

Teachers' perceptions of the principal

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Abstract

This study investigated the relation between personal functioning of teachers and their perceptions of the school principal. It was assumed that teachers with more constructive personal functioning have more positive perception of the principal. The relation between these two factors is described as important for the quality of principal cooperation with teachers and for the school as a learning organisation. The Adjective Check List was administered to 140 teachers from lower secondary school located in different cities. The ACL was used in three versions: “what you are like”, “how you would like to be” and “what your school principal is like”. Based on the results four groups of teachers with different personal functioning was dis-

tinguished. Results indicate that the more constructive teacher's self-image, the more positive perception of principal. The main conclusion for educational leadership is that the perception of principal depends not only on the headmaster work quality, but also on the personal experience and functioning of teachers.

Keywords: educational leadership, teachers, team-building, self-image

Introduction

The principal and teachers (apart from students and their parents) are the main actors of the school life. Their specific role results from the fact that they create the social climate and organisational culture of the school environment, which are important for the learning process. The two subjects make up the team of

employees. What should consolidate this team is striving to achieve a shared goal resulting from the nature of the institution and needs of the team members. The task of the school professionals is to create the best conditions which would facilitate comprehensive development of the students. The final result of this educational process should be a mature student, adapted to the conditions of living in the contemporary world and able to cope with the challenges this world brings. The challenge which the teaching staff have to face is difficult, because a graduate profile changes together with the changing world, and the students have different educational and developmental needs. Such a state of affairs requires constant development of the teachers. School in particular is predisposed to become a learning organisation.

School as a learning organisation

A learning organisation is an organisation where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new patterns of non-stereotypical thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free and where people are continually learning. A learning organisation is an organisation skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights (Senge 2012).

According to Kaziemierska, Lachowicz and Piotrowska (2016), the distinctive

features of a learning organisation include:

- learning from mistakes;
- openness to accept feedback about itself;
- continuous training of personnel and implementing scheduled training;
- management-stimulated personnel development;
- delegating powers and decentralisation of decision-making centres;
- taking risk, encouraging to experiment;
- openness to risk-taking, new methods of operation (I will do it in a different way);
- frequent critical reviews of binding operational procedures;
- searching for ways of improving work effectiveness;
- taking decisions based on facts.

In turn, based on the analysis of the concept by P.M. Senge, M. Nowacka-Sahin (2016) has proposed the three main features of a learning organisation (fig. 1):

1. Openness to the opinion of each member of the organisation leading to the creation of the culture of diverse opinions and views.
2. Ability to make use of the experience of all members of the organisation.
3. Open communication between the management and staff which leads to exchange of views and experience (no dividing lines resulting from the organisational structure)

To classify a school as a learning organisation, according to P.M. Senge (2012) it should use the following five key component technologies:

1. systems thinking,
2. personal mastery,
3. mental models,
4. shared vision
5. and team learning.

The model by P.M. Senge perfectly fits in the goals and tasks as well as rules of school functioning. There are several important arguments in favour of this concept:

School is a system consisting of numerous interacting subsystems. Efficient operation of each of the system components generates quality of functioning of the whole system. Consequently, problems which emerge at school should be analysed in the context of an inefficient system. If school problems are systemic in nature, then the main object of impact should be the school environment, i.e. the staff, students and parents.

People make up the school environment, and their efficiency - striving for excellence, sets the limits for the development of the whole organisation. Without continuous development of the school staff, this organisation will not be able to cope with the ongoing problems, challenges and changes taking place in the environment.

Each and every institution (and school above all) should strive to achieve self-fulfilment, which is a state which justifies its existence in a satisfactory

way. To reach this state, avoid frustration, pointless drifting and chaotic procedures, an institution formulates its mission and vision. Hence, the main task of the school personnel is to develop general goals and ways of achieving such goals which will be shared by all the school staff.

Fulfilment of such goals will be supervised by the team of employees with the principal as their leader. Cooperation of this team is the condition for successful implementation of accepted goals and quality of functioning.

Conditions for effective cooperation of the teaching team

In the realities of a Polish school, changes taking place in the teaching team are well reflected with the evolution of terms describing the teaching staff. So, several decades ago, this team was called the “teaching body” (literally), then (about several years ago) a term “teaching circle” (literally) was coined. Now, the term used most often is the “teaching council” (literally). Assuming that the language follows the changing reality, we should notice that these changes reflect the processes taking place in the structure of the group and mutual relations of its members. The terms above are a good reflection of the organisational culture of the teaching staff. In turn, the process of changing the meaning of the cited terms leads to a more rigid structure and minimised relations between members of the

teaching staff. The term “body” used to describe a relation between the elements composing a whole, assumes a dynamic and synchronised whole. The above cannot be used to describe a “council”, which is associated rather with a hardly dynamic object and with limited relations between members of this “council”.

