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THE DEPARTMENTAL SCHOOL HEADMASTER'S COMPETENCE IMPORTANT FOR ITS EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

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Abstract:

The competences of school principals of departmental schools are currently insufficiently monitored. The aim of the paper is to define the most important competencies of the school principal of the departmental school, which he needs for effective management of the school. The research methodology is based on a questionnaire survey conducted between 95 students of the 1st and 2nd year of the School Management study program in the academic year 2019/2020 and focused on the analysis of the competences of the school principals of departmental schools important for proper school management and leadership. At the same time, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 students on specific examples of effective management gained in management practices in departmental schools. Research question: Which competencies are most important for effective management of departmental school and leadership?

The authors' research results support the assumption that the most important competencies of the school principals of the departmental school include communication skills, general overview, ability to delegate tasks to others, self-management, cooperation and the right choice of co-workers and should be systematically implemented in their further education.

Keywords:

competence, school director, leadership, departmental school

JEL Classification: I21, I23, M53

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1 Introduction

The dynamic development of today's society is fundamentally influencing the requirements for education and bringing constant changes to education. Schools must flexibly respond to them, especially to reflect the changes in the traditional model of the family and multicultural society, to respect the increase in social differences and, last but not least, to implement new knowledge in the field of the latest information and communication technologies. The school, as a public institution, must ensure the fulfilment of many functions, the basic one being to provide education, and its functioning depends on factors operating not only within the school but also in the external environment. The competences of school principals of departmental schools are currently insufficiently monitored. The aim of the paper is to define the most important competencies of a school principal of a departmental school, required for the effective management of the school.

2 Literature review

The school as an institution

The main task of schools is to educate and instruct children and youth, to support the maintenance of generational continuity, to strengthen the stability, cohesion and sustainable development of society and to enable the integration of future generations into civic and professional life (Průcha, 2009). For a society, the school is an indispensable institution, whose main function is the targeted education of future generations.

The school in relation to the entire school system can be understood as an institution whose task and duty is to comply with the external rules (legal, economic, socio-political, hygienic...) established by the system (Pol, 2007). An institution is defined as a set of common relations, provisions, orders and subordinations. In the case of schools, the institutional dimension is based on the obligatory connection of the established school to a uniform external framework, which is binding for it in a number of respects. The school is the basic and most organized educational institution, equipped with professional educators within the comprehensive system of the care of society for the education and upbringing of its members (Foskett, Lumb, 2003). It works according to a central program or its own program, which it implements mainly through teaching, the cooperation of the learning pupils and the teacher managing the learning activity (Kolář, 2012).

School is one of the most focal institutions in modern society. It is largely through the institutionalized forms of education that modern society attempts to secure and maintain its social and economic well-being and its valuable cultural life forms. In addition to this, the school is the essential institution through which the future of a society is defined. It naturally ensues then, that modern discourses on the school have always been intertwined with the critical question of how the past, present and future can be linked in educational practices so that schools can foster (in ever better ways) the well-being of individuals, societies and humanity. The role and functions of the school in contemporary society is to orientate its transition, with a well-founded critical evaluation of prevailing pedagogical practices and policy trends

being required for this. This evaluation is vital for the future of the school and society (Siljander, Kontio & Pikkarainen, 2017).

School autonomy

The political changes in Eastern and Central European countries in the 1990s were accompanied by changes in the governance of education. In the Czech Republic, following the criticism of the previous system, (excessive unification, rigid and bureaucratic management and control, dehumanization of the pedagogical practice, limitation of local initiative, etc.). One of the first steps in the new democratic systems was to loosen central bureaucratic governance and control and extend local autonomy at the school level. The state monopoly on education was abandoned, alternative curricula were approved, the space for hobby activities was expanded and the power of the pedagogical bureaucracy was reduced.

School autonomy means its functional independence, the right of the school to decide independently on its internal affairs, in particular on the internal organization and running of the school, on the budget and management of allocated funds, on staff selection, on admission and evaluation and especially on the curriculum. The degree of school autonomy depends on the nature of the state's school policy. In the Czech Republic, schools have gained a relatively high degree of autonomy, while strengthening the school's responsibility as a legal entity, i.e. the right to decide on economic, administrative, personnel and pedagogical issues independently, when the school acts in legal relations on its own behalf as a legal entity. The role of the school principal as a statutory body of this legal entity has further been strengthened (Průcha, 2013).

