Teachers' leader functions - an institutional and organizational approach

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Abstract

The article focuses on teachers as members of a school community participating in the management process of schools as educational institutions and organizations.

An institutional approach to an educational institution implies that it is treated as an element of a larger whole, and therefore, we may speak of a state system, or an educational system. In the organizational approach, we refer to school as a specific institution accomplishing the general objectives of an educational institution in various ways. We refer to the internal conditions, to what is individual and what results from the school's organizational culture.

In order to illustrate the teachers' leader functions, certain activities related to internal evaluation, introduced by the minister's regulation and already implemented in Polish schools, have been presented.

Two opposite forms of power sharing in an educational institution have been presented: empowerment based on hierarchical structures and distributed leadership, less formal and more democratic. Empowerment as a form of power sharing has been known to head teachers and applied in accordance with procedures and organizational principles effective in an educational institution. The process of delayering hierarchical structures in an educational institution, or distributed leadership, is another step in a head teacher's initiation in the role of an educational leader.

Keywords: teacher as a member of a school community, teachers' leader functions, empowerment, distributed leadership, internal evaluation

A teacher as an educator, a teacher of a subject and a member of a school community

Teachers' work is particularly complicated. It comprises many functions and tasks described in literature[1], educational reports and normative acts.

Educationalists distinguish various teachers' functions. Molesztak, Tchorzewski and Wołoszyn distinguish teachers' obligations and duties towards pupils, towards themselves and their profession, towards other teachers and the community (Molesztak et al., 1994). It has been emphasised that a teacher's work is not only classroom work with a particular group of pupils[2]. According to Madalińska-Michalak, "the solutions advocated in contemporary school management concepts stress the importance of teachers' greater participation in the school life. Teachers are not responsible only for the accomplishment of specific didactic, tutelary and educational tasks" (Madalińska-Michalak, 2013, p. 33). Schratz appeals to teachers to change the paradigm from "I and my class" to "We and our school" (2014, p. 14).

The educational effects depend not only on what a particular teacher does, how he/she works with the pupils, but also on the teachers' board joint work, on a consensus of opinions concerning the school's objectives and tasks (Arends, 1994, p. 49).

Apart from teachers' functions related directly to their work in a classroom, Arends distinguishes also their organizational functions in a school community, such as cooperation with other colleagues, pupils' parents and superiors. He claims: "Teachers, just like representatives of other intellectual professions, are expected not only to fulfil their basic function (teaching pupils), but also to participate in the management of the institution" (ibid., p. 432). According to him, the key organizational functions of teachers are "their interactions with other adults in the school aiming at general planning and coordination" (ibid., p. 502).

Teachers' functions may also be analysed in the context of school as an organization and a social institution. The notion of school as an institution is used with reference to external situations, in particular – to its fulfilling the needs of a community, while the notion of a school as an organization refers to the internal conditions, the establishment of internal structures and their interrelations, links, cooperation principles aiming at the school's success as an organization[3]. The school's organizational culture, just like any other

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[1] "If we look at a teacher's work from the angle of dissertations dedicated to it, it will turn out that there is no other profession on which so many theoretical and research works have been written" (Fudali, 2006, p. 169). name of Republic of Poland during communism time in the year 1952 – 1989.

[2] Research on teachers' teams was initiated in Poland after World War II. R. Miller's article (1962, pp. 175-201) was one of the earliest works in this field in which research focused not on individual teachers, but on teachers' teams (positively or negatively cooperating).

[3] An organization is "a group of people working together in a structured and coordinated fashion to achieve a set of goals" (Griffin, 2002, p. 35).

organizational culture, is a system comprising various elements (such as behaviour patterns, thinking patterns, or symbols) with specific interrelations between them (Madalińska-Michalak, 2013, p. 39).

