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## ATTITUDE AS AN ASPECT OF VOCATIONAL PEDAGOGUES' PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCY

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### ABSTRACT

The article analyses one aspect of the professional competency – attitude, its connection with the professional activities of vocational pedagogues; loyalty; motivation and the psychological characterization of personalities. It examines attitudes and the assessment possibilities of the phenomena connected with it. The changes of attitude in the self-education aspect have been analyzed. It provides the analyses of survey results of the pedagogues involved in further education and the assessment of higher school faculty experience.

### KEYWORDS:

attitude, professional competency, work motivation, life styles, loyalty, satisfaction with the job, professional deformation, life style, reflection, collegiate supervision

## INTRODUCTION

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We can find very many and different explanations of competency in the scientific literature. Competency is both the group of abilities that are necessary for performing an action as well as the result of the action. The following terms are used in connection with professional activities: qualifications; characteristics; mastery; experience; aptitudes; potential, etc. The traditional components of competency are knowledge; abilities and skills; attitude. The higher the specialist's qualification, the harder it is to form a complete, rationed and measurable description of competencies.

The diversity of the pedagogue's professional competency interpretations that are reflected in the pedagogical literature and scientific discussions shows the complicated structure of this construction. But the understanding and different usages of this term have allowed specialists to agree that *competency*:

- Is a broader concept than knowledge and skills.
- Has to be explained in connection with attitude (motivation, values).
- Has to be examined in the context of activities.
- Is achievable in action, it develops because more and more new ideas are generated

(E.Svecniks, quoted from I. Maslo, 2006).

Even though *attitude* is constantly being mentioned in the profession standards, as part of the professional competency, descriptions of professions and in the education goal programs, its context explanation is either not shown at all (as if everyone understands what is meant by that anyhow), or it is mentioned only superficially (e.g.: motivated, responsible, loyal, kind, etc.). The reason for this indefinite definition of attitude as part of professional competency could be as follows:

- Social psychology and sociology includes many theories and approaches, each of which has a different definition of *attitude*.
- There is no unequivocal understanding of how *attitude* is formed.
- The research data of how *attitude* is connected with actual activities and behaviour is very different.
- The results of attitude measurements can directly depend on the used methods which often cause the questioning of the credibility of the achieved data (Renge, 2002).

In order to form the methods for assessment of vocational pedagogue's competencies, it is necessary to form a clearer understanding of the components of attitude that are directly connected with the professional activities of the vocational pedagogue, which influences the quality of results and which are possible to assess.

The structure of the article is formed by the general characteristics, description of vocational pedagogue activity style, loyalties, motivations and contentment connected with the further education of vocational pedagogues.

## 1. THE COMPONENTS AND FUNCTIONS OF ATTITUDE

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Attitude can be generally described as constant, positive or negative evaluating reaction that is directed towards specific persons, objects and which influences and motivates the behaviour connected with it. (Olson J., Zanna M., 1993)

The most common scientific assumption about the attitudes structure is a model of three components:

- Affective – emotions related to the object; like-dislike.
- Cognitive – opinions; viewpoints; thoughts.
- Behaviours – action intentions, a tendency to act in a certain direction and in a certain way.

Daniel Katz (1960) has defined four basic functions of attitudes:

1. The knowledge function. It helps to explain and understand the surrounding world. It categorizes the incoming information accordingly with a certain assessment.
2. The utilitarian function. Helps to achieve set goals, to be awarded. For example, a positive attitude towards the objects which help to satisfy needs.
3. The values expression function. It reflects the most important values, forms stable value orientations.
4. The Ego defence function. Attitudes serve as a psychological defence mechanism, which helps to lessen anxiety and to maintain self-respect.

Many social psychologists who have studied the attitude phenomena, emphasize that attitude is only a hypothetical, construct, theoretical model. Only stimuli that cause attitude and reactions to these stimuli can be actually observed and measured.

