaning orientations of a personality. This feature allows us to assume a minimum degree of the distorting influence of psychological defense mechanisms. Generalized judgment assumes its analysis as a unit of the world view analysis. At the same time a generalized judgment is a philosophical criterion for the differentiation of a judgment.

In our opinion, the prospects and adequacy of the indirect diagnosis of deep personal structures is connected with the fact that the ideological structure is a



projection of dynamic meaning structures onto the plane of consciousness that form a meaningful semantic-level personality structure. In addition, the stability of individual meaning structures in time determines a specific outline as the basis of individual structure of meaning relationships on which situational, newly emerged or previously perceived meanings are superimposed.

TMM data processing was carried out by means of a structural analysis, content analysis and projective analysis.

Structural analysis aimed at identifying the individual characteristics of the meaning strand was carried out by means of quantitative indicators, such as the absolute number of ultimate categories (T (UC)), the absolute number of nodal categories (N (NC)), the connectivity index of the resultant structure (CI), the absolute number of non-recurrent categories formulated by a tested person, the average length of the strands (ALS.) and productivity, defined as the ratio of the total absolute number of non-recurrent categories named by a tested person in relation to initial categories.

Structural indicators together reflect the degree of maturity and development of an individual world view. Accordingly, the more formulated the world view is, the more nodal categories are present, and as a result it gives a greater coherence, average chain length and productivity.

A content analysis was performed to identify the relative frequency of occurrence of certain types of categories in the police records. According to the three specific types of categories, the authors identified three methods of meaningful quantitative indicators:

- Decentration Index (DI) is defined as the proportion of categories in an individual record, in which other people act as subjects of the action. The DI allows you to see the extent to which the subject's own "I" stands as an absolute meaning center of the world;

- An index of reflexivity is defined as the proportion of the categories that describe not action, but mental reflection, certain acts of consciousness in the broadest sense, intellectual and reflexive (to know, understand, etc.), as well as direct-sensory (to feel, remember, etc). The presence of the latter indicates the development of the inner world, awareness of one's mental functioning in the absence of such a category, according to Leontiev (1977) it is a violation of regulatory functions of consciousness in relation to actions;

- Negativity index (NI) is defined as the proportion of the categories which express direct denial in the grammatical form ("not afraid", "not be lonely," etc.). According to Leontiev, the NI reflects the homeostatic orientation of the individual, expresses the pattern of a defensive behavior, a tendency to restrict any activity not caused by situational necessity.

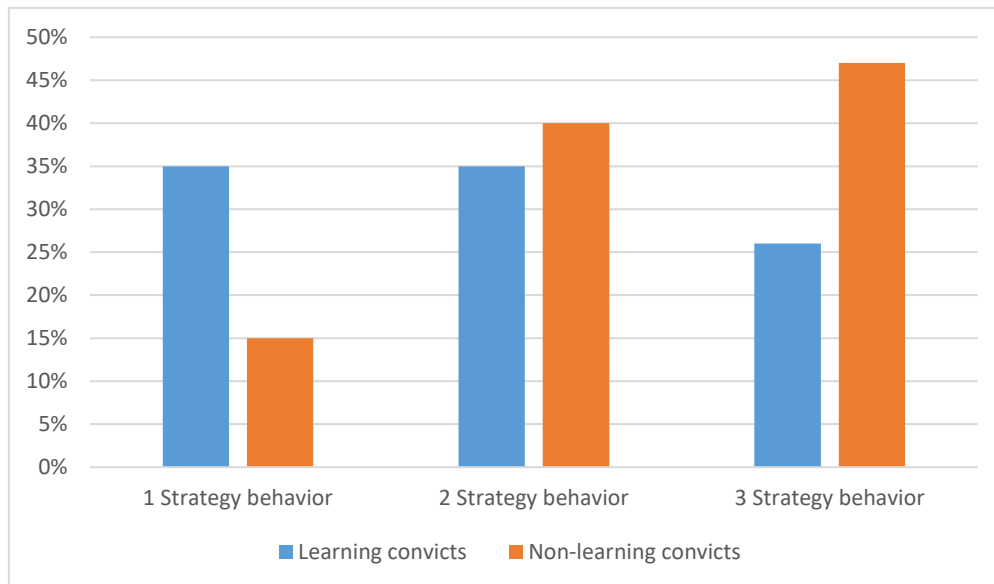
Projective TMM data analysis is a meaningful interpretation of the sense circuits and structures in terms of their reflection in the deep personality characteristics of semantic sphere of the subjects. Currently there are no standard instructions and procedures for a projective TUM analysis.

## Results

The results of sense, structure and projection studies were added to a common matrix for further mathematical and statistical data analysis. As a

criterion to determine the statistical significance of differences we used the U - the Mann-Whitney test for nonparametric samples.

