

## THE ROLE OF A SCHOOL LEADER IN ASSURING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION SERVICES

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### Abstract

The focus on quality gives a possibility for organizations to achieve better operational results. According to various surveys, in order to reach a long-term operational process, the assurance of the quality of operational results and gain strong positions in the market, an organization has to apply one of the most progressive means—quality management, which should become the key goal of the organization. Assurance and improvement of quality in a school of general education is one of the main priorities of the education policy of the Republic of Lithuania. Schools execute the assessment of operational quality by applying various evaluation measures, forms and instruments. One of the most important roles in assuring the quality of an organization is attributed to its leader. Therefore, the authors of the present article analyse school leaders' attitude towards change opportunities and the peculiarities of the evaluation of education services.

**Keywords:** quality, operational quality, learning organization, education.

### Introduction

The main priority of the European Union (EU) is to make the EU 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion' (Council of Europe, 2009). In order to reach this goal, it is necessary to fully modernize education and teaching systems. That is why EU education ministers agreed on three main objectives in pursuance of the Education and Training for 2010 work programme: to improve the quality of the EU education and training systems and facilitate the access of all to education and training systems; to open-up education and training systems to the wider world (European Commission and the Council of Europe, 2010). In view of that, one of the key priorities as emphasized in the National Strategy for Sustainable Development (Official Gazette, 2003, No. 89-4029) are studies and education. These ideas are also set out in the National Education Strategy for 2003–2012 (Official Gazette, 2003, No. 71-3216), where the Lithuanian development is projected by highlighting three priorities: knowledge society, safe society and competitive economy; it emphasises the system of responsible management based on regular analysis of the status of all education levels, management culture directed towards the improvement of education, information and involvement of the society. Article 5 of the 'Principles of the Education System' of the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania (Official Gazette, 1991, No. 23-593; 2003, No. 63-2853) stipulates the achievement of

good quality results within the education system by proficiently and cost-effectively using the available resources and by evaluating, analysing and planning activities on a regular basis. This complies with the provision of the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2001 on European cooperation in quality evaluating in school education: 'to help the educational establishments to meet the educational and social requirements in the new millennium, „to support the educational establishments in order to improve the quality of the services they provide by helping them to develop new initiatives geared to ensure the quality of teaching' (European Parliament and the Council of Europe, 2001: 51–53). Thus, the execution of the duties of each school leader is related to quality management.

Flexible, able to adapt, creative, opportunistic, collaborative, constantly developing, optimistic towards problem resolution and ready to develop capacities organizations have more possibilities to prosper in the post-modern world (Hargreaves, 1999). One of the main roles in creating the organizational culture and anticipating its evolution is attributed to school leaders (Juozaitienė and Staponkienė, 2006).

Therefore, *the goal* of the present article is to analyse the role of school leaders in assuring the quality of education services. *Tasks*:

1. to explore the role of a leader from the perspective of quality management;
2. to define the attitude of the leaders of education establishments towards the evaluation of the education services provided;
3. to analyse the attitude of experts towards school possibilities to implement changes.

*The object* of the research is the role of school leaders in assuring the quality of education services.

The following *methods* have been applied in pursuance of the goals and tasks of the research: analysis of scientific literature, a questionnaire survey of the opinion of school leaders and an expert interview.

*Respondents and research methodology.* The research (2009–2010) was executed in two stages. In order to analyse the role of school leaders in terms of school changes and their attitude towards operational quality factors in schools of general education, as *the first stage* a questionnaire including open-ended questions was designed and distributed to school leaders. A random survey included 206 directors and deputy directors of the Lithuanian schools of general education. Questionnaires to school leaders were presented through e-mail or during in-service training events in education centres. The data were analysed by applying statistical methods via the SPSS programme. However, due to the limited scope of the article, not all the issues of the research will be discussed.

During *the second stage* of the research, 16 experts and school directors were interviewed by applying the method of a structured interview. Experts were selected on the basis of the following three criteria:

- experience in school management;
- at least 10 years of experience in management;
- at least second management category.