Assuming that the above deliberations are reflected in the reality of work of teaching teams, it would be valuable to identify the key features which a well-functioning team should demonstrate. A well-functioning team:

- Understands its goals and tasks and aims to achieve them,
- Is flexible in adapting its mode of operation to the assumed goals,
- Communication and understanding among its members are on a high level. Individual feelings, opinions and views of all its members are presented in a direct and open way,
- Is able to start and complete the decision-making process. At the same time, it thoroughly analyses the point of view of the minority and ensures that all members participate in taking all crucial decisions,
- Achieves balance between effectiveness of team activities and fulfilment of individual needs,
- Ensures sharing responsibility by all its members. Everybody can come up with their ideas, develop and work on the projects of others, give opinion, check feasibility of potential decisions, and otherwise contribute to achieving goals

assumed by the group and to its proper functioning,

- Has its identity, but does not restrict the independence of its members,
- Makes appropriate use of the skills of its members,
- Is objective in evaluating its functioning, Does not avoid its own problems and is able to modify its activities,
- Keeps balance between heart and head and creatively uses emotions of its members,
- Is aware of the processes taking place within the team.

The features of an efficient team enumerated above coincide with the assumptions of a learning organisation. They are known to the public. Every principal holding the office will agree with them (at least in theory). So why so few teams are able to achieve such a level of functioning? Maybe it is the result of relations between people who make up teams and their mutual perception, following the assumption: your perception of the world affects the way you move around it?

To address these questions, it is necessary to introduce the term of perception of the principal in the context of the studies of the subject matter.

Perception of the principal and functioning of teachers

The mode of perception of the school principal has been the subject of numerous analyses conducted mostly in the

context of evaluating the quality of their work and leadership.

In general, teachers perceive the role of the principal as highly important for the functioning of the school environment, teaching staff and their own participation in it (Newton and others, 1999). In teachers' perception, the principal is the most important person in the school environment. Their power and ability to influence others may be supportive or destructive for the life of the school, students and the staff. The principal's tasks are perceived by teachers as complex, being the source of personal growth and personal satisfaction. On the other hand, the same tasks may be the source of stress, may be highly time-consuming and require high workload, may be difficult and rarely be met with gratitude. The principal is the person who should follow high ethical standards, be an authority, open to others, understanding and supportive. The quality of cooperation between the principal and the staff is decisive for the trust of the colleagues, the school climate, initiatives undertaken, educational achievements and the school image in the community.

In their studies, Hauserman and others (2013) have distinguished two groups of teachers who differed in perceptions of the school principal and assessment of their competences. The first group comprised teachers who perceived the principal as highly engaged in work and actively participating in the school life. In their opinion, the principal's knowledge about the school, i.e. the staff, students, successes

and failures of each class, is very good. In the decision-making process they focus on what is best for the students and staff, they are open to discussion, questions and hold high expectations for their staff. They are available to others, interested in successes and progress in the work of others. The other group in Hauserman's studies (2013) included teachers who perceived their superior as unapproachable, having marginal influence on the real school life and behaviour of others. A principal fulfilling their role in this way does not monitor the work of others, and does not encourage growth of students and teachers. The teachers from this group perceived the principal's cooperation with others as limited to a narrow group of teachers. In their opinion, the principal takes decisions regarding changes in the school environment, however does not participate in their implementation, delegating tasks to subordinate staff. Difference in the quality of work was observed between the two groups of teachers with different perceptions of their principal. The teachers perceiving the principal as engaged, had greater satisfaction from performing their duties, a sense of meaning of their work and were convinced of their effectiveness in performing tasks. They showed greater motivation to work as a team.

The research done by Bayler and Ozcan (2012) confirmed a relationship between the principal's leadership style perceived by teachers and the quality of teachers' work. The teachers who thought that the principal was active and engaged

(transformational leadership) were at the same time more open to self-development. It was accompanied by high motivation to work, involvement in school life and openness to implementing changes. At the same time, the teachers perceived the following principal's characteristics, which they found supportive:

- Communication skills,
- Ability to motivate others to work,
- Adequacy of displayed competences to the requirements for the position,
- Readiness to listen to others and openness to the observations of others,
- Sharing plans and vision of work,
- Support in growth and searching for new working methods,
- Readiness to take risk in the situation of implementing constructive changes in the school.

Similar conclusions were drawn in Kadi's research (2015). Teachers with low involvement and poor motivation to work noticed in the principal the characteristics similar to those which described their own behaviour. They had negative opinions about their superior's work. They observed lack of interest in students and staff, avoiding responsibility, lack of decision-making abilities. They thought that the principal rarely communicated with the team, did not provide feedback about the quality of teachers' work and did little to support staff growth.

It turns out from the surveys presented above that perception of the principal's

role is linked with the quality of teachers' work, which in turn translates into readiness to cooperate with the teaching staff. Direct relation between the two dimensions was the subject of studies conducted by Berebitsky and others (2014). Obtained results showed that the higher support in implementing changes and innovation perceived in principals, the greater teachers' readiness to cooperate. Teachers perceiving principal support also had better assessment of effectiveness of team communication.

