

DOI: [10.52950/SS.2021.10.2.005](https://doi.org/10.52950/SS.2021.10.2.005)

LEADER AND INNOVATOR IN THE CONTEXT OF EDUCATIONAL REFORMS

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Abstract:

Changes in society are also changing approaches to education. Over the past two decades, governments in many countries have addressed the need for effective education reform to improve student achievement. School leaders have a crucial role to play as they face high expectations for educational outcomes, particularly in the context of technological progress, innovation, migration and globalisation. Leadership in education is becoming increasingly necessary at the beginning of the 21st century. There is a need to rethink school management and leadership models and to introduce innovative ideas. The core work activities and competencies of a leader in education consist of their experience, knowledge, character traits, attitudes and skills. An example of this is the situation in the Czech Republic, where the public administration reform in 2000 led to the decentralisation of education, which gave schools the right to decide on matters in all areas. This paper summarises an example of leadership in secondary schools in the Czech Republic in the context of reforms that are taking place not only in education. The results show that the role of a leader and innovator in a school is mostly performed by the school principal himself and most often as needed, which is related to his responsibility for the school's operation and especially its direction, i.e. the implementation of the school's development concept. The research question is: Which of the work activities related to the secondary school principal as a leader and innovator are done by him/herself or delegated to other staff members and how often are they performed?

Keywords:

school principal, leader, management, education, secondary school

JEL Classification: I20, J24, J29

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Citation:

EVA URBANOVÁ (2021). Leader and innovator in the context of educational reforms. International Journal of Social Sciences, Vol. X(2), pp. 69-79., [10.52950/SS.2021.10.2.005](https://doi.org/10.52950/SS.2021.10.2.005)

1 Introduction

The relationship between education and social change has been debated for many years. According to some philosophers, education is the cause of social change; according to others, education is shaped as a consequence of social change. The most important functions of education in society are to socialize individuals, to enable continuity in society, and to raise generations to bring about social change. (Kuyumcu & Erdogan, 2008)

Over the past two decades, many governments have addressed the urgent need for effective education reform around the world (e.g., the US, Germany, Australia, Mexico, Denmark, England, Israel). The goal of education reforms has been to improve student achievement across OECD countries and to reduce the gap between the best and worst performers in education. The increasing demand for school improvement affects all those involved in the school community, including policy makers, politicians, head teachers and other school leaders, teachers, parents and pupils. Faced with ever-increasing pressure to transform school systems in a dynamic learning environment, school leaders are finding their role increasingly complex. (Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2016)

The demands of 21st century education require a rethinking of traditional models of school management and leadership and a focus on pedagogical aspects, distributed leadership, participatory school development, and teacher professional growth. (Contreras, 2016) Research shows that school principals make significant contributions to the functioning and performance of their schools. Unfortunately, despite the demonstrated need for effective principals, there is a shortage of candidates for this position in many regions of the world, including Germany and the United States. Three factors often discourage people from becoming principals - the role is stressful, the salary does not match the scope of responsibilities, and the position is time-consuming and complex. (Hancock et al, 2019)

The economic crisis of 2008-2013 highlights the need to update education systems to meet the need to deliver services competitively, efficiently, effectively and, above all, innovatively. In this context, school principals can no longer be confined to following orders from central educational institutions, but only to following the rules they are forced to practice by modern management methods (innovation, flexibility and leadership) and in accordance with legislation. (Brinia & Papantoniou, 2016) The current 2 years of health crisis due to the COVID pandemic¹⁹ (2020-2021) have added to the school reform approaches the closure of schools of many countries and the need for distance learning.

In a period of not only societal change and crisis, it is found that leadership in education is increasingly necessary at the beginning of the 21st century. The relevance of the above statement stems from the fact that nowadays the quality of leadership has a positive impact on schools and student outcomes. It is recognised worldwide that schools need effective leaders and managers if they are to provide the best possible education for their pupils. Many governments are increasingly recognising that their main asset is their citizens who make up the workforce, meaning that the quality of school leadership is reflected in the quality of the future workforce. Effective leadership and management by the school principal and staff is a key factor in achieving high levels of student achievement and school improvement. Leadership (leadership) is an important element that harnesses the energy and commitment of staff, pupils and parents and sets a clear direction for the work and development of schools, while ensuring effective school management and organisation. However, day-to-day management expertise

without effective leadership can lead to a school that, while functioning effectively, lacks a sense of vision and purpose. Of course, leadership skills must be complemented by management expertise if a school is to be successful, but good leadership is a prerequisite for creating an effective and high-performing school. The best leaders put pupil learning at the centre of their leadership and management activities. (Edoun, 2011)