The interview aimed at clarifying the experts' attitude towards the most relevant school problems, the impact of external changes on school activity, active involvement of community members, relationship between an education establishment and its founder.

During the expert interview, school leaders were provided with a set of questions. Their answers were recorded in writing or by means of a dictaphone. The interview was executed individually in separate rooms with each respondent. The method of content analysis was applied during the analysis of expert survey results.

## 1. The Role of a Leader in Quality Management

Quality management is a management philosophy and methods which are applied by an organization for its improvement, involvement of all staff members into improvement activity, meeting consumer needs, improvement of product and service quality and reduction of costs (Stoškus and Beržinskienė, 2005; Vanagas, 2008). Thus, quality management is a coordinated activity directing and managing an organization in the sphere of quality. Direction towards quality provides an opportunity for an organization to reach better operational results. According to various studies (Markevičiūtė, 2009; Ruževičius, 2007), in order to reach long-term operational processes, the assurance of operational quality and the consolidation of strong positions, an organization must apply quality management, which should become the key goal of the organization. Quality management is usually applied

by profit-seeking organizations; however, it should also prevail in managing public sector's non-profit seeking establishments and organizations providing social services.

Total quality management includes the participation of each member of an organization (in order to meet customer needs) and the management of their activity. Thus, it is a process involving each member of an organization into the improvement of services with a view to reaching the quality meeting or exceeding consumers' expectations (Juozaitienė and Staponkienė, 2006). There are three main principles of total quality management: 1) determination to seek high quality, 2) be customer-focused, 2) insure total employee involvement and 3) management of participants and delegation. Thus, it is possible to state that human potential is instrumental in total quality management.

In pursuance of quality and in creating a learning organization, an important role is attributed to the leader having a clear vision of institutional development, providing an opportunity to staff members to act independently, having a critical and realistic attitude towards own capacities; matching personal values to the values of the entire organization (Vanagas, 2008).

It is impossible to imagine a contemporary organization without a manager-leader in the process of an intensive change of environment; therefore, scientists (Collins, 2001; Goleman et al., 2002; Barvydienė and Kasiulis, 2005; Kets de Vries, 2003; Kouzes and Posner, 2003; Northouse, 2004; Žvirdauskas, 2006; Senge, 2008, etc.) give substantial attention to the analysis of leadership.

Leadership helps to sustain the vitality of an organization, its organizational and individual structure (Adair, 2003). Louis and Miles (1990) and Fullan (1991) emphasized the link between the effectiveness of school activity and the role of a leader. Thus, professional qualities of a school leader are determined by a constant adjustment to the situation with a view to making relevant organizational decisions.

According to Senge (2008), a leader in a learning organization is not a 'warrior', but a creator. His/her main task is to create a learning process approved by all staff members, to develop the skills of trainees and to assist them. A leader is also a guide who seeks a common vision. School leader is closely related to all subjects of an organization as well as to their interests.

Changes and leadership are two closely related concepts; changes highlight the necessity of leadership, whereas a leader is needed for the initiation of changes. Thus, in assuring quality management in education establishments, school leaders play a very important role.

## 2. The Role of a School Leader in Quality Management

The assurance and improvement of operational quality in schools of general education is one of the key priorities of education in the Republic of Lithuania. Schools execute self-assessment of the operational quality by applying selected assessment tools, forms and instruments. Self-assessment of the operational quality is a process during which the members of a school community analyse the operational quality of a school (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania, 2009).

Therefore, the main goal of the present survey is to clarify what served as the basis for school leaders in assessing the quality of education services.

A total number of 206 school directors and their deputies were interviewed during the questionnaire survey (Figure 1).