High level of satisfaction from the teaching profession is linked with the level of interpersonal skills observed in the principal and the school's organisational climate. As Waruwu points out (2015), greater satisfaction from performed tasks was demonstrated by teachers who thought that their superior was a person actively listening to others, showing empathy and communicating clearly and precisely.

Methods

The purpose of the research described in this article is to establish relation between teachers' perceptions of the school principal and their personal functioning. It was assumed that teachers with a different image of the self (actual self and ideal self) will perceive the principal in the way complementary to their own resources and limitations. Features attributed to the principal should reflect teachers' readiness to cooperate with the teaching staff. The quality of this cooperation is in turn important for functioning of the school

as a learning organisation. The proposed direction of analyses should enable better understanding of the relation between the described factors. According to the data from other surveys it is assumed that teachers whose personal functioning is characterised by features demonstrating effectiveness, resourcefulness and maturity will have similar perceptions about their superior. The following research questions were presented:

1. What are the differences in personal functioning of teachers?
2. Do teachers with different personal functioning have different perceptions of the school principal?
3. Do teachers with more constructive personal functioning have more positive perceptions of the principal?

Participants

A total sample of 140 teachers from lower secondary schools from Elbląg, Gorzyce, Lublin and Ludwin was selected, with 77.9% of respondents being females and 22.1% males. Detailed data has been presented in the table below.

Table 1. Sex and place of work of teachers

Town/city	Sex	
	Women	Men
	%	%
Elbląg	94.4	5.6
Gorzyce	85.1	14.9
Lublin	68.8	31.2
Ludwin	70.4	29.6
Total	77.9	22.1

Source: own study.

Measures

To assess the self-image of teachers and their perceptions of the principal, the Adjective Check List by H.G. Gough and A.B. Heilbrun was used in the Polish adaptation of the Team of the Psychological Test Laboratory of the Polish Psychological Association. The second group is based on Murray’s needs (15). The next one comprises topical scales describing essential aspects of intra and interpersonal behaviours (9). Scales based on Berne’s theory of Transactional Analysis comprise group four (5), and the last group focuses on creativity and intelligence based on Welsh’s Origence-Intellectence concept (4). From the list of 300 adjectives the examinee has to choose those which either best describe themselves or a person being subject to personality assessment.

In the described survey, three versions of the ACL were used: “what you are like”, “how you would like to be” and “what your school principal is like”.

Procedure

Teachers participating in the survey took the test during the meetings of the teaching council at school. It was a group survey, anonymous, and was preceded with the explanation of the purpose, rules and course of the test performance. The meeting was held by a psychologist, i.e. a person authorised to use the test.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the survey performed on 140 teachers underwent cluster analysis in order to distinguish groups of teachers with different personal functioning. Calculations were made with the use of ACL results in the “what you are like” version, using hierarchical cluster analysis with Ward’s method. Obtained results allowed for distinguishing four independent clusters, the size of which has been presented in the table below.

Table 2. Number of teachers in created clusters

	Number	%
Cluster 1	53	37.9
Cluster 2	36	25.7
Cluster 3	22	15.7
Cluster 4	29	20.7
Total	140	100

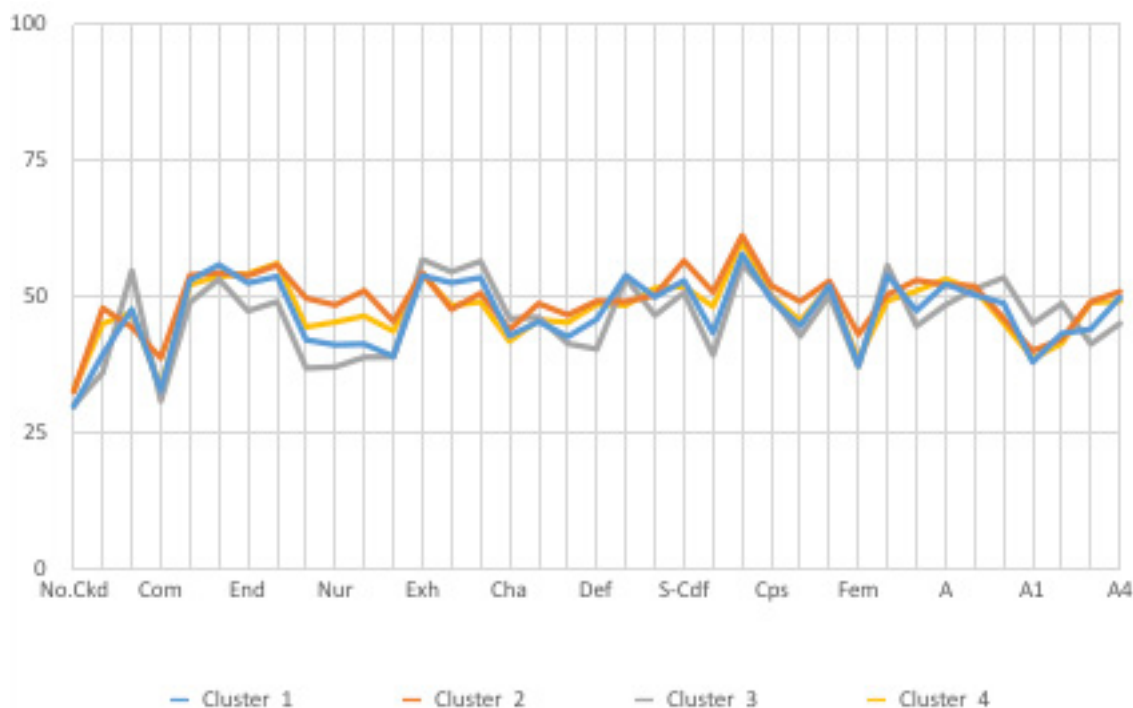
Source: own study.

