

# THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHERS' LEADERSHIP SKILLS DEVELOPMENT FOR SUCCESSFUL ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

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**Abstract:** *Discussions of the quality and effectiveness in education have become topical today. There are different challenges faced by teachers and school leaders at the primary, lower secondary, secondary and upper secondary levels. Therefore, it must be recognised that leadership skills are becoming important for the successful organisation of learning at all stages of education. The relevance of leadership skills is accentuated by the rapidly changing environment of change that also characterises the field of education. In the 21st century, leadership can be associated as a pedagogical and a managerial skill. Leadership skills and openness to change contribute to the growth of an educational institution, and this growth is at the heart of a successful organisational culture. It fosters a genuine concern for the growth of every employee, as well as an institution-driven vision, coherence, ownership, mentoring, accountability and support. These are employees with developed leadership skills who change and transform the system, because no organisation can exist without change. The aim of this publication is to describe and evaluate the impact of leadership skills and openness to change on the development of a successful organizational culture in the educational institution, and to highlight the need for the development of teachers' leadership skills.*

**Keywords:** *growth of every employee, leadership skills, teacher, organizational culture in educational institution, openness to change.*

## Introduction

The 21st century is a time of change and the culture of the workplace is constantly changing. It is understanding the dynamic nature of the workplace that helps educational staff to keep pace with change (Herrity, 2022). Regular professional development and self-reflection for both the educational staff and the manager, as well as goal-oriented collaboration, shared mission and vision building become important for implementing quality change in the educational institution and leadership skills (Mlinarević, Tokić, Cvjetičanin, 2022).

Although leadership skills are often seen as abstract and unrelated to school work, teachers' leadership skills are developed directly in the classroom with

their students, and students' academic achievement is strongly related to teachers' leadership skills (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2009, 11). Communication and analytical thinking, problem solving, critical and creative thinking, time management, decision making and other important skills are important for a leader. The need for leadership skills becomes particularly acute in the process of implementing reforms, so the leadership skills of not only the manager but also the staff largely determine the openness of the whole educational institution to change (Xu & Patmor, 2012, 253). In the process of implementing any innovation, it is not only important to increase knowledge and understanding of new approaches and methods, but it is also important to implement these processes in a well-organised and disciplined way, which involves formulating new goals and working towards them together, implementing innovative and scientifically sound methods, reflecting on the benefits and opportunities for improvement (Kapur, 2022). As an agent of change, the teacher is characterised by openness to change and readiness to learn (Dudareva, 2018). Transformative leadership can involve both significant and seemingly insignificant actions with enormous impact. They can be small actions, gestures, even a word spoken casually or thoughtlessly can have a big impact on a person and the whole organisation (Montuori, Donnelly, 2018).

The aim of this publication is to describe and evaluate the impact of leadership skills and openness to change on the development of organisational culture in an educational institution, and to highlight, based on empirical research, the need for developing leadership skills in teachers.

### **Developing teachers' leadership skills in an organisational culture focused on improving the quality of education**

Kumi Yeboah (2012) emphasises that "it takes time, dedication, hard work and learning to develop teachers' professional competence" (Yeboah & James, 2012, 170), but it is also essential to be aware of fostering collaboration with different stakeholders in the educational process to improve learning (Branch, Hanushek & Rivkin, 2013), a shared vision for the future of the educational institution, as well as a sense of moving towards a goal. Mlinarević, Tokić & Cvjetičanin (2022) also emphasise a drive towards common goals based on mutual respect, continuous learning, participation and ownership of the quality of the learning process (Mlinarević, Tokić & Cvjetičanin, 2022).

The beliefs and values of staff members are at the heart of an educational institution's organisational culture. It is an organisational culture based on values and the drive for qualitative change that reduces the need for formal rules, as the intrinsic motivation of employees is strengthened (Mlinarević, Tokić, Cvjetičanin, 2022). Creating a collaborative learning environment also becomes important. Stoll & Fink (1996) emphasise that organisational culture is both a

product (organisational achievements) and a process (organisational development (including traditions), as well as a drive towards employee self-direction). Its functions are: boundary-setting function (delineating differences between organisations, including the uniqueness of the institution, the individual talents of employees and the development of professional competence to achieve the organisation's common goals); development of collective belonging (maintaining the traditions of the educational institution and introducing new traditions); internal rules of order binding on all (Mlinarević, Tokić, Cvjetičanin, 2022).

