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LEADERSHIP AND MENTAL MODELS. STUDY OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' AWARENESS

Abstract

The main purpose of the proposed paper is to analyze paradigms (theoretical frames) of leadership owned and used by school principals. The analysis is based on the results of the research conducted for the purpose of defining and describing the school principals' way of thinking about leadership for education. For the purpose of building framework for research it was assumed that four leadership paradigms might be defined.

Leadership might be understood through classic paradigm of leadership (domination of the significant person or elite group); or transactional paradigm (influence and negotiations); or visionary paradigm (called sometimes charismatic where the most import ant is clear vision); or organic paradigm (existing in multicultural and diverse world where leadership is flexible and leaders change dependently on a situation).

Three methods have been used: interview with 99 principals of schools (of different type), observation in the same number of schools and analyses of the blogs (written on-line by school principals).

It is common to ignore the mental models (or paradigms) used by people what brings certain outcomes for every initiative. It is necessary for policy making, change projects or developmental initiatives to recognize and take under consideration the diversity of possible perspectives (mental models) owned by those who are working in the concerned area, in this case head teachers.

Civilization changes influence context and demands towards schools. Those challenges impact the modernization of schools. One of the common expectation towards management are more open − participative mode of the decision making process and the involvement of employees in sharing responsibilities. Unfortunately different initiatives towards inclusion of employees into management and leadership processes bring rather disappointing results because they ignore ideologies and assumptions of people who decide about school functioning.

Analysis of the results of the research should improve the understanding of the school reality by showing strategies and decisions adequate to the state of "educational consciousness".

Keywords: educational leadership, mental models, change, development.

Among many various initiatives, which are worth taking or should be taken, one appears to be particularly important. It is an attempt of creating a strategy for selection, education, training and support head teachers of schools (and directors of other educational institutions). Dozens of thousands of people constituting a group of the most important "actors" in education system deserve recognition and support, as well as a precise assignment of tasks and expectations. One of preliminary activities ensuring quality of such strategy is initiation of a broad discussion on head teachers' role. One element of this discussion should be a reflection on head teachers' awareness.

Study of awareness of education leaders

Civilization changes result in new demands towards schools. It coerces initiatives of schools' modernization, which have rather minor successes. One of the reasons of low effectiveness of such actions might be the fact of ignoring beliefs, ideologies and opinions of people on whom the reforms rely – the head teachers.

Although education remains one of political and social priorities, lack of critical reflection and lack of discourse on education lead unavoidably to a slowdown or introduction to inappropriate reforms, which increase the risk of stagnation. Since our interpretation of reality structuralizes this reality, and they (interpretations) depend on our knowledge created on the basis of participation in social processes, it is necessary to allow for a critical stance towards data, information and opinions [Berger, Luckmann 2010]. As our knowledge, interpretation of reality and activities depend mostly on conclusions drown through critical reflection, a systematic reflection is a necessary condition of an individual and organizational development.

This is why I decided to look at the way the head teachers think about leadership. The essence of my research project shows a variety of approaches of head teachers to leadership, and – as a result – to the tasks taken by them in schools. The research consisted of 99 in-depth interviews with head teachers of primary, junior high and high schools. This group included active head teachers who voluntary participated in two projects focused on school development and evaluation.

Mental models as concepts of reality

The possessed convictions (mental models) decide on a person's actions, their approach to tasks or interpersonal relations [Senge 2002]. Therefore it is important to define such convictions before designing systematic activities. Defining mental models of leadership makes it possible to ask crucial questions: Do the mental models of head teachers inspire them to take creative, non-schematic actions, giving students and teachers an opportunity to take autonomous decisions, or do the models rather contribute to reproducing patterns, limiting and forbidding

experiments? What leadership style will be preferred by people convicted that the main aim of education is reproduction of the current state and transferring knowledge? What style will be preferred by people convicted that school should bring a social change?

Every person has individual theories on reality and its sectors, and uses them to understand situations and act appropriately and coherently. Individual theories comprise of three elements:

1) a concept of reality, that is an answer to a question: what is it like?;
2) a system of values, or an answer to a question what is important and how it should be;
3) and an orientation on activity, or a conviction whether one should be passive or active in a given situation, and what kind of actions one should take [Polak1999].

What are contemporary concepts of leadership? In the world of global connections a traditional approach is more and more criticized. A couple of trends dominate contemporaneous thinking about leadership. When trying to grasp complexity of this subject, leadership may be described in the framework of four main paradigms: classical, transactional, visionary and organic [Avery 2009].

Classical leadership means domination of one eminent person or elite group, giving commands to or manipulating others. The goal of a group is settled, though it does not have to be openly declared. Members of the organization just conform to directives given by leaders and do not question them, due to the fear of consequences or respect to the leader. This style of work: giving commands and controlling people was a dominating style of leadership in the 20th century's organizations and is still very popular today [Avery 2009].

Transactional leadership means leaders perceive members of the group as individuals and dedicate a lot of attention to their skills, needs and motives. A basic concept of this kind of leadership is conviction that a leader consciously uses their influence to direct, order and assist in activities and relations in the group. Leaders and members of the group negotiate or conclude transactions. Their effects depend mostly on an ability of a leader to influence others in order to reach goals and on ability to reward or punish members of the group [Avery 2009].

Visionary leadership (sometimes called charismatic, inspiring or transformative) is an answer to the times of change and uncertainty. Such leaders appeal to hearts and minds of organization's members, presenting a clear vision of the future. They set up a plan of reaching goals by their organization and motivate its members to make this vision come true. Visionaries are not heroes, they are rather „products" of their times. Once the times change, such leaders lose their power. Their abilities and visions do not fit the needs any more. Subordinates of visionary leaders are expected to be active and engage in all group activities taken to carry out the vision [Avery 2009].