To identify and create new opportunities to improve organizational performance, the leader or manager plays a crucial role. Recent research on the interplay between school leadership and entrepreneurship has also highlighted the key role of school leaders and teachers in bringing about educational change by identifying new opportunities as well as developing and implementing innovative ideas and approaches to different aspects of pupils' learning. To this end, school leaders face the fundamental challenge of influencing and guiding teachers' practices towards the achievement of educational goals by discovering and introducing innovative opportunities and empowering them to transform their existing traditional practices into innovative ones. (Pihie, Bagheri & Asimiran, 2014)

A school principal requires a series of appropriate leadership skills to bring the school, staffs and students to a high level of achievement, and to maintain school effectiveness. The five areas of leadership related to effective school principals are instructional leadership, cultural leadership, strategic leadership, educational management leadership and organizational management leadership. (Piaw et al, 2014)

A growing body of research has emphasised the importance of school leadership practice for quality improvement in schools. Yet, little attention has been paid to the investigation of how principals reshape their leadership role and leadership practices when schools reorganise the leadership team with the purpose of increasing the number of formally assigned leaders. The principals re-conceptualise leadership when they move from being solo leaders to sharing leadership. Exist two approaches for principal leadership practice which the reorganised leadership team can provide –the exchanging information –and collaborative discussion approaches. (Abrahamsen, Aas & Hellekjær, 2015)

The principal's ability as a leader to select good teachers, give them feedback, and make serious decisions seems very important. In Europe and many other countries around the world, principals are faced with high expectations for educational outcomes, especially in the context of technological progress, innovation, migration and globalisation. As countries seek to change their education systems to offer pupils the necessary knowledge and skills for this changing world, the role of principals and the demands placed on them are also changing fundamentally. They are no longer just expected to be good managers. Increasingly, they are expected to be effective educational leaders in schools, which is now seen as key to education reform and to improving educational outcomes. (Pont, Nusche & Moorman, 2008; OECD, 2009)

The core work activities and competencies of an educational leader are their experience, knowledge, character traits, attitudes and skills. Experience is acquired by leaders through their life experience and forms the most valuable source of evidence for their further development. (Kovács, 2007) School principals and other school leaders in the 21st century are rethinking their traditional roles to understand the complexities and ambiguities that characterize their various responsibilities in the context of school reform. As school leadership is divided between formal and informal leaders, the role of not only school principals but also middle leaders become more complex. Both groups face an increasingly challenging and rapidly changing

educational environment while adapting to the external demands of school reforms. While school principals set the guidelines, middle leaders, who form the intermediate level of management, are responsible for implementing decisions and making them happen. Changing roles are associated with the acceptance of new responsibilities and thus accountability, putting increasing pressure on schools. This new challenge for school leaders puts them at the heart of educational reforms, requiring a much-needed analysis of their internal behaviour. Finding ways to transform schools into effective learning environments is a key element of school management for both principals and other educational leaders. (Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2016)

School leaders perform their functions in accordance with prescribed standards and focus on quality and results. In practice, school leaders are expected to operate within systems of control and performance, which are essential features of managerial management. The functions performed by school principals are essentially managerial rather than true leadership functions, despite the practice of labelling principals as leaders. As a result, the expected managerial performance of principals inevitably has specific implications for educational leadership training. Education is therefore characterised as shaping leaders rather than educating leaders. (Heystek, 2007)

In the modern school and school of the future, the model of leadership styles and their relationship to the level of staff development is a must-know for any manager who aspires to be an effective leader. Mature school leaders are guided by the principle of optimal management that is both democratic and 'participative'. They involve staff in the decision-making process, encouraging them to develop their potential and take on greater responsibility. Principals are now turning "inwards" to work with subordinates and are managing the school according to the principles of situational leadership. Good leaders have dialogue and genuinely enjoy working with people. They believe in their mission to develop the potential of people and the school. (Lilova, 2016)

