

## Management Challenges and Factors Determining Their Successful Solution

Dalia Dambrauskienė\*

Šiauliai Centro primary school, A. Mickevičiaus St. 9, LT-76341, Šiauliai, Lithuania  
dr.daliadambrauskiene@gmail.com

Reda Ponelienė

Šiauliai nursery-kindergarten "Vaikystė", Krymo St. 3, LT-78254 Šiauliai, Lithuania  
reda.poneliene@siauliuvaikyste.lt

### Abstract:

**Purpose and Originality:** This research aims to analyse challenges encountered by managers of educational institutions in their work, the solutions to overcome challenges and factors determining success. The article presents the results of the research conducted in Lithuania in 2022, encompassing structured interviews with 8 heads of educational institutions in Šiauliai region. The research has revealed that the challenges faced by the heads of Lithuanian educational institutions are determined by the specificity of the country's education system, the previous management of the educational institution, and the attitude of the very heads of educational institutions.

**Method:** The research was conducted employing a generic qualitative descriptive exploratory approach (Kahlke, 2014; Merriam, Tisdell, 2016). The research strategy is not based on a specific qualitative methodology; it is simply sought to discover and understand the phenomenon from the perspective of the subjects participating in this research. The respondents were given two questions: 1) What was the biggest management challenge that you managed to solve successfully? 2) How were you solving this challenge?

**Results:** Based on the research data, management challenges, their solutions and success factors were revealed. The research demonstrated that the solutions for overcoming challenges faced by managers included the manifestation of general and managerial competencies in the managers' activities, while the factors determining success were the managers' personal, professional competencies and value approaches – managers' distributed leadership competence and organisational culture.

**Limitations:** The research involved only heads of educational institutions (except gymnasiums) in Šiauliai region; therefore, the research results cannot be applied to the entire population. The research results could have been influenced by the subjective perception of investigated persons, their emotional state, daily institutional situations, workload, and other subjective factors.

**Keywords:** managers' competence, management challenges, factors determining success, leadership.

\* Korespondenčni avtor / Correspondence author

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## 1 Introduction

Empirical research has proved the importance of the manager's competencies for the modern organisation and their influence on organisational performance. Competent management is considered the most important dominant for successful school performance. At the same time, scholars (Spillane, Lee, 2014; Bayar, 2016 et al.) note that the work of managers of educational institutions has recently become more complex since they face an increasing number of challenges such as doubling of work functions; negative attitudes of families towards the school; immigrants, re-emigrants; teacher trade unions; the attitudes of teachers towards school principals and the way they treat them; the increase of unwanted behaviours in the classroom / school; change of the previous leadership style to a more democratic one.

Prompt and smooth solution of arising challenges determines the success of the manager and of the entire educational institution and sometimes even the institution's independence or survival. According to Storey (2016), greater complexity of the society and faster pace of change lead to a greater need for leadership in organisations such as distributed leadership (Lahtero et al, 2017; 2019; Dambrauskienė, 2021; Harris, Jones, Ismail, 2022; Or, Berkovich, 2023), innovative leadership (Khalili, 2016; Atkočiūnienė et al., 2019; etc.), or agile leadership (Hayward, 2018; Collins, 2018; Özdemir, 2023; etc.). For more than a decade, Lithuania has also been undergoing changes in its education policy towards the implementation of leadership, which is reflected in the Lithuania's Progress Strategy "Lithuania 2030" (2012), the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania (1991, current version of 01/09/2023). Leadership ideas are set out in the Good School Conception (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania, 2015). In addition, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania plays an important role in spreading leadership ideas in Lithuania by initiating various leadership projects. Therefore, school leaders are inevitably forced to change themselves and their personalities, their attitudes to the changes taking place in the organisation and to create conditions for other members of the organisation to develop their leadership talents. It is important to note that in Lithuania, heads of schools have fixed-term employment contracts of five years.

According to Videikienė, Šimanskienė (2013), Errida, Lotfi (2021), personal qualities and professional competencies of the organisation's manager remain important in overcoming challenges or seeking to successfully implement change in the organisation. According to Graham-Leviss (2016), innovative managers need competencies such as risk management, curiosity, courage, exploiting opportunities, retaining a strategic perspective. In different organisations, in different political and cultural settings, overcoming of challenges and the successful operation of the educational institution are determined by different factors. Therefore, it is relevant to study not only the challenges faced by the managers of educational institutions but also to find out how the

emerging challenges are solved and what their successful overcoming depends on. A problem question is raised as to what factors determine successful overcoming of management challenges. The research object is the factors determining the success of overcoming management challenges. The purpose of the research is to analyse the challenges faced by the managers of educational institutions in their work, to identify the solutions to overcome them and the factors determining success.

