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POSSIBILITIES OF KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER IN THE PRACTICAL TRAINING OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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Abstract:

Changes in society and rapid technological development are linking professional qualifications with lifelong learning. The ability to respond quickly to changes in the competitive environment depends on knowledge, which is one of the most important types of capital. Knowledge has become an important part of all organisations and determines their success or failure. Its management, development, sharing and use within an organisation is essential for the competitiveness of the organisation. In an organization, it is not possible for one person to perform all the tasks leading to the achievement of the set objectives, so there is delegation. Aspiring school principals are expected to have the same knowledge and skills as their predecessors and to acquire many professional skills in a short period of time. In the preparation of educational leaders, who are not systematically prepared for their profession prior to taking up their posts in the Czech Republic, it is necessary to look for ways to appropriately manage and transfer explicit and tacit knowledge from more experienced school principals to those starting out, using elements of experiential reflective learning. The results show that mostly work activities requiring explicit knowledge are delegated by the school principal to his/her subordinates, while work activities requiring tacit knowledge are mostly carried out by the school principal himself/herself. The research question is: What are the ways in which knowledge can be transferred from experienced principals to students, future school principals, in management practice?

Keywords:

school principal, management practice, transfer, explicit and tacit knowledge

JEL Classification: I20, J24, J29

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1 Introduction

Recently, changes in society and rapid technological development have inherently linked professional qualifications with lifelong learning. Increasingly high demands are being placed on people. Knowledge acquired in formal education can be quickly surpassed. The solution may lie in the development of key competences, which have found their way not only in formal education but also in corporate education. (Belz, 2001) The ability to respond quickly to changes in the competitive environment depends on knowledge, which is one of the most important types of capital. A knowledge worker in an organization is the bearer of know-how and competitive advantage because he/she can apply the acquired knowledge in practice and then share it with others. In a competitive environment, it is necessary to differentiate oneself in some way, i.e. to work better and more efficiently with one's knowledge, which is an asset that the organisation cannot own because it is tied to its bearer, i.e. a person or a group of people. This makes it clear that knowledge cannot be managed in the same way as other assets, because it deals with people and there are limited options for managing them. (Veber, 2014) Knowledge has become an important part of all organizations, it determines their success or failure and its management depends on technological development. For example, P. F. Drucker (2000) mentions in his publications that organizations and individuals will have to figure out what information they need and how to get it, i.e. learn to organize it as a key resource. (Drucker, 2000) A major factor for the success of an organization in the future is the shift towards knowledge management and knowledge-based approach. Knowledge is a powerful tool that changes and evolves every day, so managing it needs special skills. Knowledge is the only resource in an organization that has value. Managing, developing, sharing and exploiting knowledge within an organisation is essential for the competitiveness of the organisation. (Sohrabi & Naghavi, 2014)

Knowledge is defined in two ways. In a narrower sense, it is mainly theoretical knowledge acquired through learning, especially at school; in a broader sense, knowledge consists not only of knowledge but also of skills and abilities to perform certain activities. Knowledge in this sense is sometimes referred to as practical or working knowledge (working knowledge, know-how). It is essential for carrying out various professional and creative activities. (Průcha, Walterová & Mareš, 2013)

Knowledge is classified according to various criteria, but the most well-known division is into explicit and tacit. Explicit knowledge is associated with "know-what" and can be expressed in formal and systematic language, i.e. represented, expressed, written or drawn using data, formulas, manuals. They can take the form of a report, a document, a statistic, a financial statement, etc. and be stored in information systems (databases, filing cabinets, diaries). The main attributes of explicit knowledge are its objectivity and ease of transfer, which can take place either in an impersonal context, i.e. by visualisation through perceptible channels such as documents or computer programs, or in a personal context, such as verbalisation by knowledge workers through their networking competences. Tacit knowledge is generally considered as "know-how" that exists only in people's minds and is not created in any tangible form. They are created by the interaction of an individual's explicit (formalizable) knowledge and experience, skills, intuition, personal ideas, mental models, etc. They are strongly tied to the activities, practices, routines, ideas, values and emotions of a particular person. They are very difficult to express and share. The relationship between the explicit and tacit components of knowledge is important. Too much attention to the explicit component of knowledge can lead to 'analysis paralysis', while too much dependence on the tacit component can lead to an unhealthy dependence on experience and past achievements and to the neglect of new information, ideas and insights. (Armstrong & Taylor, 2015; Gamble, 2020; Mládková, 2005)

