Promoting the Entrepreneurial Competencies for School Leadership Development

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Abstract

The article presents the context and characteristics of an international project about understanding the needs of the school leaders and designing training strategies in the field of leadership that could practically meet their expectations and those of their co-workers.

This project deals with the challenges of creating strong bridges between the business environment and the education field, by assessing the successful entrepreneurial competencies from the private world and adapting and transferring them to the school organizations.

We believe that is in the best interest of the society to pay attention to the competencies required from the schools leadership teams and to assure that appropriate research and training packages are offered in supporting them to continuously develop and, consequently, to create the premises for high performances.

Keywords: *school leadership, education, entrepreneurship, Erasmus plus, international project*

JEL classification: I21, I25, M12, M14

1. The leadership and the organizational changes

The evolution of organizations, regardless of their size or of their field of activity is related to a large extent to their leadership. Even if sometimes, this could be perceived as a topic that could be odd or over debated, the researchers and practitioners agree that there is still a large room in what concerns the understanding and the possibilities to develop the leadership capabilities within organizations, as a critical factor for their success.

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We could notice that today's environment is one that is subject to numberless changes, with many constituents changing to different, but faster paces, placing many pressures on organizations to adapt to the new conditions (Green, 2007).

The technology, the demography, the ITC, the mobility of resources a.s.o. are only few examples of the factors that determine the need for organizations to continuously scrutinize and react to what happens in their business environment.

But when we talk about organizational changes, we have to take into consideration first, the most important resource within, that is the human capital.

The number of people, their education, the motivation and their perspectives are only few variables that influence their attitudes and behavior related to change and the way that they perceive and commit to the organizations' objectives (Petrescu, 2010).

At the same time we must pay attention to the people who have a lot of influence in the organization and determine the choice of the people for certain ways. We refer to the leaders, to their personal traits, their interpersonal relations and behaviors.

For an organization to be successful, it must exist a strong connection among the leaders and their followers, or better said, their co-workers. It is important the manner in which the rulers can embark in the leadership process the personnel from organization in order to reach the established objectives (Năstase, 2010).

It is clear that we talk about a managerial process, but also about a social process, where all the people within an organization is attracted and determined to participate to elaboration and implementation of the organization's strategy.

We could highlight the impact of such a participative approach, which contributes not only to a smooth process in elaboration and implementation of an organization's strategy, but it helps to develop the human resources, both in professional and personal fields (Porter, 1996).

This is for sure a way in which the leaders should treat their counterparts, moving from an individualistic approach to a collectivist one. It is a kind of social awareness that help them to create a relational and open context where the human resources can manifest in their depth.

What is of high interest for both researchers and practitioners is the way in which the leaders can impact the functionality and results of the organization. And leaving from here, it is important to highlight those competencies that can be taught and developed in order to assure the highest probability for them to reach the established targets.

2. The leadership within the schools

The schools are special organizations having in mind their constructive and functional characteristics, but also their impact on the society's evolution. It also deals with a lot of emotions as one of the main stakeholders are represented by the

pupils, by children with a lot of aspirations and who are struggling to shape their personality, but also to establish their path for life.

In this context, the leaders' mission for offering a learning environment, for showing continuously support for the children to make that their dreams to come true, proves to be a priority for their decisions and behavior (Koter, 2007).

However, the information about school leadership is perceived sometimes to be pretty scarce, lacking important studies and findings about what could be a successful kit for the educational leaders.

Different research show a wide range of approaches in managing the schools, in determining the professors to have certain conducts, to bring more stakeholders close to the schools, with the open goal of getting better support for a top quality education.

One major key for effective leadership is to succeed to decentralize the management system within the schools and to motivate professors as well as the non-didactic personnel to embrace the values promoted by the leading team.

An important role goes to the head teacher who must find the levers for getting the results through people, by creating a good organizational structure and an attractive working climate (Strategic framework – Education & Training 2020).

A good school leader will not underestimate the needs of his co-workers for recognition and achievement and will offer them the opportunity to be proud of their results and will link them to different motivators.