In connection with the reform of the state administration, the decentralization of Czech education from the state to lower levels has taken place since 2000, i.e. to the regions, municipalities and schools themselves, which has brought schools legal personality since 2003, and with it much more responsibility for their principals. Schools make decisions through their principals in accordance with legal regulations, and state administration bodies at the regional or local level intervene in this decision-making to a minimum. High demands have been placed on school principals in the Czech Republic over the last twenty years, both in the scope and diversity of their responsibilities, which results from the autonomy of schools, which attains the highest values in the Czech Republic compared to other European countries and resources, as well as in the level of curricular autonomy (Trojan, 2011).

The demand for the greater autonomy of schools places greater demands on the acquisition of managerial skills and abilities of its managers, who must manage and build schools in an environment characterized by rapid change, especially technological, political, economic and social change and schools must adapt to them (Světlík, 2006). The school management convinced of the value of building 'learning bridges' between educational and non-educational (but particularly commercial) organizations, so that successful management practice and organizational design can be transferred. (Everard, Morris, Wilson, 2004)

School principal or director

The school principal is a competent person who is the statutory body of the school as a legal entity and who is appointed and removed by the founder. He/she is responsible for running the school in accordance with the standards, for economic and personnel issues, for cooperation with parents, for the regular evaluation of work, but especially for the quality of the educational process, which is the basic activity of each school. An essential part of the pedagogical process, as a systematic effect of the school on pupils, is the pedagogical staff, and one of the director's competencies is their selection, assignment and management (Trojan, 2014).

Education reform continues to be a dominating feature of education in many countries throughout the world. As a result of this, it is now more important than ever that headteachers and school managers develop the skills which enable them to manage their new responsibilities effectively. In *School Leadership in the 21st Century*, all the major aspects of school leadership are discussed, including the following: the strategic and ethical dimensions of leadership, leading and managing change, leading and managing staff in high performance schools, information for student learning and organisational learning and the transformation of schools in the twenty-first century (Davies, Brent, Ellison, Linda, 1997).

The management and leadership of employees – teachers in schools is based on the knowledge of understanding the personal assumptions of individual employees, which determine their performance and behaviour in the workplace, as well as to understand the external circumstances that affect their performance and actions. They are therefore important for the selection of employees, the use and development of their individual skills, support for their motivation, but also for the selection of the appropriate management style that the manager uses in their management (Urban, 2017).

Competences of the school director

School management is the management process taking place within a school in order to ensure its activities, leading to the achievement of the set goals. The responsibility for the optimal implementation of the management process in the school lies with a certain person or multiple persons, which are synonymously referred to in the Czech environment as school manager, school management, and head pedagogical worker. Their task is to guide the management process so that the proper conditions are created and all managerial functions are implemented to ensure the school's activities (Veteška, 2013). School management requires mastering the managerial and personnel dimension, where management represents the duty and responsibility to decide on the goals and strategy of the organization and the use of its resources and is to some extent specific to the nature of the organization. The personnel dimension involves guiding people towards the set goals and is the same for all organizations. The issue of school management draws mainly from general management and pedagogy, but also from other scientific disciplines - economics, psychology, sociology, political science, etc. Education falls into the non-profit sector, so the concept of leadership is preferred to the concept of management (Prášilová, 2008).

The competence of management staff in education must include the following areas:

- leadership (strategic thinking) - creating and fulfilling the vision, setting priorities, presenting and promoting the school, motivating employees
- managerial (development of organization) - determination of strategy, personnel activities, provision of resources, running of the system
- professional (in terms of function) - knowledge of legal and economic regulations, knowledge of the school context, communication skills, language skills,
- personality - time management, self-development, self-reflection, decision-making, working with stress
- social - team building, problem and conflict resolution, resistance management, cooperation with partners, acceptance of conditions,
- management and evaluation of the educational process - curriculum planning and creation, process evaluation, implementation of new knowledge into the educational process, use of feedback for process improvement (Trojanová, Trojan, Kitzberger, 2012).

The prerequisites for the performance of the activities of a school principal in the Czech Republic result from Act No. 563/2004 Coll. On pedagogical staff and on the amendment of certain acts, as amended. In addition to meeting the prerequisites for performing the activities of a pedagogical worker (legal capacity, professional qualification for direct pedagogical activities, integrity, medical fitness and knowledge of the Czech language), the director of a school established by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, a region, a municipality or a voluntary association of municipalities whose subject of activity is tasks in the field of education, may only be those who, in addition to the above conditions, have acquired knowledge in the field of school management within two years from the day they began working as a school principal within the further education of pedagogical staff according to Section 24 (4) (a). In accordance with Section 5 (3) of this Act, the obligation to complete studies for the principals of schools established by the ministry, region, municipality or association of municipalities does not apply to principals who have acquired knowledge in education management through higher education in the accredited study program School Management or education in the lifelong learning program carried out by a university focused on the organization and management of education.

