

PROBLEMS OF DEVELOPING EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AS LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS IN LATVIA

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According to OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) expert report "Analysis of National Education Policy" in year 2000, the main attention in Latvian education system is paid on expert recommendations to eliminate inequality among different regions in Latvia; eliminate education differences on Latvian and cross border level by improving education quality; perfect reform and change tempo.

Those recommendations of OECD experts have made to pay a great attention to the management of education institutions. Wherewith there are management theories and general conceptions: management, leadership, quality management, learning organization, etc., implemented in Latvian education.

The aim of this research is to reveal problems that personnel and leaders of Latvian comprehensive schools run into while developing as learning organizations.

193 leaders of Latvian comprehensive schools, who acquired knowledge in professional development courses in 2007, have taken part in this study.

Management is one of the most researched fields in the world: it has been viewed from politics to business and from education to social organizations (Bass and Avolio, 1992), but still there is no united attitude about management. Also A.Storey (Storey, 2004) admits that there is immense quantity of enthusiastically disposed literature about management and it has influenced all fields, leaving also an impression upon education sector.

Leadership in education is mostly reflected as constituent part (function) of management „with real leaders often characterized as charismatic individuals with visionary flair and the ability to motivate and enthuse others – even if they lack the managerial or administrative skills to plan, organize effectively or control resources” (S. Law, D. Glover, 2000).

In this interpretation leadership is an effective work with personnel to secure successful group or team work.

M. Fullan (1993) has emphasized that successful leader is involving staff's confidence, openness, and promotion to study, as well as providing communication for understanding visions and aims. If leader takes this into consideration, the personnel will comply.

Thus it is possible to separate leadership and management functions of education institutions more strictly; leadership is referential to organization mission, vision, motivation of staff, but management is referential to planning and realization - to do things effectively and work with people (M.Fullan, 1993).

Explanation of management and leadership concepts indicates that in education leadership (as well as in modern management theories) there is a tendency to focus on human work in organization, their relations and involvement in managerial processes.

New organization leadership paradigms require from leaders ability to educate their staff or organize their education. In other words there are organizations developing that learn from their work, also called learning organizations. That means that along with the study process in education institutions there is a process of personnel education and advancement of personal competences.

Theory of learning organization is always compatible with organization development theory that is based on general quality management theory oriented on clients, improvements (innovation), staff learning and participation in decision making. Improvement process is always connected with orientation on clients and service quality.

A new model has to be developed in organization by creating new structures that foster learning. Both, self-evaluation and learning from organization results is important in learning process. In order to have a successful learning process, it has to give practical benefit and find instruments (methods and assumptions) for development of change process.

M.Fullan speaks about four basic disciplines necessary for successful change process: personal vision – building, inquiry, mastery, and collaboration (M.Fullan, 1993); for development of organization there will be necessary double-sided approach by promoting individual and organization development.

Also P.M.Senge in his book “The Fifth discipline” mentions „personal mastery” as significant cornerstone of the learning organization – the learning organizations spiritual foundation. (P.M.Senge, 1990).

Organization learns only if its staff learns as individuals and brings changes into organization.

H.W. Franz defines learning process as theoretical and / or practical process of acquiring knowledge and skills with the aim to improve personal or organizational competences for solving current or future problems. Leaders’ mission is to use human knowledge and skills in favour of organization (Franz, 2008).

Personal vision is very closely related to development of shared vision of organization, because nothing advances organization more as shared vision.

„Organizations intent on building shared visions continually encourage members to develop their personal visions. If people don’t have their own vision, all they can do is „sing up” for someone else’s. The result is compliance, never commitment. On the other hand, people with a strong sense of personal direction can join together to create a powerful synergy toward what we truly want” (P.M.Senge, 1990).

This future vision is particularly important now, when external environment is very dynamic. Development of education institutions is more and more influenced by relations with education customers, determining connection of education institution to society. Therefore, monitoring of external environment and perception or vision about organization work in future, which reveals in organization strategy, is vital. Developing strategy as study process with participation of all pedagogical personnel in context of learning organization is in such organizations where personnel groups or teams are involved in managerial processes; they should work with informative materials so that organization could ground its work on it. In order to realize such approach in strategy development, people have to change a stereotype about management as one person individual work (D.Celma, 2006).

