

The School Principal's Strategic Planning Competence: Content, Structure, And Development Mechanisms

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Abstract: The article examines the strategic planning competence of general education school principals from a scientific and theoretical perspective. The author scientifically substantiates the main criteria distinguishing strategic planning from operational and tactical processes, and systematizes six structural components of this competence (motivational-value, cognitive-theoretical, analytical-prognostic, operational-technological, communicative-collaborative, and reflective-evaluative). Furthermore, indicators for the practical manifestation of each component have been developed, and a three-level (reproductive, adaptive, and creative-strategic) matrix for assessing a leader's competence has been proposed. According to the research findings, seven interrelated mechanisms for developing this competence and a four-stage model for their practical implementation have been substantiated. The proposed approaches and models are of considerable practical significance for the system of training school leaders and enhancing their professional qualifications.

Keywords: Strategic planning, management competence, school principal, school development program, competence components, development mechanism, educational management, reflection.

Introduction: Today's general education school operates in a rapidly changing socio-economic environment: educational content is being updated, digital technologies are entering the learning process, and the demands of parents and the local community for the quality of education are growing. Under these conditions, a school leader's activity cannot be limited to merely overseeing day-to-day processes. The principal must be able to define the school's direction of development for several years ahead and align available resources with that direction. This, in turn, requires that strategic planning competence be studied and developed as a distinct component of the principal's professional competence.

The relevance of the problem is reinforced by the fact that the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Education" grants educational institutions broad authority to plan their activities independently [1], while the Concept for the Development of the Public Education System until 2030 identifies enhancing the managerial capacity of school leaders as a priority task

[2]. As authority expands, so does the leader's responsibility for the future of their institution: a school that cannot formulate its own strategy is forced to move at a pace set by others.

At the same time, in practice the school development program often remains no more than a formal document: its goals are stated in general terms, indicators are not measured, and resources are not linked to them. This situation indicates that leaders' strategic planning competence is insufficiently developed. The purpose of this article is to scientifically substantiate the content and structure of the school principal's strategic planning competence and to develop mechanisms for its development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The modern interpretation of strategic planning theory is comprehensively presented in the work of J. Bryson. The author substantiates a cycle for formulating strategy in public and nonprofit organizations in agreement with stakeholders and emphasizes that the success of a strategy depends on the range of people

involved in developing it [3]. H.Mintzberg, critiquing the mechanistic interpretation of planning, shows that strategy is not a document drawn up in advance but a pattern of decisions that takes shape through an organization's practice [4]. These two approaches do not contradict one another: in the school context they combine as the formalized part of the plan and its ongoing improvement in practice.

In research on educational management, strategic leadership is distinguished as a separate line of inquiry. B. Davies defines strategic leadership as a leader's ability to form an image of the future, translate it into language the team can understand, and embed it in day-to-day activity [5; 6]. The generalized conclusions of K.Leithwood and co-authors' long-term research establish that a school leader's influence on educational outcomes is indirect – manifested specifically through setting direction, developing people, and redesigning the organization [8]. In the instructional leadership model developed by P.Hallinger and J.Murphy, defining the school's mission is singled out as the first dimension of a leader's activity [9].

T.Bush, in his classification of management theories, shows that strategy needs to be interpreted not only through formal models but also from the standpoint of collegial and cultural models [10].

From a practical and methodological standpoint, the publication of the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning is significant: it sets out the sequence of stages in strategic planning in education – situational analysis, priority-setting, programming, and monitoring [11]. The results of the OECD's TALIS survey show that school leaders have a high need for professional development, particularly in the areas of management and working with data [12]. In transforming strategy into measurable indicators, R.Kaplan and D.Norton's balanced scorecard [13] and, in terms of change management, J. Kotter's stage-based model [14] are of methodological importance. In determining the structural composition of the competence, this study is grounded in L.Spencer and S.Spencer's competence model – their view of competence as an integrated whole of knowledge, skill, motive, and values [15]; M.Fullan, in turn, substantiates that the success of any development program depends on a leader's ability to build shared meaning within the team [7].