Further on, the four groups of teachers were compared with relation to the images tested with ACL. One-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) with post-hoc tests was applied, taking into account different sizes of compared groups and results of homogeneity of variance tests.

As already mentioned in the methodological part, based on the cluster analysis of the actual image, four groups of teachers were distinguished. Chart 1 presents the way in which the examinees from each group perceive the principal. Comparison of the groups indicates numerous differences in principal perception (see table 3). The most critical image of the principal has been presented by teachers from groups three and one, whereas teachers from group three observed a lot of negative features and few positive ones. On the other hand, teachers from group one do not see the principal’s assets, however at the same time do not pay too much attention to their vices.

Respondents from group one perceive the principal as showing little energy and passive (NoCk). They see a person having difficulties establishing interpersonal relations (Int, Nur, Aff, Het). These difficulties result from a high level of self-focus and striving to be the centre of attention plus tendencies to aggressive behaviours (Exh, Aut, Agg). The principal perceived by teachers from group three is critical and has difficulties adapting to the surrounding environment (Padj, CP). It is a person for whom it is difficult to admit defeat and assume minor social roles (Aba, Def).

Chart 1 Principal's image in perceptions of teachers from distinguished groups



Source: own study.

Teachers from group one see few positive features in the principal. At the same time, they cannot see as many negative features as members of group three. In their perception, it is a person efficient in performing tasks. First of all ambitious and working towards set goals (Ach, Iss). Performs tasks in an orderly and persistent manner (End and Ord). In teachers' opinion, is also able to efficiently manage the work of others (Dom). According to teachers from group one, the principal has difficulties functioning, understanding themselves and others and in interpersonal relations (Int, Nur, Fav, Het). This results from excessive self-focus and aggressive behaviours (Aut, Agg). The profile is completed with the

critical attitude towards themselves and the surroundings (CP). In the perception of teachers from group one, the principal has difficulties acknowledging their weaknesses and adapting in personal and professional relations (Aba, P-Adj).

Teachers from the remaining groups (two and four) have positive perception of the principal. In their opinion, the principal is efficient in their operations, persistent and organised in completing their goals and intentions (Ach, Dom, End, Ord). It is a person skilful at establishing and maintaining interpersonal relations (Int, Nur, Fav, Het). In addition, they manage well when performing in front of the group, are confident and strive to fulfil

their life goals (Exh, S-Con, Iss).

Personality prerequisites of teachers in the principal's perception

Further in the article, a description of the actual and ideal image of each of the selected groups will be presented. According to the authors, this will allow for capturing the personality determinants for the perception of the principal by the teachers undergoing the tests. To confirm the differences between individual groups, all groups have been compared one with another (with the use of ANOVA analysis). For clarity purposes, results have been presented in attachments.

Description of examined teachers from cluster 1

Teachers from group one use a small number of adjectives when describing themselves, which may prove they are careful and withdrawn in contacts with the world (chart 2). In relations with others they may exhibit ambivalent attitudes and defensive behaviours (Nck, Com, P-Ad). Their strength is efficient functioning in task-oriented situations, especially in persistence and order in achieving set goals (Ord, End, Dom, Ach).

