

## EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS' LEADERS COMPETENCES

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**Abstract:** In the fast changeable conditions, the education becomes an intellectual product, which meaning and quality changes in order to comply completely with needs of society and floating guidelines of the labour market. We have to acquire knowledge, skills and competences in order to be able to accommodate ourselves to requirements of the labour market. In educational environment the problem is topical not only for teachers but also for leaders and deputies of educational institutions, who are responsible for development of competences not only on their private and staff's level but also on level of the educational institution itself, which will improve the motivation of educational institution's employees and students to acquire new knowledge, skills and competences. We can say that administrative duties of educational institution's leader embrace multi-layered and essential field of responsibility. Nowadays, there have been made different studies on work of educational institution's leader, as well as there have been published different recommendations about professional management of an organisation and described teachers' competences, but there have been only few studies on competences of educational institutions' leaders. This article's goal is to perform a theoretical research and practically clarify the competences of educational institutions' leaders. In order to clarify these competences, ten respondents have been interviewed with help of a structural interview in this research – five principals of comprehensive schools and interest education institutions, as well as five principal's deputies.

**Keywords:** competence, concept of the competence, model of the competence, level of the competence, competences of the leader of an educational institution.

### Introduction

Competence is an important component of educational, economical, political and even human resources' directing; therefore nowadays the concept of competence is described variously in different scopes, but the definition of the term is quite wide and varied. In the literature and studies there is still no unambiguous aspect about the fact, how we should use the word "competence": the term is used both in singular and plural. The statement No.84 from 29.09.2009 of the Terminology Commission of the Latvian Academy of Science (LAS) (Lēmums Nr.84., 2009) is following: in educational branch the term "competence" has to be used in singular form, but in this article it will be used in correspondence with original – in plural and singular depending on the fact, how the term is used in literature source.

In the education "competence is described as "necessary knowledge, professional experience, comprehension in a particular area or question, as well as skills to use this knowledge and experience in a particular action. The competence of a person (employee) is evaluated by bystanders, collaboration partners and the society. Competence (also expertness): cognizance, eligibility (in any matter), totality of powers; area, whereof has been entitled the responsibility by taking into account person's education, skills, knowledge, as well as experience in the particular area" (Pedagoģijas terminu... 2000, 83). The explanation by V. Skujiņa embraces the most important features of the competence – necessary knowledge, experience, comprehension and skill to use the existing in a particular action. The competence is like totality of powers and responsibility, which has an effect on the surrounding and which can be evaluated by the society. In the Academic Terms' Database (Akadēmiskā terminu..., 2012) the competence is explained as "expertness, experience, totality of powers, legal form, erudition, special knowledge, authority, abilities, qualities, prosperity, affluence, management and keeping." Here, even in an extended explanation, the competence is defined as "legal feature (e.g., legally permitted age), competence, powers or ability. It's a mental ability to realize person's own action's nature and consequences. In instructions and indications it is a specific task or activities that have to be made; area of cognition." The competence is characterized also like "totality of factors that characterize a personality, which is necessary for a good, successful performance of

working tasks.” In its turn in the publication “Human Resources, Staff Management, Working Environment” (Cilvēkresursi, personālvadība..., 2012) competences are “knowledge, experience, abilities and skills in a particular field.” D.Webster defines competence as “sufficiently capable or qualified, appropriate” (Webster, 1992, 452).

In the Dictionary of Competences (Kompetenču vārdnīca..., 2011) it is mentioned that competences help to describe and explain, how (with what kind of skills and by acting in what manner) a work has to be done. Competences are like an instrument, which in simple actions’ descriptions explains to the employees, what kind of activity others await from them.”