Despite the variety of the explanations of attitude as a complex psychological phenomenon, organization psychology has managed to pragmatically select and according to their tasks to adapt methods that help to assess individual attitude aspects in an individual's professional activities. The most frequent goals of attitude empirical research are related to the assessment of employees' motivations, satisfaction and loyalties.

One of the methods qualified for this kind of research is the Life Styles Inventory. This method diagnoses 12 personality attitude components (specific patterns of thinking and behaving) which form three general styles: **Constructive**; **Passive/Defensive** and **Aggressive/Defensive**. The basis of this test design is a psychological conception (author J. Clayton Lafferty) according to which each of the general styles are formed by 4 segments (thinking, needs and

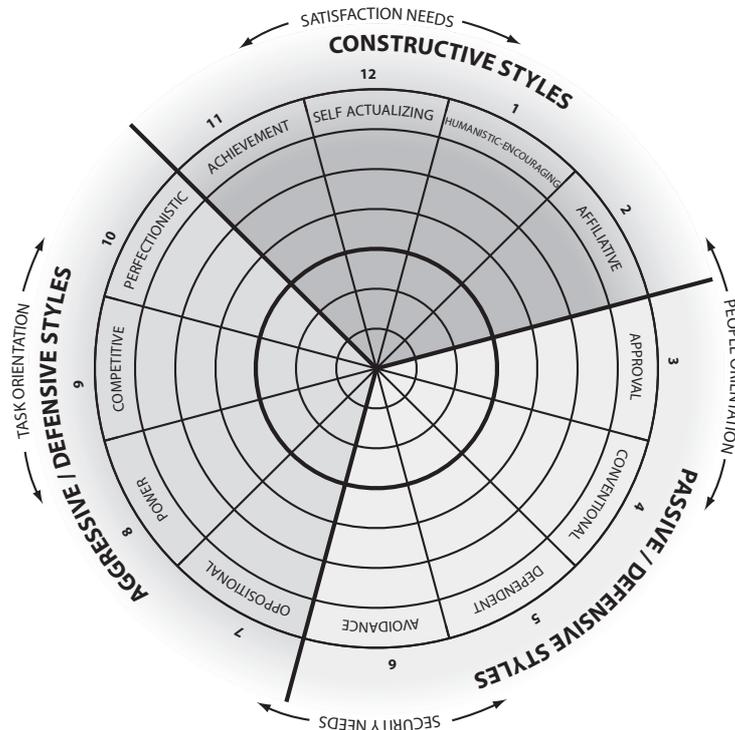


Fig. 1. Life styles circumplex

(Human Synergistic International Research and Development by Robert A. Cooke & J. Clayton Lafferty)

behaviour patterns).. The normative indicators in standardized tests are characterized by three levels: high, medium, low.

Based on the test data, we can determine, which attitude components are the most current (more explicit) and which is the dominating thinking and action general style.

**The constructive style** is described by the following patters:

- *Orientation towards achievements*. (Figure 1, Section 11). The need for high achievements, abilities to set achievable goals and to plan results. The ability to learn from one's mistakes and to correct tem. Survey data.

- *Self – Actualizing*. (Section 12). The ability to recognize and implement one's potential. Realistic thinking and a balanced orientation towards people and the task.

- *Humanistic – Encouraging values*. (Section 1). Involvement in human development. The ability to support and reflect the needs of others; the need to share experiences; cooperation oriented.

- *Affiliation needs* (Section 2). The ability to forma and maintain close, friendly relationships.

**The Passive/Defensive style** is described as follows:

- *Orientation towards approval* (Section 3). The desire to be recognized, to make a good impression.

- *Conventional* (Section 4). Orientation towards instructions and pursuance of normative. The desire for safety. The need to maintain status quo.

- *Dependence* (Section 5). Insecurity about the correctness of one's choices. Conformism. The desire to work in a subordinate position.

- *Avoidance* (Section 6).

**The Aggressive/Defensive style** is described by:

- *Opposition* (Section 7). A critical (often non-constructive) position. Denial of one's own fault.

