

SCHOOL PRINCIPALS – EDUCATIONAL LEADERS AND PROFESSIONAL MANAGERS

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Abstract: The article studies the current changes in the functions and vision of the heads of educational institutions.

The main management styles are analyzed. The professional and personal qualities modern school principals need to combine in order to successfully manage schools are outlined.

The specifics and characteristics of school principals as professional managers and educational leaders are clarified. Specific emphasis is placed on managing governance processes, the status and position of school principals in the management hierarchy.

Keywords: school management, management style, leader, education manager, administrator.

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Introduction

In order for a school to prosper in a market economy, its management plays a key role. Schools are places where students, teachers, managers and managed spend a significant part of their lives. The creation of organized environment by the teaching staff and especially by school principals is a very important condition contributing to the

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effectiveness and the ability to communicate, to the combination of connections and relationships participants build with each other in the course of the specific activities they perform.

Nowadays, school principals are not only administrators but also managers, leaders, entrepreneurs and innovators. This role is based on the fact that they constantly try to improve their qualifications “although regulations exist on their functions and authority” (A. Filipov, 2021). As education managers, they must be aware of the economic aspects of education, make full use of the available facilities, and be strict first with themselves then with their staff.

The more school principals succeed in demonstrating the staff a higher level of management competence, the more their general management qualification as administrators and managers strengthens. They have to be innovators in management and see the prospects for its development. While working, they must be intolerable to all shortcomings of the institutions they manage, especially in regard to the teaching and learning process. Good management activities provide the proper functioning of the managed school and the efficiency of the work of the teaching and non-teaching staff.

School principals are required to seek new opportunities beyond formal limits, to communicate with people working within other units and structures and to ensure cooperation between them. According to Mitropolitski, “Rank and position are becoming less and less important for managers’ success in exchange for their professionalism, sensibility, knowledge and ability to unite people, to motivate their work” (Mitropolitski, M, 1991)

In order to find the path to success, school principals must never forget the old maxim that it goes through the ability to communicate, organizational culture and behaviour.

1. Characteristic features of school principals as educational leaders and professional managers

Leadership is first and foremost an intergroup phenomenon. The main task for modern educational institutions is to provide qualified

managerial staff of school principals having the necessary skills to work with people and to apply an effective leadership style by forming a group spirit, morale and cohesion, the basic factors for achieving results in modern schools.

Studies on leadership, its key components as well as on the effects of its manifestation are dictated by the interest in management efficiency as an organizational function.

In specialized literature, there are a lot of definitions of leadership that can be mainly divided into three directions:

- Leadership as a quality.
- Leadership as a process.
- Leadership as a quality and a process.

Researchers of the first direction assume that leadership is a combination of a person's personal qualities (energy, resilience, social activity, persistence, self-confidence and initiative) and a lot of other characteristics exercising influence successfully. To be perceived as a model, a leader must be decent, enthusiastic, communicative, self-confident, sharp-minded and flexible thinking.

Considering leadership as a process is related to specific activities aiming to achieve definite organizational goals. Leadership as a process and a social phenomenon unites people around a common objective.

The third direction brings these characteristics into line and defines leadership as a direct, natural impact of individuals with the appropriate qualities focused on achieving a particular goal.

A leader is a person having the greatest authority. They are not appointed; they impose themselves due to their personal qualities. The greater the authority of a leader, the easier it is for them to manipulate the opinion of the team and to guide them in a particular direction. The need to manage reflects a certain inner necessity of the subject of management and is a source of satisfaction (Vihanskiy, O, 1995).

The relationship between the school managers' aspirations to manage and the outcomes resulting from the functions of a school exists when the subject of management (a school principal) is not only an employer but also a manager. Managers' competence represents their ability to

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perform their functions according to the rules, norms and standards of the highly effective management.

