

## Educational managerial capital and the logic of decentralization: a statistically – based analysis

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*Abstract:* The present study examines the confrontation between the rigor and the flexibility of the school manager when dealing with the needs of the actual troubled context, generated by issues like: hasty decentralization, the illusion of the social participation, economic and financial recession, poorly motivating wages. The answers offered by the authors aim at the stimulation of the field of managerial tactics centred/ based on the increase of the quality of the processes and curricula for the initial and continuous formation, of the decisional style, of the power of the professional action and display, based on competences, values and intelligent projects.

*Key-Words:* critical context, efficient style, professional motivation, performing curricula

### 1 Turbulences perception

School management in pre-university education in Romania entered, during the last years, in an area of real turbulences.

The most sensitive and critical points can be identified in some areas of competences for which the school manager is not thoroughly prepared, neither theoretically, nor practically. We invoke here only some of them:

- a. The school identity experiences a voluntary reduction, which is most frequently imposed by political factors, and the outcome is a significant shrinking in the number of schools present in an institutional network that is functionally weak, asymmetrical from the point of view of the quality, with great discrepancies between rural and urban education.
- b. The movements produced by the decentralization paradigm are still not based on socio-pedagogical relevant studies, they do not match the needs of the school's people, they do not satisfy the expectations of the beneficiaries – pupils, parents, community.
- c. The motivation for the quality of the educational offer accounts for significant reductions. The teachers are strongly linked to the too small salaries compared with those in other budgetary professions. The graduates are very poorly motivated by the job offer. The pupils are relatively poorly motivated by the compulsory curriculum that is too busy, at a weekly or daily level – on average 30-34 hours per week;

- d. The preparation for life, for acquiring the social and personal success is done based on illuminist non-pragmatic values, or leaves space to formulas that encourage lack of effort or psychological comfort given by material values, superficial learning, a weak learning self management;

- e. The lack of coherence and convergence of some social actors – NGOs, associations, foundations, professional unions, and so on, that have declared missions in the education sphere (e.g. vulnerable children protection, stimulation of children with creative potential, social partnership, school abandon prevention, reduction of school and family violence, but also salary protection of the human resource);
- f. The pressure of the decisional factors for the increase by any means of the symbolic exchanges between education actors, but, especially of the partnership projects missing the support/ expertise of the project management, of the necessary funding. The consequence is a reduction in the interest for quality teaching, learning and evaluation; increasing resistance and mistrust of parents towards the school; deterioration of the value-partnership climate school – community. More important is the drop of the school manager authority inside and outside the school.

### 2 Analytic landmarks

It is often the case that schools and their managers, just like other public institutions, are the most controversial, questionable, and criticised targets.

Therefore, a lot of questions arise: To what extent can a school cause changes in its main actors' mind and conduct? And if so, who are the agents who can be the real leaders of reforming changes? Are they from the inside or from the outside? How should such changes be produced, at what pace, at what costs and acceptable effects?

The answers to these challenging questions are not exclusive, but often alternating.

Pre-university education in Romania deals with a large area of difficulties, whose examination requires expertise, understanding, arguments to suggested solutions and sometimes risk taking.

Socially and obviously pedagogically speaking, there should be as few risks as possible! Pupils cannot undergo any social experiment. Pupils in the Romanian schools have often felt lately the restrictions imposed by the 'guinea pig' status of many unsuccessful reforming attempts, especially curricular and evaluative reform, which were unwanted and in all cases without the support of the expertise of the specialists in education sciences.

The pre-university education in Romania and its management/ managers appear as a psychological-social-pedagogical complicated infra-structure, as an intricate network, which is broken up by cultural and civilising organisations, but without too many stability landmarks, a mixture of conservative and innovative areas, which are, however, in a dynamics that is difficult to control and assess. The completion of the on-going reforms, dominated more by the 'top-down' rather than the 'bottom-up' strategy, did not give the actors the chance to be active decision-makers, to create programmes of stability and sustainable school development. The schoolmaster is confined to the possibility of designing, achieving and handling qualitatively, efficiently and effectively the roles and tasks which derive from his social and professional status on the one hand, and from the function he holds on the other hand.

The factor called *context* – social, cultural, ecological, political, legislative, technological, scientific, especially internal, but also external – generates a weak perspective on the guarantees regarding the long-term and medium-term development (see, nowadays, the public and institutional perception regarding the effects and tensions of the context generated by the financial and economic crisis on the conduct of managers and employees).

