



## Central European Cooperation for School Leadership

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### Abstract

*The Conference presentation will be about the results of a Central European project having been implemented in the countries of Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia in the coordination of Tempus Public Foundation, Hungary in the framework of Central European Cooperation for Education established among ministries responsible for education in the given countries. The cooperation started in 2008, when partners chose to deal with the situation and improvement of school leadership in the given states based on the results of the OECD Report: Leadership for Learning. The outcome of the first year's programme was a regional synthesis document ([The Role of School Leadership in the Improvement of Learning](#)) based on country reports by experts. It identifies regional conclusions and policy recommendations for decision makers. In 2009 and 2010 with the coordination of TPF the project was continued with the result of exchange of national experiences on the situation of school leadership, conducting an international research on leadership competencies from the school leaders' and decision makers' perspective in the partner countries. The partners from the countries involved are institutions, government organizations and universities responsible for the development of educational leadership and are actively supported by the ministries of education. The results are available on the [project's website](#). As the project goals are in tune with ET 2020 benchmarks, moreover the necessity of this issue is presently on the EU agenda, with the continuous support of the European Commission the project activities will go on for two more years until 2012 with the involvement of a Swedish University as a best-practice example. The project intends to reach the following goals: peer-review on international processes among partners from the region from a best-performing country, involvement of the research results in partners' own training programmes for school leaders and different methods to be developed by the partners for the assessment of competencies.*

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Description of Tempus Public Foundation

Tempus Public Foundation (TPF) is a non-profit organization established in 1996 by the Hungarian Government, with the task of coordinating the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Union in Hungary. TPF is intensively involved in international activities as well, in order to encourage foreign institutions to cooperate with Hungarian partners on the one hand, and to have the achievements spread on European level.

In 2008 a Knowledge Centre Unit was established at the Foundation in order to structure, coordinate and disseminate the experiences gained in operating the Programme in the past years, moreover, it plays an important role in implementing the Education and Training 2020 Strategic Framework in Hungary according to the Hungarian National Lifelong Learning Strategy. The Knowledge Centre also functions as an adult training unit, since it develops and regularly implements adult education courses and trainings. The courses are tailored to the learners' specific needs and focus on competence development. The Unit is responsible for the implementation of the above mentioned project on school leadership.



## 1.2 Central European Cooperation for Education

Central European Cooperation for Education is an international cooperation institutionalized in 1997 and renewed in 2007 among Ministries responsible for education in the countries of Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia. In the framework of the initiative the Ministries devoted themselves for the support of implementing international projects in the field of education in tune with the strategic goals of the European Commission. As one of the main results, an international project was started with the coordination of Tempus Public Foundation involving partners from the mentioned Central European countries with the title *The Role of School Leadership in Creating a Learning Environment that is Conducive to Effective Learning with Special Regard to the Improvement of the Quality of Teacher Activity.*

The selected partners were delegated by the ministries: they are universities and public institutions specialized on research and adult training in education from the partner countries. They are the following: the Department of Teacher Education and School Research from the University of Innsbruck, Austria and the host of [Leadership Academy](#) a well-known training programme for school leaders with an international reputation, the [National Pedagogical Institute for Further Education](#) (Continuing Professional Development) from the Czech Republic, from Slovakia [the Lifelong Learning Division of the Ministry of Education](#) involving experts from the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, the Methodical-Pedagogical Centre of Banska Bystrica, and last but not least from Slovenia the [National School for Leadership in Education](#) was selected as a partner. The co-ordinator was the Knowledge Management Centre of the [Tempus Public Foundation](#).

## 2. Main activities

### 2.1 Project activities in 2008-2009

The project already mentioned was the result of the partners' decision to deal with the situation and improvement of school leadership in the region. The reason for it was the rapidly-growing, international interest towards the issue based on international research results such as the OECD Report: Improving School Leadership (2008) which claims that school leadership has a significant result on teacher's motivation and on the quality of education. The outcome of the first project round was a regional synthesis document based on country reports developed by the selected experts from the participating countries. The summary, already mentioned above, identifies regional conclusions and policy recommendations for policy and decision-makers at both country and EU level.

### 2.2 Main conclusions of the synthesis report

The results of the synthesis report [1] revealed some common characteristics and basic differences in legislation, educational culture and school leadership practices in the five countries. Starting with the basic expression, "school leadership" as the common topic of the project; experts found it difficult to find an equivalent word in their own language. The terminological distinction between "leadership", "management" and "administration" as basic duties of school leaders is not always easy and the translation of the terms to national languages was sometimes contradictory. Setting a common ground in a terminological sense was thus a crucial issue before any further common steps could be taken in the project.