G. Dāvidsone thinks that “under the term “competence” quite different phenomena are still marked and realized. The concept of the competence is used in a meaning, which describes an individual by embracing individual skills and abilities, as well as in a meaning of an organisation by describing a totality of knowledge and skills that are common in this organisation” (Dāvidsone, 2008, 154). G. Dāvidsone also stresses that “every person has a lot of different competences and even more “sprouts” of potential competences. Every competence usually consists of totality of several knowledge, skills, motivation, attitude and personality’s nature’s qualities, that show up in person’s way of thinking and behaviour.” On the basis of conclusions made by Sveiby, G. Dāvidsone “fortifies the competence through five correlative and mutually characterizing elements: **knowledge**, a free management of various facts (knowledge is basically obtained in a way of receiving the information and acquiring the education); **skills**, which are basically acquired in a way of experiments and practicing (an employee’s know-how about how to act in particular conditions); **experience**, which basically is obtained by learning from our successes and failures in the past; **values and attitudes** – individual assumptions about the fact, what is right and what is wrong; it is an original filter of all information, which reaches an individual’s focus; **social bonds**, individual’s relationships with other people, which have developed on the basis of family, job relationships and other bonds.” (Dāvidsone, 2008, 154-156).

L. Spensers and S. Spensere explain, that „concept of the competence embraces the following: characteristic marks of a personality and person’s motives, attitude and values, conception of this person, as well as skills and knowledge that are obtained during person’s life.” (Spencer, Spencer, 1993, 24). L. Spensers and S. Spensere stress an essential conclusion in their researchable problem about the competence of educational institutions’ leaders: “Competence is a deep and permanent part of person’s personality, and on its basis we are able to predict person’s behaviour in different situations and positions. Causational relationships mean that the competence causes or predicts behaviour and working performance.” (Spensers, Spensere, 2011, 21).

The versatile definition, aspects and nuances of competence develop a tendency towards competence’s grouping, its arranging in different structures, as well as creation of “approaches that are based on competences” and combining competences into models. The approach of the competence is typical and popular in the whole world, in all fields of activity and levels of education.

In her research article’s author pays attention to competences of educational institutions’ leaders and their versatility, because leaders of educational institutions daily face different questions, for which solution they require different competences. In Latvia, competences of educational institutions’ leaders are defined by Decree No.425 of the Ministry of Education and Science (from October 16, 2009), as well as by **job description of educational institution’s leader and deputy**. Competences that are required for realization of educational institution’s leader’s working responsibilities are listed together with abilities, and they are as following: knowledge of regulatory legislation of the educational branch; knowledge of teaching and educational work’s content, as well as knowledge of didactics of a subject; comprehension about development’s features of students’ age range and regularities of interaction’s psychology; readiness to study constantly according to latest pedagogical and psychological cognitions and topicalities in education in the united European education space; ability to make decisions; ability to plan and organize own and students’ work according to goal and tasks of the educational institution; psychological stability and high communication culture; ability to create businesslike collaboration with employees of the educational institution, its students, their parents and employees of other institutions; ability to work in a team, ability to respond to needs of the students; ability to motivate students towards work; self-assessment skills; national language skills at

the highest level; skills to work with office equipment and information technologies. (Pedagoga darba pienākumu..., 2009, 2)

The mentioned choice of competences is quite wide, and it embraces aspects of different competences, which are linked to leader's personal, professional and social activity. Nowadays leaders of educational institutions daily have to face competences, which are not defined in their working responsibilities. In the same way it is substantially, whether the leader of educational institution has a working experience in administrative work of two, five, ten or even more years. In addition to idea expressed before, R. M. Ennis has described the variety of competences on the basis of conclusions by different authors in a quite interesting way. He has created a model of competence as a system of different levels, in which lower level competences serve as keystones for upper levels (Figure 1.).