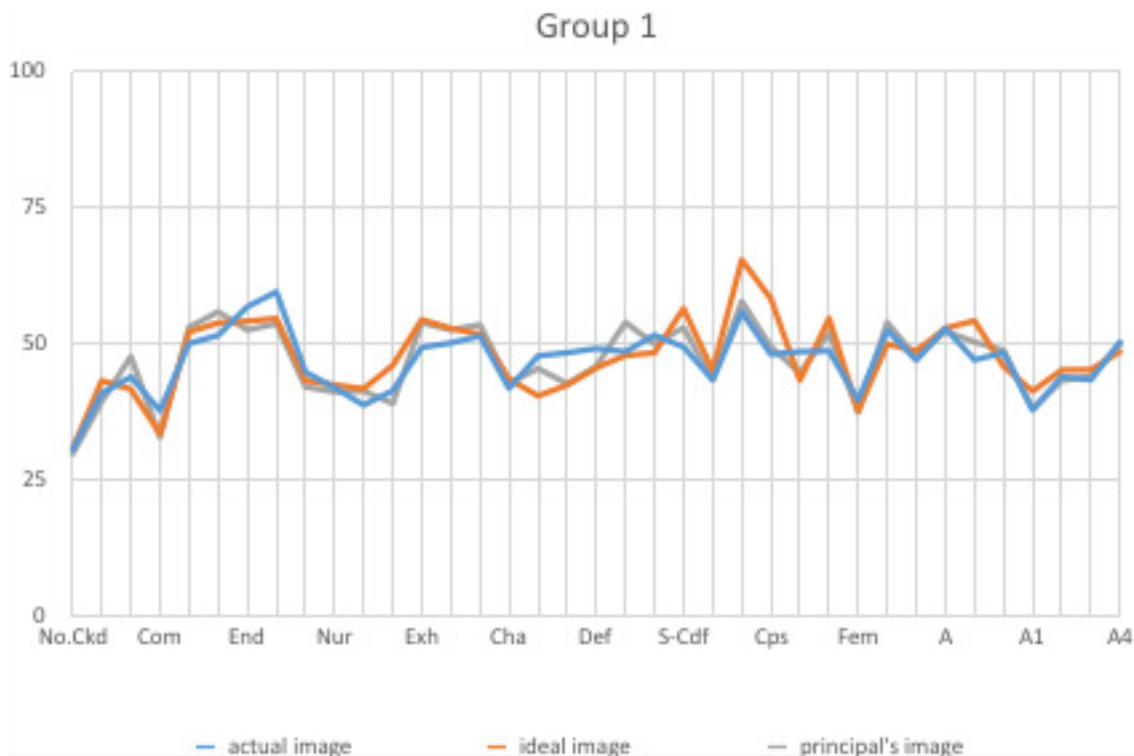
Their weakness are difficulties in interpersonal relations. These difficulties comprise: lower efficiency in understanding

themselves and others, avoiding company of others and tension in relations with other people. They don't feel very attractive in social contacts. They show marginal interest in the needs of others (Int, Nur, Fav, Het). They have a critical attitude towards themselves and the surroundings (CP). Such characteristics make it difficult for them to adapt to new situations and establish satisfactory social relations (P-Ad).

The ideal image of examined teachers and the image of the principal coincide with the actual image in the majority of examined dimensions. Similarity of the ideal and actual image may point to blocked development tendencies in the subjects. On the other hand, overlapping of the actual image and the principal's image proves the principal perception as similar to the subjects. We can speak of some form of projecting own traits to the principal.

The above mechanisms prove rare discrepancies between the actual image and ideal image and the principal's image (Ord, Het, Exh, Sub, Aba, Def, FC, Iss). Teachers from group one aim to be more independent and individual. They also want freedom of expression and wish to emerge in the perception of others by drawing attention to themselves and their needs.

Chart 2 Actual image, ideal image and the principal's image in perception of teachers from group 1



Source: own study.

Description of examined teachers from cluster 2

Teachers from group two (chart 3) have a constructive and positive image of themselves. They see more positive than negative features in themselves (Fav, Unf). They are characterised by self-confidence and faith in own capacities, which makes them able to set goals for themselves and be persistent in fulfilling them. At the same time, they can be creative and open to new solutions (S-Cdf, Iss, Cps). Moreover, their asset is efficient functioning in task-oriented (Ord, End, Dom,