Although there are many examples of what might be termed 'pure' tacit or explicit knowledge, there are many cases where this is a 'middle ground'. Within changing organizational structures, people convert tacit knowledge into "simple" explicit knowledge. It is certain that the demarcation line between these typologies of knowledge is subjective in nature, as is disputed in the literature. (Gamble, 2020) The speed of information transfer and the communication and technological advances of today have greatly increased the need to convert tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge and vice versa. Therefore, this issue has forced organizations to try harder to create more tacit knowledge. Experts believe that knowledge and the degree to which it is available are the main factors that distinguish the 21st century from those of the past. (Sohrabi & Naghavi, 2014)

Explicit knowledge is treated as information, where it can be formalised, stored, transmitted, expressed in language, etc., using information systems and technologies. The transfer of tacit knowledge depends mainly on communication and relationships between people. Nonaka and Takeuchi described knowledge creation and proposed a model of knowledge transfer among organizational members (SECI model), which specifies the process of knowledge creation, transfer, acquisition and transformation among organizational members into four processes, which are socialization, externalization, combination and internalization. Socialization is the creation of tacit knowledge based on other tacit knowledge or tacit knowledge of someone else through shared experience. Externalization is the expression of owned tacit knowledge, i.e. the process of articulating tacit knowledge. Combination is the process of combining separate explicit knowledge into a new explicit knowledge that is broader, more systematic, and more complex than the knowledge from which it originated. Internalization is the process of creating tacit knowledge from explicit knowledge, i.e., learning by doing. (Han, 2008)

Knowledge management is a process that helps organizations find, select, organize, disseminate, and transfer relevant information and expertise needed for problem solving, dynamic learning, strategic planning, and decision making. (Gupta, Iyer, & Aronson, 2000) The term "knowledge management" (KM) emerged as a consequence of the continuous storage, exchange, use and optimal acquisition of knowledge in society. (Stemberkova et al., 2020) Knowledge management is a process of organizational practices involving the sharing, storing, retrieving and transferring of knowledge held by individuals and groups in their daily work. (Cheng et al., 2016) The dynamism and multidimensionality of knowledge as a strategic resource of an organization is associated with its transformations among individuals and groups of the organization as well as its environment. These transformations are related to knowledge transformation, which includes tacit and explicit knowledge as well as overall organizational knowledge transfer. The above transformations and their effectiveness condition the transformation of knowledge resources into intellectual capital, the management of which is based on identification, measurement, exploitation and development. The issue of knowledge transformation and transfer combines the issues of knowledge management and intellectual capital management. Thus, it can be assumed that the transformation streams within knowledge-based intellectual capital combine the dimensions of intellectual capital and their management with the individual elements of knowledge management. (Sokolowska-Durkalec, 2020)

Managing knowledge in an organisation means ensuring that it is transferred so that it can be used effectively. Knowledge management becomes paramount when the organization's goal is to prevent and respond strategically to unexpected events. (Shaw et al., 2007) In the case of schools, it is the application of experiential reflective learning, first explicitly used as a concept by J. A. Moon, although many representatives (e.g. Dewey, Kolb, Korthagen, Argyris and Schön) claim its history. (Kolar, 2013; Han, 2008) Schools have the responsibility of creating, managing and administering knowledge while providing key services. They are among the knowledge-intensive organizations in which intangible resources important for the development

of society are developed. (Quarchioni et al., 2020; Becerra – Fernandez & Sabherwal, 2001; Earl, 2001) Schools are focused on their intellectual capital, i.e. their human, structural and relational capital (Bornemann & Wiedenhofer, 2014; Massaro et al., 2015). The human capital in a school is made up of teachers, principal and other staff. Their competencies and experience are important not only for education but also for collaboration, decision-making and problem solving. (Kelly, 2004)