The literature review shows that the general theory of strategic leadership has been sufficiently developed, but the school principal's strategic planning competence as an integral structure – that is, the unity of its components, assessment indicators, and development mechanisms – has been studied comparatively little. This article aims to fill that gap.

METHODOLOGY

The study is theoretical in nature and draws on the following set of methods: theoretical analysis of scientific literature and normative-legal documents; comparative analysis (to differentiate strategic, tactical, and operational planning); structural-logical analysis (to identify the components of the competence); modeling (to design the development mechanisms and the stages of their implementation); and generalization and systematization.

Three methodological principles guided the development of the competence structure. First, the principle of the integrity of competence: it is treated not merely as a sum of knowledge but as a unity of knowledge, skill, motive, and values that manifests itself in practical situations [15]. Second, the principle of contextuality: competence cannot be assessed outside the school's specific conditions and resource capacity. Third, the principle of measurability: each component is linked to observable behavioral indicators, without which the process of developing the competence cannot be managed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The content of strategic planning competence. As a result of the analysis, the following definition was formulated: the school principal's strategic planning competence is an integrative professional quality that reflects the ability to define the educational institution's long-term direction of development based on an analysis of the external and internal environment, to translate it into a system of measurable goals and indicators, to mobilize resources and the team's potential toward these goals, and to adjust the strategy on the basis of the results achieved.

This definition distinguishes four aspects: an analytical basis (decisions rely on data), the measurability of goals (intent is converted into indicators), a link to resources (the plan is aligned with financial and staffing capacity), and feedback (strategy is not a fixed document). The difference between strategic planning and other types of planning is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

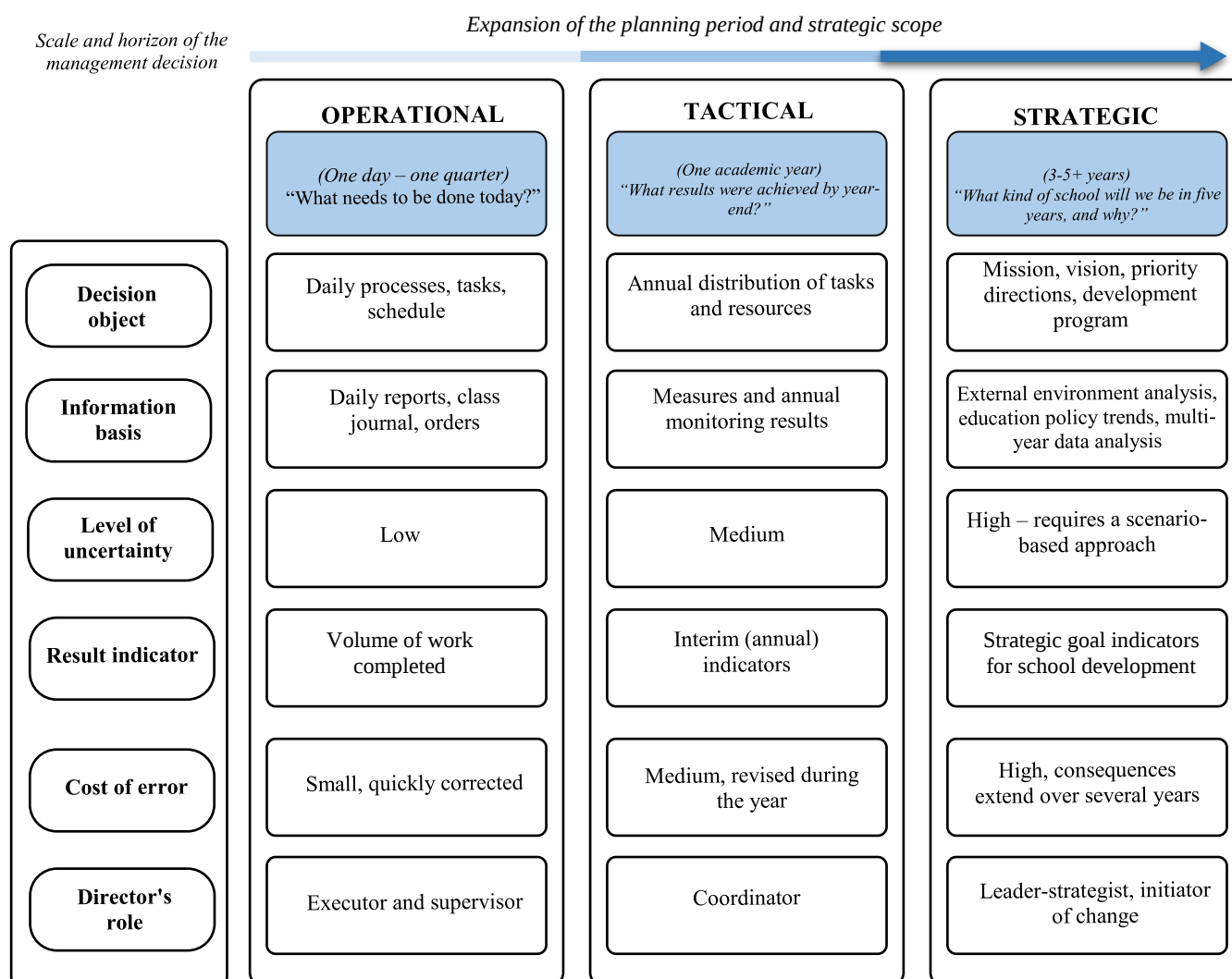
Comparative characteristics of operational, tactical, and strategic planning