As common characteristics of four of the five partner countries, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia went through radical, political and social transformation in the last two decades resulting in legislative and institutional changes in public education. Schools have become more independent from the state, brought about by significant changes in the position of school leaders, resulting in a thorough transformation in administrative, managerial and leadership-related tasks. In state administration, Austria has the most centralized system, where the federal and regional levels have a strong position. [2] Therefore, Austrian schools have a rather weak position in personnel and resource management compared to the other four countries, which are more independent. Due to reforms in legislation, expectations are also changing towards school leaders placing them in a more



autonomous position with defining specific qualifications, competencies, tasks and duties required from them.

As for strategic development programmes at national level, according to the country studies finalized in the project leadership development is present in different national strategies in all countries. In the case of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia the national development plans financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) have explicit references to school leadership. Compared to the past, however, the implementation of these plans has not been sufficient to improve significantly the position of school leadership in the countries and the situation has not changed to an extent which would be satisfactory for the purpose of the project.

The sharing of leadership functions is a relatively new but growing trend [3] distributing different tasks among different 'leaders' in the school eliminating the situation when all responsibility and burden related to leading/managing the school lies on the shoulders of only one person. In CECE countries in the most difficult situation the Austrian school leaders are being 'lonely fighters' [4] as shared leadership is hardly possible due to strict regulations on the matter. By contrast, the Leadership Academy at the University of Innsbruck (the largest and most prestigious training institution for school leaders in Austria) places great emphasis on distributing leadership functions, promoting team work and co-operation among members of the school management group. Hopefully, the ideology and sound results will lead to future legislative changes on the topic in Austria. In the other four countries, legislation enables wider distribution of leadership and management tasks; thus, its practice is more widespread.

As for the qualification of school heads, Hungary is in a special situation, where there is no compulsory training which future leaders have to attend before appointment. Certain universities do, however, offer special courses for would-be school leaders. Individual training providers also offer a variety of short-term training courses; some of them specifically targeted to school leaders. The efficiency of such, accredited training courses (usually 30-hours-long) is still questionable compared to longer training programmes - including mentoring and supervision on a long-term basis, such as at the Leadership Academy in Austria. In the other four countries, preparation of school heads is the responsibility of either the Ministry of Education, which may delegate the task to a methodological centre, such as in Slovakia, or to a national institute specially devoted to teacher and school head training, like in the case of the Czech Republic or Slovenia.

As a general conclusion from the country reports, the present state of school leadership in the partner countries needs further improvement in the near future through legislative reforms with stronger co-operation of decision-makers in different fields and at different levels. Comprehensive development and action plans, initiatives on national, regional and local level to support the position of leaders in public education offering continuous professional development, more effective training, higher remuneration, placing larger emphasis on selection and assessment besides as well as more research on the issue both on national and international level for evidence-based results in the leaders' impact on the motivation of teachers' and students' outcomes are all needed.

### **2.3 Competency framework for school leaders**

Although duties, responsibilities and tasks expected from school leaders are stated in legislative documents in all five countries, little or no mention is made of the competencies they need to possess in order to fulfil their position effectively. Without national standards on the competencies of school leaders, however, it is very difficult to reach the set goals of strengthening their position and carrying out appropriate recruitment, selection and assessment of candidates applying for school leader's roles. As a common result, there are no existing competency standards generally applied on national level up to date with the strong exception of Slovakia, where a set of national standards of school leaders is being finalized presently for future application. In the case of the other countries, there are no such plans<sup>1</sup> or there is a public debate going on related to the possible introduction of national standards.

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<sup>1</sup> In Hungary there are no official plans to set national standards for school leaders, they are available only in non-compulsory training programmes. Though there are some initiatives for using self-developed standards on a local level for the recruitment of school leaders as is presented in one of the Hungarian case studies.



Thus, as a significant result of the national reports of 2008-2009<sup>2</sup>, there is a strong need for national standards setting competencies necessary for efficient school leaders. Therefore, partners involved in the CECE initiative decided to implement a new project in 2010 (*School Leadership for Effective Learning*) with the aim of conducting international research on the expectations of school leaders' competencies in the five countries, involving decision-makers and school leaders. The results of the research are compiled in a common publication in order to set possible future trails for policy-makers and decision-makers for reform in the standardization of school leaders' competencies in the five countries.