In studies about education leadership, starting with 20th century 90-ties, management style is discussed in inconstant and changeable time and is called “transformational leadership” - it is characterized by role change between leader and followers, paying most of attention to mutual relations in organization (L.Stool, D.Fink, 1996).

Transformational leadership concept is connected with an effective leader (Griffith, 2004) that includes leader’s ability to make group participants show less interest about themselves and more about group. In content of transformational leadership it means fostering school staff return for achieving common goals.

Griffith (2004) connects concept of transformational leadership not only with leader’s ability to inspire organization staff for achieving common goals, and determine vision and mission, but also supplements with staff turnover and job satisfaction. It turned out in schools where leaders perceived these leading approaches in themselves, school staff was much more satisfied with work and staff turnover was less observed.

According to several authors (Horan, Bass, Avalio, 1992; Griffith, 2004) transformational leadership is based on several principles:

1. Vision. Leader’s ability to formulate and realize ideas that helps organization work as unit.

2. Task formulation. It secures emphasis on school work and justifies value unity.
3. Organization culture. Leader fosters culture understanding, development and beneficitation. In school culture it turns out as sharing experiences and values that are unique for each educational institution. Good culture environment creates atmosphere that fosters team work.
4. Leading skills. In order to create an effective educational institution, it is necessary to know and understand that things happen; therefore leader has to have administrative knowledge and leading skills to lead and give a support to staff.
5. Capability intelligence. To administrate different fields – technical, human resources, cultural – leader has to be endowed with different capabilities and intelligences. Interpersonal intelligence is considered as essential: capability to understand oneself, be aware of strong and weak points and perceive one's place in organization. This capability is important for improvement and development of such skills as decision making, capability to listen and cooperate.
6. System understanding. Know and understand own organization so that in correspondent situation necessary skills could be used.
7. Participation of school staff, students, parents and society in school leadership. Transformational leaders have to administrate not only school structure and tasks, but also concentrate on persons fulfilling these tasks, their mutual understanding, taken pains and cooperation with each other that is significant step towards supporting environment and pleasant ambience (Silins, Mulford, 2002). Thus analysis of scientific sources let us come to the conclusion that main essence of transformational leadership is connected with development of school culture.

The main discussion object in changing leadership is organization self-evaluation of previous study year and priorities defined by the state. Education institution leader is only a discussion partner in this discussion process.

Functioning of leadership systems is dependant on its organizational structure, those are separating and collaborative forms of leading activity within the framework of which leadership is functioning. In schools like in learning organizations people are refusing vertical leading style and communication is happening horizontally. As the main working form for carrying out activities is a team work or project group. Team persons bear responsibility about decision making.

Choice of structure in organization is often related to leader activities and use of power. Very often there are education institutions with typical power hierarchy concentrating power on highest level. Teacher is always leader of the lowest level and this level means to be engaged in operative planning: teachers develop pedagogical study programs, choose teaching aids, plan time schedule, etc. This function level does not give any rights for teacher to influence school work. According to M.Fullan schools should help creating preconditions and abilities for everyone to become a leader thus expanding leading concept which is revealed by distributed leadership theory. There are studies about students' achievements that show achievements growing if there is a distributed leadership and teachers are involved in leading processes (Silins, Mulford, 2002). Storey (2004) explains that leading activities should not be in one individual's hands but distributed among team and staff meaning that organization can be in situation when staff act as leaders.