The objectives of the research:

- To identify challenges encountered by managers of educational institutions.
- To reveal solutions for overcoming challenges arising to managers of educational institutions.
- To identify factors determining successful overcoming of challenges.

## **2 Theoretical framework**

Analysing the recent challenges encountered by managers of educational institutions, Tintore et al. (2022) observe that the increasing requirements for the education system and the abundance of work turn managers into bureaucrats and hinder concentration on what is most important in their work, i.e., (self-)education and its improvement. Another challenge mentioned by Tintore et al. (2022) it is the relation between autonomy of managers' activities and their accountability. According to these scholars, the more autonomy school managers have, the more accountability is required from them, the more control of schools and managers' activities as well as requirements to meet standards. Dambrauskienė (2021) also distinguished the abundance of external control as a challenge and a factor limiting the implementation of distributed leadership and other changes in Lithuanian educational institutions. In her opinion, abundant external control encourages managers themselves to increase the bureaucratic mechanism inside educational institutions and retain strict hierarchical responsibility.

The third group of challenges, mentioned by Tintore et al. (2022), is related to the lack of respect for school managers, and, thus, to the increasing demands and expectations of families and the society as a whole. Researchers also note a paradox that increased parental and societal expectations do not lead to more active participation of parents in the activities of educational institutions (Dunning and Elliott, 2019; Tobin, 2014). According to Tintore et al. (2022), the fourth group of challenges is related to insufficient assistance from municipal or state level politicians supervising the educational institution.

Researchers note that new heads of educational institutions face even more challenges in their work since they often encounter surprises and shocks in their professional transition to the manager's

position (Weindling, Dimmock, 2006; Wieczorek, Manard, 2018; Liljenberg, Andersson, 2020). According to Dambrauskienė (2021), managers who started managing the educational institution anew often encounter challenges caused by the hierarchical management tradition, which were formed over a long period of time (as long as 30-40 years) under the leadership of previous managers. Organisational culture shaped by such hierarchical management poses challenges: it limits the implementation of distributed leadership and other changes in educational institutions. Challenges while changing hierarchical management to a more democratic one often arises due to the attitudes and behaviours of older employees. Murphy et al. (2009) acknowledge that most older teachers find it difficult to switch to another management system that is unfamiliar and incomprehensible to them. Employees often perceive familiar hierarchical and bureaucratic structures as security and comfort, since in the event of a failure, hierarchical and bureaucratic structures allow those involved in the change process not to take the blame but rather to assign it to other persons or even to the system itself (Murphy et al., 2009). Therefore, employees are not always interested in changes initiated by new managers, which transform the established organisational culture, and managers must take certain actions to reduce employee resistance to change.

As noted by J. Kotter (2012), the more changes, the more leadership is needed in the organisation. The leadership of the head of the educational institution, his / her personal qualities and professional competencies determine not only success in overcoming challenges in the organisation. Barriers to implementing organisational change are also mostly related to the manager's personal and professional competencies. According to Videikienė, Šimanskienė (2013), failure to implement organisational change is caused by: inflexibility of managers themselves; poor management or weak leadership; lack of skills, proactiveness, effort and resources; and hasty, inconsistent introduction of change.

In summary, it can be stated that challenges encountered by the managers of educational institutions in their work depend on the external environment (e.g., education policies of local and national government: the autonomy and independence granted to educational institutions, the abundance of external control and the like) and on internal factors (e.g., personal qualities of the manager of the educational institution, his / her professional competencies, leadership, employee competencies, activeness of the parent community and the like). Faster and more successful implementation of challenges also depends on managers and their professionalism, personal qualities, leadership, change management skills and on the community of the educational institution. The education policy of local and national government can also contribute to successful implementation of challenges falling on managers through creation of a system of support (counselling, mentoring, training, etc.) for managers.

### 3 Method

The qualitative research was conducted in November of 2022. Research methods included structured interviews with 8 heads of educational institutions in Šiauliai region. The research was conducted by two researchers. Each researcher interviewed 4 informants. Informants were interviewed at their workplaces. The internal validity of the qualitative research was ensured by the direct participation of researchers in the research activity.

The research sample is non-probability, convenience. The subjects were selected based on purposive sampling. Selection criteria: managers with different seniority, working in educational institutions of different types (city, district), subordinate to the municipality (pre-school education institutions, general education schools). The research involved 8 managers. The researchers know research participants, which reduced barriers to communication and enabled to obtain the most diverse information through direct communication with the subjects. The sample size of the study was not predetermined. Data was collected until it became repetitive and their informativeness decreased due to data saturation.