Experiential learning is learning that takes place through everyday work and other activities in which an individual acquires experiences that are accumulated and used in various ways (consciously and unconsciously). Thus, experiential learning has an important role in the creation of human knowledge and understanding. (Průcha & Veteška, 2014) Elements of experiential learning can already be found in the work of Jan Amos Comenius, who mentions in *Didactics* the great fact that a person remembers events that he himself has seen/experienced better than if he has only heard about them. (Komenský, 1930)

In schools, the focus is on linking the theoretical knowledge taught in the curriculum and applied in school practice. Aspiring school principals are expected to have the same knowledge and skills as their predecessors and to acquire many professional skills in a short time. Often, leaders are expected to provide support to colleagues while they themselves are affected by day-to-day problems. Aspiring principals receive guidance and knowledge, protection and social-emotional support from an experienced person as they progress in their careers. Mentoring can therefore be beneficial to the preparation of aspiring school principals. (van Jaarsveld, Mentz & Challens, 2015) In England, various measures are being developed to develop school leaders, including mentoring programmes for both aspiring and future leaders. (Bush, 2011)

Mentoring can be used as a problem-solving approach for aspiring principals whose support is critical to school improvement. Mentoring is an absolutely essential part of socialisation and professional development, whether in the pre-start, induction or professional development phase for school leaders. (Daresh, 2004; Boerema, 2011) School leaders must strike a balance between the external and internal demands that represent the pressures of the system on the school. This reinforces the need for principals to understand how the system works and what influences the context of their school, teaching and learning, staff, students, etc. Without experience, school principals tend to interpret the demands of the system as obstacles rather than opportunities. In contrast, experienced principals do not 'waste time' negotiating upwards. Mentors, as experienced school principals, therefore need to understand how to deal with these system pressures. (Aravena, 2018)

In an organization, it is not possible for one person to perform all the tasks leading to the achievement of set goals. It is also not possible for one person to have all the decision-making authority, as it is proven that one manager can lead a limited number of people. (Wehrich & Koontz, 1993) Veber defines delegation as the assignment or delegation of a defined scope of authority and responsibility to another person, usually a subordinate. (Veber, 2014) The person delegating the work remains responsible for the outcome of the delegated task and delegation is sometimes used in an unplanned and unsystematic way. (Makanatlung & White, 2016)

Coaching is one of the methods of personal development applied in adult education. It is one of the forms of individual development, which aims to develop the potential of the coachee and change his/her attitude. It is suitable for those who want to work on themselves and have intrinsic motivation. (Svobodová, 2015) Executive coaching in education is an even more recent phenomenon. (Wise et al., 2017) A number of research studies state that coaching supports leadership development, the development of educational leaders and principals. (van Nieuwerburgh et al., 2020). Coaching can also help school leaders to improve their leadership

and thereby improve the school. Coaching can respond directly to the needs of the principal and enhance their skills and ability to solve the complex problems they face on a daily basis. (Goff et al., 2014) During the coaching process, the coachee reflects on their experiences as a leader and develops their own perspective on what it means to be a leader as well as the ways in which they will apply their skills and abilities in leadership. (Lackritz, Tseh, & Wise, 2019)

In the preparation of educational leaders, who are not systematically prepared for their profession in the Czech Republic prior to taking up their posts, it is necessary to look for ways of appropriate management and transfer of knowledge from more experienced school principals to new ones using elements of experiential reflective learning. At the Faculty of Education of Charles University, this is done in the practical training of students of the School Management programme at departmental schools. Principals of departmental schools transfer their knowledge and experience to students, future principals, using various knowledge sharing tools. In the case of explicit knowledge transfer, they mainly use different document templates. For tacit knowledge transfer, they mainly use stories (describing relationships between workers, management activities, events in the organisation, etc.) and apprenticeships (based on division of labour and defined skills, sharing non-verbal practical personal experience - coaching, mentoring, delegating).