Network (organic) leadership probably will appear in network (organic) organizations, which make the concept of an individual, central leader less and less useful. Such organizations function in multicultural, diversified world which can be presented (just like the organization itself) not as a hierarchic

system but a group of dynamic communication hubs. Inter-functional working groups are common in contemporary organizations. Their members may interchange depending on current needs or they can participate in several groups at once. Self-governing and self-improving groups do not need permanent formal leadership. It can always be handed to someone more suitable. Due to changes in organizations, the concept of leadership must have changed too. New forms respect growing dispersion of workers and complexity of connections between them [Avery 2009].

Local and global context of research

As a society in Poland and worldwide we face today unprecedented challenges. In the same time we should not forget how successful Polish society has been – political system has been changed, economy, at least partially, cured, Poland has become a democratic state belonging to the world, not to a particular bloc. However, years of civilization delay have severe consequences in many areas of social life. Among others, they led to a need of a quick construction of a new system of values, additional (bigger than in other countries) investments in infrastructure and technology, increasing effort to shape a civic society or to reconstruct an education system.

Unfortunately, either the euphoria following the smooth transition from totalitarian to democratic system or the fear of too difficult questions has virtually blocked a critical discourse on ideologies ruling social life. The hard period of transformation, economical decisions and abandoning some social groups have deepened enormous inequalities. Additionally, open borders showed us tremendous diversity of the world we, as a society, cannot deal with. It turned out that negligence in education of "the former system", and too slow reforms and modernization of educational policy (after 1989) not only have not contributed to a quick social capital development, but also have not let fully use intellectual p tential of Poles. This situation has deepened a threat Poland has been struggling for some time – a danger of becoming a place of cheap labor and consumption of goods produced elsewhere, instead of playing a role of a leader, thanks to creativity, mobility and entrepreneurship of Poles.

Awareness and common agreement on importance of the role of education in individual, civilization, economical and social development is linked, among others, to reflection on:
  – transformation from industrial age to the age of knowledge-based society, where new competences are important. Schools should be particularly interested in soft skills (such as teamwork), which have not been formally accepted as teaching goals (in spite of official declarations or even stating so in strategic documents),
  – globalization triggering economical changes and bringing different cultures together, standardizing opinions, creating similar lifestyle world-

wide. It is important to ask: Can education become a space where the youth are prepared to being open to divergence and diversity, in the spirit of equality of chances?,

– sudden, yet uncontrolled and controversial development of new communication and other technologies, which – in spite of gigantic investments – has not brought a significant improvement of education quality [Dumont, Istance 2010].

Education constantly remains one of the major points of interest of the governments all over the world, since it is still perceived as the best investment for the future. In most countries it is a significant entry in public spending and still remains the warranty of success. Actually, nowhere is conviction that investment in education is vital for strengthening opportunities of long-term increment and for reaction to technological and demographical changes influencing the labor market challenged. The belief of usefulness of education for individual and social success is confirmed by various statistical data, e.g. showing advantages of having higher taxes from higher income.[1] Education plays important role in retaining labor force in the labor market for a longer period, which is necessary in aging society or when employment rate may rise.[2] Other economic advantages are, among others: differences in income dependent on the level of education– higher education means higher income,[3] but also social advantages, including better health [*Education at glance* 2010].

It is not surprising that formal education gets substantial financial support. OECD countries spend 6.2% total GDP on average on functioning of educational institutions. In the years 1995−2007 in these countries spending on educational institutions (excluding higher education) grew on average by 43% [OECD 2010].

Despite economic proofs and social advantages stemming from education, and despite the rise of expenditures per student in the last decade, many countries note a worrying lack of educational effect. One of the experts analyzing data on education conclusions is a need of taking efforts towards appropriate changes in education system, to achieve better results in relation to the capital invested [*Education at glance* 2010]. Situation is not clear, however. It is obvious that educational systems are meaningful to individuals and to whole societies. It is certain that systems are very expensive, but there is no success in attempts to improve them.

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[1] An average male with higher education in OECD countries, during the whole period of professional activity – due to income taxes and social insurance contributions – brings 119000 USD more than a high school graduate. Society wins more, since taxes alone do not reflect directly many other advantages stemming from education.

[2] On average in OECD countries in years 1997–2009 unemployment rate for people with higher education has been about 4%, while for people without secondary education this indicator has often been well above 10%.

[3] In over 2/3 of OECD countries, which have data on their disposal, people with higher education earn over 50% more than the others.

It is as difficult to deny the need of a reform of education, as to find solid suggestions showing what should be changed and how. Stephen Ball [2007] notes that recently popular trends, appealing to market model (where workers' success depends on the ability of selling one's skills, knowledge and entrepreneurship on the global market) do not bring good results because of two reasons. Firstly, they often do not bring changes they promised. Secondly, they create new problems. New rules of creating wealth replace mass production logic of the Ford-like, industrial era with logic of flexible, knowledge-based production. However this process does not necessarily show new ways of the state's functioning. What is more, frequently used deregulation and privatization-reduced state's opportunity of direct intervention on practical and ideological level. Regarding the argument about lack of changes, Ball shows that "industrial labor" has not disappeared, but it has been exported. Cheap labor in mass production, without proper employee's protection, has found its place elsewhere on a geographical and political map. Labor requiring low qualifications still exists, but in the sector of services (and is frequently bound to feminization of certain professions). As far as the second argument on new problems is concerned, Ball notes similarities between center-peripheries relations in global economy and relations between top-ranked schools and school with the lowest stores in all rankings, especially in these educational systems which have experienced market-based reform [Ball 2007].