This global revolution in managing social organizations is given a special role. Their function is to make knowledge productive. They become institutions with well-defined objectives in order to be active and to focus their efforts on solving specific tasks. Today, management is not only business management. It is a generic function inherent in all organizations regardless of the social sphere they belong to. According to Peter Drucker (an American specialist and author of books on the theory of management and business management): "Management and organizations represent the two sides of one and the same phenomenon." (Drucker, P., 2006).

The search for definite answers to the nature and determinants of leadership is facilitated by a lot of empirical studies related to certain essential characteristics:

- real specific features of a leader's personality;
- a leader's behavioral style;
- complexity of tasks they have to solve for a successful educational process.

The main approaches used to define leadership can be classified as universal and situational. The universal ones seek the most effective management style as a combination of stable personal qualities or as a kind of behavior. Situational approaches emphasize that no most effective management style exists for all situations at the same time, i.e. effective leadership is viewed as a set of situational factors.

Modern school principals follow the principle of optimal leadership which is both democratic and participative (participatory management). They involve their employees in the process of making decisions, stimulate them to develop their potential and take on more responsibilities. School principals are 'inner-focused' with regard to working with their subordinates and manage their schools according to the principles of situational leadership which is guided by the presumption that no single model or sample exists when solving each case in a given school.

Being a school principal does not mean that you automatically become a leader. Modern school principals are clearly aware of what is required by them both in their role as managers and as leaders, namely: to

identify tasks and to analyze situations; to outline the most important in a particular problem and to analyze the case from all points of view; to choose the most appropriate leadership management style (directive or supportive) according to the specific situation for each employee. The model of leadership styles and their relationship to the level of development of staff is a must for any school manager who wants to be an effective leader.

An effective combination of formal and personal authority is considered ideal for leadership. The leader-school principals are real leaders when they succeed in making people work so that they accept the ideas related to school development as their own. According to J. Terry "Leadership is an impact on a group of people motivating them to achieve a common goal" (Terry, J., 1999). The pressure and compulsion with leadership are replaced by encouragement and enthusiasm. Managers' ability to influence people allows them to use power and authority.

School principals are key figures in school management. They have a formal and positional status of a governing body. They are expected to play a catalyzing role, to inspire, orient and to create the environment needed to achieve the specific tasks and objectives of the educational institution. However, no pedagogical activity of a school principal is conceivable or possible if they don't enjoy the high authority among teachers, educators, students and parents (Mitropolitiski, M., 1991). Authority is their moral status within the team, it is a form of discipline which help school principals to regulate the behavior of teachers and students and affects their behavior and beliefs.

In school practice, there are school principals with poor administrative capacity, a lack of organizational skills and habits, and are mediocre teachers. Similar school principals have no authority at school and in the parent community. Thus the results of their work cannot be good. School principals are central figures at school and according to V. Pisarenko they are obliged to "adjust the strings of the team so that none of them makes a false sound", says Pisarenko, V., 1987). The problems of pedagogical ethics in general and the ethics of school principals in particular are topical, actual, stimulating and with a huge practical resonance.

Due to its specific features, school management has analogue neither in the pedagogical field nor outside it. This professional field is managerial in nature and pedagogical by characteristics.

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In their relationships with teachers, in the control activities conducted, established school principals proceed from certain assumptions as follows:

1. Each teacher can achieve better results in their learning activities, as long as they strengthen their own self-preparation.
2. The demanding nature of school principals educates pedagogical specialists in a conscious and responsible attitude towards learning activities in general.
3. A school principal's trust in teachers elates, inspires, and gives them impetus for optimal learning activities.
4. Always respect and honor the personal dignity of each teacher and student.

Two types of leaders exist – formal and informal. Anyone who is appointed to a particular position and has subordinates is a formal head or manager. By virtue of their formal positions, they always have the legal authority to influence their subordinates. In cases where a person influences the behavior of others without exercising the rights officially given to them, we can talk of a leader - an informal leader. The informal power of the leader does not arise from their official status (position), but from some of their qualities, abilities or skills, which are desired by others and they like them.