No.	Comparison criterion	Operational planning	Tactical planning	Strategic planning
1	Time horizon	One day to one quarter	One academic year	3-5 years or more
2	Guiding question	"What needs to be done today?"	"What result will we achieve by the end of the year?"	"What kind of school will we be in five years, and why?"
3	Object of decision	Daily processes, tasks, schedule	Annual allocation of tasks and resources	Mission, vision, priority directions, development program
4	Information basis	Daily reports, class register, orders	Quarterly and annual monitoring results	External environment analysis, education policy trends, multi-year data series
5	Level of uncertainty	Low	Medium	High – requires a scenario-based approach
6	Outcome indicator	Volume of work completed	Interim (annual) indicators	Strategic goal indicators for school development
7	Cost of error	Small, quickly corrected	Moderate, revisited within the year	High, consequences extend over several years
8	Principal's role	Executor and supervisor	Coordinator	Leader-strategist, initiator of change

As the table shows, strategic planning requires a qualitatively different way of thinking from a leader: making decisions under conditions of high uncertainty, taking long-term consequences into account, and being able to reach agreement with stakeholders. It is

precisely for this reason that it must be developed as a distinct competence.

Scheme 1**Comparative scheme of operational, tactical, and strategic planning**



2. Structural components of the competence.

Based on theoretical analysis and competence models,

six interrelated components of strategic planning competence were identified. Their content and manifestation indicators are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Structure of the school principal's strategic planning competence

No.	Component	Content	Manifestation indicators
1	Motivational-value	Internal orientation toward school development, awareness of mission and values, commitment to long-term outcomes	Presence of long-term goals prioritized over daily urgent tasks; striving to build a shared vision within the team
2	Cognitive-theoretical	Knowledge of strategic management theory, education policy and the legal-regulatory framework, the structure of a school development program	Ability to explain the essence of tools such as SWOT, PESTEL, the goal tree, and indicator systems; reliance on normative documents
3	Analytical-prognostic	Collecting and interpreting data, identifying trends, constructing scenarios, assessing risks	Drawing conclusions based on multi-year data series; comparing at least two

