



## CHANGING THE MANAGEMENT PARADIGM OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR IMPROVED COMPETITIVENESS

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**Abstract.** Research shows that excessively centralized approaches in education and training often fail to produce the desired results. Therefore studies on regional level can yield valuable material for analysis to create new administration and management models. Empirical research was carried out in a local community of Latvia involving entrepreneurs, public administrators and educational institutions management. The aim of the paper: to investigate and draw conclusions on the relevance of various aspects in promoting the local stakeholders interest in education for a subsequent improved business environment. Research methods applied: theoretical studies of scientific publications, survey of entrepreneurs, focus group discussions of municipality and education institutions' management. The conclusion was drawn that investing in developments of the entrepreneur community and in the societal developments by the local governments greatly contributes to the emergence of a more generous business community. Direct inclusion of entrepreneurs in the management of education is the main new feature of the changing paradigm of education.

**Keywords:** vocational education and training, attitudes, innovation, municipality, entrepreneurs.

**JEL classification:** J24, J44, M53, I28.

### 1. Introduction

The issue of qualitative education to ensure qualified labour force has been addressed by numerous academic researches, as well as by policy discourse – in order to find the best possible solution for economic development encouraged by qualified specialists. Approximately 30 years ago significant changes happened in higher education. The emergence of mass higher education worldwide, diversification and high mobility changed the management of higher education. Internal and external quality assurance was introduced, networks for cooperation and diploma recognition were created. Now similar changes have started in vocational education and training. Development of technologies also requires involvement of secondary level vocational education in a united system together with the higher education. Regular improvement or change of qualification of specialists of all levels becomes necessary approximately every five years. Free market mechanisms are not enough to cope with the problems of education systems. Governmental regulations must be im-

proved and activities of local communities, employers and professional organizations must be included. Significant changes with introduction of new approaches, new paradigms of the management with united system of higher education and vocational education and training are emerging. Different countries have different approaches and ways to provide labour market with qualified specialists. There have been attempts to improve the education and training process e.g. by preparing qualified trainers, by involvement of entrepreneurs, municipalities and non-governmental institutions. Dual education system (where most of the time students works in the place of work with the entrepreneur and only part of the studies at the education establishment) has provided good results in Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and several other countries, with comparatively low youth unemployment levels. Latvia is currently looking for the best possible ways and optimal solutions for the preparation of qualified specialists for labour market needs including possibilities to the apply experience of Germany, Austria and the Netherlands through implementing dual or work-based

learning approaches. The introduction of the work based learning (WBL) approaches requires major changes in the current education system and a higher level of interest by employers and municipalities. The above mentioned approach should change the paradigm of management, as also municipalities and especially employers would be expected to get involved in vocational education to a much higher degree. Latvia is introducing WBL pilot projects in a testing regime in several vocational education institutions in close cooperation with entrepreneurs, municipalities and governmental institutions starting from 2013/2014. This is one of the reasons for an in-depth research on the experience of other countries in the involvement of employers in education process, especially by dual education approaches. The goal of the research is to investigate and draw conclusions on the relevance of various aspects in promoting the local stakeholders interest in education for a subsequent improved business environment with special attention to WBL challenges and problems, motivation of employers and municipalities in the preparation of qualified specialists. Research methods applied: scientific publications' studies, focus group discussions of municipality officials and educators on issues related to organisation of support for education development for the preparation of qualified specialists, employers' survey. For survey questionnaire for most of the questions' evaluation scale 1 – 10 was applied to evaluate the attitude of employers, where 1 – do not agree, 10 agree completely.

