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PARADIGMATIC CHANGES IN SCHOOL HEADS' ATTITUDES
TOWARDS LEADERSHIP FUNCTIONS

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Abstract

This study investigates leadership functions of school heads from the point of view of school heads. What are the roles of a school head in the context of modern school change? Which functions of school heads are the most important? This study aims at revealing school heads' attitudes towards leadership functions and activities in the context of the leadership paradigm shift. The study uses a modified version of a questionnaire, which was designed by the researcher of the competence of Lithuanian school leaders. The gained data were analysed using statistical methods, as well as content and comparative analysis. The analysis of school heads' viewpoints to leadership functions and activities reveals that they emphasise the importance of motivating and planning, as well as handling of topical everyday activities. The changes in the school heads' attitudes reflect the trends of the decentralisation of education, a more active public participation in school management, as well as an increase in the importance of cooperation culture.

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1. Introduction

Since the middle of the last century, education systems all around the world “... have undergone the double pressure of the democratisation of education and social transformation. The explosion in school enrolment stemming from universal education policies ... has created a number of tensions in the school which has had to address an increasingly diverse public” (UNESCO, 2009, p.16). The famous educational theorist Hopkins noted that nowadays “educational systems have radically altered the role and responsibilities of the headteacher or principal” (Hopkins, 2013, p. 55). Being a school leader has become difficult as education requirements, expectations of parents and education policies, and demands for school efficiency have increased (How school heads are selected, educated and assessed in different countries?, 2011; OECD, 2016). Research studies on school leadership reveal that “This shift brings with it dramatic changes in what public education needs from principals. They can no longer function simply as building managers, tasked with adhering to district rules, carrying out regulations and avoiding mistakes. They have to be (or become) leaders of learning who can develop a team delivering effective instruction” (The Wallace Foundation, 2013, p. 6).

1.1. Relevance of the research

How are the leadership functions of school heads changing in the context of new education management demands? Lithuanian research studies on school heads’ leadership mostly cover the problems of leadership style and personal competence, leadership training and qualification improvement, and analyse school heads’ approaches to the development of managerial competence (Žvirdauskas, 2006; Baronienė, 2008; Želvys, 2010; Malinauskienė & Augienė, 2010; Kontautienė & Melnikova, 2010; Cibulskas & Žydzūnaitė, 2012; Cibulskas, 2013; Melnikova, 2013, 2014; Navickaitė, 2012, 2013). The role and functions of a school head have been more widely studied by a few researchers (Želvys, 1999, 2003; Indrašienė, Merfeldaitė, & Petronienė, 2008; Mečkauskienė, 2009, 2010; Trakšelys, Melnikova, & Martišauskienė, 2016). The study done by examining Lithuanian scientific literature on leadership (Valuckienė, Balčiūnas, Katiliūtė, Simonaitienė, & Stanikūnienė, 2015) concurs with the researchers, who point out that the existing body of European scientific literature “provides an insufficient basis for analysing the work of the head as organizational leader” (Ball, 2012, p. 80), and “little attention has been paid to the investigation of how principals reshape their leadership role and leadership practices” (Abrahamsen, Aas, & Hellekjær, 2015, p. 62).

1.2. Theoretical justification of the study

Over the past decades, Lithuanian leadership researchers have analysed the activity of general education school heads in the context of traditional leadership functions – *planning*, *organising*, *managing* and *controlling*. The traditional classification developed by Fayol serves as the basis for the grouping of leadership functions into planning, organising, commanding, coordinating and controlling (Zakarevičius, Kvedaravičius, & Augustauskas, 2004). According to this approach, school management is defined as a targeted activity which is focused on a result; it includes planning, posing a guideline for activities, establishing, implementing and continuously maintaining an effective organisational structure