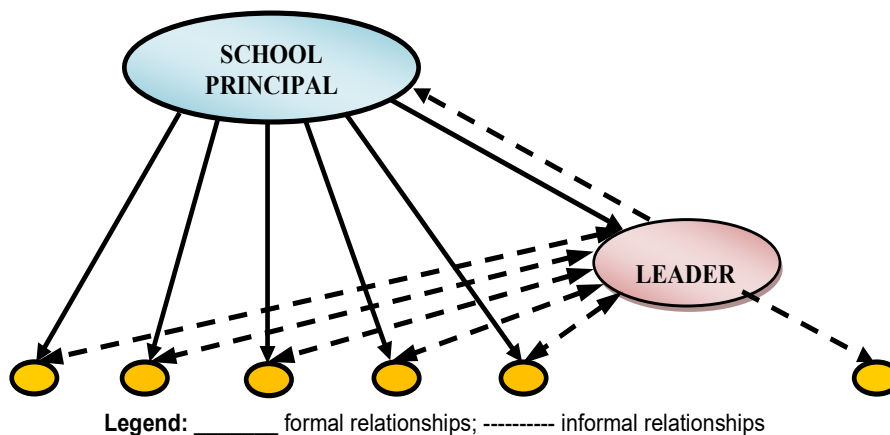


Figure 1. School principals and leaders in interpersonal relationships

Situations exist where both a formal school principal and an informal leader work together in a school. In case informal leaders influence their followers to achieve better results and work effectively, they act in support of a school's goals. A moment of conflict may occur between school principals on the one hand and the informal leaders on the other, which may not be to the benefit of the school and its management.

Managerial and leadership activities of school principals are not assigned to everyone and not everyone can be trained how to perform them. In order for a principal to be successful in the role of a manager, they must demonstrate, in addition to the right to lead (officially given to them by the position), the ability to influence the attitude of subordinates to achieve the desired results. They must wield both formal and informal authority.

Modern school principals must show the ability for both types of behavior - the behavior of a head (manager) and the behavior of a leader. Therefore, it is necessary to constantly improve their management culture.

Successful school principals–leaders–managers of the teaching staff combine the following qualities and characteristics:

- emotional intelligence;
- motivation for changes and creative imagination;
- sociability and authority;
- ability to bear work load;
- readiness to constantly develop and train;
- tolerance and patience;
- motivation for changes and management style;
- ability to organize;
- skills in effective communication and assertive behavior;
- ability to engage and guide people by personal behavior and example;
- building trust and stability in teamwork;
- concern for the members of all school staff;
- concern for the health of each member of the team;
- supporting and encouraging innovation;
- ability to predispose the members of the teaching staff and to persuade them that their vision of the future of the school institution is the right one;

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- openness, awareness, proactivity and role flexibility;
- integrity and adherence to principles;
- mastering the interpersonal relationships within the team by building an effective, supportive and developing professional environment and relationships between teachers.

The main task of modern educational institutions is to provide a trained management team of school principals having the right skills to work with people, as well as to apply effective leadership style through the formation of a group spirit, morale and solidarity, which are basic factors for considerable achievements and labour productivity in modern schools.

2. Status and position of school principals in the management hierarchy

The position of a 'school principal' is a must in the establishment plan of a school. Their functions are defined in the Preschool and School Education Act and the job description.

The position of 'school principal' is held after entering a competition. The competition is held according to pre-determined rules, which are approved by the Minister of Education and Science. The minister is a school principal's employer, the head of the relevant regional department respectively.