Schulz also mentioned these two dimensions of schools (the institutional and organizational dimension) (1992, p. 56). A similar approach to the understanding of schools and their tasks can be found in Łuczyński. Discussing the educational aspects of modern schools he writes: "A school is a social institution established and maintained by the state" (Łuczyński, 2011, p. 32). In the organizational approach, we refer to a school as a specific institution accomplishing its general objectives in various ways. A school is then a specific organizational unit of a system (ibid., pp. 88-89).

In school management practice, a new different understanding of educational leadership is also important. Referring to Fullan, Michalak speaks of "a chain of command" and the necessity of appointing teachers' teams, broadening teachers' autonomy, making teachers really responsible for their work, and claims that "the belief that leadership is exclusively connected with the head teacher is insufficient at present" (Madalińska-Michalak, 2011, p. 129).

The school's and teachers' functions and tasks within the internal perspective refer to various spheres of the teachers' activity.

Tuohy (referring to Rashford and Coghlan) mentions four levels of teachers' participation in the organiza-

tional culture of a school (individual, team, inter team, whole organization).

Level I – the individual level – comprises the relations between the teacher and the school in which he/she teaches (Tuohy, 2002, p. 59).

Level II – a team, or "(…) a typically formal group defined in terms of face-to-face interactions, common objectives, psychological awareness of other members, and self-definition as a team" (…) (ibid., p. 61).

Level III – a group comprising any number of teams which must function together to accomplish school goals; according to Tuohy, good information flow going beyond the boundaries of particular teams is necessary in order to implement projects at a range beyond their direct contact (ibid., p. 63).

Level IV – organization – "relates to the organizational goals, policy and strategy level, which constitutes the fusion of all three levels together to form a working cohesive organization" (ibid., p. 64).

A school is a dynamic structure: "An individual's attitudes and behaviour can affect the working of the team, group and the entire school. The development of one level gives rise to a changed context and perspective of other levels" (ibid., p. 67).

Basing on the division of teachers' participation in the school life presented above, we might describe the structure of leader functions in a school of a hierarchical character. With respect to the particular levels of teachers' participation in the school life,

the following functions can be mentioned:

- a leader of a teachers' team (level II);

- a leader of a project group comprising various teams and subjects within a school (level III);

- a school leader responsible for the implementation of a specific field/aspect of work at the school level; for instance, a problem leader responsible for the quality/evaluation of the school work (level IV).

A teachers' team leader and a problem leader responsible for the quality/evaluation of the school work will be presented in the remaining part of the article.

System changes and the introduction of new legal regulations are among the basic external factors influencing the school development and the appearance of new teacher functions (apart from the development of pedagogical and organizational theories).

The teacher functions ensuing from the educational reform implemented in Polish schools in the 1990s comprise the following:

– a probationary teacher's tutor (mentor),

– a leader of a cluster team (subject team);

– a leader of a tutors' team;

– an intra-school teacher training leader whose tasks comprise coordination of teacher training activities, examination of needs connected with teachers' professional development and organization of certain forms of teacher training in accordance with the school's priorities (cf. Reform…, 1998, p. 64, Szempruch, 2001, pp. 10-11).

Such teacher functions as a leader/chairperson of teachers' teams, mentor or intra-school teacher training leader are formal functions (teachers perform tasks ordered by the head teachers for the benefit of the school and its community, and they are assessed for those). Not all of them have a legal status, though (e.g. intra-school teacher training leader). Yet, ever since the time of implementing the educational reform in Poland, this function has been popular.

The fundamental areas/groups of competencies of a teacher – a member of a school community – ensuing from the social, political and educational transformations comprise the following:

– social competencies, including team work, an ability to establish

and maintain contacts with the school head teacher, other teachers and pupils' parents;

– **leadership, organizational competencies** – resulting from the performance of new teacher functions: teachers' team leader, problem leader responsible for the coordination of the school's work with respect to developing a quality system or intra-school teacher training (intra-school teacher training leader);

– legal competencies; if teachers want to be autonomous in their activities, they have to know their rights, and participating in the development of various school documents, they have to know the legal bases thereof;

– specialist competencies connected with the quality measurement of the school work (developing research tools, conducting surveys and analysing their results, etc.) (cf. Jaśko, 2006, pp. 237-241).