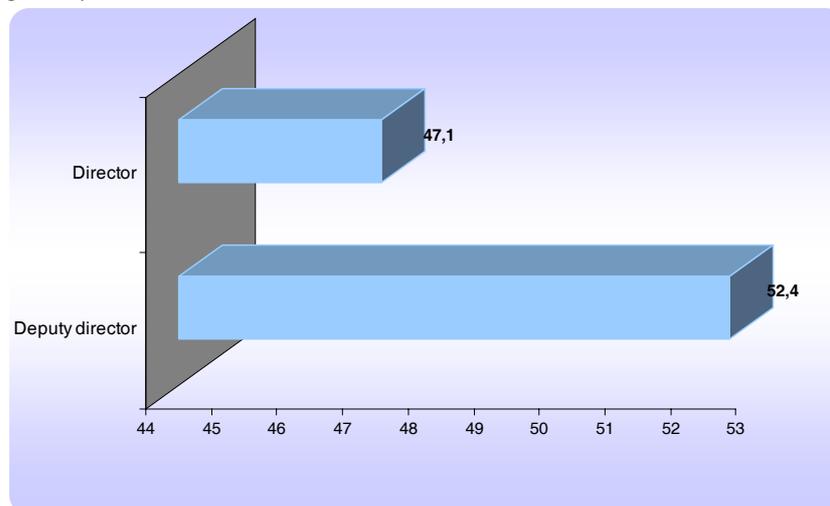


Figure 1. School leaders by positions (percentage)

The work experience of 27.2% of the school leaders was less than 5 years, 16% have been working for more than ten years, 15% for more than 15 years and 13.1% more than 20 years. More than one third (37.4%) of the school leaders had the third management category, more than one fifth the second category, 7.8% the first, the remaining (29.1%) had no management category.

According to the research results (Figure 2), while evaluating the quality of education services, half of the respondents referred to the results of internal audit; 17% based their assessment on the opinion of pupil's parents, 15% on the opinion of teachers, 9% on the opinion of pupils, while 14% of the respondents did not answer the question. One respondent noted that *'in fact quality of education in schools is not analysed today; this activity is confined to the arrangement of documentation'*.

While evaluating the quality of education services, the school leaders rarely referred to the opinion of the beneficiaries of education services, i.e. pupils and their parents.

Table 1. Institutions provided with reports of education institutions

<i>Institutions</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Municipal education divisions	100
Community of an institution: council, pupils, pupils' parents	20
Ministry of Education and Science	14
Health centre	11
The Department of Statistics	11
Other	4

The school leaders were asked about the institutions to which they submitted the reports on school activity and its quality (Table 1). According to the qualitative analysis of their answers, schools submit reports to more than twenty institutions. All respondents indicated that they submitted reports to municipal or county education divisions (founders). One fifth of the respondents noted that they presented reports to school community: parents, school council, pupils, teachers.

Reports on school activity are also submitted to institutions such as the Ministry of Education and Science (14%), health centres (11%), the Department of Statistics (11%). Several respondents indicated that they submitted reports to the police, the Service for the Protection of the Rights of the Child, Pedagogical Psychological Service, military conscription offices, the commissions for the certification of school leaders, urban ecological divisions, etc.

However, it is difficult to say whether the school leaders actually submit regular reports to nearly 20 different institutions or treat the requests of agencies or the submission of the data on the situation in schools as reports.