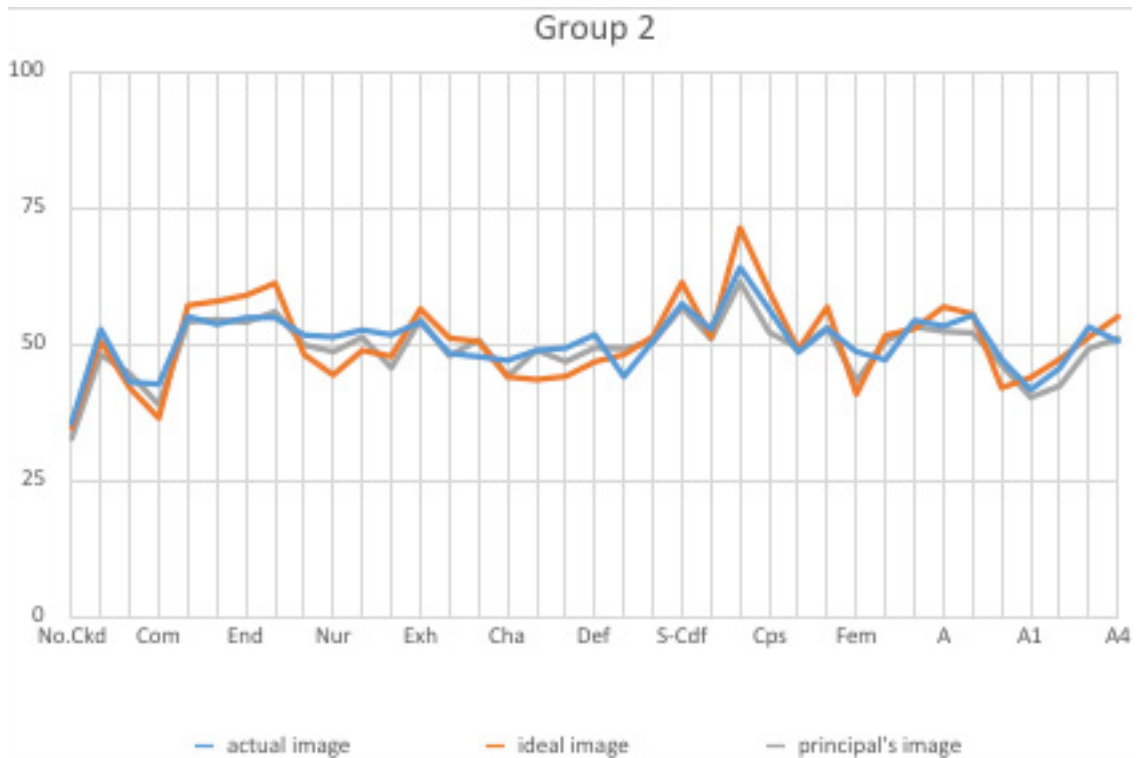
Ach) and interpersonal (Int, Nur, Fav, Het) situations. They like contacts with other people, they easily establish such contacts. They appreciate various forms of activity (Crs, FC). In difficult situations they keep distance and are cautious (No, Com). In their behaviours, they are prudent and toned down. They avoid impulsive reactions. They strongly refer to established rules of ethics.

In their ideal of development, they strive to acquire the ability to efficiently achieve life goals, even at the expense of being liked by others. They want to be resolute and persistent in performing assigned tasks. They want to be driven

by self-discipline and due effort in their undertakings, plus responsibility and efficiency in task performance. (Iss, S-Cds, Ord, End, Dom, Ach). The consequence of their focus on fulfilling individual goals will be poorer functioning in social roles which require dependence (Suc, Aba, Def). Focusing on their individual aspirations, they will draw less attention to the needs of people surrounding them.

In relations, they will exhibit defensive attitudes, cautiousness, tendency to withdraw in interpersonal relations and emotional ambivalence. In addition, they will be cautious in expressing themselves and will strictly observe norms of ethics, even at the expense of suppressing their own emotions (Nur, Com, Fem, No.Ck, A1).

Chart3:Actualimage,idealimageandtheprincipal'simageinperceptionofteachersfromgroup2
Description of examined teachers from cluster 3