In the first research stage, the research problem, questions, purpose, object, research parameters were considered. In the second stage, purposive sampling of research participants was carried out. In the third stage, verbal requests to the heads of educational institutions for permission to conduct research were made. Managers who agreed to reflect on their experiences were interviewed. In the fourth stage, the research instrument was prepared. In the fifth stage, the analysis of interviews and results was performed.

In the research instrument, the respondents were given two questions: 1) What was the biggest management challenge that you managed to solve successfully? 2) How were you solving this challenge?

Limitations of the research involved only heads of educational institutions (pre-school educational institutions, primary schools, and pro-gymnasiums) in Šiauliai region; therefore, the research results cannot be applied to the entire population. To reveal the problem under investigation in more detail, it would be appropriate to conduct the research with the heads of gymnasiums too. On the other hand, these results were not intended to represent all educational institutions in Lithuania. The information obtained during the interviews could have been influenced by the subjects' subjective perception, their emotional state, daily institutional situations, workload, and other subjective factors. Although the research sample does not allow making broad generalisations, the obtained findings enable us to see certain trends and opportunities for further research.

For data analysis every informant was assigned a code; for example, S3-1(16), K1-1(1). Code S means that the informant is a manager of a general education school; code K, of a nursery-kindergarten. The first digit shows the number of the informant on the list; the second digit, how many years the head has been managing the current educational institution; and the third digit (n), how many years of managerial experience the informant has in total. The informants managed the current educational institution from 1 to 7 years, the seniority of informants as managers was from 1 to 24 years. Research participants were women.

The responses of all subjects were analysed in parallel, looking for common points and distinguishing differences. The qualitative content analysis was performed, based on the extraction of the most appropriate meaningful units from the text and their coding. The text is analysed consistently, by inductively distinguishing meaningful units, formulating them into sub-categories and then combining into categories (Fig. 1). A category is a statement comprising a group of sub-categories (short statements) that share a common content, the meaning of the text (Bitinas, Rupšienė, Žydžiūnaitė, 2008). The combined categories form the themes that describe the phenomenon under investigation (in the case of this study, the challenges managers face, the decisions managers make to address the challenges, and the results that are achieved when the challenges are resolved). Based on the qualitative content analysis, a discussion was prepared, and research conclusions were drawn.

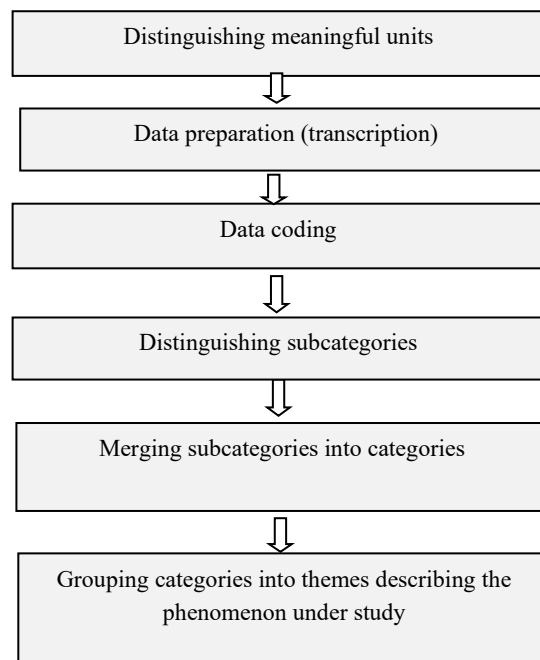


Figure 1. The qualitative content analysis process

The utterances of research participants are presented in quotation marks, indicating the participant code.

The following ethical principles of research were followed while conducting the research: informing the subjects about the purpose, stages, and methods of the research; maintaining confidentiality and anonymity; and the principle of voluntary participation. Research ethics requirements such as the researcher's professional responsibility, which is defined as avoiding fabrication, falsification or misrepresentation of data, results or conclusions; accuracy of presentation of research methodology and procedures; and the researcher's responsibility to the persons participating in the research were followed while conducting the study, performing the data analysis and announcing the research results.

## 4 Results

The research aimed to analyse what challenges were encountered by the heads of educational institutions in their work, how they were solved and the factors determining successful overcoming of challenges. After conducting the research, 5 challenges encountered by the heads of educational institutions were identified: difficulties arising in the first years of managerial work in a specific institution; poor image of the educational institution; reorganization of institutions; document management and financial management.

The analysis of the research results by every challenge, the decisions made by the heads of educational institutions and their impact on the successful operation of the institution are presented below. Table 1 presents the difficulties arising in the first years of managerial work in a particular institution and the statements illustrating them.

