

Country Background Report Latvia

1. Background – the contrast between everyday reality and the political framework

Most management theory identifies four particular functions which need managing in any organisation: marketing, financial, personnel and 'production' management. Everybody can imagine that first three are directly connected with the school but what about 'production management'? Bennet et.al (1992) argue that 'production' management is used as the omnibus term to describe whatever the organisation does as its primary activity. Schools and colleges 'produce' education. So it turns out that all four management functions refer to schools, too. In business structures, companies these functions are managed by managers who are specially trained for it. The situation in Latvian schools differs from the one in business world. People working in schools are firstly trained as teachers. Education Act (1998) states that a person is allowed to work as an educator if she/he has a pedagogical qualification or she/he studies in any of the higher pedagogical institutions. There is no difference whether a person works as a teacher, a deputy head or a head teacher – the rules are similar for everybody. Hughes (1985) has described two main sub-roles of headship – leading professional and chief executive. To lead the school on a high level means that head teachers should develop both the educator sub-role and the manager sub-role effectively. The reality shows that in Latvia the role of the head teacher is rarely well-defined, certainly not in official documents. Usually head teachers do not consider that in their work both of their roles – leading professional and chief executive – should be in balance. The case study done in 2005 showed that majority of head teachers is interested in developing the educator sub-role rather than the manager sub-role.

In order to provide a better picture of working conditions of head teachers, a brief description of the system of general education in Latvia is provided.

Preparation of five- and six-year-old children for the acquisition of basic education, the acquisition of basic education or continuation of the

acquisition of basic education until the age of 18, is compulsory. Unfortunately due to financial problems it is being discussed that preparation of five- year- old children could be stopped for several years.

Fees for the acquisition of pre-school, basic and secondary education at an institution established by the state or local governments are covered by the state budget or local government budgets in accordance with the procedures prescribed by the Cabinet. A private education institution may determine the fees for the acquisition of education.

Pre-school education programmes are acquired by children up to the age of seven, but preparation of five- and six-year-old children for the acquisition of basic education is compulsory.

The acquisition of **basic education** is compulsory; it starts in the calendar year when a child turns seven. The compulsory basic education programme content is determined by the state basic education standard. Upon the acquisition of the general basic education programme, young people receive a certificate attesting general basic education, and a list of school results.

Anyone, without any age limits, has the right to acquire **secondary education** programmes, if he/she has a certificate attesting basic education. There are four-direction general secondary education programmes: comprehensive; humanities and social sciences; mathematics, natural sciences and technology; and professionally-oriented ones. The compulsory general secondary education programme content is determined by the state general secondary education standard. Upon the acquisition of the general secondary education programme, young people receive a certificate attesting general secondary education, and a list of school results.

A school year is usually 35 weeks long – from 1 September to 31 May (except for pupils of grades 9 and 12). Criteria and procedures for the evaluation of the acquired education are set in the state education standards. Each general education institution can implement one or more licensed education programmes, including education programmes for ethnic minorities.

Education can be acquired in several forms, usually by attending full-time schools (day and evening shift), but there are also extramural education programmes. An individual can also choose to become an external student.

In the school year 2007/2008 Latvia's comprehensive day schools were attended by 250,941 Latvian, Russian, Ukrainian, Romany, Jewish, Estonian, Lithuanian, Polish, German and other nationalities children and youth.

Special types of general education are: special education, social correction and pedagogical correction.

2. Context

The national context

The education system is administered at three levels - national, municipal and institutional. The Parliament (*Saeima*), the Cabinet of Ministers and the Ministry of Education and Science are the main decision-making bodies at a national level. The Ministry of Education and Science is the education policy-making institution that also issues the licenses for opening comprehensive education institutions and sets educational standards along with the teacher training content and procedures.

Gradual implementation of basic education curriculum reform was started in September 1, 2005 and is ongoing. It covers changes in curriculum, the introduction of new subjects and the increase of learning load. A number of new subject standards were developed in order to ensure a logical link between the subjects and acquiring basic skills instead of overloading pupils with the factual material. Gradually, all pupils of basic education were involved within three years thus completing implementation of this reform in the school year 2007/08.