A characteristic dualism in educational policy of many countries is clearly visible. On the one hand, importance of an individual and individual choices of every consumer are accentuated. On the other hand – there are references to the aims of policy concentrated on satisfying economic interests of the state. It is not known whether these priorities can be fulfilled in the framework of the same initiatives. Among typical elements of thinking about education and ways of its systematic improvement we may find:

– an idea to improve economic situation through binding education with employment, productivity and trade,
– attempts to provide students with skills and competences useful in recruitment processes and work,
– a movement towards direct control over curricula and grading,
– initiatives towards reducing costs of administration and management in education,
– growth of social influence on decision-taking process and pressure of market choice [Ball 2007].

This combination of activities, or a proposition for education improvement stems from neoliberal vision of the world, where most important elements of social structure are connected with economical decisions taken in the atmosphere of a free market. I do not want to discuss effectiveness of such solutions. Yet I would like to stress how strongly do they determine thinking about education in many countries of the world, impairing critical thinking about these solutions.

Systematic approach to complex reality

One of the most important principles of thinking about education development is „interdependency". Today we cannot talk about individual theories or ideas on actions offering a solution to problems. We should rather take into consideration a whole set of conditions determining suitability and effectiveness of any initiative. To make chances for reforming education real, our actions should be at the same time:

– concentrated on the learning persons, which means that all actions should influence learning process,

– properly designed and structured, which means action cannot be a mere effect of a teacher's intuition. They should also create space for autonomy and investigations of the learning persons,

– substantially personalized, that is sensitive to the context and characteristics of individuals and groups, their previous knowledge, motivations, emotions,

– inclusive, which means sensitive to differences and deficits, enabling every learning person overcoming inborn barriers,

– social, which means that learning always takes place in interactions, cooperation and common effort to create an environment supporting learning [Dumont, Istance, Benavides 2010].

It seems today we should change the procedure of introducing reforms and improvements of education systems. A popular and practical perspective of immediate reaction to diagnosed problems should be left aside in favor of a deeper reflection on the nature of education, needs of a contemporary society and role of theory and preconceptions of reality. An approach towards education, pedagogy and leadership must be defined contextually, so it is possible to include specific conditions and problems in different areas, in which education takes place. It is also important to ask constantly about social justice and its relations with existing structures, processes, and decisions, which are taken. It is necessary to initiate, but also to perceive various discourses on education, since they construct reality of education.

Reflection on possible perspectives leads to a necessity of seeking a new pedagogical and political language, which would enable reactions on changing context and challenges. This language should create relations between democracy, ethics and politics, so that activities in education are understood as political action (or stemming from political context and influencing it) and actions in politics are understood as educational actions (or serving society's education). It is necessary to understand that the language of politics (and power) is more important for education than the language of technology and methodology, since education is a moral and political activity showing visions of social life, the future of individuals and groups [Giroux 2011: 71].

Any solution or idea to solve dilemmas connected with education should grasp and treat the issue from different perspectives, including various groups, levels and strategies. Each initiative should include a component focused on school and its

area, on teachers and other groups. It might be introduced top-down, through official channels and legal changes, or bottom-up, thanks to differences in awareness and needs of education system participants. To avoid the fate of many great ideas attempting to change the system, which have been incapacitated, since in implementation process they lost their primal, planned meaning and they have begun to function as petrified emblems of totally different order, each structured change should be treated systematically, which means including three actions:

– trying to understand relations and links between things/elements of the system and consequences of these relations. Systematic thinking tries to answer the question on the way in which we, in a given situation, confer sense to relation, structures, processes, patterns/models stemming from them, as well as what it means to us;

– introducing and engaging multiple perspectives, trying to see one thing in many ways (as it is seen by different groups). It helps avoiding stereotypes in thinking about solutions and strengthens awareness of the fact that "our perspective" influences interpretation of what we see. While introducing changes, it is worth asking a question about other ways of understanding the situation, and how these other interpretations might affect opinion on this reform. While searching for a good solution, guarantying success, one should also look analyze different meanings of success, and how different perspectives on this topic might affect human behaviors and actions;

– being aware of borders between the system's elements. Seeing everything as a whole inhibits noticing all the important elements and understanding them. Where and how do we mark out borders is meaningful to the system, because it reduces dealing with things which are not vital for us. Marking borders of course is dependent on the accepted system of values, so it is always worth asking who marked them, what is inside and what is left outsider, or about practical and ethical consequences of marking out borders, inclusion or exclusion [Williams, Hummelbrunner 2011].

It appears that the procedure of introducing changes and improving system should be reformed. A very practical perspective of immediate reactions to diagnosed problems should be replaced by a deeper reflection on the nature of education, needs of contemporary societies, and the role of theory and assumptions about reality. It is necessary to initiate, as well as to recognize various discourses on education, since they shape reality of education. Contemporary Polish school suffers from the absence of the term "leadership" – a capital we should not ignore – in its discourse.

Present and absent discourses

Among significant factors decisive for a success of development initiatives and for a success of schools and whole education systems, leadership potential is mentioned more and more often. The fact who, with what skills, aims and sup-

port leads educational processes becomes a more and more important (or just more and more clear) element deciding on quality of schools and education systems.

One of the key elements deciding on the shape of education system is a mental model of education and mental model of leadership characteristic for people deciding what goes on at school. Very often good ideas fail not because of lack of motivation or will, lack of systemic thinking, but due to human **thinking models**. New concepts fail while introduced, because they contradict our internal images – models of how the world functions, images that restrict us to old, tried and tested ways of thinking and acting.