and control system (Zakarevičius, et al., 2004; European Synopsis, 2010; Cruz, Villena, Navarro, Belecina, & Garvida, 2016). The managerial leadership is “an essential component of successful leadership, ensuring the implementation of the school’s vision and strategy” (Bush, 2015, p. 44). *Planning* is the main function that determines the effectiveness of other functions, it helps to predict operational perspectives, resources and tools; *organising* means the process of allocating work, power and resources among organisation members and their alignment, enabling them to achieve the goals of the organisation; *managing* is understood as a reference to the activities and their stimulation aiming to perform the necessary tasks; whereas *controlling* is a verification whether everything is going according to a plan, it helps to ascertain how different tasks are performed, what difficulties are experienced by employees during the entire process of organisation, and how the process can be adjusted (Želvys, 1999, 2003; Sakalas, Šilingienė, 2000; Zakarevičius, et al., 2004). The content of the described functions is more in line with the traditional concept of the “public management” paradigm, when a school head performs “technical” functions of an administrator managing day-to-day school activities, such as planning of activities, coordination of actions, controlling, etc. On the other hand, this approach does not lose its relevance, as occasionally the study of school heads’ competencies, functions and activities is based on this classification (Indrašienė, et al., 2008; Mečkauskienė, 2010).

In the changing paradigm of educational management (which is understood as the basis for the design of an education strategy), the attitudes towards managerial functions have also been changed. Researchers began to analyse management not only in the context of the traditional paradigm of “public management”, but also in the context of the paradigms of “new public management” and “systemic change” (Melnikova, 2014; Trakšėlys, et al., 2016). The new paradigm of public management was shaped by applying business management principles in the education system, seeking for efficiency and quality, decentralisation and privatisation, focusing on public services and a wider involvement of staff and other stakeholders in management processes (Mulford, 2008; UNESCO, 2009; Melnikova, 2013). The application of these principles shifted the school system towards decentralisation, competition, privatisation, optimisation, and efficiency. In the changing environment, it was important for school heads to master new managerial competencies, such as strategic planning, effective human, financial, and information management. The requirements of effective human management highlighted the importance of *motivating*: “...the headteacher should be a driving force for improved opportunities for their pupils and they should think and work strategically within and beyond the school community. This involves nurturing a shared vision through motivating, inspiring, influencing, challenging and supporting all members of the school community to develop their own and their pupils’ aspirations and expectations” (Effective Leadership, 2007). With the shift from knowledge-based society to creative society (Florida, 2005), education faces new challenges in terms of the changing school culture. In the “paradigm of change”, schools respond to changes, look for solutions to emerging problems, and develop as learning organisations. In such schools, teachers are encouraged to improve their qualification, participate in school governance, collaborate and make collegial decisions, as well as communicate with the community. In this context, school management culture and school leadership roles are changed rapidly. As the school progresses, the functions and activity areas of school heads expand, whereas their abilities to anticipate situations, to find optimal solutions and to make changes are of particular significance.

2. Problem Statement

What is the role of a school head in the context of modern school change? How do the leadership functions of school heads and the areas of their activity change in the context of the shifting paradigm of education management? *The scientific problem* is posed as a question: what were the differences in school heads' attitudes to leadership functions and activities a decade ago and what are the in the present; and is it possible to state that the differences show a paradigmatic change in the understanding of leadership?

3. Research Questions

What functions and activities are evaluated by school heads as more important in their work, and how are school heads' competencies expressed in their everyday activities?

4. Purpose of the Study

This study aims to reveal school heads' attitudes towards leadership functions and activities.

5. Research Methods

The theoretical research data were collected by employing the analysis of scientific literature and educational documents. The questionnaire survey method was used to collect empirical data. The analysis of the attitudes of school heads to leadership functions and the areas of competence expression involved the methods of content, statistical, analytical descriptive, and comparative analysis, as well as meta-analysis.

5.1. Research instrument

The questionnaire method was used for the survey of the school heads. The research instrument is based on the questionnaire created by Lithuanian researchers who were engaged in research in this area (Indrašienė et al., 2008). The questionnaire consisted of 10 diagnostical questions and a block of social-demographic questions, which was constructed in order to get general information about the respondents. The 1st diagnostical question of this questionnaire was intended to determine the importance of leadership functions in a school head's work by using Likert's scale (from "not important" to "very important") (Kardelis, 2016). The next four questions were constructed to find out the opinions of the respondents about a school head's activities in the performance of various functions at work. Semi-opened questions No. 6, 7 and 8 focus on the extent of some areas of school heads' activities.