Creating an organisational culture is a process of co-construction involving all staff, as well as students, parents, education policy makers and partners. Not only the acceptance and reinforcement of traditions and values, but also openness to innovation is important in achieving the overall goals of an educational institution (Xu & Patmor, 2012). Innovation, creativity, finding new and innovative solutions to problems, confidence and openness to new ideas, fostering a positive, open, innovative and transformative organisational culture are essential for today's leaders (Mlinarević, Zec, & Cvjetičanin, 2022).

### **The Description of Teachers' Leadership Skills**

For today's teacher, it is the responsibility for achieving common goals (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2009) that becomes particularly relevant, knowing that they "create and lead, transforming themselves and the world" (Montuori & Donnelly, 2018). An integral part of leadership is the decision-making process in professional work. Teachers make decisions on a daily basis about teaching and learning methods, teaching materials, strategies, learning environments, etc. The choice of the most appropriate and valuable alternative is also important (Kapur, 2022). It is essential for every teacher to be aware that he or she "creates and leads, transforming themselves and the world" (Montuori, Donnelly, 2018, 3). Warren (2021) in "Teacher Leadership Begins with Self-Leadership", reveals that teachers need to start by developing self-leadership skills to foster personal growth. Self-leadership is the awareness of oneself, one's strengths and feelings, as well as self-acceptance. Only then can a teacher effectively and responsibly manage his or her work both inside and outside the classroom. Developing self-leadership skills is important not only for improving performance but also for personal development and life enrichment (Warren, 2021).

Two forms of leadership can be highlighted in the learning process: administrative leadership and pedagogical leadership (planning teaching and learning, supporting professional development, building trusting relationships with staff, fostering mutual learning, structuring and organising professional work, creating a supportive environment, etc.) (Douglass, 2019). At the same time, the leadership structure can also be characterised as: shared (sharing

responsibilities and taking responsibility) and hierarchical (authoritarian leadership style) (Douglass, 2019). It is the shared leadership in an educational institution that contributes to a large extent to employee engagement, motivation and openness to change, becoming agents and facilitators of change (Kangas, Venninen & Ojala, 2015).

The importance of transformative skills and competences has also been highlighted (Montuori & Donnelly, 2018). An important transformational skill is transformational leadership or change leadership skills, which include: employee awareness of organizational growth opportunities, employee intrinsic motivation, problem-solving skills, autonomy and effectiveness (Bass, 2008), quality of collaboration, quality work environment (Hafsari, Aslamiah & Rachman, 2021) and positive relationships among employees (Mlinarević, Tokić, Cvjetičanin, 2022). At the same time, mentoring programmes (Wong, 2015, 42) and a positive emotional background (Hallowell, 2011) become relevant for the development of transformative leadership skills, for which strategies for overcoming disagreements/conflicts in the educational institution; individual approach to each employee and joint pedagogical discussions become important (Hallowell, 2011). Clearly, the presence of transformative leadership in an educational institution facilitates change (see Table 1).

*Table 1 The relevance of transformative leadership for the development of a learning and development-oriented organisational culture in an educational institution  
(made by authors)*

<b><i>The impact of transformative leadership</i></b>	<b><i>Changes at an educational establishment</i></b>
Openness to change (Montuori & Donnelly, 2018)	Show the courage to change the world (Brown, 2006)
Ability to adapt to different life situations/tasks (Montuori & Donnelly, 2018)	Staff develop problem-solving skills (Bass, 2008)
Staff develop problem-solving skills (Bass, 2008)	Staff autonomy and efficiency are promoted (Bass, 2008)
Positive emotional background (Hallowell, 2011)	Building respectful relationships (Mlinarević, Tokić, Cvjetičanin, 2022)
Moving towards common goals (Tokić, 2022)	Promoting a shared vision (Hey, 2006); Developing a shared mission and vision (Mlinarević, Tokić, Cvjetičanin, 2022)
Developing collaborative skills (Bass, 2008)	The ability to reflect, to think critically (Mezirow, 1991)

However, it is also important to recognise that the leadership skills of the staff of an educational institution depend to a large extent on the leadership skills of the head of the educational institution (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2009). In order to facilitate the development of leadership skills in preschool teachers, the preschool teacher needs to start by developing the skills of self-leadership,

which is self-acceptance, awareness of one's strengths and feelings, in order to promote personal growth. Only by developing self-leadership is a teacher able to effectively and responsibly manage their work both in and out of the classroom, contribute to improving their performance and personal development for life enrichment (Warren, 2021). Shared sharing of responsibilities and accountability is also important, as is shared leadership, which is characterised by transparency, promotion of autonomy and openness to new ideas (Kangas, Venninen & Ojala, 2015).