Thinking models may take a form of simple generalizations, such as "you cannot trust the others", or they may compose complex theories, such as a concept explaining why members of my family interact this way and not the other. Yet, most importantly, thinking models are of an **active** character – they shape our actions. Understanding the way in which thinking models shape our perception is absolutely crucial in management. Problems with thinking models do not rely on whether the models are true or false, because they are always generalizations. Problems with thinking models appear when they are accepted silently – when they function below the threshold of consciousness [Senge 2002].

Leadership, despite many different interpretations [Northouse 2007], is usually defined as a process of influencing others to reach together commonly negotiated goals of the organization [Alston 2002: 2]. It might be understood as a specific group process in the interaction between people; sometimes leadership is treated as behavior [Northouse 2007], sometimes as particular personal features, a set of characteristics – behavioral patterns and personal features, which make some people reach their goals more effectively than the others [De Vries 2008: 203]. On other occasions leadership is analyzed from the perspective of specific skills, such as reaching and processing information, problem solving, social skills, motivating others or knowledge. This approach emphasizes the meaning of competences and shows perspective of growing to the role of a leader. It gives each person an opportunity to learn leadership, stressing its complexity, while in the same time presenting the elements it consists of [Mazurkiewicz 2011].

I suggest understanding leadership as a process occurring in groups of people characterized by several specific features. Educational leadership is a process concerning processes of teaching and learning. Its specific goals depend on context of education, but the main goal is teaching people. While talking about educational leadership, it is important to remember that education is a process in which a community of learning people is created, due to involvement of mind, emotions, past experiences, sensitivity to conditions or other people, with reference to the values accepted by a given community in the same time. It is a similar situation with leadership. It is not a characteristic of an individual or even a group, but an organization quality – a result of cooperation of many people. Leadership potential has nothing to do with charisma, authority or visionariness of individuals, but rather with an ability of increasing participation of organization's mem-

bers in decision-taking process. An education leader improves abilities of revealing potentials of the others, so they can transgress from an unfavorable situation (one leader in a group) to a desired situation – participation of many people in decision-taking process and increasing leadership potential of the group. A conscious leader, together with a group, should create situations enabling everybody to learn and solve problems [Mazurkiewicz 2011].

An education leader shares their knowledge and encourages the best cooperation, helping others to believe in themselves, to see and use their own potential. A leader should also assure colleagues about the right direction of their work and decisions and help fight uncertainty, so often connected with gaining autonomy and independence. Unfortunately, more and more complex future will contribute to making head teachers' work more difficult rather than easier. Situation will require constant improvement. That does not bode well head teachers, who are already loaded with too many duties. It is necessary to redefine a head teacher's roles towards being a designer and constructor of a school culture, letting all the organization's members learn. Leaders are members of teams wiser than individuals, thanks to the wealth of teams – people. Thomas Hoerr uses a term **distributed intelligence**, which in his opinion proves that our intelligence cannot be restricted to what is inside us, but should be determined by an ability to perceive and use external resources. He believes this kind of intelligence will determine a success of organizations (and schools especially) in the future [Hoerr 2005].

Educational leadership is characterized by a specific sensitivity of people engaged in the process. This sensitivity manifests in constant searching for ways of building a community, vision of an organization and specific (for the organization) approach to the tasks. These "ways of building an organization" refer to and manifest in various areas. Here are the most important ones:

1. Reflection on conditions of functioning, community's needs, social trends, philosophy, approach to teaching process which results in activities adequate to the context (ACCURACY). In an organization with a high leadership potential, there is a conviction about the rationale of action, a desire of searching new solutions and an acceptance of mistake that might happen due to activity, not disregard.

2. Concentration on the process of learning and development (LEARNING). In an organization with a high leadership potential a goal is clear and accepted. In every aspect of organization's activity a priority of members' learning is visible.

3. Constant support and demand for participation of all the employees in decision-taking and dialogue, which define directions of activity (PARTICIPATION). In organizations with a high leadership potential employee's talents are revealed, a desire of taking more responsibility than the necessary minimum can be observed, a readiness to take part in all the events connected with institution's activity is visible.

4. Ability to act as a service reflexive towards people and institutions (SERVICE). In an organization with high leadership potential there is a cli-

mate of trust and support. A desire to help in solving problems is a visible priority. Official hierarchy is very flattened, respect and prestige is gained in relations with others, not due to a position.

5. Respecting autonomy and diversity, even if difficult and different from mainstream (DIVERSITY). In an organization with high leadership potential an ability to use all the resources, also divergence and diversity is clear Rules of autonomy let treat this divergence as an asset, not a burden [Mazurkiewicz 2011b].

It is important that people taking part in and responsible for education leadership process are aware of multitude of elements necessary for final result of institution functioning and teamwork. Gaining such awareness is a moment when a development of leadership potential, of an individual or a group may start. An attempt to build an efficient learning organization and developing leadership potential at the same time require multidirectional activities of various intensity. Then you cannot avoid a question what education is.

A necessity of reflection and active attitude towards reality

It is necessary to support leaders and candidates for leaders in their development, which is completely new, it sets new goals and is carried out in a new form. First of all, they must be supported in thinking about their roles, about teaching process, about their places of work – schools they run, in a much broader context than currently. A reflection on activities in the context of the leaders' colleagues' and society's conviction, in the context of values and preconceptions on what they are doing, in the context of priorities and justifications why they are acting this way and not another, is necessary. This kind of reflections is one of key aspects of development of leaders, who aim at constant evolution of actions, compliant with the needs, building trust in organization and to organization, responsible activity, in relation to what is going on in the world around.