According to the Preschool and School Education Act, a school principal (state or municipal) performs specific functions:

- organizes and controls the overall activity of an institution in accordance with the authority defined by the state educational standard for the status and professional development of the vice principals, teachers and other pedagogical specialists;
- manages the educational process in a school in accordance with the state policy in the field of education and plans, organizes, coordinates, controls and is responsible for the overall administrative and financial activity;
- concludes, amends and terminates employment contracts with pedagogical specialists and with non-pedagogical staff in the institution in accordance with the Labor Code;

- announces the job vacancies in the employment office and in the regional department of education within three days;
- creates conditions for increasing their professional qualification and for career development of pedagogical specialists;
- organizes the attestation of the teaching staff and, if necessary, organizes the elaboration of a plan for methodical and organizational support;
- is responsible for protecting and enriching the material and technical base of an institution while creating an appropriate organization in order to effectively fulfill the obligations;
- represents an institution before administrations, bodies, institutions, organizations by concluding contracts with legal entities and individuals on the subject of activity in accordance with the powers granted to them.

Along with the functions of a manager, a school principal has an annual norm of 72 teaching hours related to the major they graduated in.

School principals have a dual status – a principal and a teacher. In their position of a ‘manager’ they are part of the organizational management structure of secondary education and are at the lowest level of the management hierarchy in the system of education management (Mitropolitski, M., 1991). This position makes them subject to management by the higher bodies of the administrative system. At the same time, there are certain management relations between school principals and the local administration bodies. This dependent position of the school principals assigns to a certain extent a marginal position in the management hierarchy.

In the position of a member of the school team, school principals are authorized by the state to be employers of the staff, sole bodies and the main subjects of a school management, i.e. heads. In this capacity, school principals:

- have certain power;
- are members of a school team;
- have the opportunity to communicate individually with all members of the team, embodying justice and acting as arbiters in relationships between team members.

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School principals must also be professional educators. Such a school principal stands out with a very good knowledge of the overall pedagogical activity of a school and the learning process, with the design of its further development, profiling, specialization, is informed about innovations in methodology, the technology of teaching and learning, in science and practice of education, in the regulation system, is aware of the potential of their team, is demanding and strict towards the professional presentation of the teaching material by the teachers to the students. They love their profession, school, teachers, and students – communicate with them, find the right path and make the right decisions while listening to the advice and recommendations given by both teachers and parents.

The managerial functions of school principals distinguish them as strategists of a school's development, designing the future, ensuring survival in today's demographic crisis, stability and prosperity, its new image among teachers, students, parents and the public, highlight their position as generators of ideas, making sound decisions, as entrepreneurs, organizing the implementation of the selected strategies, as resource managers, seeking and finding additional funds for the school, knowing and applying market mechanisms.

School principals-managers are active leaders, work hard, make bold decisions, rely on their team, take risks, create many contacts with the business community and form good relationships with the local self-government, i.e. the municipality.

3. The linear nature of the management structure of a school institution and the place of principals in it.

A modern school is a large and complex organism. It is not possible for a single person to solve all management tasks. Hence, it becomes necessary for many people to work together and divide the work among them. As a result of this division, governing bodies, officials (principal, vice principals, chairmen of methodological unifications) and subdivisions of management (pedagogical council, school board, public council) exist within the management system.

The word structure (Latin Structura) means a set of stable connections and relationships between the parts of a whole. When defining the term 'structure' a great variety of opinions exist. However, when analyzing it, there are always three key points:

- the structure is a set of elements with certain characteristics;
- the elements are interconnected in a strictly determined order, through appropriate relationships;
- the structure is a hierarchically arranged set of elements and the relationships between them.

