SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: A HOLISTIC APPROACH

The capacity builders’ view

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Introduction
For further social, economical, technical and political development in all countries of the world, schooling and (vocational) education are key.
School leaders or education executive\(^1\) play a pivotal role in this development process.
The real need everywhere in the current situation is to provide school leaders with knowledge, skills and competences for increasing the quality of education.

Educational management is a specialist field, a profession. Changing demands from the community, pupil diversity in a continually changing world and teachers with their own ideas about good education are all challenges that have to be met in a complex organisational and administrative context.

The current or future education executive needs to undergo thorough professional development in order to lead people through these challenges and help them find their way. In short, in order to create an environment in which pupils can learn what they need to know and learn it well.

The main purpose of school leadership is to further enhance student comprehensive learning and equity. Leadership, however, refers not only to individual leaders or to senior leadership, but can also be understood as the outcome of many actions and interactions involving teachers, students and others who in different ways contribute to school leadership.

The overarching theme for school leadership is to explore how essential school structures and cultures are for learning, and to examine in what ways leadership can provide both a structural framework and school cultures that establish a context in which successful, comprehensive learning can take place within a commitment to equity. To achieve this, students need high quality teaching, high expectations for engagement and participation and empowering communities. How

\(^1\) By ‘education executive’ and ‘school management staff’ we mean persons in a leadership role with full responsibility for an educational organisation or part of it. A director or member of a school board with responsibility for several schools is also covered by these terms in this brochure.
Education Managers shape this model of schooling is an essential focus of enquiry. Students and teachers need space in which to pursue and develop learning and teaching, and to develop their own leadership. Therefore the creation of a formal framework for their daily life, the school organisation, is an important area of responsibility for Education Managers: They need to shape the school’s structure to support and not to hinder learning.

Over the years NSO has carried out, home and abroad, a large number of programmes in which core curriculums of Comprehensive Educational Leadership were developed, implemented and embedded in sustainable infrastructures. The curriculums are based on the latest insights of scientists, policy makers, practitioners and stakeholders in the school environment and communities.

**NSO’s Approach to Educational Leadership**

NSO’s approach to Educational Leadership is to establish a professional and organisational development programme, in which participants work on their competences and leadership skills. Professional development is linked to and based on: (i) innovations and developments in the country’s society and the education sector (macro level), (ii) developments in participant’s own organisation (mezzo level) and (iii) participants learning needs (micro level - real life cases). The programmes are based on three inextricably connected domains: the social function of the educational organisation, its primary process and the management of the organisation as a work system. Leadership runs through all three as a constant thread, as shown in the figure below.

![Diagram](image)

**Social function of the educational organisation**

Schools fulfil a very significant role in society. They are an important hub in many chains and networks. The educational chain from school to work, of course, but they also form part of the care and welfare chain and the safety chain for example. Chronic social problems converge in schools. Dropout and non-participation, problems transferring from one school to another and from school to work require supra-institutional approaches (nowadays called: ‘system leadership’). Due to its strong position within society, schools have many partners, inter-institutional links and external relationships which have to be maintained and managed. Politics also has a major influence on schools. The way teaching is organised is determined to a large extent by legislation and regulations.

Schools find themselves in a dynamic environment: mergers, expansions of scale and customer-oriented thinking determine much of how education in schools is organised.
For the current or future education executive’s competences this means:
◊ thinking and acting as a player in a chain or network and are able to maintain your existing network, enter into new relationships and forge new partnerships in order to interpret and carry out the school's role in society;
◊ following and participating in social debates about the role of the school in the community and where necessary instigate debate at a local level;
◊ able to deal with outside pressure, choose positions and find answers to the multitude of wishes and requirements descending upon you and your school.