The voices calling for fundamental social change, reminding the need of mass cooperation and change of the style of leadership, which might mean abandoning mythicizing specialization and expert knowledge, expertise and control in favor of cooperation, participation and creativity. It is well known that we will not prepare leaders of the future, looking back. Phenomena connected to social and virtual cooperation not only change the way of learning, but learning as such, which creates new tasks for the leaders. Today they should become anthropologists focusing on the groups, rather than (as it has been so far) psychologists focusing on individuals [Gobillot 2009]. Obviously a demand of giving up expert knowledge and experience might sound worrying, but one should remember we talk about leadership potential, the capital that should help us deal with results of disturbing trends. Gobillot talks about an appalling demographical trend, observable as lower and lower level of understanding between generations, about expert trend disturbing traditional activities, noticeable by the fact that expert knowledge can be found not only inside,

but also outsider organization, about the trend of loosing attention/concentration, which is seen when it is more and more difficult to engage attention to the most import ant aspects of the organization, when there is less and less time for it; and about democratic trend, manifesting itself in the fact that it is less and less probable that the leaders might control resources and people personally and directly.

While demanding thinking about leadership as a way of acting according to needs and as satisfactory development of education system, I point out to reflection as the mechanism of constructing leadership. I believe that what and how we think about the world makes the world what it is like. I suggest then accepting social constructivism as a main theory explaining mechanism of people's and organizations' learning, which means accepting the assumption of socially created reality. Here an individual is the world's creator. Through interpretation process they convey senses and structurize their environment. A man in organization is a seeker of sense [Sułkowski 2005: 77–85].

In the era of constant time deficiencies, unmet deadlines and delays, a postulate of devoting more time on reflection on theories might appear unreasonable, but it is necessary to act rationally. If you restrict yourself in professional development to "technical", practical matters, if you close yourself to so-called "theory", there is a risk of using procedures and methods thoughtlessly and taking thoughtless actions. Knowledge of your own attitudes and ability to put your opinion in theoretical context gives a possibility of specifying your standpoint, rational access to experiences and opinions of other people, justification of the practices used and intellectual tool to recognize, analyze and evaluate various issues and problems we face. Such a self-consciousness protects us from self-condemnation (for example for the fact that our students do not learn, there is a reluctance to learn) and enables a sensible development. If you understand context, structure and sources of your own concepts and theories, there is a possibility of their development in a reflective and conscious way. You can also gain terminology for the discourse it, which it is then easier (or rather possible at all) to participate and build a professional culture. It is then easier to justify and explain the action taken and protects you from fashionable trends and pop-theories [Brookfield 1995].

Head teachers and their visions of leadership

Research on leadership shows a very complex image. A leadership and a leader are terms, which at first seem clear and possibilities of understanding them seem obvious, since these words accompany humanity for a long time. We hear them, we discuss them, and we refer to them. In spite of this fact (or maybe due to this fact) precise definition is very difficult. Every conversation or analyses resemble peeling an onion: It does not lead us to a common understanding, but reveals next layers of understanding. An interview on leadership started with a question about a character of a leader: who is a leader? We could see certain regularity. The interviewed head teachers most often defined leaders through actions, functions or tasks. A leader was described

through what they did. According to the respondents leaders are people who can organize others' work, define tasks precisely, assign well-matched tasks to certain employees, appreciate subordinates, especially when they comply with commands or earlier settlements. Leaders set goals to be achieved, they decide about priorities, about which aim has to be met unconditionally, and which can be postponed.

In spite of precise specification of criteria, it was not easy to classify comments of head teachers. Similarly to the case of a question on visions of education, it appeared that mental models of a majority of head teachers combine elements of various concepts and paradigms. We should then rather talk about flexible usage of various elements of theories than about sticking to one theory. Head teachers expressed opinions, which were a specific amalgam, a mixture of perspectives and theories. That is why here, just like in the case of visions of education, I defined four additional mixed paradigms of leadership.

Despite a conclusion about a multitude of stands in between the paradigms, we can answer the question about the state of awareness and about who the leader is in head teachers understanding. Two groups came to light. They expressed their opinions on leaders clearly enough to be assigned to a certain paradigm. 22% of respondents expressed themselves in a way combining a paradigm of visionary leadership, treating a leader as a charismatic, inspiring, magnetic person, and 18% of respondents invoked a vision from the classical paradigm. Here a leader is defined as a person or a group on top of the ladder and executing power over other members of the group.

A group of respondents presenting a mixed, classical-transactional leadership paradigm constituted 22%. Together with 18% of supporters of classical leadership it forms 40% of head teachers inclining towards a strong person, using their formal power or ability to punish and reward, combined with an ability to negotiate (transactional leadership). If we take into account an 8% group of people presenting opinions from both visionary and transactional paradigms (and a group of 22% pointing to a visionary leadership), we will have a 70% group of respondents invoking to a visionary or classical leadership, enriched with elements of transactional leadership.
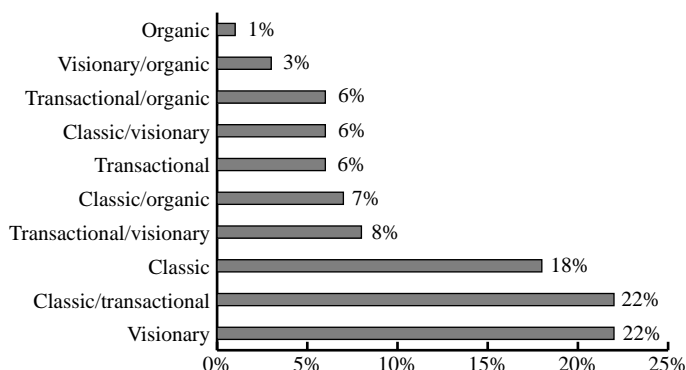

Figure 1. Paradigms reflected in answers to the question: who is a leader?