A.Harris (2003) has defined distributed leadership as collective management form, where everybody acts as a leader in certain level and develops own expert role in mutual cooperation. Yukl (2002) characterizes distributed leadership as splitting management

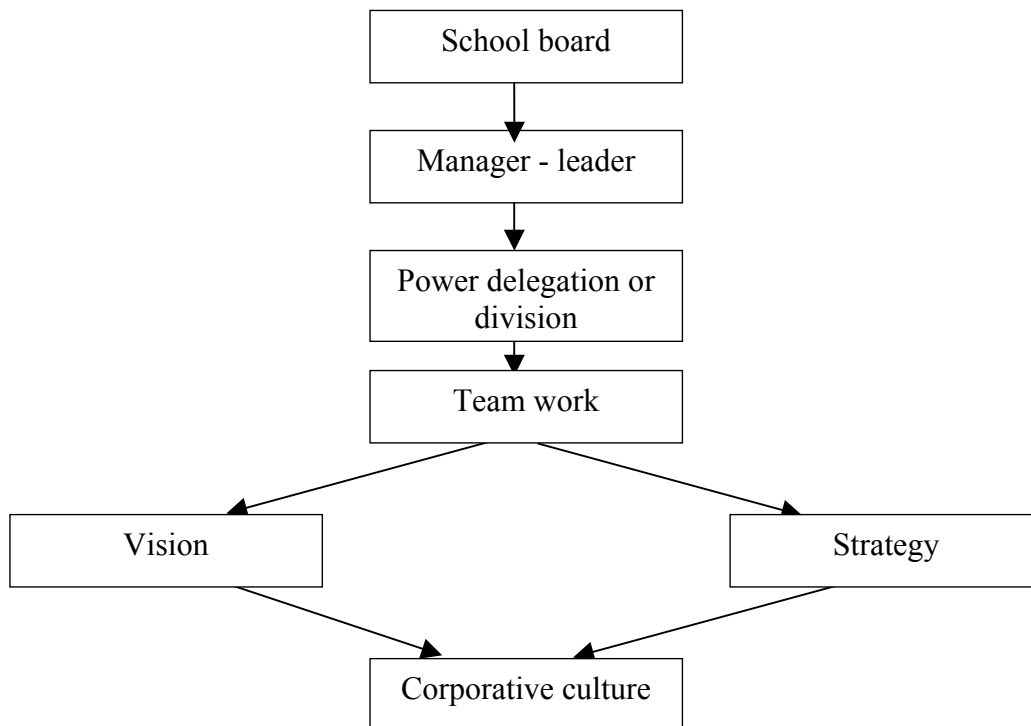
functions among different teams or staff. That means – leader and his work is important, but his contribution is not considered as basic principle of effective management. One leader management model step by step is replaced by team leadership. This tendency allows implement leadership on school level, and not individual's. Staff of leadership process – teachers, students, and parents help to define and create these processes, thus leadership can be considered as organization shared ability.

In practice this can be complicated and difficult process because of externals and internal resistance. Leadership distribution means devolve power and control (not delegate) in other hands. Moreover, distributed leadership approach has to be supported by majority and it is not possible to impose team work if individual is unwilling. Vision of school and staff can differ, overwork can appear, lack of competences, mutual relations as well as relations with formal leaders (school management) can bother. The most important in use of distributed leadership is leader's attitude towards it: advantages and own role have to be seen, acknowledging necessity to acquire new competences in work with staff and team.

School leaders in Latvia, often working in chaotic, paradox and postmodern environment, try to motivate their staff to deal with challenges of countless reforms and adjust and realize them to achieve school goals. However, creating learning organization leaders have to take into consideration current economical crisis and demographic situation in Latvia. It indicates on rapid decrease in number of students and increase of competitiveness among education institutions. We have to think about maintenance, development and improvement of competitive elements to ensure sustainability. According to Hargreaves and Fink sustainability does not mean merely the ability to change but the ability of an innovation to function without adversely affecting the development of other elements in the some environment now or in the future (Hargreaves and Fink, 2004: 8 – 13). That means essence of sustainable leadership is to ensure sustainable learning process for whole school staff. Different analyzed concepts of leadership theory (transformational leadership, distributed leadership, sustainable leadership) allows leader to create own “mental models” (Senge, 1990) and choose ways for their realization.

