



MANAGING COMPETENCES IN SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary challenge is to define the competences of headteachers from the point of view of the goal and needs of the school as an organisation. The aim of this article is to present the concept of competence management in schools and an attempt to answer the question: what are the desirable competences of headteachers within the area of educational leadership? The sources of information were: literature of the subject and own research. A diagnostic survey method was used as a testing technique. In the research it was decided to select a targeted sample, which is why the performed studies are idiographic in nature, which means that the conclusions refer only to the studied population. The conclusions are as follows: competence management should be used in schools because it affects not only the human policy but also the development of the institution. Headteachers and teachers have pointed to the many traits and behaviours that an educational leader should have. The mentioned competences of educational leadership included: consistency, creativity, competence, communication skills, cooperative attitudes, openness to change and the needs of others, flexibility in action and planning.

INTRODUCTION

Modern schools, which operate in a changing environment, are becoming more and more aware of the importance of human resources. In this context, great importance is attached to the best employees by defining their required sets of competences. The school headteacher is required to manage these competences skilfully, which is one of

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the latest and dynamically developing concepts of human resources management. The main reason for the ever-growing interest in this area is its enormous practical usefulness. Applying this concept will enable the headmaster to recruit staff that are as suitable as possible to the current needs of the educational institution at the stage of recruitment. It also includes a process of participatory shaping and utilization of the knowledge of all employees, aimed at effective achievement of current and future goals of the organization.

The aim of this paper was to present the concept of competence management in schools and to try to answer the question: what are the desirable competences of headteachers within the area of educational leadership? The basic methods of preparing the paper are analysis and synthesis. The basis of the analysis was literature on competence management in educational institutions and own research. A diagnostic survey method was used as a testing technique. In the research it was decided to select a targeted sample, which is why the performed studies are idiographic in nature, which means that the conclusions refer only to the studied population.

COMPETENCE MANAGEMENT PROCESS

The interest of theorists and practitioners in managing professional competences of employees has a long history. D. McClelland introduced the concept of competence to management sciences¹ in the early 1970s (Adams, 1997, p. 34). In the 1980s, the concept of competence became very popular in the Anglo-Saxon world. As a result, two models of understanding competences were developed: the British model and the American model. In the American model, R. Boyatzis' studies (Boyatzis, 1982, pp. 55-67) played an important role in the development of the competence concept. Competences began to be identified with the qualities of a manager who is doing their job well. In the UK model, the competence related to the standards related to jobs.

Appreciation of the role of competence in organizations and intensification of scientific research on competences caused that the last twenty-five years of the 20th century are defined as the time of competence revolution (Oleksyn 2010, p. 40). In foreign literature on the subject, competences were defined by, among others: L.M. Spencer and S.M. Spencer, P. Jucieviciene, and D. Lepaitte, Ch. Rowe (Spencer, Spencer 1993, Jucieviciene and Lepaitte 2005). In Polish literature, the definitions of competence were provided, among others, by M. Jabłoński (Jabłoński 2011), T. Oleksyn (Oleksyn, 2001), A. Poczowski, (Poczowski, 2003, 2007), J. Moczydłowska (Moczydłowska, 2008), S. Borkowska (Borkowska, 2006) et al. Ultimately, the concept of competence management was formulated in the 1990s as a response to the requirement for new ways of management in learning and intelligent organisations.

Despite the great interest in this problem, there is no clear definition of competence (Nieżurawska, 2010, pp. 56-59). One reason for this is the interdisciplinary nature

¹ He sought to explain the paradox of the fact that the quotient of employees' intelligence does not explain their professional success and it often happens that people with high intelligence achieve lower remuneration than people with lower intelligence. The theory of competence management also explains other apparent paradoxes, e. g. why people with higher education do not always earn more than people with lower education.

of the discussed category. The term "competences" has been evolving and over the years the authors have added further elements that build competences. As problematic as the definition of competences is their naming and describing (Masłyk- Musiał, 2005, p. 43). On the basis of the review of definitions, it is assumed that competence is a set of characteristics including: personality, knowledge, skills, attitudes, experience, and responsibility that determine efficient and effective management.

Competence management can be considered widely, as a certain management philosophy, the way an organization thinks about all its resources and skills. A narrower understanding refers to the competences of employees, especially their professional competences (Wyrzykowska, 2012, pp. 15-22).

