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IMPROVING A PEDAGOGICAL IMAGE OF AN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION: A CASE STUDY¹

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Abstract

The article substantiates the essence and specifics of forming an image of an educational institution while taking into account globalization processes, intensive development of science and technology, expanding opportunities for academic mobility among other factors. The study defines the image of the institution in the context of such concepts as reputation, publicity, identity, public relations and others. The stages of formation of the image of an educational institution are presented. The emphasis is placed on the importance of pedagogical management, which involves the development of the effective interaction strategy among the principal, teaching faculty, students, stake holders and the media to form a positive image of an educational institution. The paper presents the results of the empirical study of the operational characteristics of a personal profile of school principals and their preferred style of communication with the faculty. It has been identified that four types of difficulties

¹ The article is based on the collective research theme of the Center for Innovative Educational Technology “PNU-EcoSystem” Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University “Teacher training: socio-pedagogical context” (2017-2027).

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are most often encountered by the education managers, among which the most challenging are the development of communicative potential, digitalization of the management process and improvement of personal and professional qualities. It has been found that some education managers can be characterized by the persisting stereotypes based on life experience and management practice; lack of motivation to learn new patterns of behavior and often a conservative approach to management.

Keywords

Image of Educational Institution – Education Manager – Communicative Strategies in Management

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Introduction

In the current conditions of globalization, competition between educational institutions of different countries, regardless of ownership, is growing significantly. Progressing in the development of science and technology is one of the reasons for improving the quality of educational services, as well as increasing requirements for new teaching methods (distance learning), variability of educational programs, academic mobility of students and professors within different countries and continents. Secondary schools find themselves in a complex competitive environment, which is created both by the demographic situation and the ranking of the institution and student performance, as well as their ambition to enter the top international universities. In addition, the prestige of an educational institution lies in the fact that nowadays parents pay much attention to secure for their children in class the favorable psychological climate, comfortable learning conditions, availability of a system of extra education services, various leisure activities, motivation to study in this very school, classroom and so on. Higher education institutions, in particular universities, today are also working on mechanisms to increase their ranking in the market of educational services, the introduction of information and communication resources, the interest of applicants and highly qualified professors. At the same time, current trends in the modernization of education are aimed at updating the management technologies of educational institutions. Directors face new tasks and societal challenges. This requires the ability to analyze a significant amount of factual material, summarize trends, predict further development of the pedagogical system, make decisions, optimize an educational process, evaluate outcomes and more. Education managers become increasingly conscious to the impact of market relations; they realize that management processes are not limited to internal management of a school. After all, the influence of society and the public on managerial activity is growing. Therefore, the human resources management, motivation and involvement of teachers, psychologists, parents, students in accepting topical challenges of science and education need special attention of directors. In the study, we aim to determine the nature and features of the image of an institution; factors influencing its improvement, as well as to present the results of empirical research on the role of a principal of the educational institution, its strategy and tactics of management in this area.

Results of Research

The essence and structure of the image of an educational institution

The concept of the *image* is a polymetric and functionally diverse one. In psychology, the concept of the image is interpreted as a mental picture or impression of a person, perceived by that person or others on the basis of perception and interpretation of certain symbols reflected in their consciousness²; as an emotionally colored picture of someone or something, composed in the mass consciousness, which has the characteristics of a stereotype. Regarding the organization, it is noted that image formation occurs spontaneously, but is often a result of efforts by specialists in the field of political science, psychology of advertising, marketing and so on³. Thus, we can argue that the image in a broad sense – is a set of unique characteristics of different origins, which are a means of forming a certain idea of any subject, institution or person in the audience.

² Dictionary of a practical psychologist, comp. S.Yu. Golovin (Minsk: Harvest, 1997), 53.

³ Psychology: Dictionary, edited by A. V. Petrovsky & M. G. Yaroshevsky (Moscow: Politizdat, 1990).