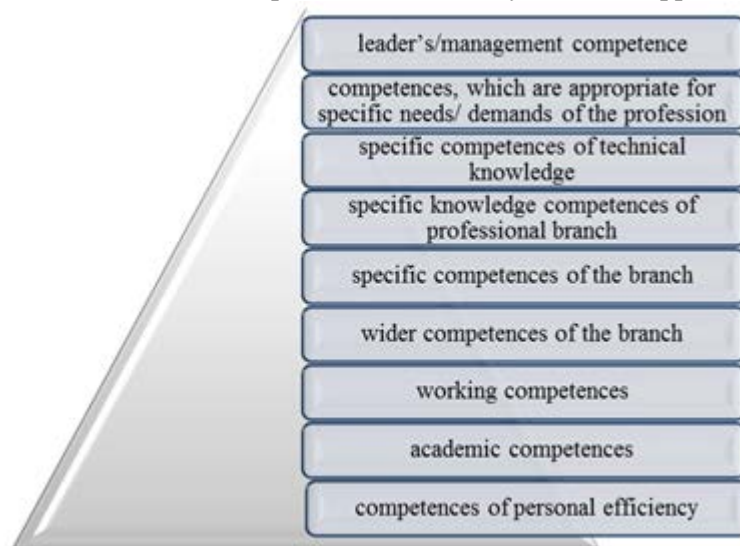


Figure 1. Model of different level of competences (Ennis, 2008).

**In the first level are combined** competences of personal efficiency: communication skills between persons, honesty, professionalism, initiative, focus, reliability, and readiness to study. **The second level** embraces academic competences: reading, writing, calculations, communication skills, listening and talking, knowledge and skills in latest technologies, critical and analytical thinking, active studying, and knowledge in information technologies. **In the third level** there are working competences: collaboration skills, adopting skills and flexibility, concentration on clients, creative thinking, concentration on problems, ability to make decisions, skills of tools and technologies' management, computer using skills, planning and coordinating skills, control, monitoring and expertise skills, as well as business basics. **In the fourth level** there are wider competences of the branch, which embrace knowledge and technical skills of the branch. **In the fifth level** there are specific competences of the branch: particular technical knowledge. **In the sixth level** there are combined specific knowledge competences of professional branch: they are linked to the ability to distinguish interconnection, as well as to systemize and classify knowledge of the corresponding branch. **In the seventh level** there are placed specific competences of technical knowledge. **In the eighth level** there are competences, which are appropriate for specific needs/ demands of the profession. **In the ninth level** there are combined leader's/management competences: skills of personnel selection, information literacy, delegation of responsibilities, diagramming, work monitoring, entrepreneurship, support, motivation and inspiration, development encouraging and mentoring, strategic development planning and process, budget creation and evaluation, conflict resolution, time planning, as well as development of organisation's evolution's vision and control options (Ennis, 2008). It is relevant that at the top, in the ninth level, R. M. Ennis places the management competence. This prompts the question, what competencies must have the leader, before he gets this position. By studying the competences of educational institutions' leaders, the author also agrees with this cognition, because, while performing the administrative responsibilities, it is crucial for leaders of educational institutions to have prior experience, which is linked to specific knowledge in the professional branch, as well as to diverse personal competences.

## Methodology

Since the administration of educational institutions is made from leaders and deputies of an educational institution, and in order to clarify competences of educational institutions' leaders, five principals of comprehensive schools and interest education institutions, as well as five principal's deputies (deputies in educational work, deputies for IT issues, etc. Among the respondents there were also leaders of methodology associations of Jelgava city) have been interviewed with help of a structural interview in this research. Following educational institutions took part in the research: administration of Jelgava State Gymnasium, administration of Jelgava Spīdola Gymnasium, administration of Jelgava Secondary School No.4, administration of Jelgava Elementary School No.4, administration of Children and Youth Centre "Junda", as well as administration of Salgale Music and Art School.

The goal of the research was to clarify competences of educational institutions' leaders.