The study allowed us to identify the main trends in the structure of the need-motivational sphere of the convict groups LC and NLC (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Strategy behavior of convicts in a correctional institution

The results indicate that the percentage of convicts with positive orientation and a favorable trend towards re-socialization occurs in the LC group, whereas in the group NLC this figure is much lower.

The number of ultimate categories is presented by a small range, but in the group of LC, it is also higher than in the group NLC ( $u = -5,550$ ; at  $p \leq 0,001$ ). Thus, in a group of learning convicts on average more than three ultimate categories were formulated, whereas in non-learning convicts there were not more than two. The number of nodes in the same categories has a different range ( $u = -5,688$ ; at  $p \leq 0,001$ ) (Table 1.).

**Table 1.** Distribution of the number of categories

Number of categories	Ultimate categories of learning convicts	Ultimate categories of non-learning convicts	Nodal categories of learning convicts	Nodal categories of non-learning convicts
1	0%	33%	0%	0%
2	10%	46%	0%	7%
3	26%	14%	3%	50%
4	47%	7%	20%	36%
5	17%	0%	33%	7%
6	0%	0%	31%	0%
7	0%	0%	13%	0%



From these data it follows that the group of learning convicts is largely characterized by the maximum number of categories, while there is a minimum number of them in the non-learning group ( $u = -3,648$ ; at  $p \leq 0,001$ ).

The next stage of data processing is to extract the decentration index, the reflexivity index and negativity index (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Averages values of convicts' indexes by the method of ultimate meanings of A.N. Leontiev (1977)

Index of decentration (Degree of importance of the ego as an absolute meaning center of the world )		Index of reflexivity (A category that describes the prevalence of mental reflection over practical actions)		Index of negativity (Homeostatic orientation of the personality)	
Learning convicts	Non-learning convicts	Learning convicts	Non-learning convicts	Learning convicts	Non- learning convicts
14%	9,03%	18,4%	21,36%	19%	19,9%

The findings indicate that in learning convicts the negative index is prevailing, which indicates the maximum severity of homeostatic orientation in this group. For non-learning convicts the reflexivity index prevails, which indicates, in turn, the excessive intellectualization of action, the delay in planning and deliberation stage and the difficulties in the transition from a concept to realization.

## Discussions

We used the method of ultimate meanings, a projective analysis in particular to identify meaning systems of the world view of a convict in a correctional institution in the context of his re-socialization. Based on the qualitative analysis of ultimate meanings and identification of a dominante in the statements of the needs of each interviewee, we determined a strategy of behavior of a convicted person in the correctional system. Answers to questions of the subjects (the overall tendency of statements) were analyzed in accordance with the types of orientation of the convicted person (Deyev, 1978; Ushatikov, 1998):

- Convicts with a positive direction, varying degrees of socio-positive activity (active and passive);
- Convicts with uncertain (neutral) oriented, immature and unsettled values
- Convicts with a negative orientation, which can be both open and hidden.

However, along with the types of individual orientation by V.G. Deyev (1978) and A.I. Ushatikov (1998), we have also used the typology of groups by A.M. Yakovlev (1971). The author argues that the particular value-semantic sphere of the person largely dictates the process of re-socialization of convicts. Therefore, the study of these features will make it possible to establish the affiliation of a convict to one of the groups: with a favorable trend towards re-socialization; those with an uncertain trend toward re-socialization; those with an unfavorable trend towards re-socialization.

Thus, the data obtained by the method of ultimate meanings were analyzed based on the types of a convict's orientation (Deyev, 1978; Ushatikov, 1998) and taking into account the typology of A.M. Yakovlev (1971), which also determines the novelty of our empirical research.

1 behavioral strategy – convicts with a positive orientation, with a favorable trend towards re-socialization;

2 behavioral strategy - convicts with an uncertain (neutral) orientation, with an uncertain trend towards re-socialization;

3 strategy of behavior - convicts with a negative orientation, an unfavorable trend towards re-socialization.

## Conclusion

Thus, the comparative analysis of the two groups allows us to give convicts the following characteristics. In the group of learning convicts the general worldview of convicts who are guided in their aspirations to self-development of the meaning of life, has the greatest structure and coherence, such subjects are more productive in finding intermediate meanings of their actions, they are characterized by active and pro-social worldview. The focus lies on family values combined with the homeostatic model of behavior (with the fear of a change). In the group of non-learning convicts the worldview of convicts is less structured, there is a predominance of reflexive processes of practical activities. In non-learning convicts the list of ultimate meanings that govern vital functions, as well as nodal meaning is limited. This is clearly demonstrated in the fact that the structure of the world view is a series of individual, unrelated, sense chains, whose number is very limited (Kraynova, 2005; Kudryavtsev, 1998).

## Recommendations

The results of empirical research presented in the article can be used by staff members of the Federal Penitentiary Service, psychologists and social workers in the course of practical work aimed at correcting and reforming a convict.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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