Thus, the school manager works in a quite unpredictable sphere of values, with a weakly coordinating social philosophy at the level of employees' conduct and of the 'common/

community well being', with a 'fragile ethical code', not powerful enough to diminish the disparities, the malfunctions and the current vulnerabilities, including those at the level of morality and spirituality.

The manager of the public or private school in Romania, teaching staff by default and with a status granted by regulations and methodologies that are formally acknowledged, cannot handle by himself such a pre-conditioned reality without the support and solidarity of a team of collaborators. Even in this case, one may require changes in mentality, in conducting feedback of education actors to different pressures that come from the inside or from outside the school, as change itself becomes a cause of pressure and stress. By the breaches it causes, the change by means of the managerial reform can affect the relationships between the actors of education and the manager. They can also disturb the common values, the relevance of the objectives, the architecture of competences, the community support, the standards of the managerial culture specific to education, especially from the organisational perspective (see Peretti, 1996).

### 3 The school master in Romania: functional landmarks

Within the pre-university education, according to the current legislation, the school master:

a) represents the school management with legal status and is responsible for providing the quality of the functions of guidance and control of all the activities that are formally or non-formally carried out in that institution: kindergarten, school – secondary school, high school, school of arts and crafts, school complex, postgraduate school;

b) occupies such a position by competitive examination (the standards are known) or, in special cases, by relocation in the interest of education. Currently, there is a large number of school managers without competitive examination (that is non-titular), which is not a positive reference for our school.

Table 1. The status of school managers in the pre-university education – the formal criteria of appointing

	School unit managers	Nr.	%
1.	Appointed by contest	4085	59,49
2.	Appointed without contest	3272	40,51
	Total	8077	100

Source: MECI, internal data, academic year 2008-2009

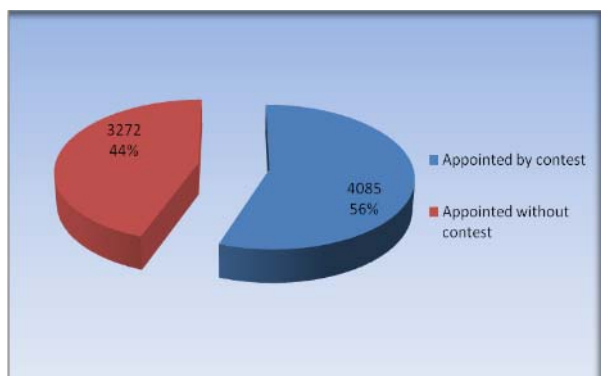


Fig.1. The school managers’ status in the pre-university education

Table 2. The school deputy managers’ status in the pre-university education – the formal criteria of appointing

	Deputy school managers	Nr	%
1.	Appointed by contest	1359	53,06
2	Appointed without contest	1202	
	Total	2561	100

Source: MECI, internal data, scholar year 2008-2009

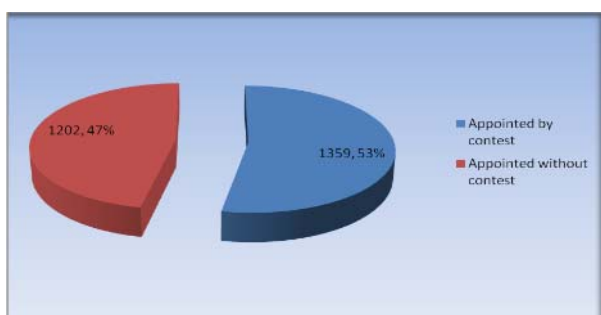


Fig. 2. The school deputy managers’ status in the pre-university education – the formal criteria of appointing

The statistical analysis referring to one component of the policy for managerial, training and controlling positions continues.

The larger perspective, a systemic one, may be better understood if we first analyse the core of the issue, taking into account the developing regions. We thus admit that such an analysis is not the usual method in Romania, it has not been a priority and it even misses from the general procedures about the distribution and value of the managerial resource.

The use such a method is based on some advantages and we would only mention two of them:

- (i) methodological, especially in the strategy for decentralization;
- (ii) administrative, especially for the study/analysis of decision-making process aimed at forming/ training to be a “school manager”.