In order to clearly interpret the essence of the notion “image”, it is necessary to study the meaning of such concepts as “reputation” and “publicity”, which are often considered identical in scientific literature. At the same time, these concepts are associated with the creation of a positive image, social confidence, projection of the competitiveness of the organization in the market. *Publicity* is an act or device designed to attract public interest; information with news value issued as a means of gaining public attention or support; the dissemination of information or promotional material; public attention or acclaim⁴, i.e. a wide positive popularization of an organization by means of disseminating information and advertising. Thus, the image of the university also depends on the Internet representation, which is manifested in the availability and comprehensiveness of its official website, where prospective students can find the latest news and receive answers to questions, as well as its presence in various social networks. At the same time, such an image can be short-lived or distorted because of dishonest competitors and negative information in the information space for example. Therefore, the *image* and *reputation* of the educational institution should include other activities besides advertising. *Reputation* is defined as public opinion about a particular educational institution, ideas formed in society about the quality of educational services, human resources, prominent graduates and more. Whereas reputation is more objective, being a system of societal ideas from the outside, the image is self-centered, being the institution's self-assessment of its activities and its efforts to convey these achievements to the community in this perspective. It is also necessary to distinguish between the concepts of “image” and “identity”. Identity shows what an educational institution really is whereas the image also reflects how the external world perceives the educational institution. This applies not only to schools, but also to universities or other organizations. A corporate image can be projected through organizational communication, also it can be enhanced by external influences, such as media⁵. It is important to combine reputation with elements of identifying individuality, to create an image and move to an attributive component with positive characteristics. Public relations are a component of modern marketing communications to improve the image of the educational institution. Therefore, competence in this area is necessary not only for education managers, but for all teaching staff. In the context of our study, the important goals of Public Relations are:

- 1) creation, reproduction and maintenance of a favorable and manageable image of the educational institution;
- 2) raising (elevating) the pedagogical image, using the ranks of indicators of this image according to the degree of their significance;
- 3) producing anti-advertising, i.e. conscious reduction of image as needed (if the university is not able to satisfy the needs of customers in certain areas of activity);
- 4) counter-advertising, i.e. the restoration of accidentally reduced image of the institution through the refutation of unethical information of competitors, etc.⁶

Through explicating and examining the concept of contingent organization-public relationship (COPR), Yang Cheng investigates relationships between corporations and activist publics, and provides dynamic instances of the value of COPR and its six modes in conflictual situations⁷.

⁴ Publicity, Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/publicity> (02-12-2020).

⁵ H. Park & K. Rees, “Motivators of fair labor management and the role of top management in the US clothing/footwear industry”, *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, Vol: 12 num 4 (2008): 487-501. DOI: 10.1108/13612020810906146.

⁶ O. H. Romanovskiy, N. V. Sereda & Ye. V. Vorobiova, *Foundations of Public Relations* (Kharkiv: NTU “KhPI”, 2015).

⁷ Ya. Cheng, “Contingent organization-public relationship (COPR) matters: reconciling the contingency theory of accommodation into the relationship management paradigm”, *Journal of Public*

Findings of researchers (A. B. Palacio, G. D. Meneses & P. J. P. Pérez) prove that the process of image formation is carried out with the help of its various components in both cognitive and affective aspects. After all, the cognitive components of the image of the educational institution significantly affect the affective component. Therefore, in its activities, the university must focus on students, society and employers⁸. Research shows that students do not identify the image of the university (college) and the level of the study program. At the same time, students' satisfaction with the level of educational services and the image of the educational institution are directly related to the loyalty of applicants. It is important that they are satisfied first of all with the educational program offered by the university⁹. Certain scientists¹⁰ (T. Khomulenko, Y. Padafet, O. Skorynina) argue that the sequence of forming elements of the institution image may consist of different stages, but the the most suitable is shown in Figure 1. Adherence to the considered process of sequence of formation of image of educational institution will promote recognition by its customers and the public and create a productive dialogue between them.

