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Leadership competencies for project based school management success

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Abstract

Manager's leadership style influences the performances of every organization, process, activity or project. In the past 10 years, in Romania, the educational system faced important changes beginning with the decentralization, the transformation of schools into self-managing systems, continuing with stakeholder's implication in school management and the development of international project cooperation. In Romania, project based school management is a new concept for many schools, but in some institutions the manager's proactive attitude and vision settled the premises of a project-management culture. Our article examines the leadership competencies required for a successful project based school management. The analysis is based on the findings of a research conducted at regional level on a representative sample of secondary school teachers. Our research describes school teacher's opinion using a structured questionnaire approach together with constructed conversation with participants. The research involved 96 teachers from six schools. The schools involved in the research are developing an academic program based on technical or services education and the teachers included in the sample were coordinators or members in an international project team. The findings generated from our research emphasize that school principals need to improve the empowering procedure, to develop their vision and the ability to foresee the impact of changes.

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1. Introduction

Project management is common for many industries in different ways, from large infrastructure projects, to small-scale projects. Nowadays, more institutions are regarding project management as being mandatory for their survival and all the organizations that were opponents to project management are now advocates (Kerzner, 2013). In the educational sector, scholars, government experts and international organizations are searching for the best

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alternatives to improve the educational system and the projects as a constant preoccupation for the school management may represent an opportunity to overcome some major concerns like financing, curriculum and stakeholders implication (Ciobanu, 2013).

As stated by Rondinelli, since 1990 projects have been an “important tool for schools managers interested to increase training and improve the skills of young people and also an important tool for the Government and other local authorities in the process of reform and decentralization implementation” (Rondinelli, 1990).

In the educational system there can be encountered different project categories. All the extracurricular activities can be considered projects because all the requirements of a project are met. The Project Management Institute established the following characteristics for a project:

- a project is temporary meaning that it has a defined beginning and end in time, and therefore defined scope and resources.
- a project is unique that it is not a routine operation, but a specific set of operations designed to accomplish a singular goal. So a project team often includes people who don't usually work together – sometimes from different organizations and across multiple geographies.

Some examples of complex projects developed in the educational system are: the curriculum project for designing curricula and materials, the educational project for the development of student's competencies and the institutional development project as a strategic tool for manager's educational policy. Other distinctive categories are the international projects in cooperation with an international organization and the public-private partnership projects for infrastructure development.

The need to work constantly and simultaneously with an increasing number of projects created the circumstances of a new management system, of adopting new techniques, using new tools, reorganize the activities. The specialists described a new type of organization called project-oriented organization. In those institutions a project is considered a strategic option for the organizational design (Gareis and Huemann, 2000). Every school manager should try to attain in his institution high quality activities, efficiency in the decision making process, equity for employees and learners, internationalization for project schools.

2. Leadership and project based school management in Romania

In Romania, the European integration, but also the pre-accession measures allowed teachers to get involved in complex international projects. These projects contributed to teacher's skills improvement and qualification, to increase educational mobility, to develop student's dialogue skills, to foster cooperation and dialogue, to engage in intercultural exchange.

In 2011, as the educational system education moved to decentralization the principal's role became more and more demanding. They are expected to comprehend and interpret the national curriculum guidelines and to provide the necessary leadership for motivating and empowering their teachers, but also to increased personal responsibility as pedagogical leaders.

Moller mentioned in his researches that school leaders are increasingly experiencing a work environment in which contracting, outsourcing, public relations, benchmarking and test scores are taking center stage. Managers are fighting unpredictability, lots of uncertainty, deregulation and managerial accountability. Standards have become almost like a mantra for school reformers and increasingly, in many countries, there is a trend towards developing a culture of performativity (Moller, 2012).

Lifelong learning is considered the key of the social and individual development, therefore an increasing number of countries have included lifelong learning as a goal in their political agenda. The European cooperation concerning Lifelong learning is sustained by the European Commission through programmes as Comenius, Leonardo, Erasmus, Grundtvig, etc.

There are also other types of projects and programmes in the educational sector such as: the Academy of Central European Schools Programmes, the Sectorial Operational Programme Human Resources Development financed from the European Social Fund, “START” – Danube Region Project Fund, etc.

We chose to analyze data related to the Lifelong Learning Programme due to its wider distribution in national public schools and the budget allocation. LLP contributes to policy cooperation, innovation, learner mobility and social and work integration. The evolution of the budget allocation for international projects in Romania, under the Lifelong Learning Programme is presented in *Table 1*:

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