- *Power* (Section 8). A tendency to control, lead others. Usage of pressure tactics in cases of disagreements.

- *Competency* (Section 9). The desire to attest one's self in a certain discipline. The domination of professional values above general human values.

- *Perfectionism* (Section 10). Orientation towards a higher performance quality, control. Exactingness. Inflexibility.

The empirical research data summarized by the Human Synergistic Centre show that a high constructive style level corrals with an effective professional activities both in groups and with the individual performance.

The criteria of any specialist's professionalism are not just the work results and achievements, but also:

- The adequacy of profession to a person's motives, psychological characteristics.
- Satisfaction with the job.
- Individual responsibility.
- The ability to self-actualize and develop.

## 2. THE POSSIBILITIES OF VOCATIONAL PEDAGOGUE ATTITUDE ASSESSMENT

Unfortunately the performed research data in Latvia education institutions are fragmentary and do not reflect the general impression which would illustrate the particularity of work attitude of vocational pedagogues as an organization employees.

During the vocational pedagogue further education courses in 2007 the faculty of Riga Technical University performed a survey to ascertain the attitude of pedagogues, which in a

broader context could be denoted as a life style tendency. For this purpose we used the Life Styles Inventory (See Chapter 1).

The surveyed respondents (46 people) are pedagogues from the same vocational education institution and they are in average 50 years old. Mostly their length of service is more than ten years. We have to mention that the totality of this survey selection doesn't reflect the demographical overview of vocational pedagogues in Latvia, this research should be viewed as a careful endeavor to determine the common attitude tendency of a vocational pedagogues' collective in one institution.

The average statistic indicator of vocational pedagogues' survey data shows that the most characteristic style of the respondents is *the passive/defensive style*, but the *constructive* thinking and acting style is in an explicit low level.

The most characteristic thinking and acting components of vocational pedagogues are:

- Orientation towards approval.
- Avoidance.

50% of the surveyed the previously mentioned components were at a very high level.

The medium level includes:

- Conventionalism.
- Dependency.
- Opposition.
- The need for prestige and power.
- Competence.
- Perfectionism.

The previously mentioned components are at a very high level for 1/3 of the respondents.

The following components are of low implication:

- Achievements.
- Self-Actualization.
- Humanistic encouraging.
- Affiliate relationships.

A high level of these components is shown for only 3 respondents. But most of the surveyed vocational pedagogues consider achievements, humanistic values and self – actualization needs as insignificant (low implementation level).

How is it possible to interpret the data?

Firstly, it would not be correct to extrapolate the results of one education institution vocational pedagogue surveys towards the totality of vocational pedagogues. Broader comparative research is necessary to test the assumption, that the most characteristic work attitude of the vocational pedagogue is the passive position, that they have a poorly explicit humanistic pedagogical disposition and a low self-actualization and achievement motive.

Secondly, the achieved data are to be viewed in a specific organization culture and faculty resource leadership context. These can reflect the employees' attitude towards the organization and point to the loyalty and work motivation of the employees.

Thirdly, the gained data about the traits of the vocational pedagogues' thinking and working style allows planning the further education study forms and context more efficiently.

The circumstances of changes in professional activities are characterized by two different behaviour patterns: 1) **adaptive behaviour** and 2) **professional development**. The first is characterized by a person's attempt to adapt to a new situation by using means already gained by experience (skills and knowledge). This pattern is characteristic of people with a low *constructive style* level. The second pattern includes searching for new resources, the ability to develop as well as professional growth.

If during a time of changes the pedagogue works in the “adaptive behaviour” pattern, there is a chance for quicker professional deformation. Professional deformation is the simplification of a system (personality, professional activities, and relationships). A person’s “visual angle” is sort of restricted. He cannot comprehend things and activity outside a narrow situation context (no perspective). While it is possible, standard methods acquired during previous experiences are used. Opposition to all that’s new and tiredness of the old.