5.2 Research sample

The target sample consisted of 74 aspiring school heads, who were registered for the competence evaluation at the National Agency of School Evaluation. The main characteristics of the sample were the following: 80% women, 20% men; the percentage of principals and vice-principals was 32% and 64% respectively; out of them 26% of women and 64% of men in the position of a principal; 34% of the respondents managed basic schools and 36% - gymnasiums. 34% of the respondents were 40-49 and 37%

- 50-59 years old; 11% of the school heads acquired the highest management category (I), 51% - the intermediate management category (II). The aforesaid two categories were acquired by 70% of the respondents over the age of 50; 23% of the respondents did not acquire a managerial category, whereas 86% of them were younger than 30 years old. 37% of respondents had more than 15 years of managerial work experience; 27% of the sample participated in qualification development courses up to 100 hours, and 18% – from 200 to 299 hours. 37% graduated from Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences, 22% – Šiauliai University, 11% – Vilnius University, 10% – other universities, 20% - did not indicate the higher education institution they graduated from. 20% of the school leaders completed Master's studies, 53% of them were over 50 years of age, 73% of them were women.

5.3 Limitations and ethics

The sample of the respondents represents the school heads of more than a half (58%) of state municipalities. For this reason, the study is classified as a survey aiming to present general tendencies. As the research methodologists (Kardelis, 2016; Žydzūnaitė & Sabaliauskas, 2017) recommend, the respondents were introduced to the purpose of the study; the emotional and social security was guaranteed. The principles of respect for personal dignity, and the right to receive accurate information about the study results were observed. I am grateful to Petrauskas for the part of the empirical data gathered while performing the previous joint study (Cibulskaitė & Petrauskas, 2017).

6. Findings

6.1. The importance of leadership functions and activities in a school head's work

The 1st diagnostical question of this questionnaire intended to determine the school heads' views on the importance of leadership functions (planning, organising, managing, controlling, motivating) in their work using Likert's scale. The numbers of different choices were expressed in percentage (Figure 01). The data revealed that school heads often responded “extremely important” while evaluating the importance of motivating (60%), planning (50%) and managing (47%), and less frequently – of organising (35%) and controlling (12%).

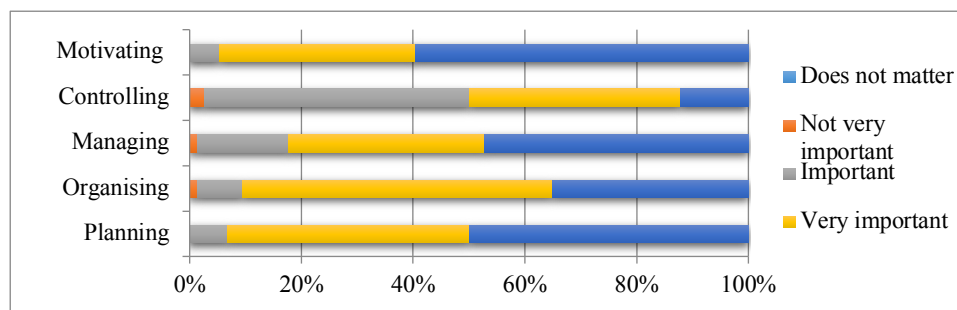


Figure 01. The attitudes of general education school heads towards leadership functions (in per cent)

For each of the selected values, corresponding scores were given (0 – does not matter, 1 – not very important, 2 – important, 3 – very important, 4 – extremely important), and the percentage for each area was determined. The data analysis suggests that respondents evaluated almost all the functions as equally

important (except controlling): the most important function was motivating (22%), relatively less important – planning and managing (for each 21%), organising (20%), and control played relatively the least important role in leadership at work (16%). The comparison of the results with the results of another study (Indrašienė et al. 2008) shows some differences: the respondents of the previous study paid more attention to planning and organising (for each 25%), showed less concern with managing (20%) and motivating (18%), and demonstrated lowest attention to controlling (12%).

