SHAPING THE IMAGE OF THE SCHOOL AS A COMPETENCE SKILL

Karolina Studnicka-Mariańczyk

Ph.D. in History, Institute of History,
Akademia im. Jana Długosza w Częstochowie, Częstochowa, Poland
ORCID: 0000-0002-4116-9350, e-mail: k.studnicka@op.pl

The article deals with the shaping the image of the school as one of the important issues of the secondary institution existence. The author states that a positive image of the organization is associated with high reputation and therefore belongs to the most valuable resources. Favourable or unfavourable image of the organization in social perception, which may arise not only due to direct contact with the organization and its employees, has been characterized.

It has been proved by the author that the image of the organization can also arise through informal contacts. The concept of such terms as «adequate communication», «image» has been explained. A positive, beneficial image of the organization, both external and internal, is defined to be one of the extremely valuable resources of the organization. It can be one of the key success factors, motivating to achieve goals and conditioning the achieved results, and indirectly the formation of a positive image usually indicates the correct functioning of the institution and the effectiveness of the strategy. Moreover, it has been said that it may also be a condition for the effectiveness of the organization's activities and occur as a factor enabling its harmonious development, a factor stimulating the attitudes of employees and the external environment, harmonizing the organization and the environment, as well as an important element of employee's identity and organizational culture.

The image of the institution also plays an important role in relation to the school's functioning. Creating the right image is one of the important skills of the principal. By his attitude, personal culture and attention to the proper functioning of the educational institution, he contributes to the creation of an advantageous opinion about the institution. This impact can be effectively reinforced through the use of conscious treatments to create a designed image. It has been stated that the opportunity for this is formed by contacts with parents, participation in school celebrations and in the city, meetings with journalists, all public appearances.

The author makes the conclusion that the principles of cooperation and the atmosphere that defines day-to-day contacts, which make up this culture, not only contribute to the creation of a favourable image of the institution, but also capture the image, as well as the results obtained in educational work. Skilful information about the achievements of the school is in this context a factor which strongly affects the awareness of people in the internal environment of the school and beyond. Knowledge about management processes helps to set strategies and lead them to the future.

Thus, ability to create a positive image of a school turns out to be an important management factor - an element that is part of the principal's management and social competence.

Key words: school, competences, principal, manager, communication.

Стаття присвячена формуванню іміджу школи як одного з важливих питань функціонування середньої освіти. Автор стверджує, що позитивний імідж організації пов'язаний з високою репутацією і тому належить до найцінніших ресурсів.

Охарактеризовано сприятливий або несприятливий імідж організації в соціальному сприйнятті, який може виникнути не тільки через безпосередній контакт з організацією та її працівниками. Автор доводить, що образ організації також може виникнути через неформальні контакти. Пояснено поняття таких термінів, як «адекватне спілкування», «образ».

Автор робить висновок, що принципи взаємодії та атмосфера, що визначають повсякденні контакти, не тільки сприяють створенню сприятливого іміджу освітнього закладу, а й характеризують цей імідж як результат, отриманий у процесі навчальної роботи. Знання про процеси управління допомагає встановлювати стратегії та реалізувати їх у майбутньому.

Таким чином, здатність створювати позитивний образ школи виявляється важливим фактором управління.

Ключові слова: школа, компетентенція, менеджер, комунікація.

Introduction

The development of the media of information transfer and shaping public opinion, including technical progress and the development of communication technologies has made the modern man live in an environment of information that reaches him constantly, almost at every moment of everyday life. The intensity of this message causes a kind of information noise, which consists of advertisements, trivial or irrelevant information, divergent opinions, etc. Excess information triggers a defensive reaction on the recipients, dulls their sensitivity to communication stimuli, which results in the appearance of a specific psychological barrier for the information message. This problem is of particular importance for marketing activities and undertakings, it also occurs in the sphere of the institution's operation, which is a school establishment. At this point, the issue of the functioning of the organization and its relationships with the external environment should be taken into account, including the strategic need to integrate its activities with reception in the social environment. It includes for the transmission of relevant information about the work and achievements of a given educational institution, the presence in the parents' awareness, shaping their interest and willingness to cooperate and support in solving problems, as well as forming a proper image supporting the high reputation of the institution in the environment, raising social trust or authority. An appropriate, positive and consistent image of the organization can contribute to improving the conditions of functioning in the external environment, as well as becoming a motivational factor and mobilizing the internal environment.