A structural interview is a method of qualitative research. A. Kroplis and M. Raščevska (2004) show that a structured interview is an exchange between highly structured questions and responses, in which the researcher uses specially prepared questions and awaits to receive specific responses. Questions of that kind usually are obtained on the basis of existing theories of particular branches, or even from results of prior or pilot researches, or from researcher's anticipation or intuition, or they simply are linked to specific interests of the researcher in a specific field. Questions often are read loudly from a protocol or record sheet, by using the same question formulation and query order for all the respondents, if only the respondents haven't spontaneously responded any of questions (it means – before the researcher has asked the particular question). Sometimes questions in structured interviews are getting opened only at the end of an interview (it means, the respondents give their responses in a free manner), but another time the interviewer can offer alternatives for the answers, from which the respondents can choose the suitable respond for them. Not always the statements of the respondents have to be written down literary; only specific keywords or phrases can be written down (Kroplis, Raščevska, 2004; Kristapšone, 2008). Authors think that with interviews of that kind have their own advantages. They create prior structured information and as a result it is easier to analyse it and it also takes much less time. A. Bryman defines a structured interview as an interview, which is based on defined questions and their query, as well as fixed transitional phrases. In order to use such interviewing method, researchers shall have assumptions, what they would like to clarify or discover with help of a structured interview. The interview affects only a particular aspect or theme (Bryman, 2004).

The research has been performed during March 2012. General group of the research is made by 10 representatives of educational institutions' administrations – 5 leaders of educational institutions, and 5 deputies.

The interviews have been performed at respondents' working places by prior coordination of interviewing time. Interviewing of some respondents took place after their working hours, in order not to disturb their direct working duties. Interviews that took place during respondents' working hours sometimes were disturbed, because the respondents had to settle unexpected working issues. In general, all interviews have passed in peaceful and informal atmosphere, in a favourable environment, which has promoted the respondents to pass their own opinions freely. One interview has lasted from 35 minutes up to one hour and ten minutes. All interviews have been recorder on the Dictaphone, but interviews' transcripts were written down after interviews. By choosing the respondents, research's author has made her selection in such a way, so that the obtained results shall comply with existing situation to the utmost and that the obtained information shall be complete and believable. Gender and age of the respondents was not a decisive factor, because interview's questions are related to competence of educational institutions' leaders and their deputies.

## Results and discussion

Structured interview consists from twelve questions, but in the research the author uses only four questions in order to reflect the competences of educational institutions' leaders.

Questions of the structured interview are concentrated on research of respondents' general competences, consciousness and progression of competences of the educational institution, as well as on clarification of personal competences of educational institutions' leaders and deputies.

By summarizing respondents' answers on the question, *how long do the principals and their deputies perform their administrative duties*, all the respondents can be divided in following groups – duties of leader's position have been performed from 2.5 to 19 years. Two leaders, who have a 17 and a 19-year-long experience in administrative position, have been deputies of principals before; three leaders didn't have such experience at all – they have worked as teachers before. The working experience of leader's deputies in an administrative position ranges from one to eleven years. Common duration of respondents' experience in administrative position is from one to 19 years.