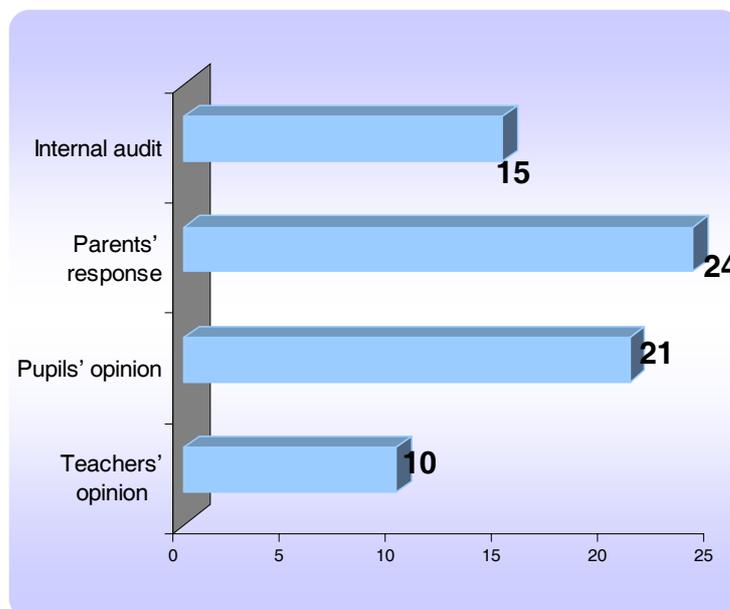


Figure 2. Evaluators of the services of an education establishment

The school heads were asked to identify what knowledge and capacities were instrumental for a school leader in order to ensure the operational quality of a school (Table 2). Nearly one third of the respondents emphasized that it was impossible to ensure the quality of a school without relevant personal qualities of a school leader ('respecting other opinions'; 'good will'; 'justice'; 'tolerance'; 'responsibility'; 'integrity'; 'self-confidence'; 'activeness'; 'collegiality'; 'flexibility'; 'personal example', etc.).

The majority of the respondents (77%) indicated leaders' management skills as the capacity of key importance in assuring the quality of a school; the creation and implementation of school strategy as well as planning and work organization were also mentioned. The respondents also emphasized the importance of communication (19%) and team work (15%) skills.

A large proportion of the respondents (43%) indicated education policy knowledge and understanding as key knowledge relevant for school leaders. Only more than one tenth of the respondents emphasized the importance of psychological knowledge in assuring the operational quality of an educational establishment. It has to be noted that only a small number of the interviewed school leaders was of an opinion that legal and pedagogical knowledge was necessary for the assurance of operational quality in a school.

Table 2. Knowledge and capacities relevant for a school leader in assuring school quality

Options of responses	Percentage
<b>Knowledge</b>	
Good knowledge of education policy	43
Psychological knowledge	13
Legal knowledge	7
Pedagogical knowledge	3
<b>Capacities</b>	
Management skills (design and implementation of the school strategy, planning and work organization skills)	77
Communication	19
Team work	15
Development of school culture	11

One of the key tasks of a school leader is to initiate and manage changes as well as to recognize the resistance to change. Therefore, the respondents were asked to describe how they perceived change management and what possibilities for the implementation of these changes they had in their school (Table 3).

Table 3. Change management qualities

Qualities	Percentage
Initiation and organization of changes	32
Collegial decision-making	23
Systematic evaluation of progress and operation results	22
Establishment of a learning institution	20
Quality and accessibility of the updated education content	10
No response	21

As the results of the research show, one third (32%) of the respondents perceived change management in an organization as the initiation and organization of changes. Collegial decision-making (23%) and systematic evaluation of progress and operational results (22%) were also qualified as elements of change management. One fifth of the school leaders emphasized the development of a learning community as the main change management quality, while one tenth of the respondents mentioned the accessibility and quality of the updated education content.

The questionnaire also allowed finding out the attitude of school leaders towards the possibility to implement school changes (Figure 3). 16% of the respondents indicated that work conditions for the implementation of changes in schools were favourable. Nearly one fourth of the respondents (24%) noted that there were few possibilities to implement changes. The school leaders explained such an answer by stating that teachers were conservative and that it was difficult to convince them on the necessity to change. Several respondents (2%) said that change was possible only when the school leader himself/herself was willing to change.