Table 1. Difficulties arising for new managers

Category	Subcategory	Illustrating statements
Difficulties encountered by new managers	Absence of a team	K1-1(1): <i>A highly fragmented team</i> . Before me, another manager worked for about 30 years. S2-1(24): It is specific to the work of us as managers of educational institutions that we come to work at the institution alone, without a team. And <i>we have to work with those people that we find at school as a legacy</i> .
	The organisational culture being changed	S3-1(16): The challenge related to organisational culture is also important. It is necessary <i>to understand relationships, what actions were taken earlier, to show that culture changes naturally when new people come</i> or to explain what principles we must and can use to build relationships and the like. I would say it is a kind of continuous challenge and at the same time, an opportunity to act differently.

Summarising the data presented in Table 1, it can be stated that the newly appointed managers of educational institutions face twofold difficulties: the newly appointed manager starts working in the institution without a team of his own; thus, has to adapt to the current situation and the team of the institution. At the same time, the new manager takes up the challenge to change the established procedures and organisational culture to pursue the set goals and improve the quality of the institution's activities. To achieve the latter goals, the manager has to make certain decisions (see Table 2).

Table 2. Decisions taken by new managers

Category	Subcategory	Illustrating statements
Decisions to be taken by new managers	Staff turnover	K2-4(7): It happened so that there was a <i>significant staff turnover</i> in the first year of management. In the beginning, I assumed that I was doing something wrong, that I was not able to maintain the team. <...> Now, I realise that those who were out of the way left, while the remaining ones and the new members of the team have a similar view of the institution's activities. S2-1(24): Over the course of a year, I was gradually <i>changing part of employees</i> and <i>started forming my own team</i> . I realized that it would not be possible to achieve a breakthrough at school, to achieve better educational results if I don't do this. K1-1(1): <i>A person was found who was able to organise STEAM activities.</i>
	Communication, collaboration with the community	K1-1(1): <i>There were a lot of discussions, communication, explaining to parents, consulting the community, the council of the institution.</i> S2-1-(24): Everything <i>is discussed with employees, I listen to their opinion</i> ; therefore, I don't feel resistance to change.
	Creation of a shared vision	K1-1(1): A lot of work had to be done with employees. We were discussing <i>what quality was and how we would strive for it.</i> K2-4(7): When you come to the established team, the biggest challenge is to "unify" thinking, to work in one direction. <...> So, we had to start from the scratch and take small steps: first, <i>to find out our strengths and where we could improve.</i>

The data presented in Table 2 show that the decisions made by new managers include human resources (staff turnover, communication and collaboration with the community) and the creation of a common vision, striving for quality of the institution's activities. Decisions made by the heads of educational institutions have a direct impact on the quality of the institution's performance. Informants named the results achieved after overcoming challenges (see Table 3).



Table 3. Results achieved in the first year of managerial work

Category	Subcategory	Illustrating statements
Results related to the quality of the institution's activities	Changing organisational culture	S3-1(16): It is an ongoing process. <b><i>Culture doesn't change very quickly, it takes several years rather than some months.</i></b> S2-1(24): Maybe it's still too early to rejoice, but <b><i>the work is done much faster and smoother.</i></b> I believe and trust those people who are around now.
	Created vision	K1-1(1): <b><i>We created a vision of the institution's quality.</i></b> We found out what was missing, and that's how STEAM appeared.
Results related to the quality of the manager's activities	Increased trust in the manager	K1-1(1): After 6 months I felt that <b><i>people were starting to trust.</i></b> People try hard, work hard, everyone is equally important to me. Equality appeared.

The results achieved by the informants who have overcome the challenges of the first year of work should be related to the improvement of quality of the institution's activities and a more positive attitude of employees towards change and the new manager (trust in the manager increased). In summary, it can be stated that the challenge "New manager, old team", arising for new managers, named by the informants, is surmountable.

The second challenge faced by the heads of educational institutions is the poor image of the educational institution. Table 4 presents the reasons identified by the informants, which in their opinion, lead to the poor image of the institution.

Table 4. Reasons determining the poor image of the institution in the community

Category	Subcategory	Illustrating statements
Reasons determining the poor image of the institution	Diversity of education is not ensured	S1-7(7): When I started working at school, the first thing was that our school was shrinking, shrinking, shrinking and there was that limit where already ... <...> <b><i>The biggest challenge was to offer something that the school did not offer and that would be attractive to the local community or the like.</i></b>
	Quality of education is not guaranteed	K1-1(1): The image of this institution in the city was not good <...> It was necessary to do a lot of work with employees. <b><i>We were discussing what the quality of education was and how we would strive for it.</i></b>

Summarizing the data presented in Table 4, it can be stated that one of the challenges for new managers of educational institutions is the improvement of the image of the educational institution, which is directly related to the institution's tasks, namely, assurance of quality and diversity of education. In order to improve the image of the educational institution, managers make various decisions (see Table 5).