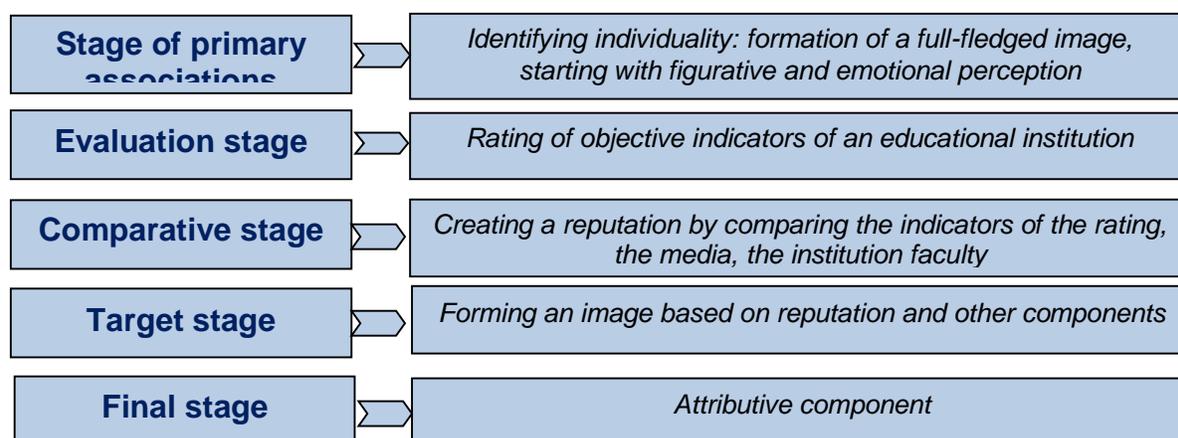


Figure 1

Stages of formation of image elements of an educational institution

Current scientific literature on the subject¹¹ singles out a combination of the following components in the process of creating a positive image of an institution:

identification of social groups interested in providing quality educational services, defining current needs and expectations of the audience;

Relations Research, Vol: 32 num 3-4 (2020): 140-154.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2020.1830405>.

⁸ A. B. Palacio, G. D. Meneses & P. J. P. Pérez, "The configuration of the university image and its relationship with the satisfaction of students", *Journal of Educational Administration*, Vol: 40 num 5 (2002): 486-505. DOI: 10.1108/09578230210440311.

⁹ Ø. Helgesen & E. Nettet, "Images, Satisfaction and Antecedents: Drivers of Student Loyalty? A Case Study of a Norwegian University College", *Corporate Reputation Review*, Vol: 10 num 1 (2007): 38-59. DOI: 10.1057/palgrave.crr.1550037.

¹⁰ T. B. Homulenko, Y. G. Padafet & O. V. Skorynina, *Theoretical and practical aspects of image research*, monograph (Kharkiv: Injek, 2005).

¹¹ A. B. Palacio, G. D. Meneses & P. J. P. Pérez, "The configuration of the university image and its relationship with the satisfaction of students", *Journal of Educational Administration*, Vol: 40 num 5 (2002): 486-505. DOI: 10.1108/09578230210440311 y H. Vasianovych & O. Budnyk, "Pedagogical Elite as phenomenon of modernity: spiritual and moral context", *Leader. Elite. Society*, Vol: 1 (2017): 96-108.

selection of qualified scientific and pedagogical faculty to increase the rating of the institution;

constructing the image of the educational institution, development of management strategies for its formation;

direct formation of the image of the educational institution, control of intermediate results and their adjustment in response to social challenges;

monitoring of the developed image of the educational institution in the context of its innovative development.

The process of forming a positive image of an educational institution is clearly and strictly algorithmic. It is no coincidence that S. Sushko highlights the following technological stages of its formation: 1) initial image (creating a personal image of a principal, creating an original concept of education institution that can display novelty and relevance, work with personnel, effective employment based on qualifications, concluding agreements with other organizations, maintaining optimal conditions that would ensure the universality and elitism of education); 2) image in progression (measures to create advertising through the media); 3) sustainable image (stable positive public opinion, formed with the help of factual data on the results of high learning outcomes; accreditation or licensing of educational programs; generally recognized popularity)¹². The structure of the image of the educational institution is presented in Figure 2. Hence, this concept includes the following components: *the image of the service* – the presentation of core and additional educational services provided in the institution (new study programs, academic mobility, international projects, research and publications, etc.); *the internal image of the organization* – how employees perceive their place of work. The main determinants of the internal image are the culture of the organization and the socio-psychological climate; *the image of the principal* and *the image of the faculty*.