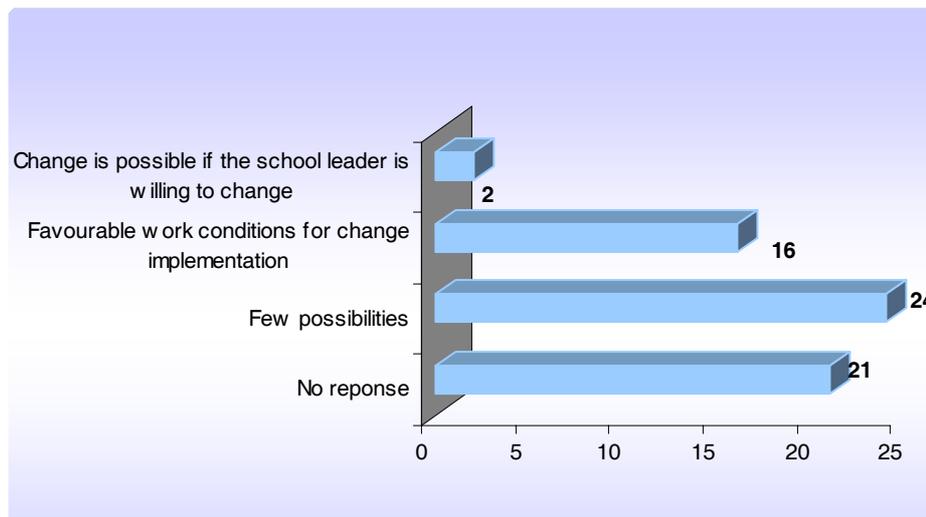


Figure 3. Change possibilities in schools

The expert survey was applied for the analysis of change possibilities in school. After a qualitative analysis of survey results, the main institutional problems impeding the realization of changes were identified. Experts—school teachers—emphasized the main problem: schools are not ready for changes and there is lack of support during the change implementation (*'schools are not ready for the implementation of changes initiated by top authorities (top-down approach)'; 'change support systems are not yet established'*).

Another important problem faced by a school leader who is initiating changes is the reluctance of teachers to participate in the school management because of, as teachers claimed, *'low motivation', 'passive attitude of teachers', 'unwillingness to do additional job because of low wages'*. The experts related material problems with inadequate planning of financial resources.

According to the experts, the success of changes mostly depends on the position of a school leader. They emphasized the ability of a school leader *'to demonstrate the necessity of changes to the pedagogical staff', 'to explain the problem to community members' and 'to seek mutual understanding between the leader and the pedagogical staff, and the perception of the meaningfulness of own activity'*. The experts also indicated that in order to sustain and ensure successful implementation of changes, strategic planning, i.e. the identification of a *'clear policy' and 'clear goal'* was instrumental. According to the experts, in order to ensure successful realization of institutional changes, these changes have to be *'part of relevant strategies' and 'other documents'*. Some of the experts were of the opinion that the success of changes highly depended on the preparation and attitude of the pedagogical staff.

According to the school leaders, the success of changes highly depends on teachers' competence and motivation. However, the experts noted that quite often teachers were passive and not willing to take part in the elaboration a school's strategic plan due to the lack of *'motivation and/or competences'*.

The experts related the lack of motivation to *'inadequate remuneration for the additional work'* as well as the fact that *'pedagogues do not see the meaning in the preparation of plans', 'they do not believe in changes', 'are negative towards changes', 'are of the opinion that this is the responsibility of the director or other staff members', 'are passive and careless about the job'*.

The lack of competences was identified as: *'teachers' narrow attitude towards the activity of a school'; 'teachers usually notice trivialities and are concerned only about their problems'; 'they are afraid to make mistakes and lack management knowledge'; 'are not enough aware of the education reform'; 'are not sure about their personal opinion'; 'do not know how to do that'; 'are not acquainted with management theories'; 'do not know the strategy of the city and the country'; 'do not interpret facts correctly'; 'are not able to realize changes'; 'there is a huge gap between teachers and administration'*.

Nearly all interviewed experts evaluated legal acts regulating school activity negatively or as satisfactory. According to the experts, legal acts regulating school activity *'stipulate an excessive responsibility of school directors'; 'schools' functions go beyond their responsibilities'; 'there are a lot of contradictions and confusion in different regulatory enactments'*.

Assistance and support of the founder of an institution is instrumental throughout the change initiation process; however, the experts noted that they got more tasks than received support from the founders: *'There is no relationship, only orders and tasks: we should speak more with school leaders, teachers, we must hear and solve their problems'; 'Dialogue is impossible if problems are not solved. However, they require financial resources. Without funds problem solution and dialogue is impossible'; 'The founders do not interfere into our work, but they do not help us either'; 'I do not think that they realize the strategic goals of education or are aware of what they want in this field'; '...do not show any initiatives with regard to school, but do not interfere into my activity or the activity of other pedagogues'.*