The most characteristic traits of a pedagogue’s professional deformation are:

- The lessening of comprehension and behaviour resilience: usage of homogeneous behaviour tactics in different situations. Stereotypical comprehension. Usage of directive methods, control.
- The lessening of tolerance: growth of intolerance towards something unusual, different, the desire to criticise students, faculty, leaders, government, colleagues. The desire to use sanctions.
- Emotional stress and dissatisfaction. Irritation, disability to control one’s self or atypical indifference. Somatic reactions.
- Ignorance of one’s personal inner contradictions. Disinclination to develop. The lack of reflection. Rerouting of responsibilities.

Another risk involving a low *constructive style* level and a high passive / adaptive style level is the attitude towards further education. Vocational pedagogues with this style more often think of further education as a nuisance and their participation in the education classes happens according to the adaptive pattern: low attendance (especially in cases of deficient control circumstances), low productive activity, orientation towards fictive studying that could be called “a taught imitation of studying”.

### 3. LOYALTY

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In describing the aspect of pedagogical competency attitude, it is very important to mention the fact that any pedagogue is the faculty (representative) of some specific education institution with lesser or greater sense of belonging to the working strategy and basic approaches of their organization. During the last decade one of the most current and arguable themes in organization psychology and leadership is **employee loyalty**.

**Loyalty** is a psychological state that a) describes the employee’s relationship with the organization; b) influences decision making to continue to work in a certain organization (Meyer J. P. & Allen N. J., 1997). Meyer and Allen have developed a 3 dimensional pattern of loyalty according to which loyalty is an emotional (affective), rational (pragmatic) and normative aspect. Loyalty indicators are:

- Satisfaction with the job and career.
- Conviction that the work within the organization is valuable also in the long-term.
- The feeling that one is needed in the organization.
- Readiness to accept collateral responsibilities.
- Personal interest in keeping their job.
- Pride in the organization.
- The desire to develop professionally, to work as successful as possible.
- Joy about the success of colleagues and organization.
- Similarity of opinions.
- Readiness to share experiences, also to discuss flaws.
- Readiness to warn about dangers.
- Honesty.

Research shows a stable correlation between the level of loyalty and work quality. Also

the loyalty of employees shows the competency of an organization's staff guidance: the ability to effectively organize an institution's activities by using human resources. Of course, it would be misleading to hope that all employees (including pedagogues) would express complete loyalty in their attitude and readiness to work. In accordance to the market demand for methods that allow identifying and projecting staff work quality, the empirical research of loyalty is one of the most popular methods in organization psychology and leadership sociology. The summary of research data allows to conclude that the loyalty of employees can be expressed in five levels, beginning with the lowest feeling of employee belonging in an organization (1<sup>st</sup> level) up to the highest level – a person completely identifying themselves with the organization (5<sup>th</sup> level).

**Levels of expressing loyalty:**

1. *The attribute, pseudo-loyalty level.* The affiliation to the organization is minimal. A person formally performs their responsibilities. They are not satisfied (or are indifferent) with the job, wage and leadership. In their opinion the organization is a temporary work place, a "trampoline" for further intentions. Theirs is an interim job. Low attendance and regular breaches of discipline. A low professional qualification, minimal comprehension of the organization and field. This level of loyalty is usually characteristic of vocational pedagogues who combine their job as a vocational pedagogue with their basic profession. These are usually people who have been trusted with the pupils' practice leadership in the organization, but who are less concerned to teach.

2. *The behaviour level.* The compliance to accepted normalcy. ("If you really need it, I'll do it".) The person has the necessary skills and knowledge but they are not interested in development and growth possibilities, or in the organization as a whole. The lack of initiative and an elusive relationship with the leadership. The person does the minimum required of them in order to keep their job. The most important job motivations are wage, social guarantees and privileges. By using usual clichés they automatically perform their professional responsibilities. They do not show interest about the field and the achievements of the organizations, the leadership politics. Estranged but correct. Friendly with colleagues but elusive with the leadership. Considers further education skeptically even though in case of need is responsive. Well acquired professional skills. In education institutions this level of loyalty can be characteristic to the pedagogues who changed their field of work in the 90ties, based on economical considerations. They have the necessary knowledge, communicative experience but a poorly explicit pedagogical self-confidence.