On 2nd September, 2008 the Cabinet of Ministers approved the 'Regulations on National Standards for General Secondary Education and Secondary Education Subject Standards'. The regulations foresee both a gradual transition to a modernized curriculum, and changes in criteria for assessment of pupil study achievements at general secondary

education level, beginning with school year 2008/09 and providing a succession of basic education content changes at general secondary education level. New subject standards for Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Natural Science, Mathematics, Sports and Foreign languages have been in force since 2008/09; the standards of the remaining subjects will enter into force in 2009/10.

The regional/local context

The year 2009 in Latvia was characterised by major changes and reforms in all spheres. After 11 years of effort the Local Government Reform (LGR) has been finished. Management of education services has been affected very much. Regarding the general organization and administration of the education system the aim of the reform is to create counties, which ensure competitive education and are able to attract qualified teachers and develop a better resource base.

Up till July 1, 2009 there were 525 municipalities in total but education services were provided by 36 amalgamated municipalities. After the LGR was implemented in July 1, 2009 the total number of local municipalities has decreased to 112. This means that smaller municipalities have joined together and now the education services should be provided by each municipality now called a county because the regional level does not exist any more.

Therefore the number of education service institutions will increase and the organization of work and cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science should be changed as well as the system of transfer of financial resources. Moreover, the reform and possible models are still subjects of discussion. Currently the Ministry of Education and Science, its subordinate institutions and representatives of education boards are developing a model of the network of several education boards. It is planned that the new model of education boards shall come into force in the school year 2009/2010.

Despite the LGR the functions of local governments regarding education stay the same: they provide children with the possibility to acquire basic education at the school which is the closest to the place of the residence, provides youth with the opportunity to acquire secondary education,

as well as providing possibilities to realize informal education, supports extracurricular work and camps for children, establishes, reorganises and closes schools in co-ordination with Ministry of Education and Science (MoES), employs and dismisses the heads of institutions under its supervision, distributes and allocates the financial means from the state and municipal budget and controls the rationality of expenditure.

3. School leadership concepts and practices

The institutional context

Further education of school heads

At the school level the head teacher is responsible for the organisation of the teaching and learning process, learning outcomes, appointing teachers and technical staff, compiling the detailed budget in co-operation with local municipality.

Head teachers in large schools (with students round 800) have more than one deputy head. Deputy heads usually share their responsibilities: deputy head responsible for teaching and learning process, deputy head responsible for ICT, deputy head responsible for out-of-class activities. The head teacher together with the deputy heads forms the leadership team. It is up to the head teacher if other staff is included in the leadership team. The best practice shows that subject group leaders could be included there, too. Subject groups are compulsory in Latvian schools. In smaller schools usually two groups are formed – the humanities and the sciences. In larger schools there is a subject group for each subject e.g. Mathematics, Foreign languages, etc.

Duties and responsibilities of school head teachers

The majority of head teachers in Latvia see themselves firstly as teachers, secondly as managers but only some can identify themselves as leaders. Besides the administrative work head teachers can teach no more than 12 lessons per week. Most head teachers do it, motivating their choice not to lose their pedagogical experience and earn additional money. If head teachers teach 12 lessons per week, it means that one third of their working load is devoted to teaching.

Head teachers overall are responsible for staff development in their schools. It is stated by Cabinet regulation that each teacher has to join in-service training courses and has to cover 36 hours in the three years' period. Usually teachers choose shorter programmes up to 12 hours and this means that joining in-service courses should be planned very carefully not to disturb the teaching process at school. In-service training of teachers is financed by the state and partly by the local municipality, sometimes teachers pay themselves if they wish. In-service courses are organised unitarily. This means that schools do not receive money for teachers' in-service training directly. In this case the head teacher's responsibility is to accept the plan of in-service training needs and send it to the local municipality. The local municipality collects all applications from all schools and is responsible for forming groups.

Despite many responsibilities head teachers cannot be absolutely free in their decision making procedures because they are restricted financially. Schools are financed by state, local municipality and private organisations or individuals. The total budget depends on the number of students at school. Teachers' salaries are fixed by the government, but salaries of technical staff by the local municipality and head teachers cannot use this money for other purposes.