Educational leadership is proving to be the most effective model for achieving sustained improvement in schools. Educational leadership is a core element of this model and has also been accredited in recent years as a core characteristic of a successful school. A theoretical and conceptual introduction to pedagogical and teacher leadership is made, presenting the conditions under which they can be developed and their role in school improvement. The conclusions are as follows: Teachers, their leadership potential and pedagogical leadership define a new holistic conception of school that is focused on serving students and their learning process and on supporting human and professional development. In order to achieve educational change and school development, it is essential that teachers and principals are appropriately trained and empowered and recognize their key role in these processes. (Contreras, 2016)

Research on school effectiveness and improvement shows that leadership plays a key role in ensuring the viability and growth of schools. Yet there is growing recognition that public schools and school systems as they currently exist are simply not being led in ways that enable them to respond to the increasing demands they face under standards-based reforms. The way out of this problem is through large-scale improvement in instruction, something that public education has not been able to do, but which is possible with dramatic changes in the way public schools define and practice leadership. (Southworth & Quesnay, 2005)

The principal should work with others to implement the vision into the structures and processes of the school, which requires technical and human skills - conceptualizing and planning. (Bush & Glover, 2003) The need for effective school leaders is widely recognized, but there is much less certainty about which leadership behaviours are most likely to produce positive results. (Veteška, 2013) The focus should be on professional development and training to improve and develop the appropriate core competencies that should characterize a good school leader. (Bitterová, Hašková & PISOŇOVÁ, 2014)

An example of this is the situation in the Czech Republic, where the public administration reform in 2000 led to the decentralisation of the education system, which gave schools the right to decide on matters in all areas (finances, staffing, organisation, etc.). Since 2003, autonomy has been strengthened in the legal and economic spheres, and since 2005, thanks to the introduction of the framework curricula for the different levels of education, also in the pedagogical sphere. The degree of autonomy of schools in the Czech Republic is the highest in comparison with other European countries. The decisive person for each school, its development and the quality results of its pupils is its headmaster, who performs the roles of leader, manager and process executor. As a leader, he or she sets the direction of the school and convinces the staff of its correctness; as a manager, he or she ensures the achievement of strategic goals; and as an executor, he or she achieves the set goals and completes tasks. The Head of School performs the functions of teacher, employer, economist, lawyer, psychologist, and personnel officer and is responsible for the smooth running of the school, which consists mainly of ensuring teaching and learning in terms of personnel and content. He or she must manage and lead people, communicate, make decisions about the use of funds, seek additional financial resources, evaluate and reward staff and, last but not least, carry out direct teaching activities. (Průcha & Veteška, 2014; Trojan, 2011; Trojan, 2021; Vašátková, 2006)

In the Czech Republic, principals, vice-principals, and other school leaders who want to achieve outstanding results in their schools must pay special attention to the management of all staff (including teaching and non-teaching staff) because their skills, motivation, and performance determine the desired school outcomes. Anyone who influences and manages others in the organization should be involved in personnel management and participate in the various personnel management activities related to selecting, evaluating, rewarding, or training staff. Important competencies for principals and other leaders in personnel and school management include managerial competencies (the ability to manage others), personnel competencies (the ability to manage oneself) or professional competencies (the ability to manage a school). (Šafránková & Šikýř, 2018)

In addition to direct teaching activities, the head teacher must be able to manage the school and take responsibility for its development. The transformation of Czech society has led to new expectations and requirements for the change of the work of school principals, who should focus on the key activities of the school, especially education, in the Czech school environment, create conditions for the formulation of the school's vision and ensure cooperation with all target groups to achieve it. (Pol, 2007) In this context, it is important to understand how people reach the position of school principal, how they adapt to it, and how they continue in their career. At the beginning of their careers, principals usually grasp most of the acts of management themselves, but later find that external support is needed and learn what competencies can be shared and with whom. (Pol et al, 2013)

2 Goal and Method

The paper focuses on the analysis of the work activities of a secondary school principal in the Czech Republic in the role of a leader and innovator. The aim was to find out which of the work activities related to the high school principal as a leader and innovator are done by him or herself or delegated to other employees and how often they are performed.

The achievement of the objective is based on the analysis of data available in scientific literature and scientific journals focused on the work activities of managers and the results of a research survey conducted among secondary school principals in the Czech Republic.