### **Methodology**

In order to conduct an empirical analysis of preschool teachers' leadership skills in the context of the competence approach, a survey of preschool teachers was implemented, as "a specific feature of a survey is the possibility to ask a larger number of questions in writing and to receive responses from a larger number of subjects" (Kamerāde, Mārtinsons, Pipere, 2016). The survey was implemented online. Statistical processing of the survey data was implemented for validity using a predictive analytics and statistical analysis software package (IBM 81 SPSS v.22 Results are considered statistically significant if  $p$  (statistical significance)  $< 0.05$ ). The survey was conducted from 1 January 2023 to 30 January 2023. The survey was carried out among 271 respondents from different regions of Latvia (Kurzeme, Vidzeme, Zemgale, Riga and Latgale). All respondents were pre-school teachers.

### **Results**

The study involved an online survey of pre-school teachers and administrators. 271 respondents took part.

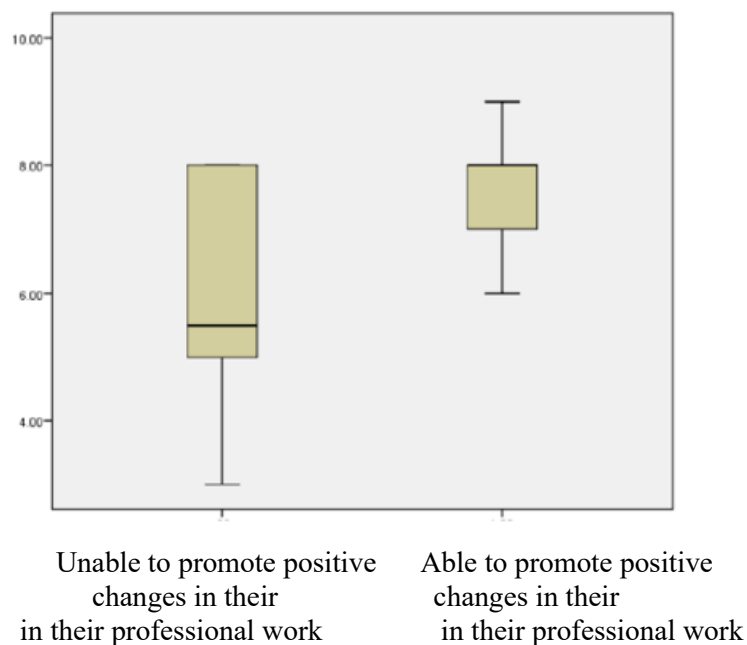
93% of the respondents were preschool teachers, including methodologists, speech therapists, music and special educators, 4.4% preschool managers and 2.6% deputy preschool managers. 11.8% or 32 respondents work in the private sector, and 88.2% or 239 in municipal institutions. The questionnaire was sent to the 5 preschool institutions of the study base. All of the schools in the study base are preschools in the Riga region. The master sample consists of 374 respondents.

The majority of respondents - 86 (31.7%) - have 15 or more years of experience, 47 (17.3%) have 10-14 years of experience, 64 (23.6%) have 5-9 years of experience, and the remaining 72 (26%) have 4 or less years of experience in the field of education.

Analysing the age of the respondents and relating it to the generational theory, it was found that the majority of 154 (56.8%) teachers were born between 1981-2000, 111 (41%) were born between 1961-1980 and 4 (1.5%)

were born between 1946-1960. One teacher born between 2001-2014 and one teacher born between 1923-1945 also participated in the survey.