No.	Component	Content	Manifestation indicators
			scenarios; using a risk matrix
4	Operational-technological	Converting goals into a measurable form, designing programs and roadmaps, linking resources to goals	Goals that meet SMART criteria; a roadmap reflecting stages, responsible persons, and deadlines; a plan linked to the budget
5	Communicative-collaborative	Engaging stakeholders, reaching agreement, distributing authority, managing resistance	Discussions involving teachers, parents, and the community; working groups; analysis of the reasons for resistance to change
6	Reflective-evaluative	Monitoring the progress of the strategy, analyzing one's own management activity, and timely adjustment of the strategy	Existence of an interim assessment procedure; making evidence-based changes to the program; the practice of analyzing mistakes made

The components are not hierarchical but cyclically interrelated: the motivational-value component provides the impetus for action, the cognitive and analytical components prepare the basis for a decision, the operational-technological component turns it into a document and action, the communicative component engages the team, and the reflective component evaluates the outcome and initiates the next cycle. A deficiency in any single component reduces the effectiveness of the whole chain: for example, strong

analytical preparation combined with a weak communicative component results in a "strategy on paper" that is not accepted by the team.

3. Levels of competence development. Managing the process of developing the competence requires determining its current level. The study proposes a three-level assessment matrix: low (reproductive), medium (adaptive), and high (creative-strategic). The assessment criteria are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Criterion-based description of the levels of development of strategic planning competence

No.	Assessment criterion	Low (reproductive) level	Medium (adaptive) level	High (creative-strategic) level
1	Goal-setting	Goals are copied from higher-level organizational documents; the school's context is not taken into account	Goals are adapted to the school's conditions, but the measurement criteria are incomplete	Goals are formulated independently based on an analysis of the school and have measurable indicators
2	Working with data	Data is collected for reporting purposes and does not influence decisions	Data is analyzed, but mainly to assess past periods	Data is used to build forecasts and scenarios, and decisions are made on this basis
3	Engaging the team	The plan is drawn up within a narrow circle and announced ready-made	The team is involved in discussion, but the decision is mostly made individually	The plan is developed jointly with working groups and stakeholders

No.	Assessment criterion	Low (reproductive) level	Medium (adaptive) level	High (creative-strategic) level
4	Linking resources	The plan and budget are documents independent of one another	Certain activities are linked to a funding source	Every strategic direction is linked to a resource source and a responsible person
5	Monitoring and adjustment	Monitoring is limited to the final report	Interim checks exist, but adjustments are not systematic	The strategy is consciously revisited on the basis of regular interim assessment
6	Attitude toward risk	Risks are addressed only after they occur	Some risks are identified in advance, but there is no response plan	A risk register is maintained, with preventive and response measures defined in advance

This matrix serves two purposes: first, it is a diagnostic tool that allows a leader's self-assessment to be compared with external expert assessment on a single

scale; second, it indicates the direction of development, since each cell defines the specific behavior required to move to the next level.

Model 1

Radial (circular) model of the levels of development of strategic planning competence



4. Mechanisms for developing the competence

A mechanism is understood as a set of interrelated

conditions, tools, and actions that ensure the competence grows to a defined level. The study substantiates seven mechanisms (Table 4).