The necessity to appoint various types of teachers' teams in schools has been mentioned in the Polish educational law for a long time (Regulation…, 2001). Pursuant to the legal regulations, a chairperson appointed by the school head teacher at the team's request leads the work of the team. Teachers' team leaders (leaders of subject teams, educational teams, leaders of teachers in a particular department, leaders of problem and task-oriented teams) support the head teachers in the school management process. The author's own research indicates that the basic tasks of leaders of permanent teachers' teams defined as statutory teams comprise the following:

– planning the team's work (often together with the other team members);

– documenting the team's work (semester reports, annual reports, team meeting reports);

– participating in team members' training (selecting teachers to conduct peer lessons, organizing internal trainings);

– presenting the team work results to the teachers' board;

– monitoring and evaluating the team's work (often together with the other team members).

Problem and task-oriented teams appointed for a particular school year have a less formal character than the subject or educational teams. Their leaders do not have to account for the team meetings or document the task implementation in details. The final effect, i.e. the fulfilment of the specific tasks of the team, such as the internal evaluation carried out within a determined scope, is the most important (this refers to the tasks of one of the most popular problem and task-oriented teams – the internal evaluation team).

A teachers' team leader should lead others and support them in the implementation of their common objectives. As an educational leader he/she should have the skill of convincing others and enabling them to express their potential (cf. Mazurkiewicz, 2011, p. 55). The school leaders' autonomy also depends on empowering teachers to make their own decisions, as well as on the atmosphere of co-responsibility for the school's work and its effects.

Problem leaders responsible for quality/internal evaluation

Teachers' functions related to their participation in the school life may ensue directly from tasks imposed on schools by the state, defined and specified in various legal documents. Legal acts concerning pedagogical supervision and introducing quality evaluation to Polish schools (previously defined as quality measurement[4], and now as internal evaluation[5]) provided for legal frameworks to develop man-

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agement systems involving the responsibility and participation of all parties of the school: teachers, pupils and their parents. Internal evaluation was introduced by the minister's regulation, but it was presented in a very schematic way. It is the head teachers and other teachers who decide about its final form, how to organize it and how to make use of its results in the institution's development.

I agree with Dorczak who in his article entitled: *The importance of a school's organizational culture in the implementation of the educational evaluation system* claims that the reform of pedagogical supervision may be an impulse for the transformation of a school's organizational culture. The very term "evaluation" offers an opportunity to think of participation, democracy and openness of all parties to the idea of quality development in schools, and the requirements included in the Enclosure to the Minister's Regula-

tion imply a positive value of cooperation and activity of various groups within a school (Dorczak, 2012, pp. 69-91).

Madalińska-Michalak observes that organizational culture is directly influenced by these external factors which are a part of the social community of the organization members.

By necessitating changes, the external factors have also an indirect influence on the organizational culture (2013, p. 40).

New tasks of educational institutions mean also new tasks of teachers, not only research-oriented tasks but also organizational ones.

Teachers' organizational functions can be analysed in two systems: a hierarchical system and a cooperation system (see diagram 1).

My experience as a teacher training system representative supporting head teachers in the internal evaluation process organization as well as my conversations

Diagram 1. Teachers' organizational functions in a cooperation system and a hierarchical system
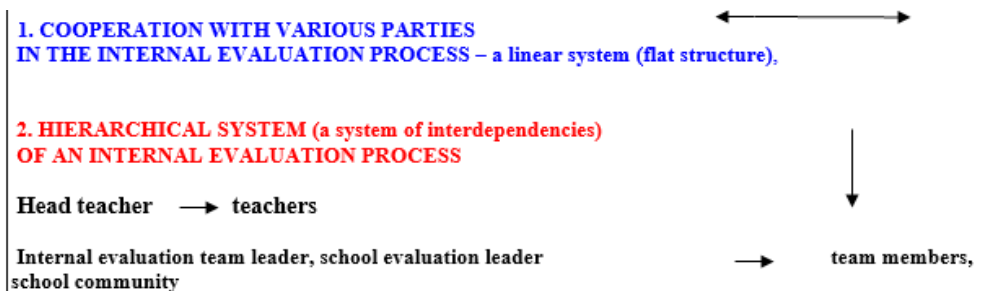
Source: Own elaboration

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[4] Teachers' participation in the internal evaluation process considered as a formal requirement commenced to a larger extent when the new pedagogical supervision formula based on quality measurement was introduced (re.: Regulation…, 1999, Regulation…, 2004).