If one accepts that a school manager is one of the pillars for building mentalities in educational communities, a vector for the positive change as far as participatory and anticipatory thinking are concerned, the data analysis is useful.

The philosophy of decentralization that is currently promoted by politicians is not well prepared. Moreover, we foresee several risks: lack of interactivity in public debates, weak interest from stakeholders, locally limited decisions as well as unequal schools, double language, illusions etc.

The following analyses, taking into account the distribution of school managers in developing regions in Romania, require comparative reading, and a thorough understanding of the socio-economic context, of the traditions and new challenges due to the disparities among the different counties and regions of the country. We present in tables and graph the data that are available for this study.



Fig. 3. Romania: regional perspectives

Table 3. Statistical distribution – school managers in North East region

County	School managers in pre-university educational institutions		
	Appointed by contest	Appointed by relocation in the interest of education	Total
Botoşani	101	62	163
Suceava	170	66	236
Neamţ	133	17	150
Iaşi	110	225	335
Vaslui	138	35	173
Bacău	174	104	278

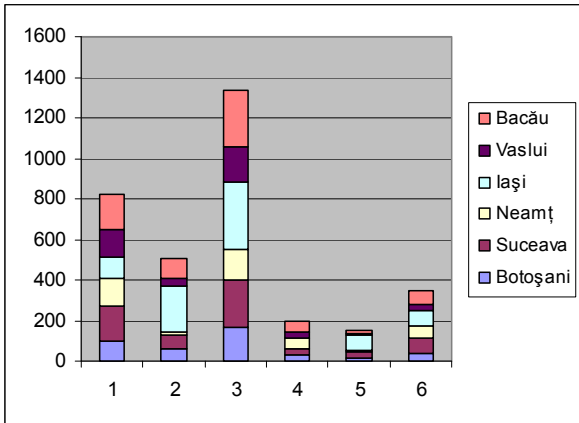


Fig. 3. Statistical distribution – school managers in North East region

Table 4. Statistical distribution – school managers in South East region

County	School managers in pre-university educational institutions		
	Appointed by contest	Appointed by relocation in the interest of education	Total
Vrancea	102	37	139
Galați	119	122	241
Brăila	100	38	138
Tulcea	45	47	92
Constanța	129	152	281
Buzău	112	86	198

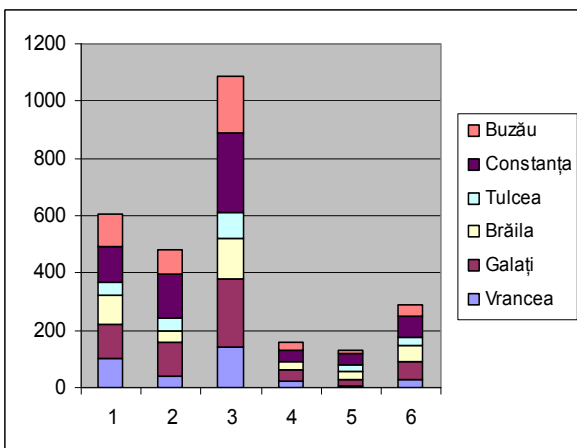


Fig. 4. Statistical distribution – school managers in South East region

Table 5 Statistical distribution – school managers in region South-Wallachia

County	School managers in pre-university educational institutions		
	Appointed by contest	Appointed by relocation in the interest of education	Total
Ialomița	76	43	119
Călărași	42	87	129
Prahova	159	136	295
Dâmbovița	167	42	209
Giurgiu	65	45	110
Teleorman	103	90	193
Argeș	157	69	226

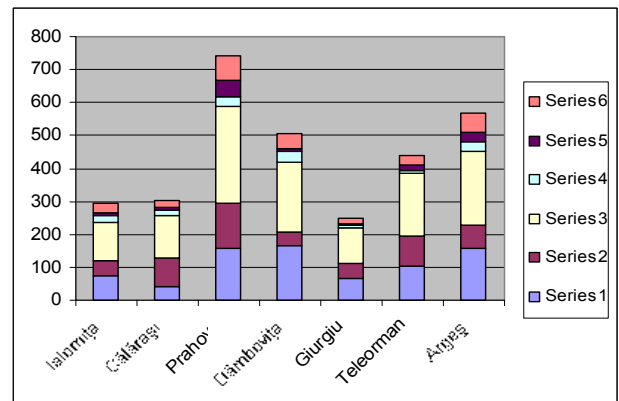


Fig. 5 Statistical distribution – school managers in region South-Wallachia

Table 6 Statistical distribution – school managers in region South-West Oltenia

County	School managers in pre-university educational institutions		
	Appointed by contest	Appointed by relocation in the interest of education	Total
Vâlcea	42	130	172
Olt	142	43	185
Dolj	216	26	242
Mehedinți	66	53	119
Gorj	78	36	114