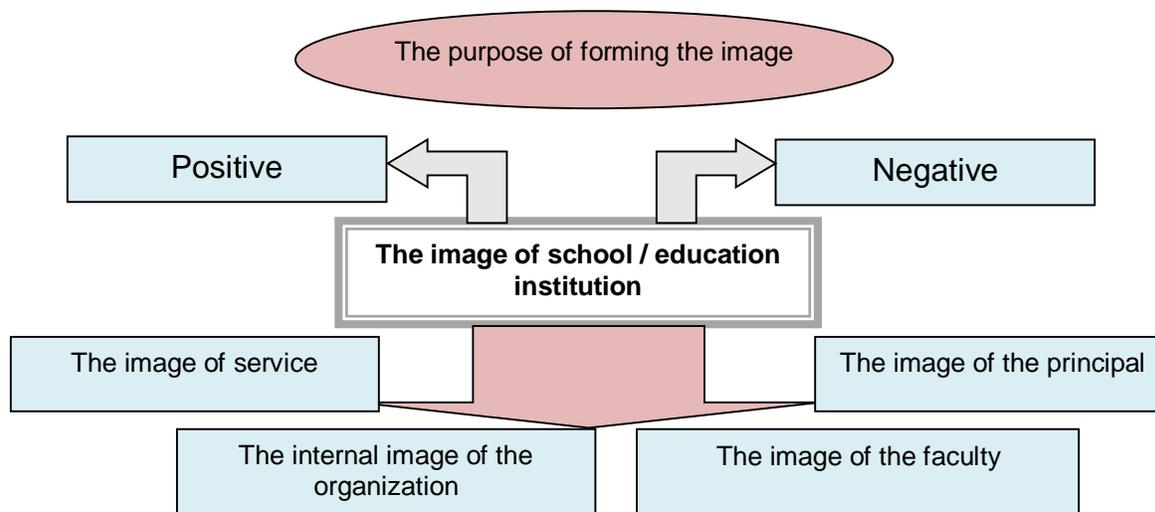


Figure 2

The structure of the image of an educational institution

The image of an educational institution largely depends on the professional qualities of the scientific and pedagogical personnel, which is the bearer of the highest humanistic values, freedom, tolerance and democracy¹³. The faculty of such an institution should belong

¹² S. Sushko, "The modern management model of a grammar school", Director of school, lyceum, gymnasium, Vol: 3 (2003): 85-100.

¹³ H. Vasianovych & O. Budnyk, "The Category of freedom in the written heritage of John Amos Comenius and Hryhorii Skovoroda", Advanced Education, Vol: 7 (2017): 85-89.

to the pedagogical elite that “reflects the activities of the most advanced scientific and pedagogical group in the direction of spiritual, moral, cultural, educational and professional growth of the subjects of learning”¹⁴. In this context, it should be noted that the activity of the pedagogical elite is gaining special importance also because it receives the status of meta-activity, therefore, thanks to it, a whole new person and a qualified specialist is brought up. The image of an educational institution can be positive, negative, indistinct. At the same time, the goal, of course, *is to create a positive image of the educational institution* – it is a complex and long process of forming good and lasting reputation, attractiveness, creating a situation of success at all levels of the organization.

Organizational culture is an integral part of an effective functioning and development of the educational institution, taking into account which creates the preconditions for obtaining positive results and, if necessary, change the image. Organizational image of a university needs to be systematically studied and adjusted according to appropriate quality criteria. For example, the results indicate that the organizational image scale adapted to the Mexican population has adequate psychometric properties to assess this construct¹⁵. It is obvious that the image of an educational institution in each country has specific national, regional and ethnic features. Thus, the mechanisms of forming a positive image of the educational institution is a certain system of actions, which provides: justification and development of strategies in various areas of activity; setting priorities; image audience research; selection of appropriate management methods; diagnostics of the level of development of researching and teaching staff; sociological surveys of the environment and institution; choosing and cooperation with mass media; application of content analysis, etc.