Head teachers are responsible for the pedagogical quality, too, but more on the administrative level. Head teachers are not obliged to visit teachers' lessons but they can do it if they wish. Usually deputy heads visit other teachers' lessons. All schools go through the accreditation process. The schools are assessed by external experts. The schools are accredited from four to six years. It is very important for schools to get six years of accreditation. Good accreditation results mean that a school works well.

Cooperation with the staff

A school like very many other organizations could be described in two ways: it has a formally instituted pattern of authority and different kinds of rules and procedures which are intended to aid the achievement of goals. However, besides the formal aspect there are networks of informal relationships and unofficial norms which arise from the interaction of individuals and groups working together. An average city or town school

is usually a large educational establishment where about one hundred people are employed. There are teachers but also a head teacher, several deputy heads, support staff, technical personnel. All of them have a different background of understanding how things should be done. The head teacher's task is to manage the whole staff despite diversity occurring there. One way to cope with it is introducing teamwork as a part of school management. If the organization tends to work effectively, forming groups of individuals,

building effective teams, it can lead to the main purpose of the organization – balance between working towards the goals and individual satisfaction.

The situation concerning the cooperation within the school differs from school to school and in most cases it depends on the personality of head teacher. A good example of effective teamwork in the secondary school in Latvia shows the following (Neimane, 2005):

Team type	Team staff	What do they do?
Leadership team	Head teacher, 4 Deputy Heads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting goals and tasks • Analysing results • Implementing changes (global) in set tasks
Operational teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subject teachers' team • Year teachers' team • Class teachers' team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solving specific tasks • Gathering specific information • Guiding the work of support teams
Support teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project teams • Parents' teams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentrating on one particular task

The head teacher described the successful model as follows:

“Teamwork has given impulse to seek for new ideas – firstly individually, secondly as a team. The school microclimate has been changed because teachers started to evaluate their own work as well as one done by their colleagues. The school is anymore not a place where only individuals work. The teachers work co-operatively and it is the greatest success.”

But not all head teachers introduce teamwork in their schools. There are many cases where schools are governed top-down, using autocratic leading style.

Management analyses

Deputy Head

As was stressed in the previous chapters, a head teacher can have one or more deputy heads according to the number of students in the school. A deputy head is the so-called right hand

of a head teacher and the right choice can serve as a basis for effective teamwork in the school leading process. A deputy head is usually chosen by the head teacher in a simple way – with the help of an interview. But there are more complex situations when a newly appointed head teacher has to start to work together with deputy head who has worked at school for years. In this case high skills of co-operation are needed from both sides to lead the school successfully.

There are no strict regulations for deputy heads' in-service training. But usually new deputy heads, as well as experienced ones, actively participate in seminars and workshops provided by local education services of municipalities, as well by the Ministry of Education and Science. Education officers give additional support to newly-appointed deputy heads but there is no special support system at the state level.

Quality management – school as a learning organisation

The one constant factor in contemporary society is the exponential increase in the rate of change, so, tomorrow will be different to what we expect today and before we are used to this, it will change anyway! To respond successfully to rapidly changing environments, schools need to learn at least as quickly as the prevailing rate of change, otherwise they are forever playing catch-up. Schools learn via the individual teachers within an institution and their interactions with colleagues both internal and external to the organisation. To make the concept work – a school as a learning organisation – every school has its own plan of development for three years and more. It is worked out by the leadership team with the help of all the staff and the students' council. Different activities are organised within the school and/or outside the setting to promote individual as well as collective learning. The most popular activities are:

- Visiting lessons led by colleagues working in the same school and/or visiting lessons led by colleagues working in other schools
- Master classes (it is new type of activity in Latvia, introduced only in 2008 and it means that a teacher gives a lesson for other teachers who participate in the lesson as students. Master classes are usually prepared by experienced teachers who have worked out a new teaching method or give a lesson on how to teach some new content of the subject)
- Round tables and discussions
- Field trips
- Experience exchanges
- Conferences
- Projects

Financial management

The school head teacher (together with economists) is responsible for budget planning. The head teacher is responsible for reasonable use of money. In Latvia head teachers are not free to use money which comes from the state or local municipality as they want because it is for a special aim (salaries, books etc.). Head teachers can allocate money from private persons or companies but there is a strict system of reporting twice a year to contributors how money is spent.