3. *The ability and skill level.* The person has appropriate professional education, abilities and interests which can be transformed in high mastery in professionalism contributing circumstances. Distinctively good professional self-confidence and growth possibilities. High work motivation and pragmatic achievement goals. The person knows his value in the work market, he is flexible and open to new job offers which promise better conditions: wage, career and social privileges. These specialists are usually in their "prime of life" with a small or already "accumulated" work experience. To them the professional self-realization motive is more important than the feeling of belonging in a certain organization. Leaders are usually the most interested in involving and employing these kinds of specialist because they cause the greatest "added value". But the greatest risk is to loose especially these specialists because their loyalty to the organization is fairly low. In education institutions most often the specialists who conform to this level are the information science and foreign language teachers, as well as those whose specialty is sought-after in the work market. In professional education institutions the mastery of these pedagogues raises the prestige and serves as a strong leering motivator even though theses specialist have a low level of pedagogical and especially didactical skills.

4. *Conviction and value orientation level.* Loyalty that includes a high trustworthiness and sense of belonging. The employee considers themselves as a part of the organization – Us. They are interested not only in personal achievements but also in the achievements of the organization. High work motivation. Participation in different activities. Care for the institution's reputation.

Special professional skills and knowledge can be even less developed than the general professional competency. Patriotism. The employee's investment is much larger than the wage. An organization can be satisfied if these kinds of employees make up 15-20 % of the staff. Usually these employees are leaders and staff with high professional identity. In Japanese management this kind of employee loyalty is a part of the organization culture. Sometimes pedagogues with this level of loyalty are called outstanding masters of the trade.

5. *The identity level.* "The organization is my family". The employee uncritically considers themselves as part of the organization. Readiness to sacrifice. Professional identity resembles religiousness. This kind of loyalty can be seen in some religious organizations, criminal structures (the mafia, gangs, grouping).

Unfortunately there has been no employee loyalty research performed in the vocational education institutions in Latvia. Implicit data of school pedagogues is achieved in the empirical research the goal of which was to ascertain the connection between satisfaction with the wage and loyalty towards the organization in banks and schools (Pavuls, Renge, 2003). The results of this research show that the school pedagogues have a lower rate of rational pragmatic loyalty than bank workers. The connection between the satisfaction with the wage and loyalty is different in the pedagogue group than in the bank workers' group. Also, the loyalty display of teachers is varies in different parts of Latvia. For contemplation I can mention the conclusion of this research: "If a worker's emotional or moral connection with a specific organization increases, he can also alter his attitude towards the wage. Even if the worker is dissatisfied with his wage, there is a possibility that in the influence of affective and moral loyalty the satisfaction with the wage could be raised." (Pvuls, Renge, 2003, p.184).

The research data activates the question of the pedagogues' wage, satisfaction with the wage and work quality. Despite the fact that the wage for pedagogues in Latvia is fairly low, the individual satisfaction with the wage can be high, medium and low. A pedagogue who is dissatisfied with the wage could stay and work in a school because "there is no place else to go" or "by leaving, the loss could be even greater". Despite the fact that the pedagogue's skills and knowledge are valued as satisfactory, it is the work quality of these pedagogues that could be low and lessen the general work productivity of the school. The awareness and comprehension of the school about pedagogue loyalty and satisfaction can help to form a more flexible motivation and professional development systems.

#### 4. ATTITUDE IN THE CONTEXT OF SELF-EDUCATION

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Assuming that the pedagogue's attitude towards self, their activities and work environment influences the professional development motivation, one of the goals of the further education programme could be to actualize the necessity of the vocational pedagogue to be aware of their personal experience.

A pedagogue from Russia, O. Dautova, bases the self-education context on "the three whales" – creativity; experience; reflection (Dautova, 2006).