Table 5. Decisions made by managers regarding improvement of the institution's image

Category	Subcategory	Illustrating statements
Working with people	Improving the quality of education	S1-7(7): In addition to preschool education development, improvement of technical resources (such as a minibus), improvement of the aesthetic school environment, we focused on the aim of improving <i>the quality of education</i> . K1-1(1): We were discussing what quality was and how we would seek it. <i>We created a vision of the quality of the institution</i> .
	Searches for the institution's uniqueness	S1-7(7): <i>Pre-school, pre-primary education, full-day education</i> seemed attractive. <...> The year until the next September 1st was a sufficient period of time. It was easy to communicate with both the district municipality and the district education department, to reconcile certain fields, voicing certain goals. K1-1(1): We found out what was missing, <i>this is how STEAM appeared</i> . A person was found who was able to organise STEAM activities.
	Learning within the institution	S1-7(7): We were that team where <i>we learned from each other a lot</i> and sought to support each other. <i>We watched each other's lessons</i> . What can we learn [from each other]. Great respect of basic education teachers for primary education [teachers] appeared. Something has changed in our perception, in getting to know each other. We saw how many and what kinds of creative things [the teachers] applied.
Decisions related to financial resources	Striving to enrich the institution's material resources	S1-7(7): The next step was <i>looking for opportunities</i> . Because we were a district school, a suburban school, the question was <i>how to get a minibus, because that also gives a lot of opportunities, a lot of advantages</i> . For pupils, for families. Especially education in other spaces, other settings and the like.

The solutions named by informants in order to improve the institution's image include activities that should be related to the institution's community activities and depend on the manager's work with people (the focus on improving the quality of education, creation of the institution's vision, learning with and from others) and management of financial resources (improvement of the institution's material resources). It is noticeable that the above-mentioned decisions are not taken by managers alone, i.e., they are supported by both the institution's community and the founder (municipality or ministry). Research participants named the results achieved due to the improving image of the institution (see Table 6).

Table 6. The results determined by the improving image of institutions

Category	Subcategory	Illustrating statements
Results of the improved image of the institution	Increasing number of pupils	S1-7(7): <i>And one year, one group appeared. The following year, another group appeared.</i> K1-1(1): In summary, <i>the kindergarten is full of children.</i>
	Richer material resources	S1-7(7): It was also a big advantage here when 2 years later or after 3 years, we managed <i>to get a school bus</i> from the ministry (because of the expansion of pre-school education).

The data in Table 6 shows that research participants named the results achieved due to the improved image of the institution, which directly correlate with the problems previously expressed by the managers, i.e., a decrease in the number of children is replaced by an increase in the number of pupils, and the striving for improvement of the institution's material resources is replaced by a richer material base. Ensuring the optimal number of pupils leads to more funding, and more funding, in turn, leads to the opportunities of enriching the educational settings.

The lack of managers and the striving to reduce administration costs lead to the fact that a share of Lithuanian municipalities takes decisions to optimise the network of educational institutions by merging part of institutions. In addition to the advantages mentioned by municipal administrations, research participants facing the challenges of reorganizing institutions name the problems they have to encounter when merging institutions (see Table 7).

Table 7. Problems encountered by managers of reorganized institutions

Category	Subcategory	Illustrating statements
Problems of managing people	Getting to know the employees	K5-3(14): The biggest challenge was upon reorganisation of institutions. <i>The challenge was to get to know people, to let them get to know me.</i>
	Different organisational culture	K4-1(7): The problem is that <i>teams are very different, the mentality is different.</i> I currently work in two kindergartens; I do not compare them with each other because there are <i>completely different traditions and culture of communication</i> in them.

Summarizing the data presented in Table 7, it can be stated that the main problems faced by managers of reorganised institutions are related to human resources management, when in order to achieve the common goals of the organisation, managers and the community must get to know each other, find an acceptable communication style, and build new culture while maintaining existing traditions.

While the first three challenges distinguished by informants (difficulties faced by new managers, improvement of the image of the educational institution and solving problems arising upon the

reorganization of institutions) are associated with human resources management, the other two areas of the manager's work, namely document management and financial management, are no less important for informants.

Tables 8 and 9 present the problems arising to research participants, related to document management and the decisions made by the managers in solving them.