## 2. Theoretical background

The issue has been extensively addressed by academi discourse. Dominiguinhos *et al.* (2009), Cassar (2005) have stated that there are different approaches for a knowledge – based society to prepare qualified specialists where one of the approaches is promoting business creation through real world experience and evaluation of entrepreneur opportunity costs and intended venture growth. Top *et al.* (2012) has paid special attention to evaluations of entrepreneurship intentions of vocational school students. The sophisticated links between decision making in economics and emotional and cultural experience have been widely investigated by Nobel Prize winner Daniel Kahneman and his colleague Amos Tversky who paid special attention to the analysis of decisions under risk (Kahneman *et al.* 1979). The prospect theory of Daniel Kahneman (asymmetric utility function for changes of wealth etc.) has been viewed as an alternative to the rational choice. There have been studies on differentiation versus

homogenisation of education systems in Europe: different political aims and welfare regimes by Veloso *et al.* (2013), there have been studies on the fit between entrepreneurs' personalities and the profile of the ventures they manage and business success by Dvir *et al.* (2010), on the evaluation of experience on organising workplace learning with focus on the relationship between the education and workplace systems. Extensive studies have been carried out by Swedish researchers from several universities, e.g. by Lenart Svensson, Hanne Randlee and Maria Bennich (Svensson *et al.* 2009). Regional development and the tasks of vocational education and training professionals are well-tied in the Netherlands, e.g. the experience is reflected in research at Groningen University by Santema (1997). Oosterbeck and Webbink (2007) have stated that there have been noticed wage effects of an extra year of basic vocational education – this has been studied in detail in Dutch vocational schools. The research results on effects of training and assessment in vocational education and training by different approaches are widely evaluated by German researchers Klaus Brauer and Balthasar Eugster (2006).

Investigations of Ha Joon Chang show significant changes of values, traditions and culture together with the changes in economics (Chang 2010). There are important implications in this approach. The necessity for the successful development of industry depends also on investment in culture, and this should be supported by the government and local communities. Harmonised activities of employers can be encouraged by supporting changes of attitudes in culture and education, and this is possible by political decisions. An example of the political support for the changes in society is the development of WBL approaches with a broad involvement of relevant stakeholders at local level. Local communities are interested to reduce the unemployment and poverty, and to prevent emigration. Municipalities are interested in well-paid and satisfied inhabitants paying taxes for the municipality development. The development of local industry and services is the best alternative to the concentration of industry and wealth in big cities and rich countries. Joint efforts of local entrepreneurs, local municipalities and educators in education improvement and creation of motivation for employees is being viewed as the best way for overall economic development. These theoretical findings are important in the current Latvian context, as well.

Further on Jones (2013) has carried out research on practice-based approaches of evidence-based practice by studying professional practice portfolios for the assessment of WBL. The study

of Jones concludes that a well-designed professional practice portfolio is a powerful mechanism for connecting workplace learning and learning in the university. Quality assurance and qualifications frameworks – exchange of good practice have been researched by Blomowist *et al.* (2012). For these researches different research methods have been applied, including Delphi study about key qualifications in senior secondary vocational education carried out by van Zolinger and Klaasen (2003) - the results have been widely evaluated in the Netherlands. Berglund and Andersson (2012) have paid attention to the recognition of knowledge and skills at work and have posed the question in whose interests it is being done. Aspects of entrepreneurs' education and special attention to critical areas for the pedagogic-didactic agenda and beyond have been evaluated by Grüner and Neuberger (2010). Holmgreen (2012) has pointed out that serious preparations for practical exercises in vocational education are needed with special attention to research on possibilities of ICT-based distance instruction as alternative to face-to-face instructions. Liao and Welsch (2009) have studied patterns of venture gestation process: on exploring the differences between tech and non-tech nascent entrepreneurs. Fossde and Büttner (2013) have claimed the great importance of the returns to education for opportunity entrepreneurs. All research results show significant changes in education management, closer cooperation between public administration, education system, employers and professional organizations. Now new approaches in higher education management are being developed and implemented in higher education (during the last 30 years). These approaches are now being spread for implementation in vocational education and training. At the same time new new features and new approaches specific to the vocational education and training management appear. First of all more this refers to a more significant involvement of local communities. Quality assurance, exchange of information and mobility in vocational education and training has many specific features which should be investigated using the wide experience gathered in higher education.