Source: own construction.

It is clear that a leader, as understood by the interviewed head teachers, is a strong person – strong due to their vision and ability to convince others, or strong due to a position and authority. Additionally, respondents stressed that a useful skill of a leader is an ability to negotiate, arrange or manipulate others through a distribution of rewards and punishments.

Supporters of visionary leadership paradigm would say first of all that leaders are active in two areas: appointing a direction of development of an organization through creation of a rousing vision or showing valuable goals and enhancing others to a certain direction of actions or new initiatives:

> Someone who knows what he wants, has a program and can captivate crowds, has a certain charisma.

> A leader is a person with a vision, a strategy, he creates an atmosphere to work and triggers creativity. A leader is a guide who must show direction very clearly...

> A leader is someone who can captivate, impress, introduce something new, give a new direction. A person who makes a flock follow him.

Without a leader – according to followers of visionary leadership paradigm – a group does not know what to do, is not able to define goals, and is apathetic, not energetic. Moreover, in this vision a leader integrates and helps others feel a community of goals:

> It is necessary to unite these people in a certain way, because it is essential, if you want to lead a group. A leader has to convince others to what he wants to do, and must have supporters (…) for me the most important thing is making others believe they all want to go in the same direction.

Supporters of classical paradigm express a similar conviction on integration. However, an integrating element is not an attractive vision worth taking effort of cooperation, but a person of an intriguing, strong leader – someone who enjoys respect, has authority and can control "his" or "her" people, a man of power. Among the most important skills and abilities assigning tasks and executing their realization were pointed out. Such a perspective is often related with an appropriate understanding of social life, where hierarchy, dependence and power relations are a natural state:

> If there is an institution – a school or police, there must be someone on top of the institution. Surely this hierarchy must exist (...). There must be a constant control of one person over the other. If you look at a family life – a child must be controlled by a parent, a parent is often controlled be their parents, or by relatives, neighbors. A leader, on the one hand, should be accepted, and on the other hand – treated with respect.

According to head teachers, leaders are people who can organize work of others, precisely define tasks to be done, and at the same time match tasks with predispositions of a given employee. They also appreciate subordinates, especially when they follow the commands and comply with earlier arrangements. Leaders set goals to achieve, they decide about priorities, about which aim has to be met unconditionally, and which can be postponed:

A leader is like a dance leader – he assigns tasks. You can say – He deals with cards, he organizes everybody's work.

The most important task is to coordinate the team's work so it is fluent and harmonious (…). Someone who says: "do this, do that" is always needed.

It is someone who leads a group, organizes it, presents clear goals, clear, I say, and minds if the others know his expectations.

As you can see, a leadership is often identified with organization of work or leading people with deficits, who cannot deal, who could not survive or work on their own, which is perceived as a natural state. Controllers are necessary – without them everything becomes too complicated:

From time immemorial, someone must have ruled and someone must have been ruled. A leader is a person who leads the others, who manages them, takes decisions, so we do not kill one another, so there is a certain hierarchy.

Everybody is lazy by nature. We like to avoid certain things, or go shortcut. That is why a leader or a head teacher has to control, check, and limit shortcomings… because people need showing them a direction and a monitoring of their activities.

Not everybody might become such a leader, because of the perennial order:

(…) Since the down of history someone has had to wield the power and someone else has had to obey.

Leaders are self-confident, believe in their competences and know what to do. This confidence infects the others, but also creates a situation where subordinates wait for confirmation of the rightness of their decision or action, and they do not bring themselves to act on their own:

This is someone who is aware that they are a leader, what depends on them, what they influences. It is a responsible person, conscious of their decisions.

People often wait for a signal. They want to do something, but they are afraid to step out. While talking to a leader, they get a green light and they carry out something they were first reluctant to; a leader is a manager, whose opinion and influence are decisive.

Both paradigms – visionary and classical, were very often combined with transactional leadership. An element of negotiations, consultations, arranging something with subordinates appeared in comments of head teachers preferring classical or transactional leadership. However, in most cases, the voice of subordinates was only a mere addition to decisive power of a leader. A leader, in good faith, with all his knowledge and experience, listens to all the voices, to take decision:

(…) a good leader also listens to the others and allows for common realization of some tasks.

As a leader, I try not to be autocratic, but almost democratic – we have conversations, talks, and only after such a confrontation of opinion, I choose the main task and assign given jobs to certain people, using potential in every person.

An expectation that leaders should know their employees to be able to motivate them better, was visible:

> It is a person who knows best all the people in their group, who knows its needs. Such a person should appreciate a contribution of a worker and should notice everything, or a majority of things, what employers do for this institution.

> A leader has to know how to work with people, since every person is different, a leader must know how to talk to people.

Leaders are trustworthy thanks to their competences, an attitude they manifest and rules they follow. A leader arouses respect and inspires:

> A leader should be open, go-ahead, ready to take risk, able to listen to others, sensitive. Should have a charisma. A task of a leader is to create a team with whom you can do something no one has done before.

> A leader must set an example and be an authority for all.

> A leader is someone who looks more bravely and further in the future than the others.

Leaders are self-conscious of their potential, tasks and the influence they have on people and organization. Therefore, they take responsibility for their own action and for the action of others. People cannot function or cooperate in a team without a leader.