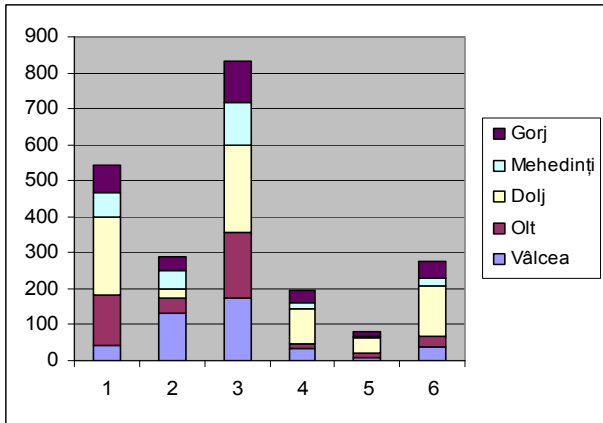


Fig.6 Statistical distribution – school managers in region South-West Oltenia

Table 7 Statistical distribution – school managers in region West Romania

County	School managers in pre-university educational institutions		
	Appointed by contest	Appointed by relocation in the interest of education	Total
Hunedoara	105	85	190
Caraș-Severin	92	57	149
Timiș	143	107	250
Arad	113	75	188

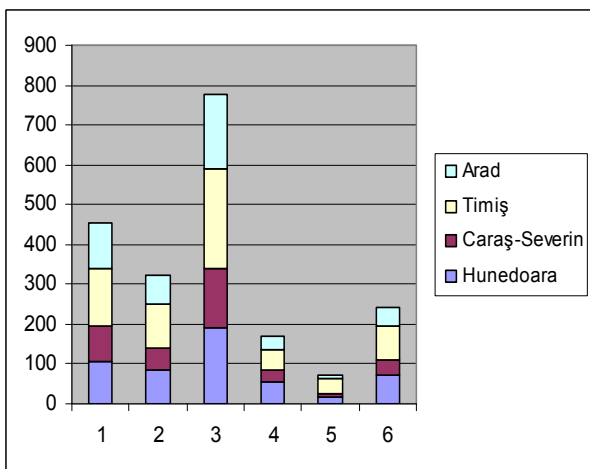


Fig. 7 Statistical distribution – school managers in region West Romania

Table 8 Statistical distribution – school managers in region North West

County	School managers in pre-university educational institutions		
	Appointed by contest	Appointed by relocation in the interest of education	Total
Bihor	167	46	213
Cluj	212	35	247
Bistrița-Năsăud	75	56	131
Maramureș	161	55	216
Sălaj	86	55	141
Satu-Mare	121	24	145

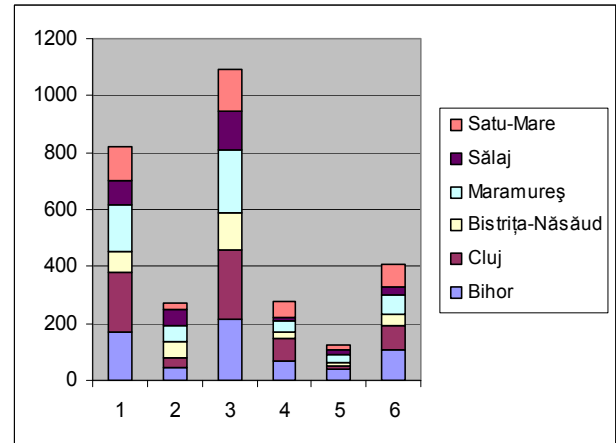


Fig.8.Statistical distribution – school managers in region North West

Table 9 Statistical distribution – school managers in region Center

County	School managers in pre-university educational institutions		
	Appointed by contest	Appointed by relocation in the interest of education	Total
Alba	74	102	176
Mureș	169	87	256
Sibiu	130	40	170
Harghita	101	59	160
Covasna	61	25	86
Brașov	103	158	261