Networks

Co-operation with other schools, universities and other institutions depends on the school's value system – either it is open or closed. Open schools usually have open-minded and active head teachers who are ready not only to gain experience from others but, firstly, share his/her school experience, new ideas with colleagues from other institutions. It is not a secret that open schools are more successful.

4. Recruiting school leaders

Recruitment and retention of leaders

Any person with an appropriate education and professional qualification may work as head of an education institution. In the case of basic and general secondary education institutions, one must have higher pedagogical education, or higher and pedagogical education. It is also possible to have higher education and be still acquiring pedagogical education (Education Act, 1998). The open recruitment procedure is used in Latvia. Recruitment, also firing, of school heads is the responsibility of the municipality. As there are no other requirements to become a head teacher stated in the Education Act, municipalities can work out their own regulations with additional requirements, e.g., at least three years' experience in an administrative position, good knowledge of English etc.

Head teachers have to apply for attestation in which their professional qualification and suitability for the post is assessed. The newly-appointed head teachers should send their application asking for attestation not earlier than after one year of work but not later than three years of work in the position. Besides the application head teachers should send a certificate that they have completed the further education program "Management of General Education" consisting of 72 hours. This is the only one program head teachers are obliged to cover. Head teachers are attested only once in their working life. There is no limit how long a person can be in the head teacher's position because the local municipality according to the Labour Law must sign permanent contracts with head teachers.

Attractiveness of School Leadership

Salaries for head teachers as well as for teachers are paid on a monthly basis and the number of salaries payable per year is 12. Salaries are fixed for the whole country but they depend on the number of students in the school. As salaries of pedagogues and head teachers are rather low compared with other sectors, sometimes local municipalities try to support them financially and allocate certain sums of money as an additional payment for a good quality of work. Compared with teachers, a head teacher's position is more attractive because it is better paid and it is chosen by educators who would like changes, a career and new challenges. Advertisements for the head teacher's position are put in local newspapers, homepages. It means that people who are interested in applying for the head teacher's position can do so. Usually there are more than three applications.

Department of Education, Youth and Sports of Riga City Council is an example of good practice how head teachers, deputy heads and subject group leaders can be trained together to develop leadership skills in all management and leadership levels in schools. During the project "Guidelines for the development of leaders and leadership in education in Latvia" were worked out. The Guidelines are for the use by people new to any leadership role in schools, and those that may work with them as mentors or critical friends. It will also be of interest to teacher educators and those who are being trained to be teachers. The Guidelines are rooted in theory and practice. They draw upon some 'big ideas' in leadership practice and development, but more important, the guidelines arise from comparisons between 23 individual action research projects undertaken by a group of heads, deputy heads and subject group leaders in schools across Latvia. Here are two examples of the guidelines provided:

5. Challenges, problems, innovations

The greatest challenge in the whole education system now is two-fold:

- Local government reform. The question to be answered – how the Local government reform affects educational management and leadership?
- A dramatic decrease of students in schools compared with 2000 and a dramatic decrease of finances in education in 2009. This causes a decrease of teachers, too.

In this difficult situation head teachers will have to solve many problems, the major one being how to lead the school with restricted finances. The knowledge of crisis management and change management could help. But as it was said previously, there are no special in-service training programs for head teachers except one - "Management of General Education". So there is a challenge for the Ministry of Education and Science to work out a support system of professional development for head teachers.

"School Leadership Project"(2006 – 2008) organised by British Council, Centre for Curriculum Development and Examination and

- It is essential that leaders develop a good understanding of the difference between the concepts 'management' and 'leadership'. At its simplest, *management* refers to the decisions and actions surrounding the use of resources to achieve a task. *Leadership* refers to the setting of goals, directions and priorities and the creation and maintenance of a culture and ethos to enable the realisation of these things.
- Good leaders should also see themselves as 'unfinished', and as continuing to learn. They should expect difficulties and disappointments and some failures, but see these *primarily* as opportunities to learn and as signals for how to do things differently.

Appendix

Legislation

- Latvian Education Act (1998) www.izm.gov.lv
- General Education Law (1999) www.izm.gov.lv
- Procedure how programs of general education and education institutions are accredited and how head teachers are attested (2006) No 216 www.izm.gov.lv

Reference materials

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- Hughes M (1985) 'Leadership in professionally staffed organisations' in *Managing Education* London: Cassell.
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