In question about the fact, *which three most important competences, according to respondents, must have the leader of the educational institution*, as first and most important competence was mentioned the *“management competence”*. This competence was mentioned by nine respondents, and they have underlined that *“the collective has to feel the leader, it has to see certainty and planning in that field, which is lead by the leader (if it is a principal's deputy), but in his/ her turn the leader has to lead the collective”*. Leaders have pointed out that this competence is the most difficult to acquire. The next most frequently mentioned competence was *“social competence”*. The respondents have mentioned this kind of competence, because they *“daily have to create contact with students, collective, and parents. They also have to deal with many problems together with management of Education Administration and representatives of the City Council.”* The next important competence, according to employees of the educational institutions, is the *“competence of strategic thinking”*. *„I think that each leader's work has to be based on the strategy, which is linked to thinking. The leader has to evaluate resources and think, how to improve them in the future.”* *“Our work has to be strategically thought-out, even when we're acquiring the necessary things, technologies; we have to think that they must have sustainability. We should not acquire things for concrete purposes, because then we won't have any other application for them. In the same way we are planning the reparation works, because it is necessary for our institution – it has four buildings and a territory, and they are sufficiently resource-intensive.”* *“It is one of the most important competences, because we, as leaders, are planning the strategy of educational institution, and then we are taking part in development of common educational strategy for Jelgava city. The Education Administration invites schools' leaders and their deputies to these meetings and develops educational institutions' visions for the planned strategic period.”* As the next competence, which was mentioned by three of respondents and which perfects the previous competence, is *“competence of systematic and regular planning.”* *“A principal shall have this competence, and only then he can delegate his duties to his deputies”*; *“if a principal has a strongly expressed planning competence, he plans and delegates duties, and then the work of deputies and even the collective's work is easier, because everybody knows, what everybody expects from him/ her”*; *“the planning alone is not enough; you also must be able to substantiate your plan in order to convince that this is the most suitable solution, but this problem is frequently linked to dialogues with municipality, and with sponsors, too.”* As next there were also mentioned *“decision-making competences”*, *“problem solving competences”*, and even *“ability to inspire”*. Every of previously mentioned competences have been mentioned by two respondents. They have stated that these competences are important for leader of an educational institution, too. *“There are such decisions, in which solving you have to involve deputies, collective, parents, and even municipality, and this way a principal just must have such competence. He also has to evaluate strategically, which decisions he can make alone, but which – only in a collective.”* *“It is possible that there is a particular problem, which must not be solved by a principal, because it can be solved by deputies. The principal must to differentiate, which problems must be solved by subordinates, and which problems – by the principal.”* As previously mentioned, two of the respondents have pointed out that *“the principal has to be an inspirer; he must be able to substantiate his/ her ideas and fascinate with them the entire collective.”* *“A principal shall inspire, motivate students and the collective, because it is important not only in meetings and different arrangements, but also in daily situations”*; *“he/ she must have the ability to inspire for common ideas by highlighting and developing the abilities of an individual, in order teachers and students can feel themselves evaluated.”* One of the respondents has expressed that leaders of educational institutions must have *“competence of changes”*, and another one respondent

has mentioned the *“competence of an organiser”*. Author of the research thinks that these competences have been pointed out only by two respondents, because, probably, the others have merged these competences with others, e.g., in management competence or competence of strategic thinking.

In question, *which competences, according to respondents, are most important for the educational institution’s leader’s deputy*, different competences have been named, which have been divided by the author in six groups. Eight respondents have underlined the fact that educational institution’s leader’s deputy must have the *“methodological competence”*. In this competence are embraced such aspects as: *“knowledge of the methodology and management of the pedagogical process”, “clearly developed methodological principles for working organisation of his/ her own work and work of his/ her colleagues”, “clear evaluation and analysing methodology of teachers’ work”* – probably we can call it an *“analysing competence”*, but, in principle, it also may be a *“methodological competence”*. As next, eight respondents have mentioned *“leader’s competence”*. Without doubt, it is *“management, as well as knowledge, planning, organising, and revise of one’s field; organiser’s skills in a strategic management”*. *“It is knowledge and management of tasks and processes, a skill to plan and organise work, to lead and motivate one’s employees to achieve qualitative working process and results.”* Six respondents named *“competence of interpersonal efficiency and relationships.”* This competence, according to author, has something in common with *“social competence”*, which was mentioned as second important competence for the leaders. Leader’s deputy *“must have a high communication culture and has to take into consideration standards of professional ethics”, “must have communication skills, good and efficient communication, as well as social competence”, “has to create positive interpersonal relationships between colleagues, students, principal and parents.” “Deputy must have an ability to create and lead communication in the collective; exchange of opinions, experience and information for a fruitful achievement of goals. These abilities are topical at conducting meetings, by evaluation of students’ assessments, as well as in communication between colleagues during meetings of methodological associations.”* The next competence is *“organisation’s understanding competence”*, which was also mentioned by six respondents. *“A deputy shall have a skill to conform to an organisation, as well as to accept organisation’s values”, “a skill to manage organisation’s social environment, to have an influence on persons’ actions and work results, skill to collaborate, to work and direct the team, to prevent or reduce conflict situations.” “This competence has to be supplemented with a remark that principal’s deputy shall know skills of a team work, has to understand common goals, has to develop tasks for achievement of these goals, therefore he/ she also must have a high sense of responsibility about working results.”* Five of respondents have mentioned the *“self-guidance competence”*, connecting it to persistence and intellectual competence, because *“an intellect is the one that encourages self-guidance. If the deputy will successfully organize himself/ herself, it will also reflect on the working collective. It is also a desire to learn individually, time planning and other similar things.”*