The questionnaire contained 250 work activities and was sent electronically in spring 2021 to all secondary schools in the Czech Republic (1274). A total of 240 schools (19 %) responded. This paper defines, by analysing the results of the questionnaire survey, the part of the research investigation concerning the work activities of the secondary school principal as a leader and innovator in the field of conceptual activities that lead to the fulfilment of the set school vision and conceptual goals. The analysis revealed which of the activities are performed by the principal as a leader himself and which are delegated to other leaders in the school.

The methodology of the analysis is based on the results of a questionnaire survey with 10 closed questions and 6 questions to identify respondents. Data analysis was based on the calculation of relative frequencies (as a proportion of the total number of respondents).

3 Results and Discussion

Based on a research survey on the views of secondary school principals, the work activities in the area of conceptual issues that are important for the fulfilment of the vision and strategic goals of the school were analysed.

The results of a questionnaire survey carried out in spring 2021 among 240 secondary school principals highlight those activities that are carried out by the school principal himself and relate to his role as a leader or innovator and those that he delegates to his subordinates. The frequency of these activities is determined by their complexity and importance.

The school principals chose one of the following options for the frequency of work activities: daily - weekly - monthly - 4 times a year - twice a year - annually - as needed, or they chose not to perform the activity at all. Only the two most frequently mentioned frequencies are shown in the tables.

The school principal, as the statutory representative of the legal entity and manager, carries out management activities for which he/she is equipped with the appropriate competences, powers and responsibilities. He is responsible for the running of the whole organisation. Most often he/she manages the school himself/herself (81 %), but in 19 % of schools he/she delegates this management to other managers or shares management in certain areas with them. School management is most often carried out on a daily (82 %) or weekly (8 %) basis.

The head teacher is also the employer and manages all school staff who are required to follow his/her instructions, most often by himself/herself (61 %) or delegated (39 %) to other senior staff. This is most often done on a daily basis (73 %) or as required (13 %).

Table 1 Work activities carried out by school principal or delegated by the school principal and how often they take place - management and representation of the school:

WHO AND FREQUENCY WORK ACTIVITIES	HIMSELF (%)	SHARES (%)	MOST FREQUENT FREQUENCY (%)	2. MOST COMMON FREQUENCY (%)
manages the school as an institution	81	19	daily (82)	weekly (8)
manages staff	61	39	daily (73)	as required (13)
represents the school in external negotiations	92	8	as required (80)	daily (7)
represents the school in official and unofficial meetings with partners and at various public appearances	95	5	as required (83)	monthly (8)

Source: Author results

The status of the principal also shows that he or she has the right to represent the school in external negotiations, which he or she most often does alone (92 %) or delegates (8 %). This is done on a daily basis (7 %), but more often as needed (80 %). Public relations are a very important means of communication for any organisation. PR influences public behaviour, the image of the school and its services. It serves to build image, influence opinions and maintain positive attitudes towards the school.

The headmaster also most often represents the school himself (95%) in official and unofficial meetings with partners and public appearances or, to a lesser extent, is delegated to represent the school (5 %), and takes place either monthly (8 %) or more frequently as needed (83 %) (Table 1).

Table 2 Work activities carried out by school principal or delegated by the school principal and how often they take place - basic school documentation:

WHO AND FREQUENCY WORK ACTIVITIES	HIMSELF (%)	SHARES (%)	MOST FREQUENT FREQUENCY (%)	2. MOST COMMON FREQUENCY (%)
develops a school development concept	90	10	as required (46)	one time a year (43)
develops and updates the school curriculum	16	84	as required (68)	one time a year (28)
draws up the school's annual plan	78	22	one time a year (91)	two times a year (4)

Source: Author results

The basic strategic document of each school is its development concept, which is part of the strategic management of the organisation. Every organisation should have a clear idea of its existence and its purpose, i.e., it must formulate its mission, which it fulfils through its behaviour. Some organizations still formulate a vision, which is an idea of the future that represents

aspirations, dreams, hopes, goals and plans. The school principal first encounters the concept of development when he or she is not yet a principal but is applying for the position. When the head teacher takes up his/her post, it is important to start implementing the concept with the help of all staff members who should fulfil the school's mission and share the vision with the head teacher. In most cases, the school principal prepares the school development concept himself (90 %) with input from his subordinates, and in only 10 % of schools does he delegate this activity. The school development plan is usually drawn up annually (43 %) or as needed (46 %) and adjusted according to the current situation.