[5] The Enclosure to the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 10 May 2013 amending the Regulation concerning pedagogical supervision contains the following clause with respect to requirement 12: "internal evaluation is to be carried out together with teachers (…)".

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with both head teachers and other teachers indicate that currently team work is becoming a huge challenge for schools, and new organizational structures are being formed. There are usually up to several evaluation teams in each educational institution at present. Their tasks most frequently comprise preparing an evaluation project, carrying out an evaluation, analysing and compiling data and presenting evaluation results to the teachers' board. Depending on the organizational principles adopted by a school, selected teachers - leaders or evaluation teams are responsible for carrying out the evaluation within one area of the school work or the entire school evaluation in a school year. Hierarchical structures are characteristic for such an approach to internal evaluation (see: part two of diagram 1).

The increasing popularity of teachers' leader functions is proved by the numerous training opportunities offered by teacher training institutions. Meeting the demands of schools, head teachers and other teachers, teacher training institutions organize more and more internal evaluation trainings for both head teachers and teacher leaders, or addressed to "evaluation leaders" only.

Beneath, I present fragments of my own research conducted in the school year 2014/2015. It aimed at a better understanding of teachers' participation in the internal evaluation process and subsequently, at analysing it on the basis of data from various schools/ educational institutions.

The material prepared by teachers – candidates for head teachers was analysed[6]. Their task was to examine the internal evaluation process organization in their schools as participants thereof (presenting their own observations), as well as to provide data acquired during interviews with head teachers and evaluation team leaders within a school and to analyse (if possible) school documentation. Every evaluated school treated individually eventually gave one image[7]. An analysis of written works and statements made by teachers commenting their material in groups confirmed the appearance of leader functions in schools. Two fundamental leader categories were distinguished with respect to the time of the leader's appointment:

1. An evaluation team leader/leaders appointed for a period longer than one year (usually for an indefinite period of time).

Sample head teachers' and teachers' statements: *it is easier for leaders with relevant knowledge and experience to organize the*

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[6] Research based on the application of a case analysis method was carried out by teachers as part of their examination/ diploma works in a qualification course in organization and management (17 works) and in postgraduate studies in organization and management (19 works).

[7] Analysing her own research in leadership Madalińska-Michalak writes that "According to R. Stake, a case study is not a study of a set of cases, but an instrumental study of a case involving several cases" (2012, op.cit., p. 33).

evaluation in subsequent years; it serves the continuity of the institution's activities with respect to evaluation. Teachers learning how to evaluate gather around the experienced leader/leaders; such a person may teach others how to implement new tasks. One or two persons are permanent evaluation leaders since they already have proper qualifications; it is better when the leader is permanent and knows what to do.

2. Leaders replaced annually; these are mainly evaluation team leaders appointed for a particular school year.

Sample head teachers' and teachers' statements: *it is justified to include the largest number of teachers in an internal evaluation process; participating in evaluation teachers gain knowledge about their schools, they learn in practice what internal evaluation is about; every year other teachers should be members of evaluation teams; everyone should find out what it means to be a leader, it is not a simple task and it requires considerable involvement.*

The research showed that head teachers are motivated mainly by substantial criteria when including teachers in the internal supervision process (knowledge, internal evaluation skills). They also take into consideration their experience in school management. Head teachers willingly "share their power" with permanent teacher team leaders, school educators/

psychologists, intra-school teacher training leaders, i.e. persons who have their place in the school structures. Evaluation leaders not only **coordinate the school's activities** with respect to internal evaluation, but also perform **functions related to social representation: informative and representative functions.** They frequently prepare comprehensive evaluation results, present the results and recommendations to the teachers' board, and act as liaisons between the teachers, team members and head teachers. They also support teachers in their intra-school evaluations performing **consultative and supportive functions** (this refers mainly to permanent leaders appointed for periods longer than a year and having experience in intra-school evaluations).