This conviction about a necessity of a strong leader, strong person, strong individual probably reflects a desire of safety, certainty, conviction that what we are doing is right, because our leader confirms it. Few adductions to organic leadership paradigm and lack of adduction to participation or distributed paradigm show a deep aversion and lack of trust to group forms of wielding power. Probably this is a result of experiences of our society. However, we should encourage construction of a new vision of leadership, leadership answering to contemporary challenges and dilemmas, leadership different from a vision of a strong individual controlling people and situations. Probably there are clear and sometimes reasonable fears which make people stick to the vision of a strong personality of a leader. One of them is a fear that increased participation, broadening a commanding group results in limiting competences on the leaders' side. Elite approach fights here with participatory approach. A conviction that on the side of classical leaders we will find knowledge and competences is balanced by a conviction that for quality and fairness of actions, people should be engaged in the decision-taking process.

Leadership is an integral element of human nature. It has been with us since the times of antic tribes. Here everything, which is the best, and the worst in our human nature is cumulated: love and hatred, hope and fear, service and egoism. Leadership stems from what we are like, but also results in what we are like. That is why leadership manifests in various forms and types, why it answers to many challenges and problems. A basic problem of a human being has always been surviving, dealing with physical environment. To survive as a team, we had to, and we still have to learn, remember, solve the problems, but also make

mistakes. Although some difficulties can be faced individually, most often we do it in a group – we are dependent on one another. In this collective effort, taken to survive, people take up various roles, including the roles of leaders.

The next problem, after survival is the understanding of the world. When we are safe, we want to understand what surrounds us and share this understanding with others. We live in groups, so we construct social reality – commonly possessed definition on what is true. Group memory holds experiences, images, and dreams. These, who take dominating roles in creating a group narration, become leaders and tinker with myths and facts. We can imagine as well that constructing organic leadership is easier when we struggle with understanding the world, rather than when we fight for survival.

The third problem of a human being is managing the power, or searching for a way of reconciling interests and needs of an individual with interests and needs of a group. Balancing a desire of autonomy with a desire to live with others is a task for leaders. This is done through delicate, often hidden mechanisms. These three problems are strongly interconnected and decide about our lives [Harvey 2006].

Education needs a modern leadership, based on cooperation and permanent communication with people, efficiently using complex diversity of actions, attitudes, behaviors and values, found in every organization. Leadership has to be a process of taking actions, creating situations determining organizational initiatives, entitling others to take actions, modeling relations between the people. Then, various features, believed to be leaders' characteristics are useful, but first of all we should remember that a function of a leader can be executed only in a group. Without a group this function does not exist. It can only be understood in the context of relations, in a specific game between people, school environment, and atmosphere, school culture ant the whole community. The theoretical consideration and practical requirements towards head teachers we had until now bring more confusion than support. They concentrate on an individual – their predispositions and duties and they do not appreciate the role of a group, which is led. Therefore, it is worth stressing that although there are many ways of conceptualization of this issue, we may note key components making understanding the leadership phenomenon easier: it is always a dynamic process, connected with influencing some people by others, it manifests in a group context and refers to goals' realization [Northouse 2007: 3].

In the whole world postulates to improve school leadership are heard. Everywhere there is an investment in leaders, although sometimes it is hard to prove effectiveness of such actions. An importance of a leader in ensuring sustainable development of a school is strongly accentuated. Such people are perceived as having key role in a school's success, so there are attempts to invest in various ways in their professional development, but in the same time they are required to come up some additional expectations and tasks. This contributes to a more and more difficult situation of managers of education. The most serious restriction of this approach is not including a context in which a manager functions. A majority of researchers stress that the more participation, transfer of entitlement, trust toward the others and democratic attitude, the more effective the leadership [Michalak 2006].

For now it sound like "mission impossible" if we take under consideration opinions heard earlier. Strong personality, charisma and clear vision, high competencies in leading teams, high position in hierarchy and finally for majority of respondents not directly declared but possible to track in their language masculinity are features of the leader. Our schools and our societies need something different.

In order to be able to see the broader picture of the leadership in education I have decided to check not only the "ideal" picture of the leader but also leaders' "real work day" and their understanding of their role and typical tasks what is described in the next section.

Key tasks of education leaders in practice

From the comments of the head teacher participating in a research, a particular difficulty arises. It stems from a necessity of reconciliation a role of administrator responsible for, let's say, physical environment, with a role of a person responsible for a learning process of both students and teachers. Domination of organization and administration tasks is clear. What is interesting, an intensification of tone and comments connected with classical leadership paradigm might be puzzling. As it turns out, in everyday life, in practice, there is no place for being a visionary. Only 3% admitted that their tasks are somehow connected with setting goals, creating a vision or integrating others around tasks. As many as 48% head teacher unambiguously talked about tasks and behaviors, which enabled to assign them to a category of classical leadership. If we add head-teachers presenting intermediate types: classical-transactional (19%) and classical-visionary (14%), we will receive a group of 81% head teacher, who act in a quite authoritarian way to manage administrative issues -– control, regulations, finances, providing facilities, making renovations, and also sometimes training teachers, but almost never touching the issue of students' learning.

> A head teacher is responsible for safety of building, so they must know that it is obligatory to have a complete technical documentation, technical, inspections, chimney, gas, fire inspections etc. Evacuation plans to be prepared.

> A fundamental role of a head teacher is pedagogical supervision, but they almost do not have time for it. Then, there is function of an employer. A head teacher is a person who hires employees, and sometimes also fires them.

The next role of a head teacher is representing school outside, which translates into cooperation with others:

> The most important task of a head teacher is preparation of an organizational sheet, which is a fundamental document on the basis of which a school works.