Competence management is a way to conduct a personnel policy that integrates activities from various aspects of human resources management (recruitment, selection, career planning, employee evaluation, training, building incentive systems) (Filipowicz, 2016). It also includes such components as: analysing needs and designing competency portfolios, ensuring the right competence in the right place and at the right time, encouraging people to acquire and develop the necessary competences and analysing and assessing the relationship between the competences needed and those actually available, and ensuring their compliance. Competence management also includes the process of shaping and using the knowledge of all employees (Szczepańska-Woszczyna, 2016, pp. 8-13). Such a holistic approach means that we are dealing with an integrated competence management system, which effectively links all areas of human resources management into one coherent system (Tyrańska, 2015, pp. 56-59).

In order for the headteacher to be able to manage competences, they should first identify the school's key competences. By defining its specific characteristics, this activity will allow to distinguish a given school from other competitors. The school's specific characteristics include: generic features, quality features, and individual features. These features permeate each other, creating a compatible system. It is therefore very important to distinguish these characteristics, because they determine the specific character of a school (Bednarska-Wnuk, 2010, pp. 98-100).

The generic characteristics of schools as organisations are meant to compare them with other socialisation centres. Against this background, such differentiating features as: specific purpose of action, division of roles and tasks, hierarchy of power, impersonality in interpersonal relations and selection of personnel on the basis of qualifications and competences are distinguished. The individual features will be the analysis of a selected school against the background of other schools included in the educational system. In the context of quality characteristics, a school as an organisation is compared with other organisations, e. g. social or economic organisations. Identifying these characteristics as key competences of a school will help to improve its competitiveness and enable its further development (Elsner, 2003, pp. 37-42).

The headteacher of the school should then define the unit's key competences, in this case those of teachers and administrative staff. This is usually done by creating a profile and matrix of competences, emerging as a result of functional and behavioural analysis, which are a precondition for building a coherent competence management system. If the employee's competence profile is identified, a list of competences should first be drawn up, containing knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal qualities of the employee, tailored to the needs of the organisation. It is also necessary to take into ac-

count the changing environment, which affects the outdated character of individual employee's competences. In this context, it seems appropriate to create two types of models of competence at school: those present (such as the one that is needed at a given moment in time) and those that are desirable. Particular importance is attached to the identification of the desired competences, as they will respond to the future needs of the educational institution in a given area. The identification and definition of key competences of employees may become the basic criterion of gaining a job, promotion, participation in training or evaluation of teachers' work (Filipowicz, 2014, p. 47).

When building a matrix of competences for employees employed in school, it is most often assumed that the headteacher of a school should take into account all areas existing in the educational institution, i. e. teaching, care, management, and upbringing, and identify in them the given competences of employees (Bednarska-Wnuk, 2010, p. 99).

When discussing the competences of teachers in literature, three groups are most often distinguished: substantive competences (concerning the subject to be taught), didactic and methodological competences (containing the teacher's and student's workshop in the scope of teaching and learning methods and techniques, especially activating, projecting and group work) and educational competences (concerning different ways of influencing students, e. g. communication skills). It is also proposed to include the following competences: psycho-educational, diagnostic competences related to becoming acquainted with the students' learning and their environment, in the field of planning and design, communication competences, media and technical competences, related to the control and assessment of student achievements, quality measurement of school work, self-educational skills related to own professional development, as well as those related to design, evaluation of school curricula, and school textbooks (Strykowski, Strykowski, Pielechowski 2003, pp. 71-79).

THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE HEADTEACHER AS AN EDUCATIONAL LEADER

The work of the headteacher of a public school as an employee of the public sector is currently different from that displayed not only in the centrally planned economy, but also from the one whose conceptions were changed after 1990. The new operating conditions in which the headteacher of a public school currently operates have meant that he or she must be aware that the education system is marketable. This implies a new structure for the headteacher's role in school management, especially in the public sphere. The similarity of the school headteacher's role to that of the manager of an economic organisation is becoming increasingly apparent (Bednarska-Wnuk, 2010, p. 22). Therefore, it seems that we are dealing with the process of forming unified management roles characteristic for all types of organizations (Witaszek, 2011, p. 27).