### 3. Different approaches in countries worldwide

Many developed countries have noticeable results in applying work-based learning involving the interested parties (educators, employers and municipalities) in the realisation of it. In principle it is known as the Triple Helix approach, but more typically attributed to the higher education, and relatively rarely to the vocational education. Ex-

tensive experience exists in Germany which has been studied by German researchers as well as researchers from other countries. Moder *et al.* (2012) have paid attention to international competitiveness, job creation and job destruction of German job flows. Different aspects between policy and practice in structuring workplace learning in higher vocational education in Sweden and Finland were studied and analysed in detail by Lindell and Storstööm (2005). Staff training and further development in place of redundancies in Sweden was carried out by Olsson (1998). Evaluations of authentic and self-directed learning in vocational education as challenges to vocational education in the Netherlands were carried out by de Bruijn and Leeman (2011). Importance of sustainable leadership and future-oriented decision making in the educational governance as a Finnish case was evaluated in details by Metsämouronen *et al.* (2012). The allocation of resources for secondary schools in the Netherlands was studied by Haerlermans *et al.* (2012). Options of school district size and student educational attainment as evidence from Denmark were evaluated by Heinesen (2005). Brunello *et al.* (2012) have made research on training subsidies and the wage returns to continuing vocational training in Italian regions. Different aspects of developing of core skills – lessons from Germany and Sweden has been researched in great extent by Gibbons-Wood and Lange (2004). The research results are interesting and most of the findings could be noticed in real life already ten years later. Belgian experience has been researched and reflected by Geers (1990). The importance of apprenticeship in industry for craftsmen and technicians in Spain is underlined by McSweeney (1963). Buscher *et al.* (2002) have pointed out that special attention has to be paid to the willingness of young Swiss adults to participate in continuing education and training. Soysekerci and Erturgut (2010) pointed out the importance of improvement of non-governmental organisation entrepreneurship in vocational schools in Turkey. Sánchez *et al.* (2011) have made comparisons of education with ICT in South Korea and Chile and came to interesting findings could be useful also for other countries. Metzger *et al.* (2010) have studied the comparative perspective on the secondary and post-secondary education systems in Hong Kong, Japan, Switzerland, South Korea, Thailand and the United States. Jurjada and Paligorova (2009) have made investigations of Czech female managers and their wages. Education through e – learning in Serbia has been studied by Markovic (2009). Nugin (2014) in the research has pointed out that rural youth's out-migration in post-socialist Estonia has to be ac-

cepted, as Nugin confirms that rural young people can go abroad allowing them see something – for obtaining experience and own evaluations and values choice, after gaining experience abroad it is their choice to return back with wider experience and knowledge or not.

#### 4. Empirical results

Empirical results were obtained through the analysis of focus group discussions of municipality officials, education managers on work – based learning and possible co-operation among municipalities, entrepreneurs and educators and possible realisation of the triple helix approach. Participants in each focus group were 8 – 10 persons. The results of focus group discussions indicated that in general municipalities, educators and entrepreneurs are interested in co-operation for the preparation of qualified labour force, but there has to be stronger motivation for employers, especially regarding the practice organisation in companies, as the current situation in Latvia does not provide any material or any other kind of incentives for employers. Mainly there are obligations on qualitative practice organisation and realisation supervised by responsible persons for practice from the respective education establishment and from the respective company. The main incentive for employers is to observe attitudes and motivation for work of trainees – to potentially consider offering permanent workplace to them in their companies after the practice. Theoretical findings of researchers worldwide, analysis of their theoretical findings as well as experience of good examples in other countries were the basis for questions stated in the survey of employers on their expectations from municipalities for the improvement of the situation in the preparation of qualified specialists. The participants of the survey were asked to evaluate the importance/ relevance of the below mentioned statements regarding the application of various business support instruments: Creation of business incubator; Creation of association for entrepreneur's support; Small and micro companies support fund; Tax reductions for real estate; Municipality grants for new business ideas; Municipality support for entrepreneurship training; Employ entrepreneurship specialist in municipality in scale 1 – 10, where 1 - not important; 10 – very important. The companies to be included in the survey were selected from the company register LURSOFT, every fifth company from the register was approached to ensure mechanical selection of units in the sample to ensure a random selection of respondents. The selected entrepreneurs (included in the sample) were approached by a phone call