Table 01. The attitudes of general education school heads towards the importance of leadership activities

Functions and activities	Sum of given ranks	Rank
Planning		
Making operational plans	256	3
Goal setting	167	1
Understanding of needs	194	2
Financial planning	330	4
Identification of expected results	353	5
Selection of operational methods	358	6
Presentation of action plans to the community	404	7
Organising		
Determination of responsibility	217	1
Allocation of power	235	2
Determining relationships	306	5
Assignment of tasks	270	3
Resource allocation	359	6
Creation of working groups (teams)	277	4
Promotion of school activities	416	7
Managing		
Provision of information	360	7
Staff qualification	302	3
Development of employees' creativity	325	6
Motivation of employees	245	2
Initiation of activities	174	1
Tuning of the tasks	308	5
Coordination	305	4
Controlling		
Control system	285	5
External information accumulation	319	6
Determination of evaluation criteria	160	1
Periodical evaluation of the results	282	4
Providing information on changes	270	3
Setting strict discipline	383	7
Promotion of changes	247	2

The respondents were asked to evaluate the components (activities) of traditional leadership functions (planning, organising, managing, controlling) by ranking them in a decreasing order of their significance, when the most significant activity was awarded the rank equal to 1, a less significant activity was ascribed to the rank equal to 2, ..., and relatively least significant activity – to the rank equal to 7. The data were analysed using Multiple Criteria Decision Making (Podvezko, Podvezko, 2014). The

calculated sums of the ranks allowed setting out the activities in the decreasing order of their significance (according to the school heads, from the most important to the least significant ones) (Table 01).

The hierarchical model of school leadership activities (the three the most important components of each function) is presented in Figure 02.



Figure 02. The school heads' activities rated in the order of importance

According to the school heads, *planning* was the most important function, which covers the following main activities: *goal setting*, *understanding of needs* and *making operational plans*. The main activities of *organising* are the *determination of responsibility*, *allocation of power* and *assignment of tasks*. The *managerial* function includes *initiation of activities*, *motivation of employees* and *staff qualification*. *Controlling* covers *determination of evaluation criteria*, *promotion of changes* and *provision of information on changes*. The comparative analysis demonstrated that the obtained results concurred with the results of the previous studies (Indrašienė et al. 2008) with certain differences:

1) in both studies, the same activities of the *planning* function were distinguished as the most important ones (with a difference in its sequencing in both studies); *presentation of action plans to the community*, *identification of expected results* and *selection of operational methods* were the least important actions;

2) the assessment of the two activities of *organising* coincided; however, in our study, *assignment of tasks* was more important than the *creation of working groups* emphasised in the previous study; the *promotion of school activities*, *allocation of resources*, *establishment of mutual relations* were considered as the least important actions in both studies;

3) the only activity of the *managing* function - the *initiation of activity* – was considered as the most important one in both studies. The current study focused on the *motivation* and *qualification of employees*, whereas the other study put more emphasis on the *provision of information* and *coordination*. The *development of employees' creativity* and *tuning of tasks* were considered as the least important actions. The greatest difference was noted in the *provision of information*, which was considered as a

priority activity a decade ago; however, our study revealed that the school heads gave priority to the *motivation of employees*;

4) both studies emphasised the two *controlling* activities: *determination of evaluation criteria* and *promotion of changes*; however, this study prioritised the *provision of information on changes*, whereas the previous study considered the development of a *control system*; *setting strict work discipline* and *accumulation of external information* as less important *controlling* activities. It is noteworthy that the same three activities of *planning* and *organising*, and two activities of *managing* and *controlling* were considered to be the least important in both studies.

The analysis of the research data suggests that modern school heads emphasise the importance of motivating and planning, put a relatively less significance on managing, and find control as performing the least important role in leadership at work. A decade ago, school heads paid more attention to the planning and organising, lesser – to the managing, motivating and controlling. The comparison of the results of two different studies shows that school heads allotted more attention to managing activities a decade ago, whereas at present, they attach more importance to staff competence and motivation.

6.2. Accountability and coverage of school heads' activities

The respondents were asked to indicate who and how assessed the quality of school services, what teams / groups work at school, which school management activities and responsibilities they delegated to other staff.