Table 8. Problems arising to managers, related to document management

Category	Subcategory	Illustrating statements
Lack of internal documents and / or failure to follow them	Mandatory documents are not prepared	K1-1(1): <i>Some orders, other documents are missing.</i> S2-1(24): <i>Procedure descriptions, protocols, event plans and the like are missing.</i> K4-1(7): The institution has a trade union and <i>a bilateral agreement has not yet been signed and registered.</i>
	Prepared plans are not implemented	M2-1(24): <i>The annual activity plan, the strategic plan were written, but no one even tried to implement them.</i>

Table 9. Decisions made by managers in solving problems related to document management

Category	Subcategory	Illustrating statements
Solutions to document management problems	The manager's personal input	S2-1(24): As to the chaos in the documents, I manage it in a simple way: <i>I sit and write, I do what has not been done.</i>
	General agreements with employees	K4-1(7): <i>We agreed that the agreement should be rewritten, somehow, I managed to persuade those people.</i>

Summarizing the data presented in Tables 8 and 9, it can be stated that problems related to document management emerged in the utterances of part of subjects. The said type of problems were encountered by managers working in specific educational institutions for the first year. Looking for solutions related to document management, subjects took personal initiative to prepare those documents regulating internal procedures, which had not been prepared before they started managing the institution. Solving problems related to poorly prepared or prepared but unimplemented documents, subjects looked for common solutions with the employees of institutions.

The fifth challenge named by respondents, which they had to face in their managerial work, was financial management. Based on the analysis of change in the wording of the article of the Law on Education, which regulates the activities of the heads of educational institutions, "from 2018, the head is responsible for the financial activities of the educational institution, considers and makes decisions related to the use of the educational institution's funds and assets". The head of the educational institution assumes responsibility, which is even more pressing when the institution's management resources are limited (*Švietimo įstaigų vadovai: iššūkiai ir pokyčiai*, 2021 / Heads of

Educational Institutions: Challenges and Changes, 2021). Research participants indicated the factors that lead to the said challenge, namely, financial management (see Table 10).

Table 10. Causes of problems related to financial management

Category	Subcategory	Illustrating statements
Causes of financial management problems	Lack of knowledge and practical experience	S3-1(16): In the first months, at least for me personally, one of the biggest challenges was finances. In my previous professional activities, <i>I never analysed estimates, followed financial flows, linked them to the possibilities to buy, not to buy, to go, not to go, whether we can employ a new person or not, etc.</i> <...> Today, I can see where I needed to pay attention and <i>what I need to pay most attention to, what indicators to monitor, what to analyse when the new financial cycle starts.</i>
	Additional costs of managerial time	K5-3(14): the idea of centralisation of accounting immediately comes to mind. That moment was very difficult due to various redundant matters; where there used to be one person in charge, now I have seven people above me and <i>I have to delve into seven different areas.</i>

Summarizing the data presented in Table 10, it can be stated that financial management is a complex and time-consuming area of the manager’s work, requiring theoretical and practical knowledge. Research participants acknowledged that this challenge could be overcome through both personal qualities and counselling assistance: “Only by constantly giving questions to responsible persons related to this field” (S3-1(16)).

During the research, the informants not only revealed the challenges of managing the educational institution but also identified the factors that led to successful overcoming of challenges (see Table 11).

Table 11. Factors determining successful overcoming of challenges

Category	Subcategory	Illustrating statements
Manager's personal competencies	Proactiveness	K1-1(1): I talked to parents myself, <b><i>I showed initiative.</i></b> S2-1(24): To achieve smooth work of the entire organisation, <b><i>I pay much attention to the reorganization or creation of work or activity systems / structures &lt;...&gt;</i></b>
	Empathy, communication skills	K5-3(14): The most important thing in the manager's work is social and communication competencies, i.e., <b><i>your ability to communicate, collaborate, resolve conflicts, and accept the person the way he or she is.</i></b> K2-4(7): <...> <b><i>to allow others to make mistakes and to acknowledge your own mistakes.</i></b>
Manager's professional competencies	Time management skills	K4-1(7): I remember the first days of working in two kindergartens at a time. I remember the first of September. I had a plan of <b><i>when I was going to go and where I was going to be</i></b> so that I could allocate time for both institutions.
	Information and management competencies	S2-1(24): To achieve smooth work of the whole organisation, <b><i>I pay a lot of attention to redesigning or creation of systems / structures for work or activities</i></b> , e.g., the staff information system; the system for recording work that needs to be done; holding meetings (for teachers, administration, etc.).
Manager's value approaches	Striving for constant learning	S3-1(16): What helps in solving problems: conversations, self-analysis, especially <b><i>learning on one's own and constant interest</i></b> in the experiences of colleagues.
	Assuming responsibility	S2-1(24)<...> I do things the simple way: I sit down and write, <b><i>I do what has not been done.</i></b>
Organisational culture	A unified approach to work	S1-7(7): <...> the belief of all of us that if we show the result, we will survive. <b><i>We were quite united.</i></b> S1-7(7): <b><i>When the administration works in unity, supporting each other</i></b> , that is extremely good <...> First, we have a discussion internally and we go out to the teachers in unity. K2-4(7): <b><i>Team members have a similar view of the institution's activities</i></b> , we have updated the institution's vision and mission, which is comprehensible to all team members.
	Striving for quality	K1-1(1): We were discussing what quality was, how we would seek it <...> <b><i>We created a vision of quality of the institution.</i></b> S1-7(7): <...> Two teachers, in order not to be accused of friendship, fellowship and poor quality, <b><i>made a qualitative step forward by performing activities together.</i></b>
	Change as a process	S3-1 (16): To understand relationships, how people acted, to show that when new people come, <b><i>culture changes naturally</i></b> or by explaining what principles we must and can follow to build relationships and the like.