The basic pedagogical documentation includes the school curriculum, which is issued by the school principal and must be in accordance with the framework curriculum issued by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. The staff shall identify with it and actively work with it. It is an open document that responds thoughtfully to current changes based on the needs of the school. In 16 % of schools, the school curriculum is drawn up and updated by the head teacher himself or herself, but most delegate this activity (84 %). The curriculum is updated annually (28 %), but more often on an as-needed basis (68 %).

The most important part of the planning process is the school's annual plan, which contains the school's activities for the entire school year, including the names of those responsible for them. The plan always shows the framework and schedule of tasks that elaborate the management's intentions. In this sense, a quality plan creates the primary condition for overall school improvement, prevents the infiltration of non-essential daily activities into priorities, and increases the efficiency of the use of human, material and economic resources. The annual school plan is most often prepared by the head teacher himself (78 %), and in 22 % of schools this activity is delegated. The plan is most often drawn up annually (91 %) or twice a year (4 %). (Table 2).

Table 3 Work activities carried out by school principal or delegated by the school principal and how often they take place - school projects and innovations:

WHO AND FREQUENCY	HIMSELF (%)	SHARES (%)	MOST FREQUENT FREQUENCY (%)	2. MOST COMMON FREQUENCY (%)
WORK ACTIVITIES				
decides on the school's involvement in projects	80	19	as required (85)	two times a year/one time a year (5)
decides on innovations	72	28	as required (57)	monthly (13)
decides on additional activities of the school	60	33	as required (57)	monthly (12)

Source: Author results

Schools receive funding from the state for direct expenses and from the founder for operating expenses. However, they also have the possibility to seek other sources of funding, e.g. from the European Union, which announces calls for proposals within the programme periods, and grants from various state or private organisations. These sources should be continuously sought. Involvement in various projects bringing additional sources of funding to the organisation is important for the development of the school. This is decided by the headmaster himself (80 %) or delegated to subordinates (19 %). Schools are involved in projects either

annually or twice a year (5 % each) or more frequently as needed (85 %), which is related to the irregular announcement of grants and programmes by various institutions.

Project management is also linked to decision-making on innovation, which is important for schools, especially for competitive reasons. Schools must respect and adapt to changes in, for example, information and communication technologies, teaching aids, and programmes that are needed to prepare pupils for their future careers. Innovation is most often decided by the head teacher alone (72 %), delegated by 28% of schools, with a monthly process (13 %), made four times a year in 10 % of schools and as needed in 57 % of schools.

The school may carry out additional activities, which must be related to the main activity of the school and must be defined in the charter. The decision to choose a specific activity is up to the headmaster. Decisions on ancillary activities, the proceeds of which finance the main activity of the school, are linked to the development of the school and are made by the head teacher in the majority of schools (60 %), with 33 % of schools delegating this activity, with 12 % of schools deciding on a monthly basis, 8 % on an annual basis and 57 % on an as-needed basis (Table 3).

4 Conclusion

The paper summarizes an example of leadership in secondary schools in the context of reforms that are taking place not only in the education system in the Czech Republic, but also in many countries around the world. The results of a questionnaire survey focused on the analysis of the work activities of a secondary school principal concerning conceptual issues that are important for the fulfilment of the established vision of the school show that the role of a leader and innovator is performed by the principal himself, only one activity is delegated to other senior staff, namely the elaboration and updating of the school educational programme. While this is an important document, it is a collaborative effort of all teaching staff, so that it may be coordinated by another senior manager. From the results it can be seen that the headmaster, as the statutory representative of the school, retains the management of the school and also the creation of strategic documents, which is related to his responsibility for the running and especially the direction of the school, i.e. the implementation of the school development concept with which he succeeded in the competition procedure. Most often, work activities are carried out as required.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the work activities related to the conceptual activities are retained by the school principal as the statutory representative and the person responsible for the direction of the school in accordance with the school's development concept and also for the fulfilment of the school's vision. This is linked to the role of the head teacher as a leader and innovator who must fulfil the objectives of school reforms taking place around the world, namely improving pupils' educational outcomes and reducing the gap between the best and worst performers. It is necessary to implement the changes taking place in society, such as the possibility of distance learning and modern ways of management (competitiveness, innovation, flexibility) into school concepts. It can be expected that work activities related to operational and administrative tasks will be delegated to other senior staff and will be the subject of further research.

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Acknowledgment

This paper was supported by Charles University PROGRES Q17 - Teacher training and teaching profession in the context of science and research.