Primary process of the educational organisation
At its core education is a noble enterprise: aiming to ensure the best possible climate in which pupils and students can learn. Outside factors such as policy, competition and the community, as well as demographic factors, perspectives and opinions about learning and undersupply of teachers influence thinking about how to organise the primary process. What is it that we really want to be? And what does that mean for our views and beliefs about learning, school climate and how we would like to phrase them? To reflect on the primary process of the school is to reflect on its identity, on what sets one school apart from another. And it is also to reflect on the principles underpinning the systematic approaches of all who are directly or indirectly involved in the education process. For the current or future education executive’s competences this means:
◊ able to make considered choices about your school’s place in society and what you see as your school’s contribution;
◊ having insight into trends in the field of education and you are responsive to future themes. You make your own choices on these matters in the school;
◊ able to seek and develop a vision of learning in your school, to develop a corresponding education concept and to design and implement the strategic vision and policy.

Management of the educational organisation as a work system
A school is not a learning factory. The terminology and ideas from industry, which have crept into education in recent years, are not really helpful for "doing the right things and doing them well". After all, one can only organise and build up a work system if one has thought carefully about the primary process and what is to achieve. Only then can the primary process and support processes be moulded into an interaction which makes optimum use of both the professionals (teachers) and the administrative personnel (support staff). This is the challenge for current and future education executives, while at the same time permanent improvement, change and innovation remain constant factors in education. For the current or future education executive’s competences this means:
◊ covering the knowledge and skills to translate the primary process the school aspires to into a plan for a healthy work system which gets the most out of both the professionals and the support staff in the school, able to design this work system in collaboration with those involved;
◊ being good at engaging support staff in various processes, so that steering and managing the school are enabled and so that monitoring and accountability can take place;
◊ able to design and implement change processes at individual, team and organisation level, including mobilising the relevant parties, inspiring them to engage in their own activities, so that they retain ownership of issues and their capacity to solve problems is increased;
able to direct change processes, while demonstrating being able to deal with unclear and unstructured situations, uncertainty and opposition;

able to create scope for innovation by making the tension between daily operations and innovation manageable and productive, by leading the innovation as a learning process and by creating a climate of trust with open communication.

The three domains discussed above are tied together by leadership. Participants in NSO’s programmes reveal their positioning and profiling role in their performance: skills, self-knowledge, reflection and systematic action are at the heart of this.

Possible strategies towards Education Leadership Courses
As described above, a wide variety of training programmes on educational management are present and currently being implemented in a wide variety of contexts. Whereas the presence of strong academic management training programmes will ensure inclusion of state-of-the-art practices into the training programme, embedding of its content into the local contextual factors of the education sector a country is of utmost importance. Instead of offering a predefined set of training-topics within the programme, a flexible approach will be adopted in both defining the content and implementation of the programme. Closely following the need for increased educational management capacity at educational agencies and institutions, the approach will be laced on existing expertise and best practices in relation to the development and implementation of a tailor-made transfer of knowledge and training programme for education managers and policy makers. Drawing from an international existing database of accredited training programmes for school managers and education policy makers, expertise on the following topics can be mobilized and adapted to the context specific needs of the country’s education system.

Starting from the perspective of the country’s national educational system context (macro), taking into account the current state of the educational organisations involved as points of departure (mezzo) and based on learning needs assessments of the participants (micro), an Educational Leadership Course will be designed in such a way that it will contain all or parts of the following modules and components in a comprehensive and holistic way, covering the 3 domains of educational leadership and the constant thread of leadership. See figure below.
The way programmes work
NSO’s vision on Educational Leadership teaching and learning combines several theories of personal learning preferences and constructive group learning. The first essential feature of its proposed teaching and learning concept is to closely connect experience, theory and practice, depicted in the figure below.

In training sessions, the proposed programme will make use of all available modern interactive working and learning methods, such as: management e-games, classroom short lectures, case studies, workshops, interactive and directive instruction, assignments, laboratories, practicum, plenary discussions, problem-based learning and instruction, brain storming, role play, personal feed-back, reflection and personal development plans to accommodate participants’ individual learning preferences in order to achieve the optimal mix educational leadership competences.