Summarizing the data presented in Table 11, it can be stated that successful overcoming of challenges is determined by the manager's personality and culture of the institution he / she manages. The successful work of the manager is influenced by the manager's personal proactiveness, empathy and the ability to communicate, time management skills, information and management competencies as well as favourable value approaches, i.e., taking responsibility and the wish to learn. However, solely the manifestation of the manager's personal and professional competencies would not be significant if the working environment is not dominated by a unanimous approach of employees and administration to work, acceptance of change, and striving for quality of education.

## **5 Discussion**

The analysis of the scientific literature allowed us to identify the following challenges encountered by the heads of educational institutions: the increase in work functions, the attitude of parents and teachers and the lack of respect for managers, change in the management style, the relationship between the autonomy of the heads' activities and accountability, insufficient assistance of municipal or state-level politicians supervising the educational institution for the heads of educational institutions. Scholars note that new heads of educational institutions face even more challenges in their work.

Insufficient support from municipal or state level politicians supervising educational institutions, mentioned by scholars (Tintore et al., 2022), is also encountered by newly hired heads of Lithuanian educational institutions. Without sufficient experience and competencies, their team, and assistance from outside they manage staff turnover, organise the community to create a common vision and ensure the quality of the institution's activities. This change carried out by newly recruited managers as well as reorganisation of educational institutions, implemented in the country, determine change in management culture in educational institutions (as well as change in organisational culture) and related challenges, which has been reported in the scientific literature (Spillane, Lee, 2014; Bayar, 2016, etc.). The fact that some of the challenges identified in our research differ from those previously identified by scholars (e.g., the challenges distinguished in the Lithuanian research, related to the institutions' poor image, reorganisation, document management and financial management, etc.), could have been determined by the specificity of the research, since the subjects were interviewed about the challenges that they had managed to successfully solve. Meanwhile, the challenges distinguished by scholars have more negative connotation; their overcoming requires not only managerial or organisational activity but also decisions at the national level. The heads of Lithuanian educational institutions, who participated in the study, did not mention challenges that would be related to the lack of respect for managers or to high demands and expectations of the community, autonomy of managers' activities and their accountability, which were mentioned by other researchers (Dunning, Elliott, 2019; Tobin, 2014;

Tintore et al., 2022). Solutions to the challenges encountered by managers of educational institutions included manifestation of general and managerial competencies in managers' activities. General and managerial competencies are distinguished on the basis of The Description of Qualification Requirements for Managers of State and Municipal Educational Institutions (except for higher education institutions) (2011). Current summary version 2022-06-18 <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.EE75CCBEC71F/asr>). The group of general competencies: personal effectiveness (solution – personal contribution of the manager), strategic thinking and change management (solution – staff turnover), the ability to learn (solution – learning within the organisation), communication and information skills (solutions – communication, collaboration with the community, joint agreements with employees). The group of competencies in management areas: strategic management of the educational institution (solutions – creating a shared vision, searches for uniqueness of the institution), management of education and learning (solution – improvement of the quality of education), management of the structure, processes, resources of the educational institution (solution – enrichment of the institution's material resources).

## 6 Conclusion

Challenges identified during the empirical research: difficulties arising in the first years of managerial work in a specific institution (for example, team formation, changes related to change in the organisational culture), poor image of the educational institution, reorganization of institutions, document management, and financial management. In summary, it can be stated that specific challenges faced by the heads of Lithuanian educational institutions are determined by the specificity of the country's education system, previous management of the educational institution, and the attitude of the very heads of educational institutions.