The basic work activities and competencies of a leader in education are his/her experience, knowledge, character traits, attitudes and skills. Managers gain experience through their life practice and form the most valuable source of data for its further development. Information that is repeated and used by a manager becomes knowledge. In the actions and behaviour of a manager, his/her character traits are manifested. Skills are the ability to perform certain activities and use knowledge as well as their personal beliefs and attitudes. Skills can be divided into four areas - professional technical, analytical and conceptual, managerial, process and organizational, while the last group consists of skills in interpersonal relationships in the workplace (Kovács, 2007).

According to Kovács (2007), work activities can be viewed from several angles.

From a data point of view, it is a standardization of the job description with a focus

on the functional content and requirements for knowledge, skills and behaviour. Competence is a comprehensive demonstrated ability of an individual to perform specific tasks needed to satisfactorily meet special requirements in the performance of professional job functions and other major extracurricular activities and social roles. It also includes practical knowledge, skills, attitudes and other personality qualities.

3 Goal and Method

The purpose of the paper is comparing and discuss some parts of the analysis of the work activities of school principals by students of education management in terms of their managerial activities and skills.

The aim of the paper is to define the most important competencies of the school principal of the departmental school, which he needs for effective management of the school. Research question: Which competencies are most important for effective management of departmental school and leadership?

The research methodology is based on a questionnaire survey conducted between 95 students of the 1st and 2nd year of the School Management study program in the academic year 2019/2020 and focused on the analysis of the competences of the school principals of departmental schools important for proper school management and leadership.

The sample of students – respondents was students of 1st year of undergraduate study of School management study programme at Faculty of Education, Charles University, Department of Andragogy and Educational Management - total of 51 participants of which 36 work in education and 15 outside education.

Second part of respondents of our survey was students of the 2nd year of the field of study School Management, study programme at Faculty of Education, Charles University, Department of Andragogy and Educational Management, a total of 44 students participated in the survey, of which 28 work in education and 16 outside education.

Third part of our background was secondary analysis of data from international survey Talis 2013 and Talis 2018 (Teaching and Learning International Survey), as base of questions for respondents to compare analysed work activities of the school principal necessary for its effective management.

At the same time, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 students of 1st and 2nd year of undergraduate study on specific examples of effective management gained in management practices in departmental schools.

When respondents answer to questions in questionnaire in sentences, the results were obtained by content analysis of respondents' statements, theirs comparison and summary of frequencies in key areas. The semi structured interviews was analysed by content analysis and in paper the most frequently repeated statements are shown.

4 Results and Discussion

In order for a school to be effectively managed, it must first and foremost have an educated and enlightened principal who will ensure a sufficient number of qualified pedagogical staff who fulfil the basic function of the school, ie educating future generations through whom the principal directs the pedagogical process. In addition, appropriate working conditions must be created, including salary evaluation, which must be ensured by sufficient funding. The school principal must constantly educate himself, especially in the legislation that is governed every day and that is constantly changing. Last but not least, the principal must promote the school to ensure a sufficient number of pupils.

The students of the 1st year of the field of study School Management processed in the form of a questionnaire survey the work activities of the school principal, which he needs for its effective management. In the research survey of the authors, the students divided these activities into the areas of legal (PR), economic (E) and school management (SM) (see Table 1).

Table 1 Activities of the school principal

| Job activities | Number of students (in abs. nb) |
|---|---------------------------------|
| ensuring a sufficient number of qualified pedagogical staff (PR) | 51 |
| solution of labour law issues (PR) | 46 |
| continuous study of legislation (PR) | 50 |
| admission of applicants to education (PR) | 51 |
| support for continuous and further education of pedagogical staff (PR) | 49 |
| liability for damage and occupational safety (PR) | 38 |
| issuing internal regulations (PR) | 45 |
| personal data protection (PR) | 48 |
| documentation management (PR) | 33 |
| performance of direct pedagogical activities (PR) | 51 |
| school budgeting (E)) | 32 |
| securing extra-budgetary financial resources (grants, sponsors) (E) | 44 |
| public procurement (E) | 25 |
| bookkeeping (E) | 32 |
| asset management (E) | 46 |
| ancillary activity management (E) | 27 |
| creation of strategic documents (SM) | 51 |
| provision of PR school (SM) | 51 |
| Negotiations with legal representatives, founder, social partners, authorities (SM) | 48 |
| delegation of work activities to other employees (SM) | 42 |
| school culture (SM) | 46 |

Source: Own research

Students of the 2nd year of the field of study School Management analysed the work activities of the school principal necessary for its effective management on the basis of Talis 2013 and Talis 2018 (Teaching and Learning International Survey), which provide teachers and principals with the opportunity to contribute to the analysis of

education and educational policies and compared them with the work activities of a manager in a company. A total of 44 students participated in the survey. In the author's research survey, students defined the specific activities of the school principal during the comparison (see Table 2).