Table 4**Mechanisms for developing strategic planning competence**

No.	Mechanism	Content	Main tools and forms	Expected outcome
1	Normative-organizational	Establishing strategic planning as a formal requirement of the principal's role	Incorporating strategic competence indicators into qualification requirements and job descriptions; a procedure for approving the development program	Competence shifts from an incidental quality to a systemic requirement
2	Educational (professional development)	Equipping leaders with theoretical and methodological knowledge	Modular courses, seminar-trainings, case studies, management simulations, analysis of international experience	Formation of the cognitive and analytical components
3	Applied-project	Combining the learning process with a real management task	Designing a development program for one's own school, project defense, peer review	Practical mastery of the operational-technological component
4	Mentoring and coaching	Individual development with the support of an experienced leader	Assigning a mentor, management supervision, communities of practice among leaders	Translating knowledge into real managerial behavior
5	Information-analytical (digital)	Grounding decisions in a data system	School data management system, monitoring dashboard, analysis of assessment results	A culture of data-driven decision-making
6	Motivational-incentive	Supporting the achievement of strategic results	Leadership rankings, recommendation to the talent pool, material and moral incentives	Reinforcement of the motivational-value component
7	Monitoring-reflective	Regularly measuring the level of competence and providing feedback	Self-assessment scorecard, multi-source (360°) assessment, individual development plan	The reflective component and a continuous growth cycle

The systemic nature of these mechanisms is such that, applied in isolation, they do not produce the expected result. Relying solely on the educational mechanism creates in the leader a state of "I know, but cannot apply"; relying solely on normative requirements leads

to formalism. For this reason, in the integrated model the mechanisms are combined into the following logical blocks: a goal block (the expected level of competence), a content block (the six components), a technological block (educational, applied-project,

mentoring, and information-analytical mechanisms), an organizational-motivational block (normative and incentive mechanisms), and a results-assessment block (the monitoring-reflective mechanism).

The driving force of the model is the combination of the applied-project mechanism with the educational mechanism: while studying the theory, the leader

simultaneously develops a real development program for their own school, refines it with the support of a mentor, and has it reviewed by peers. In this approach, both a learning outcome and a management outcome are produced at the same time. The step-by-step model for implementing these mechanisms is presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Stages of implementing the development mechanisms

No.	Stage	Purpose	Main content of activity	Outcome indicator
1	I. Diagnostic	Determining the initial level of competence	Self-assessment, multi-source assessment, review of the school's current planning documents	A competence profile compiled for each leader and a list of identified gaps
2	II. Design	Defining an individual development path	Selecting modules matched to the gaps, assigning a mentor, drawing up an individual development plan	An individual development plan with timeframe and expected outcome indicated
3	III. Learning-practice	Transferring knowledge into real management practice	Developing a development program for one's own school in parallel with modular training	A school development program project that has undergone review
4	IV. Reflective-assessment	Measuring growth and defining the next cycle	Repeated assessment, project defense, discussion of results with peers	Change in competence level and tasks for the next development cycle

The four stages form a closed cycle: the repeated assessment in the fourth stage serves as the diagnostic stage of the next cycle. This makes it possible to organize the development of the competence not as a one-time event but as a continuous process.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research conducted, the following conclusions were reached.

First, the school principal's strategic planning competence is an integrative professional quality that encompasses the ability to define long-term goals based on an analysis of the external and internal environment, translate them into measurable indicators, mobilize resource and team potential, and adjust the strategy on the basis of results.

Second, the competence consists of six structural components that function in cyclical interdependence;

a deficiency in any one component reduces the effectiveness of the others. Identifying observable behavioral indicators for each component turns the competence into an object that can be assessed and managed.

Third, developing the competence is effective through the unity of seven interrelated mechanisms — normative-organizational, educational, applied-project, mentoring and coaching, information-analytical, motivational-incentive, and monitoring-reflective. Their integrated application is ensured through a four-stage cycle.

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1) to include an applied-project module on strategic planning in the professional development curricula for school leaders, with the participant's own

development program project for their school defined as its final product;

2) to use the levels matrix proposed in Table 3 as an assessment tool when certifying leadership personnel and forming the leadership talent pool;

3) to establish a mentoring system for young principals, delivered by experienced leaders, and to formalize it as the practical continuation of professional development courses;

4) to establish the measurability of goals, their linkage to resources, and the existence of a monitoring procedure as mandatory criteria when reviewing school development programs.

A further direction for this research involves empirically testing the effectiveness of the proposed mechanisms under conditions of a pedagogical experiment and developing a standardized diagnostic tool for assessing the competence.

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