According to the research data, the distinguished factors determining successful overcoming of management challenges encompassed managers' personal competencies (empathy, proactiveness, communication skills, etc.) and professional competencies (of information, management, time management, etc.) as well as value approaches (striving for continuous learning, assuming responsibility and the like). All these manager's competencies can also be referred to as the manager's distributed leadership competency, because as stated by Dambrauskienė (2021), the manager's distributed leadership competency is a whole, a combination of personal and professional competencies and value approaches that create a culture of trust and ensure the mutual interaction between leaders and followers. Successful overcoming of leadership challenges was facilitated by managers' understanding that "united we stand, divided we fall"; i.e., that an important role is played by culture of the organization being managed, encompassing a unified approach to the work being done, the striving for quality of education and a positive approach to change.



The research results indicate that the key to success of the heads of educational institutions is communication and information skills. This could be linked to theories of organizational behaviour, a relationship-based approach to leadership – the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory or the relational leadership theory.

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**Dalia Dambrauskienė**, PhD in Management (Social Sciences), a headmistress of Šiauliai Centre Primary School. Scientific interests include leadership, change management, organizational culture, and digital transformation. Dr. D. Dambrauskienė is a member of the Council of the Association of Heads of Preschool Education Institutions in Lithuania, a manager-mentor of educational institutions in Šiauliai City Municipality (has 25 years of managerial work experience), an evaluator of professional development programs of Šiauliai City Municipality Education Centre, a developer of professional development programs and a lecturer.

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**Reda Ponelienė**, PhD in Social Sciences (Education), a director of Šiauliai nursery-kindergarten “Vaikystė”, who strives for the harmony between science and practice in her professional activities. The initiator of integrating sustainable development goals into the curriculum planning and implementation processes and the day-to-day running of the institution. The organizer of continuous national methodological-practical conferences for educators of preschool and preprimary age children, for heads of preschool institutions, the author of scientific and science popularization articles, papers, reviewer of methodological publications.

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## **Povzetek:**

### **Izzivi upravljanja in dejavniki, ki določajo njihovo uspešno rešitev**

Namen in izvirnost: Namen raziskave je analizirati izzive, s katerimi se pri svojem delu srečujejo vodje izobraževalnih ustanov, rešitve za premagovanje izzivov in dejavnike, ki določajo uspeh. V članku so predstavljeni rezultati raziskave, ki je bila izvedena v Litvi leta 2022 in je obsegala strukturirane intervjuje z osmimi vodji izobraževalnih ustanov v regiji Šiauliai. Raziskava je pokazala, da so izzivi, s katerimi se soočajo vodje litovskih izobraževalnih ustanov, odvisni od posebnosti izobraževalnega sistema v državi, prejšnjega vodenja izobraževalne ustanove in odnosa samih vodij izobraževalnih ustanov.

Metoda: Raziskava je bila izvedena z uporabo splošnega kvalitativnega deskriptivnega raziskovalnega pristopa (Kahlke, 2014; Merriam, Tisdell, 2016). Raziskovalna strategija ne temelji na posebni kvalitativni metodologiji, temveč si preprosto prizadeva odkriti in razumeti pojav z vidika subjektov, ki so sodelovali v tej raziskavi. Anketirancem sta bili zastavljeni dve vprašanji: 1) Kateri je bil največji izziv na področju vodenja, ki vam ga je uspelo uspešno rešiti? 2) Na kakšen način ste reševali ta izziv?

**Rezultati:** Na podlagi podatkov iz raziskave so bili razkriti izzivi upravljanja, njihove rešitve in dejavniki uspeha. Raziskava je pokazala, da so rešitve za premagovanje izzivov, s katerimi se soočajo managerji, vključevale izkazovanje splošnih in managerskih kompetenc v dejavnostih managerjev,

dejavniki uspeha pa so bile osebne, strokovne kompetence in vrednostni pristopi managerjev - porazdeljene kompetence vodenja managerjev in organizacijska kultura.

**Omejitev:** V raziskavi so sodelovali le vodje izobraževalnih ustanov (razen gimnazij) v regiji Šiauliai, zato rezultatov raziskave ni mogoče uporabiti za celotno populacijo. Na rezultate raziskave bi lahko vplivalo subjektivno dojetje preiskovancev, njihovo čustveno stanje, vsakodnevne institucionalne razmere, delovna obremenitev in drugi subjektivni dejavniki.

**Ključne besede:** usposobljenost vodij, izzivi vodenja, dejavniki, ki določajo uspeh, vodenje.

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