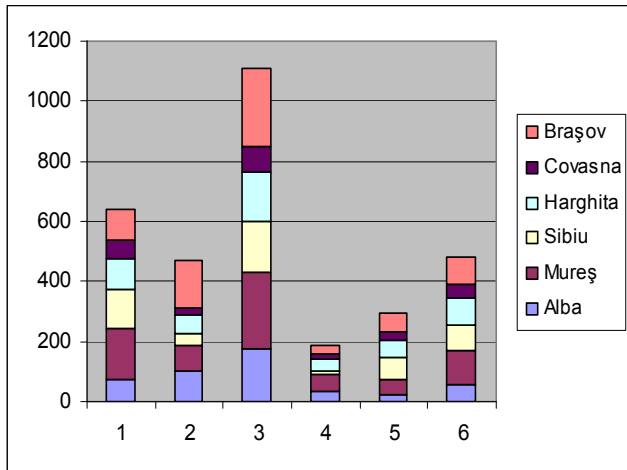


Fig. 9 Statistical distribution – school managers in region Center

Table 10 Statistical distribution – school managers in region Bucharest-Ilfov

County	School managers in pre-university educational institutions		Total (set 3)
	Appointed by contest (set 1)	Appointed by relocation in the interest of education (set 2)	
Bucharest	89	368	457
Ilfov	57	47	104

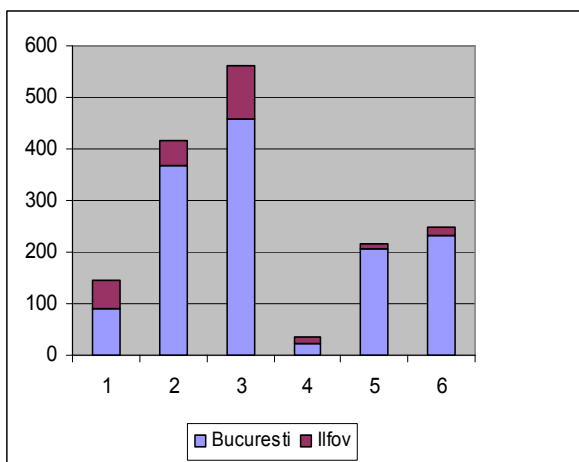


Fig. 10 Statistical distribution – school managers in region Bucharest-Ilfov

As a preliminary conclusion we may state the following: we are far away from the critical areas and the virtual ones, we still have a lot of work to do at the level of decision-making without reinventing the management wheel of investing into the human capital, of using diagnosis at the lowest level of

synergy between norms, procedures, forms and decisions as well as intelligent educational policy.

If we make it simpler, essential reasons for such a situation can be: unattractiveness of the position, a salary that is not motivating, excessive bureaucracy, unproductive relationships with school inspectorates, a lot of time spent on organisational tasks or without great formative and managerial relevance, competences are confined to decision-making level, pressure/ political coalition which is difficult to bear.

c) has a relative decisional, organisational and financial autonomy; some recent exceptions are recorded in eight pilot counties, which undergo experimental improvements related to the local legislation, reference elements in the decentralisation area: financial, selection and human resources management, motivating salary, some local curricular decisions, partnerships etc.

For a better understanding by the school managers of the significance of the real decentralization in the concrete context of the experiences and professional-teaching thinking models in Romania one can retain some more significant ones, formulated both by representatives of the unions, and by some representatives of the politics within the educational system.

At a conception level:

- Decentralization should not be seen as a self-contained goal but as a well thought movement to lead to a better organization, administration and finance, to free and equal access for all children and youngsters to the educational act, to a better and appropriate balance between the educational offer and the interests/ needs of the direct and indirect beneficiaries.
- Correlated with the sustainable development, globalization of education and quality assurance in education, decentralization becomes a dynamic action, that is also involved, responsible, strategic, interactive, a process that demands a clear, well balanced and well delimited distribution of the decisional power between the organisms and institutions from the local and regional communities, on the one hand, and the ones at a national level, on the other.
- The efficiency of decentralization has to be found in the added value in education, in the increased capacity for integrating young graduates in the society, on the ground of professional competencies acquired in the school.
- In decentralization, the school will be led by a teacher-manager, elected by the school staff and by contest, not by a manager appointed by the Mayor at the suggestion of the Local Council.