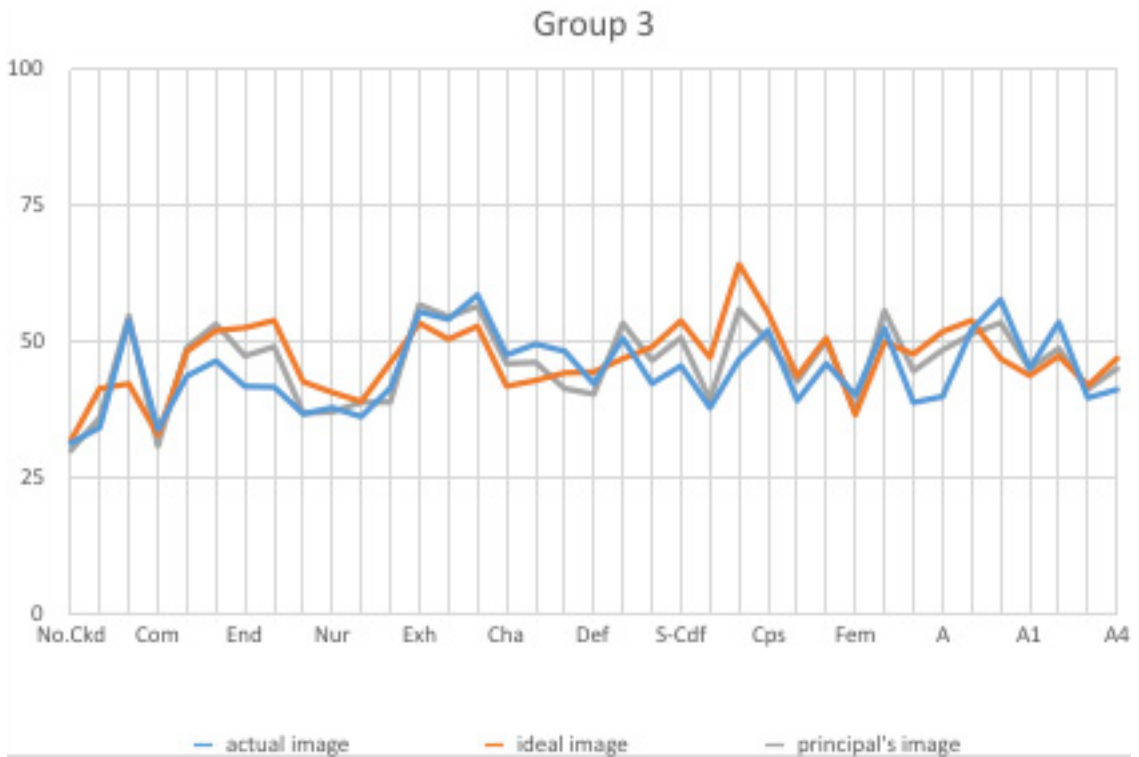


Source: own study.

Teachers from group three (chart 4) describe themselves through negative adjectives. This way of perceiving oneself leads to impulsiveness and defensive attitudes in relations with others. This may be demonstrated with ambivalent attitudes and quarrelsomeness (NoCk, Unf, Com). Difficulties in interpersonal functioning seem to be indicative for such a style of functioning. Subjects from this group are focused on their needs, and in relations with others they exhibit low sensitivity to feelings and distance in relations. Caution in contacts with the surrounding results from doubts as to the intentions of other people. The effect of this is avoiding closer relations with colleagues at work and treating them with suspicion. They apply a narrow range of social roles towards others. They also prefer individualism in action (Nur, Aff, Int, Int, Het, A2). They are also significantly self-centred and show the tendency to use others for their own purposes. They like to be the centre of attention and expect recognition. Self-centred attitude and difficulties under-

standing intentions of others lead to aggressive behaviours. They treat others as rivals. They are able to show aggression violating social norms, in an uncontrolled way which hurts others (Agg, Aut, Exh). Such a way of functioning makes it difficult for them to play subordinate social roles and leads to difficulties in adaptation. They often come into conflict with the environment. They have a pessimistic approach to life, which is the source of stress and tensions in life (P-Adj, Def, S-Cn, S-Cf). They look critically at themselves, so they have problems trusting themselves. Consequently, it leads to defensive attitudes in relations with others. They are unpredictable to the environment, they are perceived as immature and impulsive. To cope with strains of everyday life they close in their own world; in pursuit of satisfaction they escape into the world of dreams and fantasies (NP, A, AC). The teachers from this group see themselves as practically ineffective in performing tasks, especially in terms of persistence and order. They poorly deal with obstacles, they are quickly discouraged and are impatient in awaiting results (End, Ord).

Chart 4 Actual image, ideal image and the principal’s image in perception of teachers from group 3



Source: own study.

The ideal image of development of teachers from group three is focused around high expectations in the area of self-fulfilment and functioning in task-oriented situations. They would like to see both, their own limitations and assets (Fav, Unf). They wish to prove themselves by skilful goal setting and efficient task performance. They aim at self-discipline and maintaining internal order at work. They wish to plan their activities carefully and aim at their completion with

persistence and consistency, avoiding unnecessary distraction. They would like to experience optimism and energy, which would drive others to cooperation (Iss, Ord, End, Dom, Ach). By efficient operation, they would like to get the sense of confidence in themselves and independence in social relations (S-Cd, Suc, Aba, Def). They wish to build self-confidence on task orientation and independence at the expense of good interpersonal relations. They are ready to put their own

interest before the feelings and needs of others (Exh, Aut, Agg, Int, Nur, Aff, Het, Fem).