The legislator has made it clear what functions the headteacher of the school has to perform within their role. In accordance with the legal acts in force, the headteacher should be seen as a:

- head of the organisational unit of the commune,
- manager of the company,
- pedagogical supervision body for subordinate teachers,

- chairman of the pedagogical board,
- public administration body.

Each of these functions involves a wide range of tasks, powers, and competences defined by law.

At this point it is worth mentioning the five-level hierarchical structure of roles developed by J. Collins, with which according to M. Fullan (Fullan, 1995) the headteacher of the school should identify themselves (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Five-level hierarchical role structure

Source: Collins, 2001, p. 20

The presented concept indicates that in order to become a leader, it is necessary to go through all these steps. The first level, i.e. a highly competent individual, works only owing to their talent, knowledge, skills, and good working habits. Subsequently, when an individual moves to a higher level, they contribute to the achievement of group goals and cooperate effectively with other members of the group. Therefore, the individual becomes a member of the team. In turn, a responsible manager organises people and resources in order to effectively and efficiently perform predefined tasks. The fourth level, on the other hand, is characterised by an individual that acts as a catalyst for employee involvement. What is desirable is leadership that is expressed in the personal ability of people to persuade and influence others. The leader's task is to build the size of an organisation based on his personality and managerial skills (Bednarska-Wnuk, 2010, pp. 153-154).

The headteacher must definitely be more than a teacher or a manager. Above all, they must be a leader. In order for educational leadership to emerge, it is essential that those who have formal managerial (leader) positions in relation to their own position, to themselves and, above all, to others. Therefore, scientific knowledge of management theory is not enough – more needs to be done. On the one hand, there are certain im-

portant personality traits and on the other hand attitudes based on a system of self-trust values, such as: honesty, objectivity, the collective nature of actions, responsibility for one's own actions and the functioning of the organisation in which one acts. The basic determinant of educational leadership is the creation of conditions for individual and organisational learning of all persons employed in it (Kubiczek, 2016, pp. 24-25).

The need to define the competences of the headteacher of the school and to shape new ones have intensified with changes in the economic system. The conditions in which educational institutions have so far operated have changed. Globalisation, development of the information society and Poland's integration with the European Union forced the need for changes in the competence of all employees, especially the managerial staff.

LEADERSHIP SKILLS AT SCHOOL – RESULTS OF OWN RESEARCH

Research group and organisation of studies

The aim of the research was to select a targeted sample, because by narrowing the number of investigated cases and minimizing the differences between them, it makes it possible to expose and better recognize the phenomena or processes under investigation (Hammersley, Atkinson, 2000). The survey was conducted in three poviats of the Łódzkie Region: Skierniewicki (townships and country poviats), Łowicki, and Rawski. Its aim was to identify the approach of headteachers and teachers to leadership in school management. The study covered the competence of the educational leader, their tasks, the effectiveness of their actions, the motivation to work, and the unlocking of the teacher's leadership potential.

The research was conducted among headteachers and teachers of junior high schools. As a result, 41 headteachers took part in the survey (12 men and 29 women), which is 89%, and 254 teachers, which corresponds to 33% of teachers employed in junior high schools in these three counties. The majority (28 out of 41) of the headteachers managed junior high schools located in rural districts, one in ten of the surveyed students was a headteacher of a junior high school in a city with 20-49 thousand inhabitants, while the remaining respondents (4 out of 41) were headteachers of schools from towns with less than 20 thousand inhabitants.

On the other hand, the largest group of teachers participating in the study came from junior high schools operating in cities from 20 to 49 thousand (42%). More than one fifth of teachers (22%) represented schools from towns with less than 20,000 inhabitants. In turn, the percentage of teachers studied in junior high schools in rural areas was at the level of 36%.

More than 90% (37 out of 41) of the surveyed headteachers are certified teachers, the rest are nominated teachers (4 out of 41). The majority – 156 people (61%) of teachers participating in the survey were women, men constituted 39% (98 people). More than half of the teachers (52% – 132) were certified teachers, followed by nominated teachers (38% – 96 persons). Among the respondents, there was a small percentage of contract teachers (9% – 23%) and teacher trainees (1% – 3%).