> A head teacher, first of all, fulfills the role of manager, or person running a school and responsible for it. A head teacher must organize work of students and teachers, prepares a school year – preparing a certain number of classes, planning and adapting teachers who are going to teach young people. (…) As a result, their role is the one – to use an ugly word – of a supervisor.

A head teacher watches over the course of the schedule. It is clear that every day a head teacher supervises whether the teachers are at work, or they have called sick, or they have taken a leave.

Controlling and running documentation of teachers. Observation of lessons, of teachers' work, assessment of the teachers' work. A head teacher is everything at school. They are often a secretary, a PR-specialist. Suddenly they must know everything about constructions, health and safety at work, plumbing, law.

Organizes schoolwork, remaining safety and in compliance to all the requirements. Signs a pile of documents and takes responsibility for everything, regardless they know the matter or not.

A head teacher must go out of the office, make a stroll through corridors, check what is going on in every toilet. This guarantees order at school.

There is a clear disappointment resulting from a disproportion between a broad scope of responsibility and relatively low pay and status. There were also few voices suggesting that a head teacher may inspire teachers:

(…) I constantly encourage my teachers to develop. E.g. last year I set twice such requirements, so the teachers tried to use multimedia in teaching. In the first place I just talked and talked, but later I just organized a training course.

Activities of a head teacher aiming at team integration were also emphasized:

A head teacher fulfills a role of an arbiter in settling controversies among teachers. Head teachers absorb directions of reforms set by the ministry and adapt them to conditions in a given school, to the community's characteristic, to type of students, way of access.
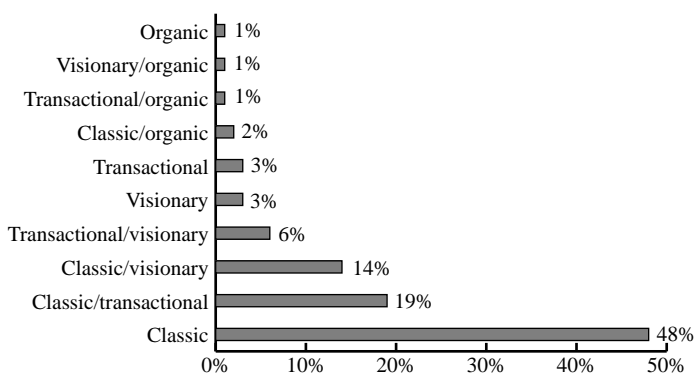

Figure 2. Paradigms reflected in answers to the question: what are basic headteacher's tasks?

Source: own construction.

Everyday activities of the head teachers, who took part in a research, duties they perceive as fundamental, are a far cry from the duties of an effective head

teacher[4] enlisted by Marzano and his colleagues [Marzano, Walters, McNulty 2005]. Sadly, one can have an impression that in Polish schools the most burning questions are: controlling and disciplining teachers, filling documents in, and bigger and smaller renovation works. There is very little reflection on the role of educational leaders in designing and ensuring conditions for teaching and learning, or promoting life-long learning. Of course there is possibility that external world demands it form people assigned to the position of school leaders, but is it situation we need and desire? What systemic changes must occur, to make head-teacher take responsibility for learning process?

Recapitulation

Among many conclusions quoted already before one seems particularly important. First of all, educational leaders, whose profiles emerge from the interview, are people functioning as source of inspiration and vision, with a substantial formal power. Unfortunately, practically they are controllers of teachers and organizers of the process of replenishing facilities and improving school infrastructure, responsible for safety rather than for an intellectual development. In fact there is no visible desire or potential for initiating of running a process of change.

In order to face contemporary challenges we need something more from those on leadership position for future success. But are we able to define "something"? It is difficult but more disturbing is the fact, which the interviews with the head teachers prove, professionals in the field of education do not even see a need for it. We should immediately start a serious conversation about values of democracy, solidarity and fairness. Of course it is not a task for education sector alone. It is

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   [4] Affirmation, or recognition and celebration of successes; promoting change, or an agreement for disturbing school's balance to reach intended effects and preventing sticking in the same place for years; appropriate rewarding, or noticing differences, using flexible ways of rewarding, showing examples of excellent work in all cases; communication, or caring about efficient communication between all the students and teachers; caring about culture which directly influences students, that is reinforcing culture which directly and indirectly influences learning process and students' achievements; taking care of discipline; flexibility, that is adapting to current needs and situations; concentration on priorities; explaining convictions, or a discussion to define convictions about education, school functioning, duties of teachers and showing their value and usefulness; inviting teachers to contribute; commitment in the issues related with teachers (curriculum, methods, grading);intellectual stimulation, or ensuring teachers know the newest theories, good practices, researches' results or literature useful in their work; knowledge of the best practices in teaching, that is constant learning, knowing effective practices and guidance in this area; monitoring and evaluation, that is appropriate designing of a process of information collection to achieve a valuable feedback; optimistic attitude, or consciously constructed optimism as an important feature of an effective school; order, that is avoiding chaos and uncertainty on what should be happening; relations, or caring about effective, professional relations at school; connections, that is organizing relations with external environment – teachers, authorities, the whole community; means, or rather its readiness to be used; sensitivity to context, that is an awareness of what determines current situation of a school; visibility, that is maintaining as frequent a contact with all the employers, students and teachers and other stakeholders as possible [Marzano, Waters, McNulty 2005: 41−61].

the society, understood as citizens, organizations, politicians, and social leaders, who must show political will of including a question of the role of education in the mainstream of public life. A public debate on what education we want and what leaders we need should be started. When we decide what a good school is, there will be a chance to create such school in a systemic, not incidental way. Similarly, it is crucial to achieve a well-understood and accepted vision of roles and tasks of education leaders – key people in education system organizing such complex processes as teaching and learning.

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