The task of each organization is to occupy a specific place in the social world. For business entities, this task considers in locating in the economic and market area, no less important is taking a position in the minds of customers and recipients of services, knowledge of the company, its products, identification of brands and trademarks, as well as forming positive associations with the company and the product – shaping the right image. These issues are also important for institutions. Admittedly, the commercial or market aspect will be less important in this case – in favour of social aspects, which – as a rule – involve the mission of a given institution. It should be noted, however, that in a commercialized market environment, the context of competitiveness and market-oriented activities cannot be avoided. In this sense, for example, it is said about the competitiveness of educational services, in a similar way you can treat the organization's activities in the area of ideas and values – here also comes competitive and confrontational activities. There is also a financial aspect – without guaranteeing sources of financing and adequate resources – capital and technical – it is difficult to talk about the proper functioning of the organization, and sometimes even about its existence. That is why it is so important to form an appropriate, positive image in the minds of residents, members of a given community, recipients of services or customers. This image serves to create an emotional bond and gain trust, and thus is a factor in modelling the external environment. Literature also emphasizes the necessity of consistency of this image. This means, among other things, that it should also include the awareness of the members of the organization, record in the awareness of the management and employees capture knowledge about the organization, its missions, strategies and ways of acting [1, p. 13]. In other words – the external image, transferred to the environment, should be consistent with the internal image created within the organization. It is also obvious that this message is confirmed and strengthened by the practice of the functioning of the organization.

The term «image» comes from Latin and, according to the dictionary definition, means «likeness», «imagination», as well as «portrait» or «image» [2, p. 72]. According to the contemporary Polish language dictionary, the image is also a «model», «prototype» and «reflection». These terms, synonymously, can be identified with the word image, meaning the way of perceiving and judging a character or organization [3].

The content of the image, it's symbolic meaning, does not always present a positive image – it can be neutral or even negative, causing unpleasant associations or emotions. This implies a close relationship between the organization's image and its reputation in the community [4, p. 36].

In the subject literature, there is often the identification of the internal organization's image with the concept of its identity. The rationale for this approach is the fact that the image of the organization is shaped in its external environment, and therefore the possibilities of its formation are conditioned by numerous circumstances on which the organization may have only limited influence. Significantly smaller obstacles occur in relation to the awareness of organization members – employees and management. In this case, the internal image directly shapes the identity of the organization – the identification of employees with the institution, strategy or

mission and methods of operation. Identity is therefore an inseparable element of the organization, constituting the organizational culture and subject to the possibility of influencing the management mechanisms occurring in the organization [5, p 42].

A positive image of the organization, associated with high reputation, often belongs to the most valuable resources. This is particularly evident in the market environment, where there are many entities offering similar quality products or services. Reaching the recipients with their own offer in these circumstances will depend on the knowledge of the organization and its products, and above all – positive opinions, a favourable image that will make it stand out from the competition [6, p. 193].

Forming appropriate awareness of recipients through the impact of the organization's image therefore supports consumer decisions, and in the case of educational institutions – decisions of parents and guardians, decisions of students or candidates, reduces the dissonance associated with the possible risk of wrong selection, confirms previous beliefs [7, p. 54–55].

Achieving coherence of the image, strengthening the power of communication and external influence, is not a simple task, for the reason that the image of the organization is usually not a uniform image – it can vary significantly in different environments or groups, subject to changes under the influence of context or circumstances, assume different content in the environment and internal environment of the organization. The latter situation is particularly marked when the opinions of employees about the organization strongly differ from the opinions created in the environment – external environment. Inconsistency of the image is undoubtedly a factor disrupting the social impact of the organization and its proper functioning, which is why management actions should be multi-directional in this respect, aimed at internal perception (employee awareness) and external reception - environmental and social, group, and individual, taking into account different aspects social and cultural reality. These activities should, therefore, lead to the disappearance of information or mental barriers between the organization and the environment creating environment, eliminate the anonymity of the organization's actions and lack of social response, shape a positive, friendly attitude to the organization and effects of its work, win the opinion and raise attitudes of readiness to cooperate or providing support [8, p. 21–22].