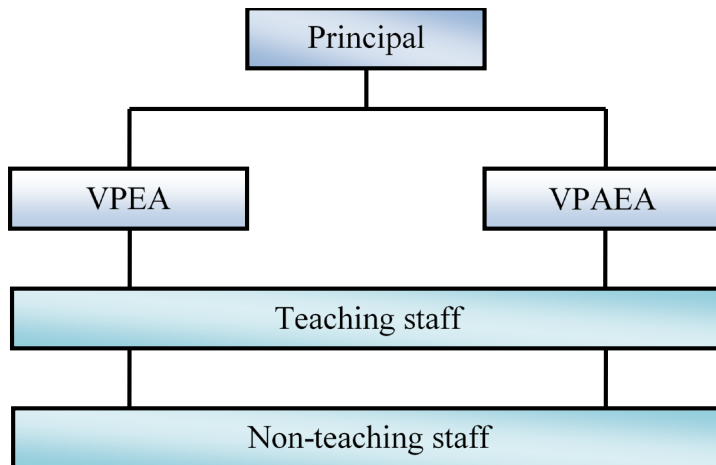
The organizational management structure is a set of bodies, among which powers and responsibilities for implementing management functions are distributed. It has no autonomous value, but is important only for supporting the systematic analysis when considering its problems as an organization (Balkanski, P. 2001).

There are different types of organizational structures. The simplest type of organizational management structure is the linear structure. This structure is characterized by the existence of two or more hierarchical levels of management, each of which has a subordinate group of employees and the relationship between 'a manager and subordinates' is built on the principle of unity. The head of the school, i.e. the principal is authorized to resolve any issues arising in the activities of his subordinate school staff (teaching and non-teaching).

With this type of structure, the solutions of issues are approved by the manager thus creating good conditions for coordinating these decisions. However, at the same time, the head (principal) is subject to very high requirements, as they must be competent in many areas of school management.

Within this structure, everything revolves around school principals, they must quickly switch to solving different types of tasks and therefore are subject to heavy workload.

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Legend: VPEA – Vice principal on educational activities; VPAEA – Vice principal on administrative and economic activities

Figure 2. Linear management structure of a school

School principals are at the highest level of the hierarchy. Vice school principals are directly subordinate to principals, while the members of the staff are subordinate to them. The orders are passed down the chain by the principal to their deputies, and from them to the staff. In the management theory, this way of conveying commands is called a columnar chain.

The advantage of the linear structure of school management is that decisions on all issues concerning the educational process and relating to a particular part of the work of the team are made by one head – the school principal thus creating good conditions for coordinating these decisions. However, at the same time, a school principal is subject to very high requirements, as they, as principals, must demonstrate competence in solving school problems of administrative, pedagogical, financial and other nature throughout the school year.

Modern school principals must set a daily personal example of discipline, punctuality, efficiency, competence, self-control and diligence. It is very important to communicate regularly with teachers, to support and

stimulate their personal development and to provide opportunities for professional growth.

Schools educate children of different ethnic groups, have teachers of different ages, men and women with different religious beliefs. The diversity existing in schools since their establishment has taught us to be above all tolerant, to trust each other, to rely on more experienced and highly skilled colleagues, to help each other in difficult situations.

As leaders, school principals must be aware of the emotional intelligence and individual abilities of each teacher, to show an individual approach, to take care of the moral health of teachers and students, the working conditions and comfort at work. It is a must to be able to speak eloquently, correctly, competently and intelligently, to be well dressed and to show cultural manners, to be honest and principled.

Conclusion

Today, in a developed market economy, a modern school principal must be a manager, leader and reformer. They should feel comfortable with the constantly evolving technology and show greater interpersonal competence. At the same time, they must have confidence in the abilities of pedagogical specialists in order to solve problems locally together and also to think globally. Their main task is to create conditions for developing the innovative and creative potential of all teachers, which will result in higher efficiency of the learning process. The key to the future competitive advantage of a school as an institution is the development of human potential. School principals are the ones who have to think strategically, to motivate their staff, to improve the facilities, to work on projects that will support the financially delegated budget and will motivate teachers for conducting more effective teaching practice.

We are convinced that today, more than ever, modern and quality education guarantees the prosperity of our society. We are fully aware that in order for schools to be true European educational institutions, they need modern approaches, methods and forms of governance.

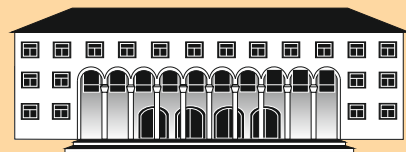
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