Table 1. Structure of the research group (%)

	Headteachers (%)	Teachers (%)
Gender		
Women	70.7	61
Men	29.3	39
Qualifications		
teacher trainee	-	1
contract teacher	-	9
nominated teacher	10	38
certified teacher	90	52
School location		
City of 20-49 thousand	24.4	42
Town of less than 20 thousand	9.7	22
Village	68.3	36

Source: Own research

Organisation of the study

The survey was conducted from 19 to 30 April 2013. The data were obtained using the diagnostic survey method. The questionnaire contained information on the author, the title and purpose of the study, questions and the respondent's particulars. The questionnaire survey was both quantitative and qualitative. The questionnaire drew attention to three issues: content, type of questions, and their structure.

Before commencing the study, a written request was made via the Superintendent of Schools Office in Skierniewice, to the Chief Education Officer in Łódź, to make it possible to carry it out in junior high schools in three poviats (Skierniewicki, Łowicki and Rawski). The request presented the purpose of the planned research project and the principles of its implementation, which were introduced to the Director of the Department, exercising direct pedagogical supervision over the junior high schools selected for the study. After obtaining the approval of the Director of the Department in Skierniewice and the Chief Education Officer in Łódź the studies were commenced.

The relevant studies were preceded by a pilot study to check the relevance and communicativeness of the language used in the questionnaire. Subsequently, appropriate study was commenced by means of a draft questionnaire, which was sent electronically to junior high school headteachers asking them to inform teachers about the conducted study and to fill it in. The questionnaire in question included accordingly: 26 questions (survey for headteachers) and 19 questions (survey for teachers). The questions were open, semi-open and closed.

The headteachers of schools and educational institutions as effective leaders are guided by values, they are creative, competent, cooperative, open to change, willing to learn from others, flexible in planning and acting, they do not adhere to once set rigid rules but change them as the organization develops, they care for the well-being of the institution and all persons connected with it, they have high expectations towards others and towards themselves. Leadership in this sense can be perceived simultaneously

as: a specific feature, talent, ability, skill, behaviour, social relation or the process of social impact (Kubiczek, 2016, p. 27).

ANALYSIS OF STUDY RESULTS

At present, the effectiveness and efficiency of the educational staff is evidenced mainly by their individual qualities and skills, which are necessary to perform the duties of a school headteacher. Among the specific research problems, the solutions of which were sought in the course of conducting the research in this article, those concerning the discussed issues were selected. One of the questions addressed to headteachers was aimed at determining the competence of an educational leader.

In determining the competence of the educational leader, the headteachers pointed in particular to their characteristics, skills, and behaviour oriented towards relationships, tasks, and achievements. They most often pointed to: openness to changes and needs of others, creativity and consistency, trust, encouragement of cooperation and improvement, competence, firmness, integrity, communication skills, being organised, striving for the development of the institution, development of teachers and students, and exploitation of teachers' leadership potential (responses are presented in Table 2).

Table 2. Competence of headteachers – personal qualities and skills of an educational leader

No.	The replies of the headteachers surveyed...	Number of indications	Percentage (%)
1	open to change and other needs – change management	36	87.80
2	creative and consistent	24	58.53
3	inspiring trust, encouraging others to cooperate, improve and thus achieve their goals – motivates	21	51.21
4	competent (with knowledge and experience) and fair,	18	43.90
5	has organisational skills, pursues the development of the institution, teachers and students – is able to extract leadership potential from others.	12	29.26
6	responsible, honest – promotes team efforts,	9	21.95
7	empathetic, friendly, demanding, expressing a vision, able to solve problems and share their authority	6	14.63
8	other qualities: determined, objective, honest, controlled, able to inspire others with good working and learning conditions and quality of education – they are a leader of the team and make optimal decisions.	3	7.31

Source: Own research

As educational leaders' strengths, the headteachers most often mentioned: ability to work in a team, ability to listen and draw conclusions, responsibility, having organizational skills, supporting teachers' actions in order to achieve common goals, good relations with employees.

The vast majority of the surveyed headteachers (92%) believe that they bring out the leadership potential of teachers, most often by:

- involving them in the independent and team implementation of new and diverse tasks (51%),
- using positive reinforcements, e. g. support, motivation, encouragement to take up new challenges, praise, reward, trust (34%),
- delegation of power (24%),
- participation in the decision-making process, taking responsibility for the tasks entrusted to them (12%),
- enabling teachers to improve their own workmanship, e. g. organisation of training councils, participation in improvement courses, conferences (10%).