The new tasks that teachers face also imply the need to acquire new knowledge and skills. Appropriate competencies are important in the team establishment and leader appointment process. In the case of internal evaluation, teachers must possess specialist skills (research skills), and leaders also team leading skills.

The relation between possessed qualifications and performing leader functions may constitute one of the structural elements of a school as a learning and developing organization. The example of school X presented beneath shows that knowledge and skills may help teachers to take important positions in a school community, predisposing them

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[8] The presented case study is the result of my own research dedicated to teachers' functions in the evaluation of the quality of school work.

to become leaders of other teachers[8].

Teachers' leadership based on competencies – a case study of school X

The quality assurance system in school X developed gradually, undergoing various stages. In the first stage, the head teacher's and the permanent quality leaders' role was very significant. They were experienced in team work, they were teacher team leaders and they had previously supported the school head teachers in the implementation of various tasks. Delegated by head teachers to implement new tasks ensuing from the regulation concerning pedagogical supervision (Regulation…,1999), they were also chosen to participate in one of the first courses concerning the intra-school quality assurance system organized by a teacher training centre. Mentioning their participation in the course they stressed its importance both for them and for the school. They felt distinguished being able to participate in the training, in particular, because the course was addressed to the managing personnel, and they were the only representatives of teachers among all the course participants. After completing the course, they were chiefly responsible for initiating and coordinating the school's activities in systemic collection of data concerning the school's quality. When asked about their leaders and the tasks implemented by them, the teachers in the school put emphasis on their supportive, controlling and evaluating functions.

"In the first stage, it was difficult for us; we were supported by leaders appointed by the head teacher, we asked them for help, and for approving our research tools, sometimes even several times in a row, before these were finally approved. After their approval of our research tools, we were satisfied and we could continue our work" (a statement made by one of the school teachers).

Quality leaders had formal authority not only because of their function, but also their scope of knowledge. They continuously improved their skills participating in various courses and they supported others in the learning process. The deputy head teacher referred to them as "guru" and added that they were leaders, other people's teachers, and the decisions made by them were accepted by the head teacher and binding for other teachers. Possessing knowledge related to the intra-school evaluation process, they shared it with other teachers, not only when it was required. They carried out system training for team leaders within the intra-school teacher training system. Quoting Mazurkiewicz, one might call them **"leaders of a learning organization"**, who are capable of developing and supporting others in this process (...)" (Mazurkiewicz, 2012, p. 391).

A cascading manner of learning was developing among the teachers' board members in school X; it was related to their organizational functions. Team leaders shared their knowledge acquired from school leaders with

Diagram 2. A cascading manner of learning of the teachers' board members in school X related to their organizational functions.

Source: Own elaboration

their team members (see: diagram 2).

The organizational structure of school X was created by the quality leaders and the teams appointed by them and by the head teacher in order to implement certain tasks in a particular school year. The members and leaders of such teams were not permanent or "administratively" appointed. Teachers joined such teams on their own accord, as they were interested in a particular problem, had relevant knowledge and skills. Sometimes they announced their candidacy for team leaders or decided who the team leader should be, thus sharing their work and responsibility (they said for instance: "now you are going to be a leader, I was a leader last year" - a fragment of one of the teacher's statements). The principle of replacing task leaders was common in the school – which was also confirmed by the school head teacher who said: "the point is that everyone should be responsible for a certain task – if a teacher was not a leader before, he/she will be one soon".

Along with the progress of the implementation of the internal quality as-

surance system, teachers worked faster and performed their tasks better.