and – with an invitation to participate in the survey and fill out the questionnaire located on professional research company server – to enable the researchers' team to make all necessary calculations, data processing and analysis. For some entrepreneurs who had difficulties to fill in the web survey form the survey was implemented through a telephone interview and the questionnaire was filled out by the interviewer (9.6% of cases). There were also several cases when the company had no internet access. If the questionnaire was not filled out by the approached company in one week the respondents were phoned once more and asked for a second time to answer the survey questions. The third approach (by a third call) to entrepreneurs who had not yet filled out the questionnaire was made in two weeks (for 32% of respondents). The response rate was 21.7%. The main reason for refusals for responses were related to the inability of the staff to respond to the questions asked, as the management of the companies were absent (on a business trip, at meetings or not interested to give their views). In general entrepreneurs were positive, as the initiator of the research was the local municipality. The municipality in its previous activities had indicated a real interest in the development of various activities and had done it in an efficient way, and that was mentioned also by entrepreneurs. Some results of the survey of entrepreneurs are reflected in Figure 1.

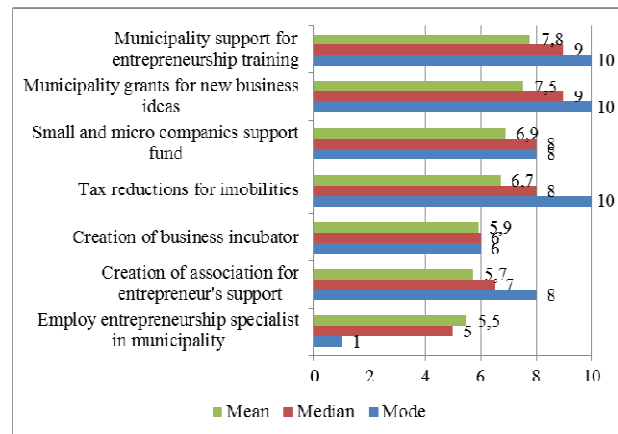


Fig. 1. Averages (mean, median and mode) on possible support of entrepreneurs by municipality for education development in 2013 (source: compiled by authors based on entrepreneurs' survey)

The survey results confirm that entrepreneurs are very positive on the municipality support for entrepreneurship training with average evaluation of 7.78 (in scale 1 – 10, where 1 – not important; 10 – very important), half of entrepreneurs gave evaluation 9 (characterised by median), the most frequent evaluation was the highest: 10 (characterised by mode). Entrepreneurs are supportive for municipality

grants for new business ideas (mean 7.54; mode 10, median 9). Entrepreneurs in general are interested in the creation of the association for entrepreneurs support (mean 5.73, mode 8, median 6.5). Very different are the views of the entrepreneurs on the option to employ entrepreneurship specialist in the municipality – some of entrepreneurs are supportive, but most of the entrepreneurs are giving the lowest evaluations for this aspect finding that it is not important (mean 5.5, mode 1, median 5). Main statistical indicators on possible support of entrepreneurs for education development are reflected in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Main statistical indicators on possible support of entrepreneurs for education development in 2013 (source: compiled by authors based on entrepreneurs’ survey)

	Provide awards	Offer practical placement places	Offer transportation to schools	Sponsor more gifted students
Mean	4.48	4.63	2.96	2.50
Std. Er. of M	0.606	0.631	0.494	0.381
Median	5	4.5	2	2
Mode	1	1	1	1
Range	9	9	8	6
Minimum	1	1	1	1
Maximum	10	10	9	7

The results of employers survey confirm that there is a rather low level of interest among employers to support students in their education process: part of employers are ready to offer practical placements – average evaluation (in scale 1 – 10) is 4.63, but the most selected evaluation was the lowest 1 (characterised by mode), half of employers gave evaluation less than 4.5, half of the employers gave evaluation higher than 4.5 (characterised by median; the opportunity to provide awards was evaluated rather low - average evaluation (in scale 1 – 10) is 4.48 but the most selected evaluation was the lowest 1 (characterised by mode), half of the employers gave evaluation less than 5, half of the employers gave evaluation bigger than 5 (characterised by median).