Table 2 Specific activities of the school principal

| Job activities | Number of students (in abs. nb) |
|--|---------------------------------|
| performance of direct pedagogical activities | 44 |
| ensuring a sufficient number of qualified pedagogical staff | 40 |
| high administrative burden | 44 |
| continuous study of legislation | 38 |
| recruiting candidates for training, not just employees | 44 |
| negotiations with legal representatives, the founder, social partners, authorities | 40 |
| cooperation with other school principals | 33 |
| communication with all target groups | 40 |

Source: Own research

Citation of students for interviews: "I see the main difference between the school principal and the manager in the company in the fact that the school principal, in addition to managing the whole process and performing related activities, also participates as an executor (direct teaching obligation)." "The director is obliged to teach a certain number of hours, which means that one of his tasks is the activity that his employees do, which may not be the case for managers in the company." "The principal is thus obliged to lead by example by all teachers, not only by his leadership, but also, for example, in the form of teaching." "Because a lot of people don't go to work for education, the school principal is often alone in managerial and leadership activities and can't delegate them to almost anyone. And he is required to be an expert in several fields: economics, law - not only school and work, pedagogy, human resources, people management, management... "In my opinion, the school principal takes the most time for administrative tasks and tasks that often cannot be delegated to other subordinates (teachers)." "The position of director requires knowledge and monitoring of legislation that applies to both employees and hygiene and safety regulations. In addition, the principal is not only a manager, but according to the law he is also obliged to hold the position of a teacher. "The school principal must communicate with all those around him and address more or less all requirements / problems."

5 Conclusion

Thanks to the school reform at the beginning of the 21st century, schools in the Czech Republic gained a high degree of autonomy, which means that school principals perform work activities that school principals in other European countries do not have to perform. Some of these activities are the same as the manager's work in the company, but some have their own specifics.

Based on a research survey among first-year students of school management, it was found that the most important work activities of the school principal, i.e.

headmaster, which he/she needs for effective school management, include ensuring sufficient qualified pedagogical staff, admitting candidates for education, performing direct pedagogical activities, creating strategic documents, negotiations with legal representatives, founder, social partners, authorities, continuous study of legislation, delegation of work activities to other employees.

Based on a research survey among 2nd year school management students who analysed parts of the results of the international survey Talis 2013 and Talis 2018 concerning the work activities of the school principal and compared them with the work activities of the manager in the company, the following differences were found - the school principal performs direct pedagogical activities, i.e. the activity performed by his subordinates (pedagogical staff). In a company, the manager does not perform the same activity as his subordinates. Another difference is the large administrative burden of the school principal, which the manager does not have to perform in the company, because it is performed by administrative staff. Another difference is the admission of applicants for education and employees to schools, which is done in the company by the personnel department. The school head must communicate with all target groups (founder, staff, pupils, legal representatives, social partners, suppliers, etc.). On the other hand, the school principal and the manager in the company perform the same work activities that result from the managerial function (e.g. planning, organizing, leading, controlling).

The research results support the assumption that the most important competencies of the school principals of the departmental school include communication skills, general overview, ability to delegate tasks to others, self-management, cooperation and the right choice of co-workers and should be systematically implemented in their further education.

The results show that in the job activities of school principals, particular emphasis should be placed on developing cooperation between teachers, human resource management, financial management, providing effective feedback and developing a career development program for teachers.

Of course, the school principal can delegate selected work activities to other staff, but he will always be responsible. In small schools, however, there is often no one to delegate to. Unfortunately, the high level of school autonomy in the Czech Republic is often a problem for school principals, because in practice there are often conflicts with legal regulations that do not correspond to the real situation in education. On the other hand, the school management is often affected by the school principal to a high degree of competence.

From the perspective of future student management, the results of the research support the assumption that students in education management gained experience during their studies during this professional practice. For further research, the author will focus on monitoring the work activities of school principals in the Czech Republic.

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