Only few (4 out of 41) respondents disagreed.

Teachers, in answering the question: who is an educational leader?, like the headteachers, pointed out their qualities, skills, and behaviour. They most often mentioned: motivating and supporting teachers' actions, creativity, competences, openness to changes and needs of others, responsibility, communication skills, good relations with employees.

More than half (53%) of the teachers surveyed need leaders focused both on implementation of tasks and communication between people, 39% expect relationship-oriented behaviours, while a small percentage of teachers expect performance-oriented and task-oriented leaders (5% and 3% respectively).

According to 80% of teachers, the school unleashes their leadership potential, but one in four of the four respondents felt otherwise. Respondents, like headteachers, most often mentioned the following as a way of extracting leadership potential:

- delegation of power (22.5%),
- possibility of carrying out own initiatives, especially when working with students (17%),
- use of positive reinforcements, e. g. support, motivation, appreciation, encouragement of own initiatives (12.2%),
- participation in the decision-making process concerning teaching and upbringing, taking responsibility for the tasks entrusted to them (9%),
- involving in team implementation of tasks (5.5%),
- enabling teachers to improve their own skills, e. g. participation in improvement courses, conferences, training (3%).

It should be noted that less than half of the teachers surveyed answered questions on how to unleash leadership potential and proposals for changes in order to extract it.

Table 3. Expected behaviour of the leader in the teacher's opinion

Responses of the teachers surveyed	Percentage of indications	Examples of test responses
Behaviour geared towards relations and performance of tasks	53	They should be positively oriented towards people and work "Good communication and performance of tasks should be present" "should be a role model for the team that manages" "should take care of an appropriate atmosphere conducive to cooperation of the team, as well as perform tasks and recognize the effort put by people in their realization" "A leader should be focused on communicating with people and performing tasks in order to improve the quality of school's work,"
Relationship-focused behaviour	39	They should: "be able to work in a team," "support, help, and inspire employees to be satisfied with their work," "treat all employees equally and fairly, to instil confidence, to give them a sense of security," "listen to what others have to say," "be open to the ideas and initiatives of others so that they are satisfied with their work," "create a friendly atmosphere," "strive to create a cohesive team."
Performance-oriented behaviour	5.2	They should set and implement strategic objectives," "Achieve high quality education,"
Behaviour geared towards the performance of tasks	3.2	"Should make the right decisions in order to accomplish tasks," "Should put the employees in charge of tasks and problems whose solution enables the school to become a learning organisation," "Should carry out tasks in a thoughtful, consistent and prudent manner," "Should be determined to carry out tasks."

Source: Own research

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

For a long time now, the perception of priorities in the management of the Polish school has been changing. A possibility emerged of transferring methods from economic organisations and adapting them to the needs of public organisations. Less emphasis is placed on keeping school records in accordance with the provisions of educational law or managing the institution's assets for the communication skills of the headteacher of the school. In this situation, school headteachers must acquire new competences to facilitate their management in the new environment.

The IT revolution, changes in work organisation, technologies and working techniques require management staff to be prepared using the idea of educational leadership. Headteachers and teachers have pointed to the many traits and behaviours that an educational leader should have. The most common competences of educational leadership were: consistency, creativity, competence, communication skills, attitude to cooperation, openness to changes and needs of others, firmness, responsibility, striving for participation in decision making, building trust, empathy, justice, flexibility in action and planning.

Competence in education management makes the headteacher a specialist who is able to actively, independently, and creatively manage the school. These competences allow them to understand and actively participate in the management of educational change, which in the coming years will take place in the educational system and to assess practical solutions in this respect. Improving the art of negotiation, mediation, delegating powers or building the authority of a leader is of strategic importance for the success of future headteachers.

The management of professional competences is a way of conducting a personal policy in schools in various fields (recruitment and selection, career paths, staff evaluation, training, incentive systems, etc.). The headteacher of the school as an employer should be interested in continuous improvement of competences, not only their own but also of the teachers. Because it is the professional competence of teachers that determines the school's development and success. The majority of headteachers and teachers agreed that the school offers teachers leadership potential. Most often by: involving them in team implementation of new, diverse and interesting tasks, using positive reinforcements, delegating powers, participating in the decision-making process, taking responsibility for tasks entrusted to them, enabling teachers to improve their own professional workshop.

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