We consider that there is vital the connections among leaders and the human resources as in a more decentralized education system, the responsibility goes more and more to the organization level.

So, it is necessary to be able to build up a strong entrepreneurial spirit throughout the school, in order to meet the new and diversified challenges that the educational units face under the new conditions.

These are predictable phenomena and the leaders should take measures in order to prepare their human resources to work with a wider category of stakeholders and in new conditions (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2006).

Interacting on different coordinates with pupils, parents, public administration, business people etc. could require some guidance from the top level, at least in the first decisions and actions.

Sometimes, we can perceive a tendency to overlook or to underestimate the people concerns related to how they could best fulfil their tasks, what changes could occur in their job descriptions, or what additional knowledge and efforts are necessary to get their work done properly.

In such transformational process from a centralized to a decentralized system, the leaders shouldn't look with suspicion to the people who don't do right their activities or tasks from the first time (Radu, 2009).

It is rather a sign that more effort should be put on making the people to understand the changes are taking place, the characteristics of the new management

system, their role within this mechanism and the fact that they could apply all the time for support from their leaders and colleagues.

Of course that the leaders should also encourage the human resources to combine the individual learning with a collective one, by sharing the knowledge and experiences. It is a matter of job description, but also of a personal initiative and responsibility, aspects that can be fostered by the leaders through open communication.

We would like to emphasize here an important source of learning that is of high impact for professors, but it could also be used to a large extent in their classes, with the pupils of different ages (Winer, 2009).

We refer here to making mistakes and the way that they are treated. It is important to remind this subject because when we speak about changes and management of change in turbulent or dynamic environments, we face many times this phenomenon (McDonald, 2000).

Punishing the mistakes, blaming the people who committed such deeds will determine only a climate of tension, fears and avoiding risks. We'll not be surprised to notice that nobody is going to have initiatives or take responsibilities!

Instead of this, especially as we talk about the schools, the leaders should treat them as real sources of learning and improvements. The exploitations of such events will develop the people confidence in their leaders, will help them to progress, but they will also support the development of ethical approaches, with human resources being more open and responsible (Witzel, 2012).

3. The Erasmus plus project: "Entrepreneurial Competences for School Leadership Teams"

The "Entrepreneurial Competences for School Leadership Teams" is an international project that focuses on the evaluation of the how the leaders lead their schools and what are their needs in a more decentralized educational system where they are asked to act in an entrepreneurial way (Năstase, Hotâran, 2011).

The studies of effective management in private sector and the comparison with educational system are not false approaches or lines of actions! It is important to recognize the value of first-hand knowledge from the industrial world and their applicability to different organizations, including the schools!

Of course, we must take into account their particularities, the constraints as well as their perspectives. The assessment of the real needs for school leadership is not simple, but request time, resources and clear methodologies (Smith, 2011).

The paper outlines the coordinates for implementing an international project within the educational field, having as main goal the modernization of school management by taking into consideration the manifested leadership at different hierarchical levels.

This international project has been designed and carried out within the Erasmus+ program, by a consortium made from the next organizations: University Of Newcastle Upon Tyne from Great Britain, edEUcation Ltd from Great Britain,

Univerza Na Primorskem Universita Del Litorale from Slovenia, Bucharest University of Economis Studies from Romania, European School Heads Association from Netherlands.

Having in mind the practical approach that the project has, four schools from primary and secondary education from each partner countries from the consortium have been involved in the project implementation, each school having its own change project that focused on a real issue.

In project implementation a special methodology has been debated, approved and used in order to take advantage of the experience and capabilities of this international consortium (Teece, 2000).

We are talking about the 'professional enquiry', an iterative approach that includes not only the school leaders, but practically bring together all or the most important stakeholders of a school.

Based on these investigations and results obtained by the international partners and the schools involved, it was created a training package in four fields of activity that the project team considered to be of the highest impact for the school leadership.

The entrepreneurial competencies assessed in the business field and prepared to be transferred to the educational field at the level of school leadership focused on four main areas: Strategic Thinking & Visioning, Team Building, Personnel Management & Development, Communication & Negotiation Skills, Financial resources mobilization & Optimization.