Besides the above, the interactive part of the Management Training Programme will utilize approved methods of Virtual Action Learning (VAL), a Virtual Learning Community (VLC), educational concepts on collaborative learning and creation with ICT. Over the last couple of years NSO contributed to the development of VAL and VLC to apply the latest insights of personal learning, learning through gaming, the evolution of formal learning, collaborative creation, meaningful dialogue through feedback and reflection, visual learning and knowledge production. In VAL the Education Leadership’s competence profile - see later in this article the body of knowledge and competences, skills and personal attitude in the school leadership areas of strategy, educational laws, concepts of teaching and learning, human resource and finance management facility/operations and communication - is point of departure. Members of the VLC pass through the stages, such as: choosing learning arrangements, selecting information, creating learning product, interacting with peers, having meetings, improving good practices to finally be assessed by tutors and trainers. See figure below.
This makes it possible to realize the second essential of NSO’s teaching and learning concept: cooperative and group learning, peer group supervision and reflection. It is easy to understand that developing educational leadership competences in this way, the third essential of NSO’s teaching and learning concept can be achieved: parallel personal development and organisational development in educational organisations involved. See figure below.

Possible topics in Educational Leadership capacity building
Depending on fact finding and real need analyses, a great variety of subjects might be addressed in the Educational Leadership Trainings, such as:

◊ Developing strategic planning for schools
◊ Translating external requirements into internal meaning
◊ Negotiating and communicating meaning, visions and mission statements
◊ Facilitating the optimal learning and teaching environment
◊ Fostering ethical standards
Improving teaching and student learning

Fostering teachers’ competencies in subject matters, didactics, methodologies, classroom management and ICT

Building team work and distributing leadership

Ensuring performance management, assessment and evaluation

Developing efficient Human Resources Management

Creating a culture of professional learning

Developing school leadership and management

Creating an effective organizational and communication culture

Building appropriate organizational structures

Planning and managing human and material / financial resources

Ensuring transparent decision-making

Building and maintaining relationships with parents, the wider school community and national / local / school authorities

Cooperating with agencies and organizations / institutions outside the school at local, national or international level, networking with other schools

Developing and maintaining leadership competencies through continuous professional development (CPD)

Building peer networks at local, national or international level and collaborating with those institutions to improve the quality of education and the quality of life in the communities.

The professional profile for school principals

As mentioned above, preceding the development and design of an Educational Leadership Course, it is of paramount importance to scrutinize the learning needs of the target groups. Based on fact finding and real needs analysis a detailed programme will be created in order to set up adequate knowledge transfer and make use of up-to-date working methods to exercise skills and improve competences in a comprehensive manner.

In designing Educational Leadership Trainings, NSO makes use of the Professional Profile for School Principals – Body of Knowledge, Skills and Professional Attitude- as it was brought into existence during projects at home and abroad with the aim to ascertain a common understanding of professionalization of school leaders by all actors in the education system.

The Professional Profile for School Principles serves the following purposes:

- To gain insight in (future) required knowledge, skills, attitude and competencies of School Principals
- To use as a mean of communication among authorities and policymakers
- To use as a point of departure for development of School Principals/Management Training
- To use as a benchmark for recruitment and selection
- To show to potential School Heads
- To use as an instrument for (self) assessment, self-betterment and personal development
- To use as a tool in school development.

The Professional Profile is subject to continuous improvement.
### PROFESSIONAL PROFILE for SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

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- o strategy theories and tools
- o concepts and trends in development of the national system of education
- o economic, social, legislative, demographic development of the region
- o marketing of educational services
- o learning needs of groups and individuals
- o educational management theories
- o leadership styles
- o most important tendencies of the developments of the (national) educational system
- o regional demographics
- o community demands and needs
- o parents needs
- o priorities in the development of national and o leadership theories
- o pedagogy and psychology of adults
- o legislation, rules and regulations in human resource management
- o motivation theories
- o labour market situation
- o recruitment, selection and assessment theories and tools
- o school economics
- o accounting, controlling, marketing, finance
- o knowledge about needs
- o existing and possible finance resources of
- o concepts and legislation on financial activities.
- o school needs
- o legislation on the contents and development of all the facilities.
- o basic knowledge of economic management.
- o school needs
- o resources for improving facilities
- o communication theories
- o psychology
- o basic concepts of public relations.
- o sustaining communicative culture
- o pedagogical ethics, psychology, public speaking (rhetoric)
- o legislation
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