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HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL AS PROCESS MANAGER

Abstract:

Professional training and support for school principals is one of the goals of the Czech Republic's Education Policy Strategy 2030+. The primary function of a secondary school is to educate and nurture pupils, so the school principal should be a pedagogical leader. Due to the high autonomy of Czech schools, the principal must also carry out work activities that are important for ensuring the day-to-day operation of the school. Due to this non-pedagogical and administrative burden, the principal has limited scope for developing pedagogical leadership and improving the quality of education provided. For this reason, methodological support for individual schools is being introduced in the form of a 'middle link' to provide support services to schools.

The aim of the paper is to discuss the work activities of the school principal as a process manager, the possibilities of their delegation and the use of the middle article as a support in reducing the non-teaching and administrative burden.

Research question: Which work activities of a high school principal as a process manager should be delegated to other staff members or use a middle support article to provide them?

The results of the author's research focused on identifying the work activities of a high school principal as a process manager. The research investigation revealed that many non-teaching work activities are performed by the principal himself, while he could delegate them as well as administrative activities.

Keywords:

school principal, secondary school, work activities, management, non-teaching and administrative workload, methodological support

JEL Classification: I20, J24, J29

1 Introduction

Rapid changes are taking place in all areas of life in the 21st century. It is unthinkable that the school, which has the most important influence on shaping social life according to new values, should remain aloof from these changes. School principals are expected to have leadership skills that include competencies such as making quick and effective decisions, generating effective solutions to problems and meeting expectations of the school. As open social systems that are affected by changes and developments in their environment, schools should be managed in accordance with expectations (Şenol & Gamzegül, 2021).

Leadership is different from power derived from authority, which comes from being a leader or being a good manager (Bush, 2005). Managers usually derive their authority from the position they hold within the organization. As a result, they are empowered to give orders to subordinates regardless of whether their team members agree with them. Conversely, managers' power stems from the fact that their subordinates willingly accept their influence (Haslam, Reicher & Platow, 2010).

There is an emphasis on the professional preparation of school principals, on their lifelong learning, and on the development and cultivation of their competencies not only in the Czech Republic, but also abroad, (Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development concluded in its report on improving school leadership that school principals are being prepared for a role that was designed for the industrial age, a role that has not changed sufficiently to meet the complex challenges of the 21st century. century (Beatriz, Deborah & Hunter, 2008). These complex challenges include managing change, building organizational capacity, implementing technological advances, increasing efficiency, and striving to improve student learning outcomes (Fluckiger, Lovett & Dempster, 2014). As a result, school principals may be forced to assume the roles of educational visionary, change agent, instructional leader, budget analyst, building administrator, and organizer in their schools (Robinson, 2010).

The school principal is the chief administrator and manager of the school. As managers, principals are responsible for managing the major administrative tasks. The most important competencies for principals to perform administrative work are managerial competencies, strategic thinking competencies, communication skills, methodological competencies and intellectual competencies. However, administrative work is one part of principals' work. The administrative duties of a school principal involve a multifaceted and essential area of responsibility. The management competencies (the ability to plan, organize, and motivate staff to perform their work, the ability to delegate responsibilities and control results), communication skills, competencies to ensure quality work outcomes, and intellectual competencies (information literacy, the ability to acquire new knowledge, skills, and abilities, and the ability to work with information) are most important for school principals to perform administrative work (Anderson, 2013).

The principal manages the various processes in the school, prioritizing conditions that ensure students' successful learning, facilitate teachers' professional activities, and consequently improve student achievement. Thus, the principal is responsible not only for ensuring the learning process, but also for providing targeted support in the learning process and teacher performance by building support systems or creating conditions that improve student

achievement. The school environment built by the principal together with the teachers is also an essential factor. Therefore, principals should build an environment and culture in their schools where everyone (administrators, teachers, and parents) has high expectations with regard to student achievement (Malere & Ozola, 2019).

The job of principals has become increasingly challenging and complex as they are expected to lead the school to improve, manage a range of competing demands and attend to the needs of different stakeholders (Park & Datnow, 2022). Experienced school leaders engage staff in decision-making, supporting them to develop their potential and take on greater responsibility (Liliova, 2016).

The czech educational system is characterized by a high degree of autonomy of schools both in the pedagogical and management areas, which brings with it a huge burden and responsibility of individual principals. This brings with it a number of positives, such as the ability to create their own school curricula, to adapt school operations to local conditions, customs and specifics, to decide on teaching methods and forms, evaluation rules, equipment, textbooks, didactic aids, to be in full charge of all personnel management, to decide on financial resources, to be able to react flexibly to changes or to develop innovations. The school principal performs roles as leader, manager and executor of the process. As a leader, he or she sets the direction of the school and convinces staff of its appropriateness; as a manager, he or she ensures that strategic goals are achieved; and as an executor, he or she achieves set goals and completes tasks. (Trojan, 2021).