These fields are perceived as vital for the good working of a school and for the results that we want to see at its level. They major influence the functionality and development of schools and addressing these specific competencies in the mentioned field offer the premises of a modern leadership (Androniceanu, 2008).

The project team agreed to make use of modern investigation tools in order to be able to reveal the real day to day issues that the schools and their management have to face. It is remarkable that the project didn't take into consideration only the top level management of the schools, but addressed the leadership phenomenon throughout the organization, offering the possibility for a wider range of personnel to be involved and to take part to this project.

The considerations sat with the idea that the leaders don't rule alone, but they must assure a healthy development of their schools. And this can be done, only if the top leaders succeed to create a network of leaders in their schools, to develop the entrepreneurial spirit to the personnel, to stimulate their creativity and risk-taking behaviour (Noye, 2002).

During the project life cycle, the project team witnessed the raise of different potential leaders and the personnel involved from the schools perceived this initiative as a real opportunity for expressing themselves, from both professional and entrepreneurial points of view.

4. The results of the "Entrepreneurial Competences for School Leadership Teams"

For the educational units to have significant impact and assure the expected results to the broader range of stakeholders, they need the following elements: leaders with vision and high capacity of empathy, people with the right competencies and placed in the right position in the organization, enough resources going from material, financial till the information and knowledge one and a friendly environment, existing or created by the organization itself.

The project is based on the idea that leaders are able to strengthen the competencies of their followers and to convince the schools stakeholders that cooperating with them, their interests will be the best represented and met.

It means that the leaders and all staff are able to overcome the bureaucratic borders and to create flexible and agile organizations, beyond the constraints that an educational organization usually has.

The project also dealt with the ways in which the leaders know to create, but also to manage the expectations inside and outside the schools, at the same time with their own and continuous development.

There is much room for improving the systems, procedures, but especially for creating a culture of professionalism, of teamwork, of sharing knowledge and focusing on high performances.

In this respect, the project assessed the entrepreneurial competencies from the business world and used the enquiry research for supporting the school leaders to assess their organizations based on a SWOT analysis and, subsequently, approaching a specific topic to be addressed and solved during the project life cycle, by the partner schools.

During this process, permanent communication and assistance have been assured by ASE Bucharest and its international partners, in order to assure the best approaches for developing the leadership competencies of the personnel involved from each school.

The entrepreneurial competencies targeted four field of actions considered vital for the functionality and development of school leadership:
a) Strategic Thinking & Visioning;
b) Team Building, Personnel Management & Development;
c) Communication & Negotiation Skills;
d) Financial resources mobilization & Optimization.

The project was a complex one and the excellent cooperation among the project members drove us at getting a wide range of valuable results that we are confident that will also assure the sustainability of the project.

So, the other results obtained within the project are the following:
• A project website.
• An audit of the systems and leadership development programmes in the partners' institutions.

- An report on successful entrepreneurial practice in the world of work and relate it to the needs of school leadership teams.
- An enquiry network to identify best practice and identify gaps in provision in the delivery of four key areas of entrepreneurial competence.
- A methodology of using professional enquiry and action research to examine real life cases in schools and business.
- A set of pilot training modules covering the four topic areas.
- An evaluation of the pilot modules in schools using real school based.
- A longitudinal impact study on the professional enquiry methodology and the developed resources with case studies.
- More articles and papers published in different journals or presented to international conferences.

It is obvious that headmasters and senior staff from the schools can find out how to better lead by researching and comparing with what their colleagues from the private sector do, but also interacting more and sharing their knowledge and experiences with their counterparts from other units from the educational system.

The project provided clear methodologies and tools for research, analyses and strategic options elaboration, aspects that have been highly appreciated by the all the participants. We succeeded to get rid of perceptions as "theoretical", "impractical" or "impossible"! The whole approach asked for a strong self-awareness and a real desire for improvement, both at individual and collective level.

Acknowledgement

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