The context of changes in the Latvian education system has already been highlighted, but the survey data show that only 7 (2.6%) respondents believe that the changes implemented in the Latvian education system are qualitative, while 49 (18.1%) respondents are convinced that they are "completely dissatisfied" with the ongoing changes, 136 (50.2%) respondents are more than dissatisfied, while 79 (29.2%) respondents are almost satisfied. Thus, it can be concluded that the majority of respondents are dissatisfied with the reforms and changes in the Latvian education system, such as the implementation of the competences approach to curriculum learning.



*Figure 1 Relationship between respondent's statement that he/she is able to promote positive change in his/her professional work and respondent's subjective leadership score (1-10) (N=271) (made by authors)*

The Mann-Whitney test revealed that respondents who believe they can promote positive change in their professional work have a higher median subjective leadership score (Median 8, IQR 1) than respondents who do not believe they can promote positive change in their professional work (Median 5.5, IQR 3.25,  $Z=-2.257$ ,  $p=0.024$ ) (see Figure 1). Thus, the findings revealed that it is leadership skills and openness to change that contribute to the growth of an educational institution and it is also the drive towards growth that underpins a successful organisational culture (Mlinarević, Tokić & Cvjetičanin, 2022, 105).

## **Conclusions**

1. Education reforms are largely motivated by a change in the values of education. Teachers' lack of openness to change, lack of knowledge, understanding and time planning, and lack of ownership can be a hindering factor in the implementation of reforms.
2. Moral values are becoming relevant in the development of an organisational culture. In the process of developing an organisational culture of learning and development, the purposeful and systematic, collaborative implementation of positive change and innovation, focusing professional work in the educational institution on the management of student learning, becomes relevant. The goal-setting is linked to the recognition of the importance of the results of each employee's work in the overall work.
3. Developing leadership skills at all stages of education must be seen in the context of constant change. Transformative leadership is therefore becoming relevant. The leadership skills of the staff of an educational institution depend to a large extent on the leadership skills of the head of the educational institution, as the responsibility for achieving common goals becomes relevant in an educational institution. In order to foster the leadership skills of pre-service teachers, the development of self-leadership - self-acceptance, awareness of one's strengths and feelings, skills for personal growth - becomes important. Only by developing self-leadership is a teacher able to effectively and responsibly manage his/her work both in and out of the classroom, to contribute to the improvement of his/her performance and to the enrichment of his/her personal life.

## **Summary**

Leadership skills development is not facilitated by employees' belief that leadership skills are only necessary for employees in managerial positions, so it is very important for the head of the educational institution to encourage the use of the potential of his/her employees. Organisational culture is a process of co-construction involving all employees of an educational institution. The more pronounced the organisational culture, the less need there is for formal rules and the more intrinsic motivation is promoted. In pre-primary education, the development of an organisational culture geared towards learning and development is also becoming particularly relevant, as children and adults are involved in improving the quality of education, creating a shared learning environment and working together to achieve goals. In the 21st century, leadership is valued as both an important pedagogical and managerial skill. The terms 'manager' and 'leader' are often used synonymously, but the manager of an

educational institution may not always possess the necessary leadership skills to promote positive change in the educational institution and an organisational culture focused on learning and development. Leadership skills are necessary for everyone in an educational institution, as they contribute to an institution's growth-driven vision, coherence, ownership, debate, creativity, responsibility and support, collaboration skills, self-confidence, professional competence, analytical thinking, problem solving, critical and creative thinking, time management and decision-making.

Developing self-leadership skills, which is awareness of oneself, one's strengths and feelings, as well as self-acceptance, is crucial to developing leadership skills. In the teaching-learning process, the most popular forms of leadership are: administrative and pedagogical leadership, but an analysis of the structure of leadership shows that, in contrast to hierarchical leadership, shared leadership, which is the sharing of responsibilities and responsibilities, is becoming a trend today. It ensures better organisational performance. Shared leadership is characterised by transparency, promotion of autonomy and openness to new ideas, employee involvement and motivation. Reflection, critical thinking, creating new knowledge and actively reflecting on one's own learning are essential for developing transformative or change leadership skills. Discussions between the institution's staff and a positive emotional background become important in developing transformational leadership. Also important is the sustainability of leadership, which is facilitated by the setting and achievement of long-term goals as opposed to performance and short-term targets; shared responsibility as opposed to a hierarchical leadership structure; and the evaluation of the educational institution in terms of progress and future needs.

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