The analysis of the responses to the first question showed that the quality of school services was mostly examined and evaluated by *internal evaluation*, based on the *feedback from students' parents* (87% and 86% respectively); the quality was often evaluated by *municipality / county specialists* (77%), *school board* (73%), and *students* (65%), whereas one-tenth of the respondents (9%) indicated that quality was examined during an *external evaluation*. The results of the survey conducted a decade ago (Indrašienė, et al., 2008) showed a different sequence: *municipality / county specialists* (68%), *internal evaluation* (31%), *parents' feedback* (17%), *school board* (15%), and *feedback from students* (9%). The comparison of the results reflects the tendencies of decentralisation of education, higher standards of the society's requirements for the quality of education, and more active public participation in school management.

The data on team / group work at school revealed that *strategic planning* and *internal assessment* groups (50% and 49% respectively), *administrative*, *methodological*, and *programming* groups (45%, 43% and 41%) were created more often; *child welfare commission*, *preventive work* and *class managers' groups* worked more rarely (36%, 32%, 31%); *situational* and *project* groups were commonly less organised (20% each). It was pointed out that there were other teams at school, such as *education for career*, *crisis management*, *organisation of examinations*, and *creative teams*. Meanwhile, the survey conducted a decade ago included the following data: *methodological* (12%), *project* and *situational* (each 8%), *strategic planning* (7%), *internal assessment* (6%), *special education programs*, *annual programs*, *class managers* and *preventive work* groups were identified by 3-4% of the respondents, 10% did not respond to this question, 38% of the respondents indicated working groups, but did not name them. The

comparison of the data makes it possible to assume that a decade ago school heads were less active in the creation of working groups / teams.

The answers to the question of what school management activities and responsibilities are delegated by school heads to other employees were as follows (along with the data of the previous survey): *non - formal education and projects* (46% / 28%), *methodological activity* (43% / 7%), *implementation of educational content* (43% / 34%), *internal evaluation* (43% / 34%), *management of school economy* (41% / 17%), and *financial activity* (35% / 16%). In most cases, these activities and responsibilities were delegated to: *vice-principals for education* (implementation of the school strategy and action plan / management of the education process quality); *vice-principals for non-formal education* (creativity education, implementation of work plans / child activities and safety); *vice-principals for economic affairs* (development of learning environments, management of buildings and environment / provision of material resources), *accountants* (project implementation / financial responsibility), *methodological council* and *methodological group leaders* (implementation of strategic and operational plans / qualification improvement). Currently, *internal evaluation* is delegated to *vice-principals* and *teacher teams* on an equal basis (50%), *methodological activities* are more often delegated to *chairpersons of the methodological councils* (81%), less often - to *methodological councils* (19%). The comparison of the research results with the data from the survey conducted a decade ago indicates that modern school heads tend to delegate strategic and creative activities to other members of the administration. Researchers argue that “principals re-conceptualise leadership when they move from being solo leaders to sharing leadership” (Abrahamsen, Aas, & Hellekjær, 2015, p. 62). On the other hand, one of the European studies shows that “forms of distributed leadership exist in almost all countries. However, innovative approaches are rather rare. School leadership is shared in a traditional form among formal leadership teams in the majority of countries” (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013, p. 16).

7. Conclusion

The analysis of the research data suggests that nowadays Lithuanian school heads emphasise the importance of motivating and planning, relatively less important seems managing, whereas the least important role in leadership at work is ascribed to the function of controlling. The school heads paid more attention to managing activities a decade ago, at present they attach more importance to staff competence and motivation. It can be stated that the school heads emphasise the importance of such leadership functions and activities that are more in line with the concept of modern leadership.

The data show that modern school heads are more active in the creation of working groups / teams, more often delegate some functions (planning and organising) to other members of the school community, and more often motivate them for the activities. It means that the culture of cooperation has become more important and can be seen as a more favorable situation for the implementation of distributive leadership.

The results of the research show tendentious changes in school heads' attitudes to their functions and activities – from those that are in line with the paradigm of *public management* and the *new public management* – towards the paradigm of *systemic change*.

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