According to the experts, the founders are indifferent to the development of the activity of a specific school, new ideas are often ignored; there is lack of promotion and support of innovations in school communities: *'The founder is indifferent to the issues of the improvement of a specific school. Relations are based on lobbying, everything depends on whether you are acquainted with relevant persons'; 'You better don't ask anything and everything will be okay'; 'There is no response to the suggested ideas'; 'The founder only passes the attributed functions onto other people. The formation of an institution is absolutely unpredictable (except the fields which are financed from the pupil's bag). School communities are not encouraged, their ideas are not supported. No legal assistance at all'; 'Today the founder is only a provider of funds. The lack of assistance, attention, perception of moral values make schools solve problems alone; therefore, the relations are cold'.*

The experts would like to see not formal *'but actual cooperation with the founders'*, i.e. to see *'their interest in the problems of a specific school'*, to be in a *'constant dialogue'*, to cooperate in the *'resolution of specific problems'* and see their *'assistance to teachers and school community'*, *'flexibility in solving problems'*, *'counselling assistance and the formation of a positive attitude towards an education institution'*.

## Conclusions

1. Orientation towards quality provides a possibility for organizations to reach better operational results. In pursuance of the operational quality and the establishment of a learning organization, an important role is attributed to a school leader, i.e. a leader having a clear vision of institutional development and giving a possibility of self-sufficient work to other staff members.

2. The quality of education services provided by schools is analysed and evaluated by the workers of an education division (founder). Usually school leaders judge the quality of provided services on the basis of internal audit results; more rarely they listen to the opinion of pupils' parents, teachers and pupils themselves.

3. Not only personal qualities of a school leader, but also his/her management skills and the awareness of the education policy are important in assuring school quality. With a view to achieving effective operation of an education institution, it is necessary for school leaders to initiate and manage changes and to recognize change contradictions. Work conditions for the implementation of changes in schools are more unfavourable than favourable.

4. The main problems faced by schools during the change process are: low motivation of teachers regarding their participation in the management of an education institution, insufficient funding of education institutions related to improper planning of funds by a founder, the passivity of teachers related to the lack of motivation and competences as well as to the lack of time.

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## **MOKYKLOS VADOVO VAIDMUO, UŽTIKRINANT TEIKIAMŲ ŠVIETIMO PASLAUGŲ KOKYBĘ**

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### **Santrauka**

Orientavimasis į kokybę suteikia galimybę organizacijoms pasiekti visapusiškai geresnių veiklos rezultatų. Bendrojo lavinimo mokyklos veiklos kokybės garantavimas ir gerinimas yra vienas iš esminių Lietuvos Respublikos švietimo politikos prioritetų. Mokykla veiklos kokybę įsivertina taikydama pasirinktus vertinimo būdus, formas ir instrumentus. Vienas iš svarbiausių vaidmenų, užtikrinant organizacijos veiklos kokybę, priskiriamas organizacijos vadovui. Todėl straipsnyje pristatomas mokyklos vadovų požiūris į kaitos galimybes mokykloje, išorės pokyčių poveikis veiklai. Tyrimas buvo atliktas dviem etapais. *Pirmajame etape*, siekiant ištirti mokyklos vadovų vaidmenį mokyklos kaitos procese, atlikta anketinė (atviri klausimai) mokyklos vadovų apklausa. *Atrajame tyrimo etape*, siekiant aptarti kaitos galimybes mokykloje, struktūruoto interviu metodu apklausta 16 ekspertų. Nustatyta, kad pagrindinės problemos, su kuriomis kaitos procese susiduria mokyklos, yra menka mokytojų motyvacija dalyvauti įstaigos valdyme, nepakankamas švietimo įstaigų finansavimas, susijęs su steigėjo netinkamu finansų planavimu. Mokytojų pasyvumas siejamas su pedagogų motyvacijos ir kompetencijų stoka, laiko stygiumi. Siekiant efektyvios švietimo institucijos veiklos, svarbu inicijuoti pokyčius, juos valdyti, atpažinti pasipriešinimo pokyčiams reiškinius. Darbo sąlygos pokyčiams įgyvendinti mokykloje yra daugiau nepalankios nei palankios.

**Pagrindinės sąvokos:** kokybė, veiklos kokybė, besimokanti organizacija, švietimas.