The literature of the subject emphasizes that the image is not a permanent element, on the contrary – attention is paid to its dynamics and tendency to modify under the influence of e.g. changes in views or preferences occurring in the external environment, or certain trends in opinions about a specific industry or professional group [8, p. 23]. The image of an organization can change under the influence of any new message, either from the internal environment or from the environment, from experience during contact with the organization, and also from the change in social context and cultural changes that affect the assessment and opinion criteria [9, p. 56–57]. The instability of the image is therefore determined by numerous factors on which the management and members of the organization do not always have influence. Therefore, the greater is the importance of the conscious actions of the board and employees to build positive opinions. In the sphere of purposeful influence building a positive image of the organization, there are – for example –

ethical activities of the organization, consistent with professional ethics, work ethic and service as well as social and cultural norms, architecture of buildings and rooms, their colour, type of logotype and other markings, technical equipment, professional and social competences of employees, forms of advertising, information and promotion used. Managerial attitudes and management methods play a significant role. They are oriented both on the functional efficiency of the organization, as well as building a proper work atmosphere and organizational culture, including the right relations between the organization and the environment, and the recipients or clients. The list of these factors is much longer, because it may cover almost the entirety of the internal and external conditions of the organization's operations. In the context of conscious interaction and creating a positive image, it is worth mentioning the role of opinion leaders, the impact of social organizations and informal groups, and above all the role of the media - the media message.

Striving for cohesion and stability of the organization's image is also important due to the mentioned dynamics of external conditions, which may be influenced by uncontrolled factors, such as malicious gossip or negative attitude to a specific sector of the institution, which may also affect the assessment of a particular institution [8, p. 23] (e.g. attitude social to banks or offices, but also education and teachers). A stable and beneficial image can limit the impact of the negative impact of uncontrolled factors and strengthen the trust of the local community. The diversity of the organization's environment, combined with the diversity and multiplicity of factors determining opinions about the organization, may lead to a situation in which different images of the same organization will appear. This is a somewhat normal phenomenon, resulting from the diversity of social and environmental as well as psychological factors [10, p. 4–43]. However, we should strive to make this image as homogeneous and stable as possible.

On theoretical grounds Ewa Cenker distinguishes two basic areas of creating the right image of the organization. In the first area he places the «state of affairs of the organization» and points to the importance of «mission, philosophy, vision and strategy of action – as promises to the environment», fulfilled through the decisions and operation of the organization; the meaning of the declared norms of conduct, «manifested in the current proceedings (organizational culture in all its manifestations)»; the importance of the offer, programs, products and brands (including services – their quality and adequacy to the needs of the environment). In the second area, the aforementioned author distinguishes the communication «on the state of affairs of the organization», realizing «cognitive, explanatory, and motivational functions towards the organization's environment» [5, p. 45]. Therefore, the image of the company arises as a result of the organization's functioning and results of operations as well as the effect of conscious influence, in particular – proper communication.

The term «adequate communication» should be understood as the intensity and quality of the information message. This sphere of activity depends on social, technical and information competences of people responsible for creating the image, also other people who have contact with the organization's environment. These activities affect the public perception of the message; however, they must be reliable, i.e. consistent with the facts and conducted in a competent, convincing, reliable and

credible manner. The social reception of the image message is – according to statements in the literature – dependent on knowledge about the organization, its mission and activity and effects, quality of messages, feelings and social expectations, also the degree of meeting the needs of the community, also socio-cultural and environmental standards [5, p. 51]. The experience resulting from direct or indirect contact with the organization is no less important. This is both about satisfaction with the degree of meeting the needs, as well as the satisfaction of contacts at the interface of the organization with the surroundings on the cultural plane. In this respect, the following issues should be placed: efficiency, personal culture and competence of employees, the impact of visual factors – uniform costumes, interior design and colours, appropriate design of information materials [11], etc. In this context, it is also worth mentioning that all visual elements, including the appropriate visualization of the image-information message should correspond to the specificity of the organization, its social mission and functions, as well as social expectations and cultural determinants. Incompatibility in this respect may disrupt the coherence of the image, diminish credibility, and lead to negative experiences of the recipients of the offer and recipients of the image message [4, p. 35].