Among the negatives of the high autonomy of czech schools is the overload of administration, which takes up about 40% of their time, making them the first among other European countries. In contrast, perceived by the world as one of the most important activities of the principal, pedagogical leadership, which affects the quality of teaching and educational outcomes and includes activities such as teaching hospitalization, teaching students, mentoring teachers, coordinating and directing their further professional development, coordinating educational content, developing educational methods, using external resources, etc., accounts for only 15% of their working time (Federičová, 2019).

Stable methodological support from principals and their representatives is essential for good school management. Professional training and support for school principals is one of the goals of the Czech Republic's Education Policy Strategy 2030+. In the area of professional training, Czech principals feel the biggest gaps and need for improvement especially in the area of human resource management (42%), financial management (41%) and providing effective feedback (37%). On the other hand, czech principals are relatively well educated and prepared in the area of legislation and in the area of administrative management of the school or in their duties as principals, which, however, take up a lot of their time (Federičová, 2019).

The creation of an education information system that integrates into the school system and supports data sharing by the public administration will help to reduce administration. Methodological assistance will be focused mainly on issues of school legislation, labour law and administrative procedures, as well as on economics, optimization and digitalization of processes, keeping records in school information systems and reporting, etc. The middle article will contribute to reducing the non-teaching and administrative burden on school management, support effective communication between the founder and the school, motivate cooperation and

participation in school support and development plans. Another key area will be methodological support for school founders (Fryč et al., 2020).

2 Goal and Method

The aim of the paper is to discuss the work activities of the school principal as a process manager, the possibilities of delegating them and the use of the middle link of support in reducing the non-teaching and administrative burden based on the reflection of the experience of secondary school principals. The results of the author's research focused on identifying the work activities of the secondary school principal as a process manager. Research question: Which work activities of the high school principal as a process manager should be delegated to other employees or use the middle link of support to provide them?

In the spring of 2021, a research survey was conducted in the form of a questionnaire among 240 secondary school principals in the Czech Republic out of a total of 1274. The return rate of completed questionnaires was 19%. aimed at identifying the work activities of the school principal as a process manager. It was investigated whether he/she performs the activities himself/herself or delegates them to subordinate employees and how often he/she performs the activities. In the case of the frequency of individual work activities, secondary school principals chose one of the following options: daily - weekly - monthly - 4 times a year - twice a year - annually - as needed - never. Data analysis was based on calculating relative frequencies (as a proportion of the total number of respondents). The output was suggestions for the possibility of delegating work activities to subordinate employees or using a middle support link.

3 Results and Discussion

The school principal performs many activities during the workday as a leader, manager, and process executor. The results of the author's research focused on identifying the work activities of the high school principal as a process manager in the legal, operational and administrative areas that are important to ensure the operation of the school.

The results of a questionnaire survey conducted in the spring of 2021 among 240 secondary school principals in the Czech Republic point to the work activities of the principal as a process manager that can be delegated to subordinate employees in secondary schools. The research survey found that many operational and administrative activities are delegated by the secondary school principal to his/her subordinates, but that legal work activities are carried out by the principal himself/herself and could also be delegated or could use a middle support link.

Since the school as a public institution has to comply with many legal regulations in different areas (labour, economic, educational, organisational, etc.), it is important to keep up to date with these regulations. There are many tools available to keep up to date with current legislation. Among the basic ones is the Collection of Laws. Navigating the legislation is one of the most complex areas for school principals to educate themselves on. Keeping up to date with changes in legislation is most often carried out by the school principal himself (90%) or delegated (10%), and is most often done on an as-needed (47%) or weekly (20%) basis.

An integral part of a school principal's job is to study case law relating to education cases. The school principal must not only follow the law, but must also respect court decisions (case law) that are relevant to other decisions in similar cases. The study of case law and its application in school practice is mostly carried out by the school principal himself (73 %) or delegated (12 %),

most often on an as-needed basis (73 %). In 15 % of schools, the school principal does not carry out this activity.