2 Goal and Method

The paper focuses on the possibilities of transferring knowledge and experience with selected work activities of a secondary school principal in the Czech Republic to students preparing to become school principals.

The achievement of the objective is based on the analysis of data available in the literature and journals focused on the work activities of managers and the results of a research survey conducted among school principals and students of the School Management programme.

The questionnaire included 250 work activities and was sent electronically in spring 2021 to departmental high school principals (11) and students in the School Management program (45). The return rate was 100%. This paper defines, through an analysis of the results of the questionnaire survey, the part of the research investigation concerning the transferability of selected work activities of secondary school principals as part of the practical training of the School Management degree programme.

The methodology of the analysis is based on the results of a questionnaire survey with 6 closed questions and 3 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

On the basis of a research survey conducted among principals of departmental secondary schools in the Czech Republic and students of the School Management study programme, selected work activities were analysed and the possibilities of their transfer (handover) by principals of departmental schools to students on management practice within practical training were identified.

The results of a questionnaire survey conducted in the spring of 2021 among 11 departmental high school principals and 45 students in the School Management program point to those activities that can be conveyed through documents (explicit knowledge) and through years of experience as a school principal (tacit knowledge).

In the case of the method of transferring (transferring) the activity to the students at the management practice, the principals of the departmental secondary schools and the students chose one of the following options: interpretation – a sample document - a demonstration, or they chose the option that the activity could not be transferred to the practice. The tables show only the options for the method of transfer, the missing number up to 100% represents the choice that the activity cannot be transferred to the placement.

Table 1 Opinions of departmental school principals (SCHOOLS) and students (STUDENTS) on how explicit knowledge is transferred in management practice:

WHO AND HOW TO HAND OVER	ALONE/ DELEGATES (%)	INTERPRETION (%)	A MODEL DOCUMENT (%)	SHOW (%)
WORK ACTIVITIES				
develops and updates the school curriculum (SCHOOLS)	27/73	18	64	18
develops and updates the school curriculum (STUDENTS)	36/64	22	51	14
prepares an annual report on the activities and management of the school (SCHOOLS)	18/82	18	73	9
prepares an annual report on the activities and management of the school (STUDENTS)	64/36	5	82	11
evaluates the educational process (SCHOOLS)	45/55	27	64	9
evaluates the educational process (STUDENTS)	51/49	33	51	9

Source: Author results

The school curriculum belongs to the compulsory pedagogical documentation resulting from Section 28 of the Education Act and every secondary school must have it. It is a joint work of all teaching staff of the school and its preparation is mostly delegated by the school principal (73 and 64% respectively). School principals (64%) and students (51%) agreed that this activity can be conveyed in management practice most often by a model document, then by interpretation (18 and 22% respectively), but also by demonstration (18 and 14% respectively). This is a public document that must be available to anyone in the school. Some schools even publish it on their website, so it should also be available to students in management practice and accompanied by a comment from the school principal.

The annual report is a public document that must be accessible in the school and contains an overview of the school's activities for the past school year. According to the school principals, its production is most often delegated by the school principal (82%). According to 64% of the students, the annual report is most often prepared and updated by the school principal himself. Its formalities are determined by Decree No. 15/2005 Coll. laying down the formalities of long-term plans and annual reports, as amended. This clearly shows that the appropriate way of conveying this activity to the practice is to provide a model document, according to both school principals (73%) and students (82%). In the case of the school principals, this was further supplemented by an explanation (18%).

The evaluation of the educational process (e.g. in the form of hospitalizations) is related to the school's own evaluation, which, according to the principals of departmental schools, is most often delegated by the school principal (55%). According to 51% of the students, the principal of the school most often evaluates the educational process himself/herself. Regarding the way this activity is handed over to the students in practice, the principals of the departmental schools stated that the most appropriate way of handing over is by a model document (64%), which is also thought by the students (51%). This is the completion of a hospitality record that students can use in their own practice. The second method of handover that both principals (27%) and students (33%) agreed on is by interpretation (Table 1).