Supplementary, let us add that the favourable or unfavourable image of the organization in social perception may arise not only due to direct contact with the organization and its employees, contact motivated by the fulfilment of the institutional mission and the implementation of social needs. The image of the organization (school facility) can also arise through informal contacts, e.g. during social meetings between members of the organization and representatives of the community, family, neighbours, etc. The message created at that time is some form of influence of the internal environment of the organization on its surroundings, hence the importance of business and personal relations existing within the organization – the organizational identity of all participants in the internal environment. The previously mentioned E. Cenkier emphasizes that the informal impact of employees on the environment of the organization depends on positive interpersonal relationships in the organization itself, characterized by a bond of trust, proper, reliable and two-way communication, satisfaction with the work performed, also faith in the sense of jointly implemented activities, possible success and good future prospects [5, p. 45–47]. The positive image of the organization also plays an important role within the institutional system. It contributes to identification of the actions of employees and managers with the goals, mission and strategy of the organization, creation of organizational identity and consolidation of internal culture.

Jerzy Altkorn emphasizes that «the internal image of the company fulfils the important role of integrating employees with the organization that employs them» [1, p. 16]. In the functional aspect, the creation of this image and the identity of employees differ from the actions aimed at the environment of the organization. In this regard the author mentions the occurrence of the following mechanism: first, the employee assesses his professional situation, this assessment then influences the sense of professional satisfaction – mainly satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the work, which shapes the image of the organization, the third stage is the formation of the image and identity, which directly affect attitudes towards work and the organi-

zation itself [1, p. 30]. The basic tool that is at the disposal of the management organization and serves to shape the internal image is the appropriate communication that gives information about the situation of the organization, strategy, and the most important aspects of the business. Workers' participation in the activities of the organization, and thus conscious inclusion in the process of fulfilling the mission and strategy implementation, has a similar effect, as well as skilful motivating efforts to achieve the organization's success, including its own professional success resulting from the implementation of the assigned tasks [1, p. 30].

Summing up this part of the study, the theoreticians' opinions should be restated that a positive, beneficial image of the organization, both external and internal, is one of the extremely valuable resources of the organization. It can be one of the key success factors, motivating to achieve goals and conditioning the achieved results, and indirectly the formation of a positive image usually indicates the correct functioning of the institution and the effectiveness of the strategy. It may also be a condition for the effectiveness of the organization's activities in the perspective and occur as a factor enabling its harmonious development, a factor stimulating the attitudes of employees and the external environment, harmonizing the organization and the environment, as well as an important element of employee's identity and organizational culture.

In the light of the above remarks on the image of the organization, it should be emphasized that this issue plays an important role in relation to the school's functioning. Creating the right image is one of the important skills of the principal. By his attitude, personal culture and attention to the proper functioning of the educational institution, he contributes to the creation of an advantageous opinion about the institution. This impact can be effectively reinforced through the use of conscious treatments to create a designed image. Opportunity for this is formed by contacts with parents, participation in school celebrations and in the city, meetings with journalists, all public appearances, etc. No less important role is fulfilled by the principal in creating the school's organizational culture. The principles of cooperation and the atmosphere that defines day-to-day contacts – which make up this culture – not only contribute to the creation of a favourable image of the institution, but also capture the image, as well as the results obtained in educational work. Skilful information about the achievements of the school is in this context a factor strongly affecting the awareness of people in the internal environment of the school and beyond. The ability to create a positive image of a school turns out to be an important factor of management – an element that is part of the principal's management and social competence.

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