Table 1: Work activities carried out by the school principal alone or by delegation and how often they take place - legal area

| WHO AND FREQUENCY WORK ACTIVITIES | HIMSELF (%) | SHARES (%) | MOST FREQUENT FREQUENCY (%) | 2. MOST COMMON FREQUENCY (%) |
|--|-------------|------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| monitors changes in legislation | 90 | 10 | as required (47) | weekly (20) |
| studies case law and applies it in practice | 73 | 12 | as required (73) | never (15) |
| consults with a lawyer on urgent cases | 88 | 6 | as required (86) | never (6) |
| issue and update school and classification regulations | 72 | 28 | never (59) | one time a year (41) |
| issues and updates internal directives, working rules, organisational rules, operating rules | 70 | 30 | never (65) | as required (28) |
| decides in administrative proceedings | 91 | 8 | as required (80) | weekly/ monthly (4) |
| researches, updates and creates writing samples | 55 | 45 | as required (82) | monthly (7) |

Source: Authors' research

In some cases, the school principal's decision requires the professional advice of a lawyer, whose services can be used by the school in various ways (e.g. paid service, use of a lawyer from the founder, etc.). The majority of school principals (88%) consult a lawyer on urgent cases themselves or delegate the work (6%), while 6% of schools never use these services and 86% use them as needed.

According to the Education Act, the principal of a secondary school issues school rules, which also include rules for assessing the educational results of pupils (classification rules). It must be published in an accessible place in the school. The school principal usually issues and updates the school and classification regulations himself (72%) or delegates the activity (28%), in 59% of schools he never does so, in 41% of schools he does so annually.

As an employer, the school may determine the rights in labour relations in accordance with the Labour Code by internal regulations. The school principal issues and updates internal directives, working regulations, organisational regulations, and operating regulations himself/herself in 70% of schools and delegates activities in 30% of schools. Again, 65% of schools never do this activity, 28% of schools do it as required.

The school, as a legal entity, is an administrative body that makes decisions in accordance with the Administrative Procedure Code in administrative proceedings. According to the Administrative Code, the school principal is an authorised official who represents the school in administrative proceedings and decides on the rights and obligations of secondary school pupils in accordance with the Education Act. Decision-making in administrative proceedings is one of

the most complex activities in the legal sphere, in which the school principal makes decisions alone in 91 % of schools, and delegates this activity in 8 % of schools, on a weekly or monthly basis (4 % each) or as required (80 %).

The templates of documents that the school principal works with must be continuously updated in line with changes in legislation. These include, for example, templates for administrative decisions, employment contracts, performance agreements, internal directives, etc. The school principal may use various seminars, publications, conferences or expert advice to do this. Finding, updating and creating model documents is an activity that is mostly carried out by the school principal himself (55 %) or delegated (45 %), either monthly (7 %) or as required (82 %) (Table 1).

Table 2: Work activities carried out by the school principal or delegated and how often they are carried out - operational and administrative area

| WHO AND FREQUENCY WORK ACTIVITIES | HIMSELF (%) | SHARES (%) | MOST FREQUENT FREQUENCY (%) | 2. MOST COMMON FREQUENCY (%) |
|--|-------------|------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| prepares the timetable for the following school year | 13 | 87 | one time a year (59) | as required (23) |
| performs routine administration | 49 | 51 | daily (80) | as required (16) |
| maintain a filing service (filing diary or electronic filing system) | 1 | 97 | daily (72) | as required (20) |
| completes questionnaires, spreadsheets and other forms for various institutions | 59 | 41 | as required (70) | weekly (14) |
| processing statistical outputs from the school for the Ministry of Education, the Czech Social Insurance Administration, health insurance companies and the Statistical Office | 15 | 85 | as required (73) | monthly (16) |
| sends records of injuries | 18 | 82 | as required (82) | monthly (15) |
| ensures the protection of personal data of natural persons | 31 | 69 | as required (54) | daily (29) |
| contracting the supply of water, heat and electricity | 38 | 51 | as required (58) | one time a year (28) |
| arranges repairs and operational activities (waste removal, cleaning, maintenance of the garden and school grounds) | 15 | 83 | as required (78) | monthly (10) |
| conducts an inventory of assets | 5 | 95 | one time a year (81) | as required (10) |
| prepare a schedule of revisions for the year | 9 | 88 | one time a year (65) | as required (22) |

Source: Authors' research

The timetable belongs to the compulsory documentation of schools according to the Education Act. The timetable is prepared for each half of the school year and is prepared for the following school year before the end of the previous one. The preparation of the timetable is one of the

important operational activities without which the school could not exist. This activity is most often delegated by the school principal (87%) or carried out by the school principal (13%), most often annually (59%) or as needed (23%).

The normal administrative agenda of the school principal includes processing and dealing with various documents, working with information obtained from various sources, organising meetings, communicating through various communication channels, filling in various tables, reports and questionnaires, etc. These are administrative skills that every school principal should have. These routine administrative tasks are carried out by the school principal himself (49%) or delegated (51%), most often on a daily basis (80%) or as needed (16%).

The obligation to maintain a filing service in the school is derived from the Act on Archives and Filing Service. Currently, schools are entitled to keep it either in paper form using a filing diary or electronically in an electronic filing system. As of 1 January 2026, secondary schools must switch to maintaining the filing service in the electronic filing system. In only 1 % of schools is the school principal himself responsible for filing documents, i.e. for maintaining the filing system, and he delegates it mostly (97 %), on a daily basis (72 %) or as required (20 %).