At the beginning, quality leaders (2 persons) were supported in the implementation of new tasks by the school educationalist. In time, these experts were more and more frequently joined by other teachers who had completed relevant courses/ workshops. Due to the teacher board members' acquisition of knowledge and experience, the number of teachers independently implementing their tasks was also growing. As one of the teachers put it, "we were all becoming experts and we no longer needed the gurus".

Conclusion

"Thinking of leadership in an organization, we focus on persons on its top: the president, manager, management board. In a school, it is the head teacher" (Tuohy, op.cit, p. 171). This article presents a teacher as a member of a school community participating in the school management process and performing leader functions. A school's organizational culture,

its new organizational structures (such as appointing quality/evaluation leaders, initiating the empowerment process in pedagogical supervision) are influenced both by external and internal conditions.

The model of leader structures in Polish schools presented in this article is largely regulated by the law and based on the head teacher's – being at the top of the power pyramid – delegating tasks. The teachers' tasks are included in the task assignment / the scope of additional activities. This is the traditional approach to power sharing. The process runs from the top to the bottom of the organizational hierarchy: the head teacher empowers other teachers – leaders who support him/her in the school management process taking responsibility for a particular part of the school work (see: diagram 1).

This form of power sharing has been popular and known to head teachers and applied in accordance with procedures and organizational principles effective in an educational institution. It is also relatively easy to observe and examine. Participatory leadership is considerably more difficult, not only for head teachers, but also for researchers. Numerous examples of empowerment as well as examples of teachers – leaders functioning in hierarchical structures of school management can be presented here. In this article, intentionally, empowerment has been illustrated with many practical examples in a detailed manner. Empowerment has been considered to be one of the most important factors of effective

management of educational institutions so far. According to Plewka, empowerment "is the internal decentralization of a modern school management – a process of transferring a part of formal power and responsibility for particular tasks to another person being at a lower level of management" (Plewka et al., 2000, p. 433, cf. Elsner, 1999, pp. 106-115).

Madalińska-Michalak, referring to the ideas of Hargreave and Fink, stresses that "emphasis should not be put on empowerment in schools, but on leadership distribution, as leadership in schools should not be limited to the head teachers and selected teachers only" (op.cit., 2012, p. 128).

In the case of school X presented in this article, one might refer to Fullan's "chain of command running in the entire school" (Fullan, 2006, p. 33). And according to Mazurkiewicz, "one might be a leader for a while, and what the group achieves thanks to what one has done is more important than making a decision "who is in command here" (2012, p. 33).

Participatory leadership is more than empowerment. In this case, "everyone who has relevant knowledge and experience, regardless of their position in the organizational hierarchy, is involved in task implementation and decision making, either occasionally or permanently", according to Elsner (2014, p. 32). Activities related to distributed leadership consists in searching for the possibilities of using the potential of every member of an organization, often disregarding stiff procedures and exces-

sive bureaucracy hindering grass-roots initiatives and fostering the formation of stiff organizational structures.

The long period of functioning in hierarchical structures and certain habits make it difficult to adopt such a free form of power sharing in many schools. For instance, head teachers find it difficult to get used to the fact that certain methods of acting and involving teachers in the school life do not always have to be precisely described, documented and formally introduced, that a procedural approach and an atmosphere of joint responsibility of both the head teachers and teachers for the school work and its effects is more important. A head teacher of a school in which teachers' organizational functions have been evaluated said that it might lead to "organizational chaos".

It is worth presenting various ways of power sharing to head teachers[9], examining the organizational culture of schools and searching for examples of good practice in distributed leadership. Activities aiming at delayering hierarchical structures in educational institutions constitute a huge challenge not only for head teachers, but also for schools of higher education and various educational institutions supporting the schools' work.

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[9] Such educational initiatives as for instance the international conference on "Educational Leadership" held in Kraków from 8 to 11 April 2015 within the project entitled "Leadership and management in education – the preparation and implementation of a development and improvement system for head teachers" are also valuable.

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