If school leaders aim to develop learning organizations then organization activities have to be fully democratic – school board has to be the highest institution in school management, where all stakeholders are involved: students, teaching staff, parents, and society members. School board is closely related to education institution main functions: judicial, pedagogical, and economical realization. Board aim is to bear responsibility about future of education institution, state and promote democratization processes in school. Awarding such status improves organization culture that is “totality of basis, confidence, harmonized mutual understanding, norms and traditions that are kept up by all organization workers” (D.Celma, 2006).

Analyzing scientific literature that speaks volumes for paradigm change in education institution leadership, it is possible to create learning organization model (Picture 1):



Picture 1. Model of school as learning organization.

193 leaders of Latvian comprehensive schools from different regions, who acquired knowledge in professional development courses, were inquired about development of learning organization in practice (Picture 2). While formulating questions for experts, basic ideas of analyzed leadership theory were chosen: united understanding of goals and vision, mutual cooperation of staff, common decision making, and learning from each other using self-evaluation and team work as mainspring for professional and organization development.

All personnel take part in development of education institution vision	30%	23%	47%	0%
	always	often	sometimes	never
Personnel is able to work in team and is ready for changes	27%	31%	42%	0%
	always	often	sometimes	never
Personnel self-evaluation is basis for further development of work	22%	25%	47%	6%
	always	often	sometimes	never
Professional competences of personnel is determinant for achieving organization goals	74%	22%	4%	6%
	always	often	sometimes	never
Personnel is oriented to cooperation and mutual support	40%	49%	11%	0%
	always	often	sometimes	never

Picture 2. Opinions of school leaders about personnel engagement in development of learning organization

Findings show also problems that leaders of education institutions face. In current situation main problem is work with self-evaluation, because only 22% respondents always use it as basis for improvement of further work. Attention should be drawn on team work in organization as activity basis for competitive organization where staff by mutual cooperation, taking responsibility and uniting knowledge, skills and talents move to common goal.

Education institution leaders answered also to an open question: What obstacles baulk school to become a learning organization?

Most common answers were:

- Rapid change (reform) tempos;
- Change of Ministers of Education;
- Uncertainty about future of the school;
- State economic situation (budget deficit);
- Heavy work load of teachers;
- Disinclination of personnel to participate in important decision making for school;
- Slow decision making process when new work forms occur;
- Inability to work in team.

Nowadays we can not rely on traditional leading approach only, but classic and scientific management theories oriented on typical situation can be as remedy for purposeful influence on staff only by planning, control and analysis of deviances, and it means new challenges in leadership of education institutions and change of paradigms in education management.

Education institutions have to become learning organizations that primarily demands change of conceptions or philosophy about organization leadership.

Conclusions

1. When analyzing scientific literature it is concluded that learning organization is characterized by democratic school management model with manager – leader who is able to delegate power, create learning personnel teams, and in result organization culture develops.
2. Empirical study results demonstrate that Latvian schools become learning organizations: personnel improve their professional competencies (74%), is oriented to cooperation (89%). Problems for school leaders in creating learning organizations are use of self-evaluation reports in development of strategy: only 22% use it always, and personnel team work: 58% use it always or often. This measuring correlates with answers about development of shared visions (Picture 2): only 53% participate always or often.
3. The main attention in Latvian education institutions has to be paid to team work; that will foster understanding of shared visions and improve learning in organization.

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ABSTRACT

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Regular changes in external environment and its influence on internal environment of organization fortify wide use of theories about learning organizations in management of education institutions. Leading idea for these organizations is openness, creativity, ability to adapt to changes in surrounding environment logistically not mechanically.

There was a questionnaire elaborated and 193 leaders of Latvian comprehensive schools surveyed (there are in total 984 comprehensive schools in Latvia) with an aim to reveal problems that personnel and leaders of Latvian comprehensive schools run into while developing as learning organizations.

The results showed that Latvian schools are becoming learning organizations. 74% of teachers think that personnel professional competence is determinative for reaching organization goals, 89% think that personnel is oriented to cooperation.

Only 30% leaders think that personnel always participate in development of education institution vision. 27% leaders say that their personnel are team workers; that indicates that general attention for Latvian education institutions have to be paid to team work to become learning organizations. In result that will foster understanding of shared vision and perfect learning inside organization.