**Experience.** There are two kinds of experience: the methodological (generalization of humanity's experience – e.g. science) and the empirical (a product of personal activities). These two kinds of knowledge form a "conceptual scheme" of the specialist or "the professional construct". Practice becomes the condition of development only when it is analysed and comprehended – reflected.

**Reflection.** Reflection is a process in which experience becomes personally comprehended knowledge. In analysing their professional activities, in the beginning the pedagogue can use a reflection pattern which consists of three parts:

The research part:

1. What did I do? (the result)
2. How did I do it? (the means)
3. Why did I do it?

The critical part:

1. Did I do what I really wanted to do?
2. Did I do it the way I wanted to?
3. What is my attitude towards the achieved, the reached?

The normative part:

1. In similar situations what will I do in the future?
2. How will I do it?
3. Why will I do what I will do?

In order to promote the comprehension of vocational pedagogue experience and to develop reflection skills, the Riga Technical University faculty in context of Practical vocational pedagogic course used elements of collegial supervision. **Collegial supervision** is one of pedagogical development methods. It is the cooperation of professionals, focusing on problem analyses and the optimization of activities. Supervision helps the specialist to:

- Better comprehend personal behaviour patterns.
- Ascertain problems.
- Broaden concepts about the situation.
- Share experiences and feelings.
- Find problem solutions.

Danish vocational schools' experience description and video materials were used as the collegial supervision acquirement pattern. Vocational pedagogues in work groups had the chance to perform analyses of specific cases as well as to present the fragment of their course and receive feedback from their colleagues. Based on the data from participant surveys and faculty observations we can conclude that:

1. Methodologically correct prepared collegial supervision courses develop the reflection skills of the vocational pedagogues and the awareness of individual experience. The pedagogues' self assessment reflected a better understanding of their working style, attitude and skills that should be developed.

2. The cases analyzed in supervisions light up the most current problems of pedagogues not only in the individual activity level but also defines the problem cycle in a broader context of education processes.

3. Vocational pedagogues with distinctive passive or aggressive defensive position (Passive or Aggressive defensive style) (see Part 2) have a higher resistance to the comprehension of personal experiences. Usually these are pedagogues with a longer length of service as well as pedagogues with a low self assessment of their pedagogical competencies.

4. If the participants perceive this method as a chance for personal growth (not a control and testing situation) then the collegial supervision is a fairly effective professional development method. In order for the supervision to be productive it is necessary to consider these conditions:

- To concentrate on behaviour not the personality.
- To use more verbs than adjectives.
- To observe, not interpret: what was said, done, not why, what I thought of it.
- To characterize descriptively not in a way of assessment.
- Concreteness not generalization.

## CONCLUSIONS

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Pedagogical and psychological literature mentions attitude as an important aspect of vocational pedagogues' professional competency even though comprehension of its structure, meaning and assessment is being interpreted very differently and often very generally. The term *attitude* is not included in the profession standard even though implicitly the attitude factor is of crucial meaning in the pedagogical activities.

When forming methods for assessment of vocational pedagogues' professional competencies, it would be advisable to reach a clearer understanding of the attitude aspects that are important in the professional activities and which are specifically determinable (measurable). In order to plan personal further education more effectively it would be in the interests of school leaders to study the pedagogues' work motivation, satisfaction and loyalty more deeply.

The average statistic indicator of vocational pedagogues' survey data shows that the most characteristic style of the respondents is the *passive / defensive style*, but the *constructive thinking and acting style* is in an explicit low level. Such tendency of common attitude can generate resistance for professional growth.

Most effective in influencing the vocational pedagogues' readiness to develop individually are the further education programmes which include methods that promote the comprehension of subjective experiences and develops the understanding of the different aspects of individual activities.

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## PAGRINDINĒS SAŅUKUMS:

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požiūris, profesinē kompetencija, darbo motyvacija, gyvenimo būdas, ištikimybė, pasitenkinimas darbu, profesinē deformacija, refleksija, kolegiškasis vadovavimas

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