Pedagogical management concerning the creation of the image of an educational institution should be aimed at appropriate interaction of the principal with the faculty, partners, students and community to ensure active coordinated participation in achieving the goals. However, the priority role in this process belongs to the principal of the educational institution.

The results of the empirical study

To identify the nature of the difficulties experienced by managers in forming a positive image of an educational institution, we conducted a survey. 46 principals of secondary schools from in different regions of Ukraine took part in it. The experience of management activities of respondents in various institutions ranged from 10 to 35 years. The gender rate was presented as follows: 67.4% (31 males) and 32.6% (15 females). An important goal of the study was to identify the difficulties that are most common in managing a school in the context of improving its image. The respondents stated the following difficulties:

a) difficulties caused by insufficient level of development of communicative potential (inability to conduct business talks and negotiate, insufficient mastery of persuasive methods in argument, poor communication culture, significant dispersion losses, existing barriers in communication with certain individuals, lack of information about the effects of perception, etc.) – 36.96% of respondents;

¹⁴ H. Vasianovych & O. Budnyk, “Pedagogical Elite as phenomenon of modernity: spiritual and moral context”, *Leader. Elite. Society*, Vol: 1 (2017), 6.

¹⁵ J. P. Pérez & E. M. Torres, “Evaluation of the organizational image of a university in a higher education institution”, *Contaduría y Administración*, Vol: 62 num 1 January-March (2017): 123-140. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cya.2016.01.007>.

b) difficulties related to digitalization of education¹⁶ (introduction of distance learning, selection and use of software instruments to support the educational process; creation of a methodological system to support the process of using electronic teaching aids, creation of information educational environment, etc.) – 32.6%;

c) difficulties in managing an educational institution (performing managerial functions, conducting administrative work, selecting highly qualified personnel, making managerial decisions, advertising the institution, etc.) – 19.57%;

d) difficulties related to the psychological characteristics of the head of the educational institution – 10.87 %.

The analysis of these data has found that 30.43% of the total number of surveyed principals of educational institutions indicated the existence of a resource for self-development, in particular readiness for increasing a level of communicative competence. Thus, a significant number of education managers find it difficult to “put themselves” in the situation of a subordinate (84.7%), analyze and accept the motives of other participants in the management process (76.1%), treat subordinates on a parity basis in dialogical interaction (65.2%), predict the results of communicative activity (58.7%), show empathy (54.3%), manage their emotions during communication (43.5%), take into account ethnopsychological features in communication (41.3%), control anxiety while speaking publicly (19.6%), carry out financial and economic activities (23.9%).

Empirical data show that communication skills (including online communication) are dominant in the structure of operational characteristics of a personal profile of a school principal (Figure 3). 41.3% of the respondents think so. At the same time, a significant number of the respondents also pointed out the importance of other skills for the education manager: organizational (17.39%), digital and projective (15.22% each).