Opinions of individual employers are different, but generally with understanding of the positive influence of joint efforts to improve education at local level through joint efforts of local stakeholders – the local government, the local employers and other relevant stakeholders. According to the authors’ opinion - shifting from competition to cooperation could be observed. Creation of business incubator, creation of association for entrepreneur's support, small and micro companies support fund, tax reductions for real estate, municipality grants

for new business ideas, municipality support for entrepreneurship training, employ entrepreneurship specialist in municipality all turned out to be relevant instruments to create a co-operative spirit among relevant stakeholders to promote co-operation also in local vocational education and training provision, and especially for WBL where the local entrepreneurs’ involvement is crucial. At the same time, during focus groups discussions it was found out that various joint cultural activities supported by the local government also greatly contribute to the development of the joint spirit of the community. Employers expressed willingness to participate in joint activities, to support financially and organisationally various forms of WBL through stakeholders’ co-operation.

In focus group discussions entrepreneurs have indicated that in general they are willing to cooperate with the municipality. To have more detailed picture on the real willingness for municipality entrepreneurs co-operation the employers were asked also the question “How important in your opinion is the municipality and entrepreneurs’ cooperation on the indicated aspects?” and each of the statements had to be evaluated in scale 1 – 10, where 1 – not important; 10 – very important. The averages of results of survey are included in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Main average indicators on question to employers “How important in your opinion is the municipality and entrepreneurs’ co-operation on the indicated aspects?” (source: compiled by authors based on entrepreneurs’ survey, 2013)

Skills and attitudes	Mean	Median	Mode
Entrepreneurship seminars with municipality support	7.23	8	10
Joint project implementation	7.08	8	8
Consultative entrepreneurship councils	7.08	8	8
Creation of entrepreneurship centre	6.96	8	8
Co-operation in training organisation	6.56	8	8
Support of entrepreneurship activities	6.52	8	8
Cooperation in creation of business incubator	6.16	7	10
Organisation of joint sports and cultural activities	6.16	7	9

The results of the survey indicate that the biggest need of employers is for entrepreneurship seminars with municipality support (arithmetic mean 7.23, median 8 and mode 10). During the focus

group discussions it was indicated that entrepreneurs are interested in such seminars as the municipality representatives usually pay more attention to the actualities for entrepreneurship legislation changes, for available support from international funding as small companies usually do not have much time for checking all actualities and often the entrepreneurs are not enough educated to see the needed points for their company development.

To estimate what level of employees have the employers participating in the survey were asked also the question “To what extent your employees have indicated skills and attitudes?” and each of the statements had to be evaluated in scale 1 – 10, where 1 – missing very much; 10 – have in full extent. The results are included in table 3.

**Table 3.** Main average indicators on question to employers “To what extent your employees have indicated skills and attitudes?” (source: compiled by authors based on entrepreneurs’ survey, 2013)

Skills and attitudes	Mean	Median	Mode
Solidity and allegiance to company	8.19	8,5	10
Ability to plan work time	7.91	8	10
Ability for self-contained work	7.89	8	10
Co-operation ability	7.88	8	10
Involvement	7.75	8.5	9
Intelligence	7.65	8	8
Specific professional knowledge	7.45	8	8
Computer literacy	7.29	8	8
Initiative, creativity	7.06	8	8
Willingness in skills improvement	7.03	8	10
Knowledge and skills	6.59	7	8