#### **2.4 The main results of the international research on school leaders' competencies**

The main part of the research was a questionnaire survey to collect information regarding expectations from leaders. The answers supported the finalization of the competence structure initially developed by the experts participating in the project based on national workshops for school leaders and decision makers and to provide a basis for understanding what further steps are necessary to take for translating these expectations into everyday practice so that it can have an influence on leader selection, training and further training. The questionnaire focused on the following nine main areas:

1. Developing a strategy
2. Leading the processes of teaching and learning
3. The management and development of the school as an organisation
4. Management of organisational resources, human resources development, directing colleagues
5. Supporting transparency, taking responsibility, being committed to quality
6. Positive view of life, optimism
7. Ethical operation, the moral aspect of leadership
8. Leadership competencies, personal characteristics
9. Partnership: co-operation, contact-making and building networks

The target group of the questionnaire survey consisted of active directors (head teachers) and wherever there were opportunity decision-makers. The planned sample size was defined by the individual countries. Typically, in the case of directors, it was between 30 and 200; while in the case of decision-makers it was between 10 and 50. The number of respondents in all countries was sufficient to provide us with the possibility of statistical analysis and to draw up competency profiles. Altogether 20% of the respondents' were decision makers, which is a relatively good result.

It was the researchers' initial intention to select a method for measuring behaviour on different levels besides providing information on where development is needed. In order to set up the national competency profiles for school leaders the Role Diagrammatic Approach [5] method was used. RDA is a model for describing human behaviour based on the holistic view of people. It does not only focus on effective but also ineffective behaviour. The RDA includes more than 30.000 words and expressions to characterise behaviour by developing a profile for the characterised person. The model has three dimensions and eight axes as described in the figure below.

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<sup>2</sup> Results of the project *The Role of School Leadership in Creating a Learning Environment that is Conducive to Effective Learning with Special Regard to the Improvement of the Quality of Teacher Activity*

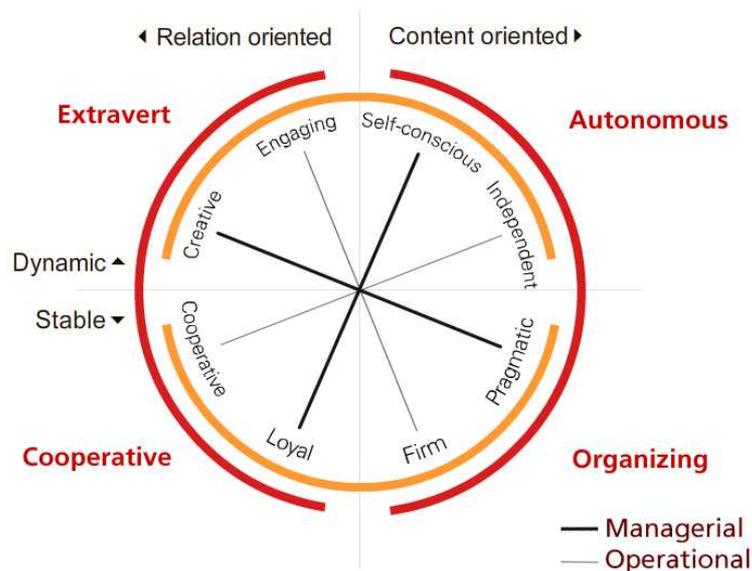


Figure 1: RDA axes

After analyzing the samples, researchers found that there are characteristic differences in the respondents' answers, which is partly due to the differences in the legal, administrative background of the given states despite of the fact that they are neighbour countries. The most important result is the strong managerial and organizational skills respondents find important in the case of a head teacher in all countries with special regard to their ability to focus on the priorities of all tasks. Slovene and Hungarian respondents found managerial skills the most important contrary to operational skills; the Czech sample shows a strong need for the balanced operation of the institution, while the Slovakian and Austrian respondents find operative competencies a priority.

Cooperative skills are also considered very important in all countries with special regard to being able to create and operate a team of colleagues besides building effective partnerships with all interested stakeholders of the system. The latter was the most significant in the Austrian sample. Independence and the ability for individual work is the most important in the Slovakian and Czech profile compared to the others, meaning that respondents find autonomy and individual working style the most important.

Based on the results of the questionnaire, and national workshops organized in the countries for school leaders and decision makers a leaders' profile was developed for all participating countries. The summary of the methodology applied in the research, project activities and the results together with three case studies from each country on school leaders' competencies are included in the final project publication, which will be available in 2011 in electronic format published by Tempus Public Foundation.

### 3. Future plans

As the project goals are in tune with ET 2020 benchmarks, moreover the necessity of this issue is presently on the EU agenda, with the continuous support of the European Commission the project activities will go on for 2 more years in 2011 and 2012 with the involvement of the University of Uppsala from Sweden as a best-practice example. Peer review processes will also be applied in order to learn from each other through study visits and international workshops. As a consequence, the mutually-developed competency framework will be integrated to the national training programmes of the partners since most are actively involved the training of head teachers at a national level. Besides the adaptation process, different methods will be developed for the effective assessment of competencies based on the results of the common competency framework. The results of the 2010 year are available on the [project's website](#).



At the Conference 'The Future of Education' to be held in Italy 2011 we intend to present the available results of the international cooperation with special regard to the results of the international research conducted in 2010.

## References

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