During interviews, the author has asked the respondents to name *three competences, which, as for performers of administrative work, are typical for respondents themselves*. Responses, obtained from respondents, formed a unique result. The respondents have mentioned following competences: *strategic thinking and planning, communication, leader’s competence, social, action, conceptual vision’s competence, organising, informative, self-guidance, ethical and environment-evaluating competence*. The author has combined competences, which were mentioned in respondents’ responses, in five groups, therefore it can be concluded that leaders of educational institutions have quite similar point of view on their personal competences. For many of respondents it was difficult to express their opinion: *“It is hard to define my own competences briefly; it seems that they are quite similar, e.g., interaction, communication, contact and social skills – I would merge them”*; *“It is good that I should not name these competences in order of importance, because in that case it would be one big management’s competence”*; *“Thinking of this question made me look in my job description today”*. Seven of ten respondents have mentioned *“competence of strategic thinking and planning”*, this way the author comes to conclusion that this is a competence, which is the most typical for leaders of educational institutions. Six respondents have mentioned the *“communication competence”*, when they talked about competences that are typical for them. This competence is considered by respondents as important, because *“nowadays the big art is to listen, to hear and to talk with*

certainty”; “*competence of communication and collaboration is one of the most typical for me, and thanks to it we have achieved so much in our school*”. “*Communicative skills and communication is an important thing for solving of strategic important and personal issues in the collective*”. Six of respondents have mentioned “*leader’s competence*”. As this competence is not analysed separately for leaders of educational institutions and their deputies, in the interviews all leaders and one deputy have mentioned the fact that they possess this competence. Four respondents noted the “*social competence*”, because “*it has an important role by working in a team, but you also must have accommodation skills*”. During the structured interview, respondents have also mentioned such for them typical competences as *intellectual competence, organising competence*, etc. (Andersone, 2012).



Figure 2. Competences of educational institutions’ leaders (Andersone, 2012,75).

On the basis of respondents’ responses, obtained during structured interview, the author has created a figure (Figure 2), which embraces competences of educational institutions’ leaders. Competences, which are typical for leaders of educational institutions, are different and diverse. It was quite difficult for respondents to talk about their own competences; they found it easier to name some general competences or competences of their colleagues. The respondents have also mentioned that there are such competences, which become urgent in a specific situation or time, and vice versa. The author thinks that mentioned competences of educational institutions’ leaders can be defined as point of reference and to formulate the priorities of competences’ development in the future. It means that in one year leaders of educational institutions will require the same competences, but only in new quality and development stage, because it is a professional evolution – it does not start and end, but is constantly improved.

## Conclusions

Competence is a totality of necessary knowledge, skills, personality’s characteristics and attitudes, abilities, experience, comprehension and expertness, which describe employee’s thinking and behaviour or action in typical working situations in a particular field, which can be achieved only in action – by learning or working.

The results of a structured interview show that the most important competences of educational institutions’ leaders for performing the administrative work are:

- Management competence (ability to plan, organise, and motivate employees to perform qualitative working process and to achieve qualitative results; ability to delegate responsibilities and to control the results);

- Competence of strategic thinking (ability to evaluate outer and inner environment, existing achievements, as well as consciousness of future needs by establishing the possible development trends, as well as to evaluate future visions);
- Communication skills (ability to create and manage communication in collective, exchange of opinions, experience, and information for fruitful achievement of goals);
- Methodological competence (ability to manage working process of an educational institution for securing qualitative results of the work, organising and planning abilities, presentation skills);
- Intellectual competence (awareness, ability to get new knowledge, abilities and skills, as well as ability to use them practically, ability to set the priorities, readiness for changes).

On the basis of study's results it can be concluded that for performance of administrative duties leaders of educational institutions possess following competences: competence of strategic thinking and planning, communication, leader's competence, social competence, competence of action, competence of conceptual vision, organising, informative, self-guidance competence, ethical and environment-evaluating competence.

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