Various questionnaires, forms and tables are constantly delivered to the school by post, e-mail and data box for completion by the founder and other authorities. These are other administrative tasks which the school principal attends to or not at his/her discretion. Completing questionnaires, spreadsheets and other forms is most often carried out by the principal himself (59%) or delegated (41%), either weekly (14%) or more frequently as required (70%).

In accordance with the education legislation, schools transmit to the Ministry of Education data on individual pupils and applicants for admission to education and other school-related data from the school records and registers. As an employer, the school also pays public health insurance premiums for its employees and social security premiums (pension insurance). This involves the transmission of data on employees and pupils to the Czech Social Security Administration and health insurance companies. The processing of statistical outputs for the Ministry of Education, the Czech Social Security Administration, health insurance companies and the Statistical Office is carried out by the school principal himself (15 %), but more often delegated (85 %) and carried out monthly (16 %) or as required (73 %).

In accordance with the Education Act, the school maintains an accident book and records of pupils' injuries. It is obliged to keep a record of accidents and to prepare and send the record to the relevant authorities and institutions. In accordance with the principles of staff and pupil safety, the school principal is obliged to send accident records, which he/she does himself/herself (18 %) or delegates most of the time (82 %), on a monthly basis (15 %) or as required (82 %).

The school must protect the personal data of individuals (pupils, employees, legal representatives) in connection with the entry into force of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Each personal data must be processed in such a way that it is not misused. The protection of individuals' personal data is either carried out by the school principal himself (31%) or delegated (69%), either on a daily basis (29%) or as required (54%).

In connection with the administration of the property and in accordance with the Civil Code, the school principal, as the statutory representative of the legal entity, contractually ensures the

supply of water, heat and electricity. This activity is carried out by him/her (38 %) or more often delegated (51 %), either annually (28 %) or as required (58 %).

The school principal, as the custodian of the property entrusted to him, is obliged to take care of its protection, development and improvement. Repairs and operational activities (waste removal, cleaning, maintenance of the garden and school grounds) are arranged by the school principal himself (15 %) or delegated (83 %), either monthly (10 %) or as required (78 %).

The accounting units, which include schools, shall take an inventory of all assets and liabilities and verify that the actual position recorded corresponds to the assets and liabilities in the accounts. The inventory of assets is carried out by the school principal himself (5 %) but more often delegated (95 %), either annually (81 %) or as required (10 %).

As an employer, the school is obliged to ensure that machinery, technical equipment, means of transport and tools are regularly and properly maintained, inspected and revised. The safe operation of the school building therefore requires a schedule of revisions for the year, which is drawn up by the school principal himself (9 %) but more often delegated (88 %), most often annually (65 %) or as required (22 %) (Table 2).

4 Conclusion

The paper summarizes on the basis of reflection on the experience of secondary school principals the possibilities of performing work activities by the principal of a secondary school in the Czech Republic, or their delegation to subordinates or the use of a central support link, whose activities are currently being piloted in the framework of the implementation of the Strategy of Educational Policy of the Czech Republic until 2030+.

The aim of the paper is to reflect on the experience of secondary school principals and discuss the work activities of the school principal as a process manager and their frequency, the possibilities of their delegation and the use of the middle link of support in reducing non-teaching and administrative burden.

The results of the questionnaire survey aimed at identifying the work activities of the secondary school principal as a process manager show that the school principal as a process manager most often performs activities related to the legal field himself and as needed, while some of them could be delegated to subordinates (e.g. He/she could either use a central support link (e.g. consult with a lawyer on urgent cases) to methodically focus on school legislation, labour law and administrative procedures.

In the operational and administrative area, most of the school principals delegate work activities to subordinates and these are mostly carried out on an as-needed basis, but 59% of the principals retain the activity of filling in questionnaires, spreadsheets and other forms for various institutions. In these areas, the methodological assistance of the middle support element could be used, especially in maintaining the school's registry in the school information systems and reporting (e.g. carrying out routine administration, filling in questionnaires, tables and other forms for various institutions, processing statistical outputs), so that the administrative burden on school principals could be reduced.

In conclusion, the establishment of the central support cell should reduce the non-pedagogical and administrative burden in schools in the legal area (methodological support focused on the

issues of school legislation, labour law and administrative procedures) and in the operational and administrative area, especially in the maintenance of registers in school information systems and reporting. This would give school principals more time for pedagogical management.

Other work activities related to operational and administrative tasks can be expected to be delegated to other senior staff or a middle link of support will be used and will be the subject of further research.

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