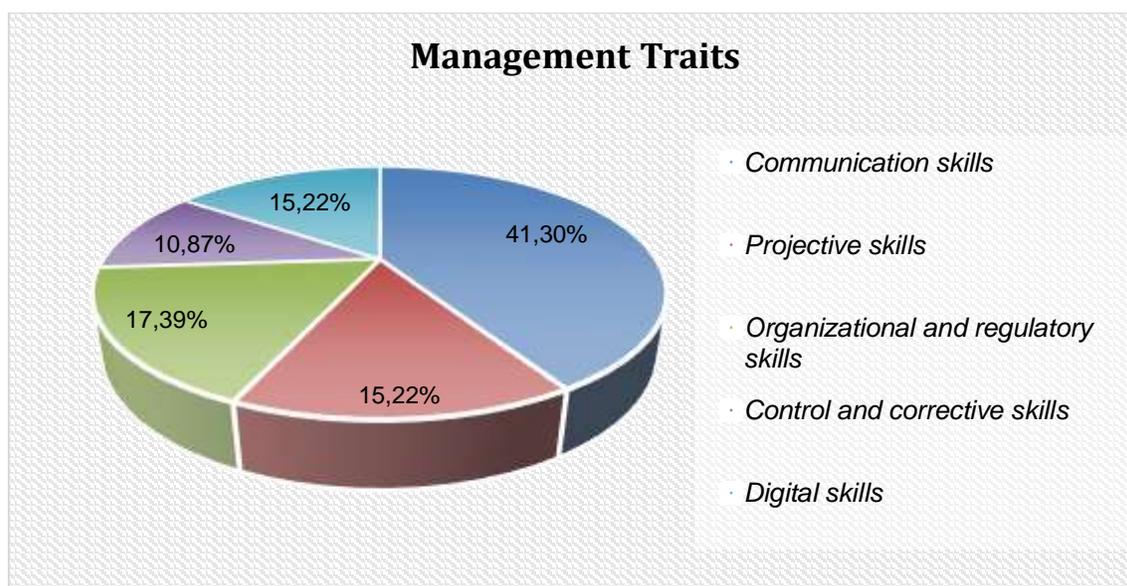


Figure 3
The structure of management traits of a personal profile of a school principal

¹⁶ O. Budnyk; R. Zozuliak-Sluchyk; S. Nedilskyi; I. Chervinska; T. Malaniuk; N. Prevysokova & U. Ketsyk-Zinchenko, “Modern Digital Distance Learning Technologies: Challenges of Future Teacher Training”, Revista Inclusiones, Vol: 8 num 1 (2021): 41-53.

Figure 4 shows the communication styles of education managers with teachers. As you can see, the majority of respondents (26.09%) prefer a dialogic style in communication. They feel confident and open to communication with teachers; show friendliness, desire for mutual cooperation and understanding, readiness for innovation; motivation for professional and personal growth. The respondents are focused on dialogue, discussion and collaboration; characterized by a sufficiently high or adequate self-esteem.

However, 10.87% of school principals (according to experts' opinion) are still prone to conflict behavior in professional activities¹⁷: irritable-impulsive repulsion of others, aggression; emotional breakdowns, informative transfer of responsibility for failures in communication to subordinates, etc; 15.22% – are likely to opt for authoritarian-monological nature of interaction, which is manifested in the desire for dominance, egocentrism, zero-tolerance for mistakes, thus, it is the evidence of lack of pedagogical tact, aggression and high self-esteem.

Manipulative style in professional communication, according to our study, was found in 8 people, which is 17.40% of the total number of respondents. This category of leaders is characterized by a high level of development of communication skills and their skillful use for covert manipulation of communication partners; knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of subordinates in combination with their own secrecy, insincerity. Such a strategy of communication behavior cannot be considered productive for an education manager who seeks to create a positive image of the institution. After all, his/her egocentric orientation, need for personal success, emphasized demanding and masked hidden selfishness over time makes it impossible to establish a state of bilateral readiness to make adequate educational decisions and to succeed in teamwork.