Table 2 Opinions of departmental school principals (SCHOOLS) and students (STUDENTS) on how tacit knowledge is transferred in management practice:

WHO AND HOW TO HAND OVER	ALONE/ DELEGATES (%)	INTERPRETION (%)	A MODEL DOCUMENT (%)	SHOW (%)
WORK ACTIVITIES manages the school as an institution (SCHOOLS)	64/36	64	0	18
manages the school as an institution (STUDENTS)	91/9	71	0	11
resolves conflicts between employees (SCHOOLS)	82/18	46	0	18
resolves conflicts between employees (STUDENTS)	91/9	73	0	9
actively seeks grant and other funding opportunities (SCHOOLS)	55/45	82	0	9
actively seeks grant and other funding opportunities (STUDENTS)	47/53	78	6	7

Source: Author results

According to both departmental school principals and students, the principal manages the school as an institution most often alone (64% and 91% respectively), therefore, in the case of transferring experience with this activity, departmental school principals are the most competent persons who can bring students closer to the reality of the management of the institution, which they most often do at the management practice by explanation (64%) or demonstration (18%). Interpretation is a description of the processes that a school principal has to deal with on a daily basis, which are of a different nature and different every day, and their solution requires a certain knowledge and a lot of experience. In the case of a demonstration, an understanding of school management can be gained through a guided tour of the school, where students can experience for themselves the operational solutions to the situations they encounter at the time. The students agreed with the departmental school principals that the most common way of conveying this activity is through explanation (71%) or demonstration (11%). This is due to the fact that due to the low time allocation of management practice there is currently not enough space for other ways of delivery.

Communicating with people is a basic activity of every manager. In a school it is all the more challenging because it takes place between different target groups (employees, legal representatives, the principal, social partners, authorities, suppliers, etc.). The school principal as manager must set up optimal communication processes in the school. Working with people in the organisation can bring conflicts between employees, which are mostly solved by the principal himself (82 and 91% respectively). Both groups of respondents agreed on the most appropriate way of transferring this activity to the practice, namely through interpretation (46% of departmental school principals, 73% of students).

In addition to the financial resources obtained from the state and the founder, the school principal tries to obtain secondary sources of funding. The acquisition of additional financial resources is related to the active search for grants and other financial opportunities. According to the principals of departmental schools, this activity is mostly carried out by the school principal himself (55%). According to the students, this activity is most often delegated by the principal (53%). Both departmental school principals (82%) and students (78%) agreed that this activity can most often be delegated through interpretation (Table 2).

4 Conclusion

The paper summarizes examples of the transfer of selected explicit and tacit knowledge of secondary school principals in the Czech Republic to students, future principals who are still preparing for their position. The results of a questionnaire survey focused on the analysis of selected work activities of secondary school principals show that mostly work activities requiring explicit knowledge are delegated by the school principal to his/her subordinates.

In management practice, this explicit knowledge, especially regarding the creation of important documents, is most often conveyed by providing a template of the document, which students can then apply in their future role as a school principal. Often it is important to complement this method of delivery with an explanation, i.e. a commentary on how to create the documents or to obtain templates.

The work activities requiring tacit knowledge are very much linked to the experience of school principals gained from their long experience in managing such an organization, so they occur only in their heads, which is why they are most often performed by the school principal himself and their transfer to managerial practice is possible, as the survey results show, most often by interpretation.

In conclusion, the transfer of work activities requiring explicit knowledge is easier to pass on to students in management practice because this knowledge is evidenced by documents that can be provided to students as a model. In the case of work activities requiring tacit knowledge, the transfer is more difficult in management practice because the knowledge and experience that are transferred are in the heads of school principals, so the transfer occurs through interpretation, which makes it impossible to consolidate the knowledge well. The work activities identified by the research investigation (250) will be analysed and grouped according to whether explicit or tacit knowledge is transferred and will be the subject of further research.

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