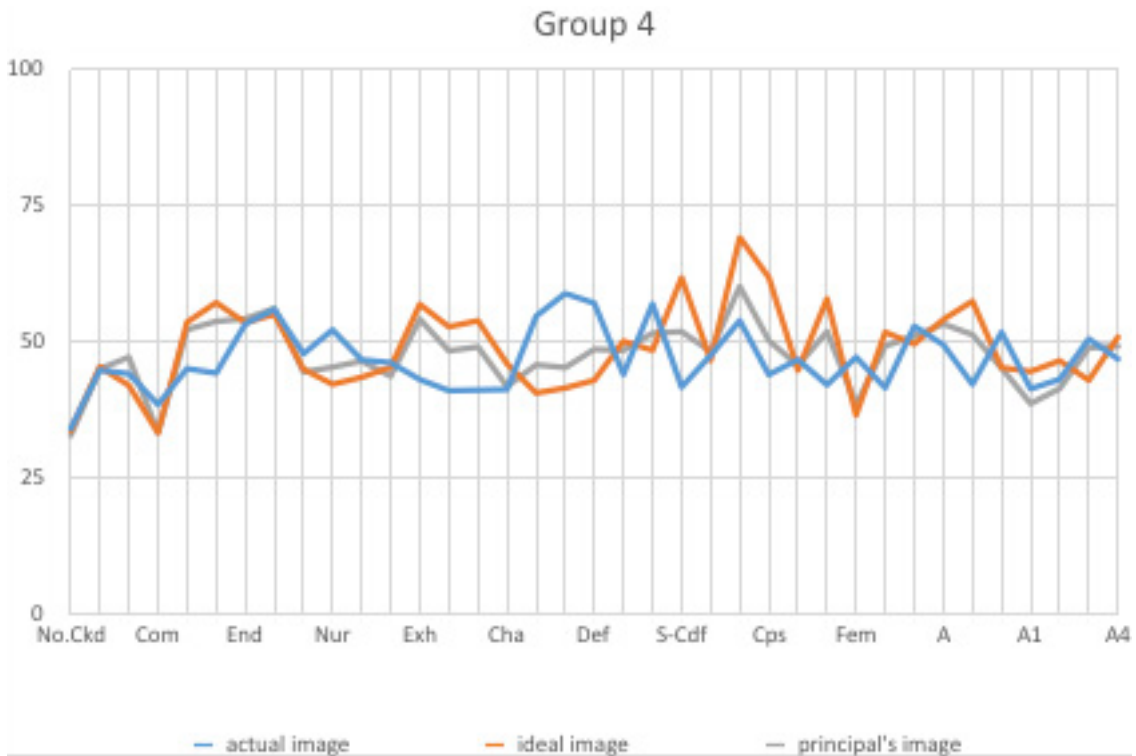
To sum up, two risky tendencies should be noticed in the ideal image of the subjects from group three. The first one is unconstructive expectations regarding their own functioning - aiming at perfectionism in task performance at the expense of good relations with others. The other tendency is a significant discrepancy in selected areas of functioning between the actual and ideal image. This may lead to blocking development tendencies of the subjects, and this in turn may lead to frustration.

Description of examined teachers from cluster 4

When describing themselves, teachers from group four used a limited number of adjectives. However, in describing themselves they see both their strengths and weaknesses. They present themselves as dependent on the environment. It comprises their conviction that others are stronger and more efficient, have good intentions and are ready to help others. That

is why the subjects seek affection and support in others. They admit their helplessness in coping with stress and crisis situations in life to others. They expect their support and help. In addition, in relations with others they easily assume subordinate social roles. They see themselves as less resourceful and modest (Suc, Aba, Def, FC, CP). They often give up themselves and do not take the liberty of spontaneous self-expression. In conflicts they use evasive techniques. They seek safety in what is proven and certain. They avoid risk and confrontation. They are understanding to others and sensitive to the needs and feelings of others (Agg, Aut, Exh). The strength of the teachers from group four is responsibility and emotional maturity. Excessive sense of control sometimes limits their activities. They can set for themselves socially attractive goals and aim at their fulfilment in a consistent, persistent and orderly manner. In work, they show conscientiousness, sense of responsibility and loyalty (S-Cn, Ord, End).

Chart 5 Actual image, ideal image and the principal’s image in perception of teachers from group 4



Source: own study.

In the ideal image of development of teachers from group four we can observe the need to be strong, dynamic and confident. They strive to acquire the skill of efficient goal achievement and performance of assigned tasks. They wish to function well in task-oriented situations, carry out tasks and be determined in pursuit of the goal. They want to act efficiently, with the sense of strength and involvement, and skilfully manage others (Iss,P-Adj, S-Cdf, Dom, Ach, Ord, End). In social relations, they aim to be independent and individual. They also wish to be the centre of attention of others, be able to stand up for their cause and be independent of

expectations of others (Agg, Aut, Exh, Fem). In the majority of dimensions, the direction of expected changes in personal functioning is constructive. However, a significant discrepancy between the actual and ideal image suggests blocked development tendencies. This might turn out to be a hindrance for the subjects to achieve the desired success in work on themselves.

Summary

The purpose of the studies described in this article was to define the relation

between perception of the principal and personality of teachers. Selecting four groups of teachers in the cluster analysis, which differ in their perception of the principal, points to the personality-based perception. A regularity emerges from the research that the more constructive the self-image, the more positive perception of the principal. A similar regularity refers to an ideal image.

Also, specific recommendations for principals result from these studies.

1. They should be aware that their perception does not depend only on the quality of their operation, but is also a derivative of what their subordinates experience.

2. It would be appropriate for principals to realise that the group of teachers they work with is not homogeneous,

3. and this should result in a diversified offer of support for them.

4. In cooperating with teachers, the principal should use various forms of cooperation and communication.

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