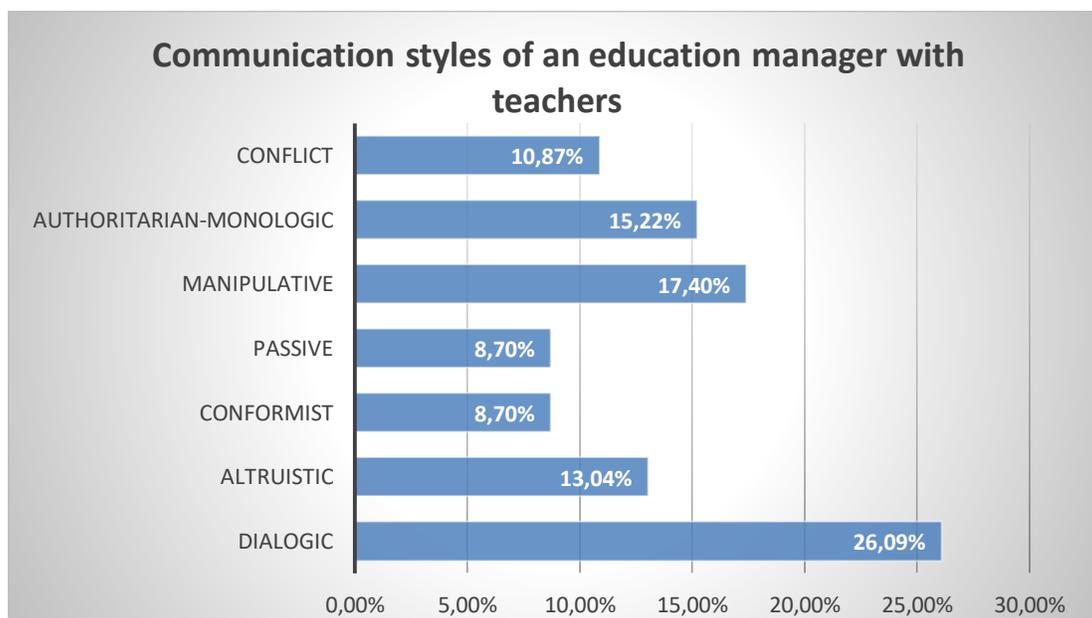


Figure 4
The tendency to styles of communication of managers with staff
(according to experts' evaluation)

¹⁷ P. Nikolaou, "Effective strategies for human resource management in educational organizations. Conflict management case studies", *Journal of Contemporary Education, Theory & Research*, Vol: 2 num 2 (2018): 30-34.

8.70% and 8.70% of principals of educational institutions displayed passive and conformist styles of managerial interaction respectively. If the former is characterized by alienation, emphasized distancing, closeness and indifference to the problems of employees, low sensitivity to emotional and mental states, high self-appraisal combined with latent dissatisfaction with communication; then the latter is mostly a deproblematized and conflict-free communication without clearly defined managerial, pedagogical or communicative goals. At the same time, this style often turns into a passive response to change, external formal friendliness with internal indifference. Of course, such managers are characterized by a low rating as leaders because of their softness, insecurity, lack of initiative and low self-esteem. Such communication strategies form a vague or negative image of the educational institution.

Thus, the communication style of principals, their personal and professional qualities, efficiency, orientation on cooperation, ability to predict and apply elements of marketing communication in management serve to increase the rating of the institution, and thus contribute to the formation of its positive image as a whole.

Conclusions

1. The article defines the essence of the image of an educational institution as a set of unique characteristics of different origins, which are a means of forming a certain public opinion about this institution as a whole. The “image of the institution” gains its interpretations a result of the contextual study of such concepts as: “reputation”, “publicity”, “identity”, “public relations” and others as these concepts are associated with the creation of a positive opinion, public trust, projecting competitiveness of the organization in the market of relevant services.

2. It was found that the image of the educational institution consists of two main parts: *the information component*, which is a perception of the institution, which has developed in the minds of people; *the evaluation component* that reflects the qualitative public evaluation of the activities of this institution as a whole. Pedagogical management concerning creation of the image of an educational institution involves effective interaction of the principal with the faculty, students, partners, the media to achieve the goals.

3. The specifics of the formation of the image of the educational institution and the factors influencing its improvement are substantiated. The stages of the formation of the image of the educational institution are presented, which promotes its recognition by customers and the public for the sake of productive dialogue. It is emphasized that *the creation of a positive image of an educational institution* is a systematic and long-term process of forming a good reputation, attractiveness, creating a situation of success at all levels of its activities.

4. The paper states the requirements to an education manager, strategy and tactics of management to form a positive image of an institution in the conditions of the market, globalization, academic mobility, etc.

5. The results of empirical research have shown that a significant number of managers experience certain difficulty in forming a positive image of the institution. In particular, it has been found that education managers often have the following difficulties in this area: introduction of modern digital technologies; presence of stereotypes of life experience and management practice; lack of motivation to learn new patterns of behavior, a conservative approach to management; shortcomings in communication: inability to counteract psychological barriers, show their communication skills and create a communicative strategy of behavior; sometimes – insecurity and emotional discomfort in working with staff, the public, the media, etc.

We see prospects for further research in studying the phenomenon of management team, the features of socio-psychological reflection of management reality and the use of marketing technologies in the context of image formation of the educational institution.

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