The results of respective question had a rather high evaluations: entrepreneurs have indicated that their employees have solidity and allegiance to company are evaluated with the highest arithmetic mean – 8.19, median 8.5 and mode 10. High evaluations are also for the ability to plan work time where the arithmetic mean of evaluations was 7.91, half of entrepreneurs evaluated with more than 8, half of entrepreneurs gave evaluations less than 8 (characterised by median) the highest share on entrepreneurs gave the highest evaluation 10 (characterised by mode). The lowest evaluation was for knowledge and skills (arithmetic mean 6.59, median 7, mode 8) which corresponds with the willingness to improve the situation for vocational education and readiness to participate in it. Entrepreneurs in general agree that innovative approaches in the VET system in Latvia should be

introduced in order to train a competitive labour force – arithmetic mean 7.64, mode 8, median 8. The importance of innovative approaches in the VET system in Latvia women entrepreneurs evaluated higher than men entrepreneurs. The differences in the entrepreneurs’ opinions were statistically relevant with high probability (t test:  $p = 0.006$ ). The main statistical indicators are reflected in table 4.

**Table 4.** Main statistical indicators on the question to entrepreneurs “Do you agree that innovative approaches in the VET system in Latvia should be introduced in order to train a competitive labour force” (source: compiled by authors based on entrepreneurs’ survey, 2013)

	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation
Female	8.50	8	8	1.265
Male	6.18	7	3	2.714

The results in the survey for the above mentioned question and evaluation difference by male and female respondents was the only question which indicated statistically significant differences in respondent answers.

## 5. Conclusions

Different countries have found different approaches in the preparation of qualified specialists for the labour market, and identical systems cannot be applied for all countries. The experience of success and problems has to be studied and taken into account by introducing some new elements into the education system of a particular country. For WBL well designed motivation systems for employers have to be applied – to encourage employers’ interest to accept students for practice (apprenticeships) in the companies.

Employers are positive on the idea for municipality support for entrepreneurship training, for municipality grants for new business ideas, but have very different views on the need to employ entrepreneurship specialist in the municipality. At the same time the employers show an increasing interest to participate in the educational processes if joint cultural events are promoted as part of the stakeholders’ communication. It suggests that the training paradigm might be changed by stimulating not only the economic processes but also the role of culture into the education and entrepreneurship processes at regional level, with the involvement of local businesses, local government and the education providers. This is an aspect that has a potential for future research on economic and social incentives for VET promotion at local com-

munity level. Investigation shows that understanding of fast changes of education system by employers is not achieved. Opinions about the cooperation with vocational education and training are very different. Free market is not able to manage the cooperation. Information and motivation of owners of small and medium size enterprises active in the area of local communities is very important for the development of industry and services in local communities. Modern telecommunications allow to implement distance education elements and to reach all participants and stakeholders of the education system. New achievements and changes at education management should be implemented in local level. Local communities should be the organizers of training of employers and employees, initiators of economical and culture development at the local level. Involvement of all stakeholders in the harmonized development of all the education system is the basis of a new paradigm. The most important part of the new paradigm of education management is the direct involvement of entrepreneurs.

Training of qualified specialists at their workplace becomes more important. The appropriate qualification of a mentors is necessary. Employers are interested to participate in the training process including training of mentors, but understanding and evaluation of the necessary changes is very different. More information about the possible involvement of employers in the training process should be spread by local communities.

Small and medium size enterprises must create local unions to support education and training of their existing and future employees. Employers must become a real part of the education system, must have good mentors as their staff members, and must act jointly to improve the qualifications of employees.

Cooperation of educators with the stakeholders of the education system has been developed in higher education. Now the models worked out in higher education must be transferred to vocational education and training. Vocational education and training and higher education must work according to the same principles, but taking in account differences in the realization of these principles. Local communities are new partners for the education system. Participation of local communities in VET is happening quickly, but cooperation with higher education also is necessary and is started. The triple helix approach must be supported jointly in vocational education and training and higher education. New organizational forms could support the process of cooperation between education, public administration and employers. Higher education institu-

tions could create branches and distance education units for the VET in the territory of local communities using support of local employers. Joint system of education for all levels of specialists create more possibilities for the training together, according to the same principles regarding the major part of staff members of an enterprise, but more administrative and organizational support is necessary. Better understanding of the common goals is important. The investigation shows that big differences of understanding the aims and means of education exist. Serious attention should be paid to the discussion about new approaches, new paradigm in VET and higher education.

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