## 4 Contextual values: Summary of SWOT analysis indicators

In terms of increased effects of the social and economic crisis, there are some elements which should be included on the agenda of managerial policies, becoming objectives of improvement. Among the most important core elements, we will mention those that are connected to:

4.1. *The policy of identifying* the teaching staff “with a potential of educational management”. At present, this is poorly defined, lacking a staff marketing oriented towards selecting trained and intrinsically motivated teaching staff for the manager position, or at least staff that could sit an exam for filling the schoolmaster positions.

4.2. *Analyses of managerial potential of the participants*. They point either to an individual who has been chosen beforehand or, less than that, at using the values offered by the “axis of managerial succession”. To be more precise, we are considering the use of the strategies aimed at the development in school management career of the teaching staff, which is mostly irrelevant, although there are master courses, graduate courses, retraining courses etc. We should admit that we can talk about financial allotment in a lot of managerial “training” courses within County School Inspectorates, Teaching-Staff Resource Centres or in some courses initiated by the providers that are present on the training market, with the accreditation of a specialised agency (CNFP) attached to the Ministry of Education.

4.3. Managerial curricular structures which are irrelevant in the situations, projects and training plans regarding the educational management (Mg).

Concordant with the methodological and curricular settlements valid today (H.G., MECT nr. 2191/2004), the modules and disciplines for continuous formation programs for the management, direction and control positions in the pre-university education are configured as follows:

### A. Compulsory subjects

#### 1. Educational management

a) Educational management in education institutions;

b) Project management.

#### 2. Communication and curricula

a) Design, management and educational programs evaluation;

b) Curricula management.

#### 3. Information and communication technology

a) basic 90-120 hours;

b) advanced 0-120 hours.

### B. Optional subjects

#### 1. Educational management:

- a) Educational policies;
- b) School organization management;
- c) Quality management;
- d) Marketing, decision, and foresight in education;
- e) Career counselling;
- f) Legislation and deontology in education;
- g) Management of excellence centres;
- h) Professional development and career management.

#### 2. Communication and curricula

- a) The school and the community;
- b) Communication and public relations;
- c) Adults psycho pedagogy;
- d) Class management;
- e) Intercultural education;
- f) School inspection;
- g) Pedagogy of extracurricular activities.

### C. Optional 2 subjects at the suggestion of the continuous formation providers

There is a real need for some lectures regarding: risk management, project management, innovation management, stress management, mentality and attitude change management, modern financial and strategic management, management of social and emotional intelligence in competition conditions, total quality management, management of monitoring negative emotional curves, management of child protection or of subjects in situations of risk: regarding age, profession (sometimes unemployment, especially among the youth), belonging to an environment characterised by various malfunctions (for example, the access and the quality of education among the children in the rural areas as compared to the access and quality of education among the children in the schools in the urban areas).

4.4. *Mental patterns* that is irrelevant to the instrumental values of schoolmasters' training and action. We can mention: the draft of the institutional development plan, auditing the performance management, the methodological regulations (that are too bureaucratic) and the implementation strategies with ecological validity, but also the relative autonomy as far as financial management is concerned, promoting human resources, effective management of the human capital with creative potential etc.

4.5. *Annual budget*, with many limitations. It is desirable to have a multi-annual budget, with a significant power of influence over areas of decisional competences, over the freedom to establish progress indicators, stability indicators or intervention indicators for planned recovery, as well as transparency indicators regarding democratic

mechanisms of making important decisions, generators of values specific to subsidiary phenomena in school management.

4.6. *The existence of a large number of priority (vulnerable) educational areas. For a country like Romania, these areas are represented by:* the existence of risk groups, a large number of children having poor parents (many of them living on the edge of poverty), numerous gipsy population, children with special educational needs (having different disabilities), violence-generating factors, situations and mechanisms, drug, tobacco and alcohol consumption within or outside the school's premises etc.

4.7. *Overloading of job descriptions.* We also point out the presence of various administrative tasks, the excessive bureaucracy as far as school audit, control and inspection are concerned, little concern for educational forecast, poor information exchange between schools, local administration and school inspectorate on the one hand, and the ministry on the other hand, weak public image capital regarding school in society, negative answers from the local administration to the financial requests for school development and equipment.

4.8. Restrictive legislative background referring to the creation of the necessary conditions for good quality services. The most frequent negative reports concern the lack of specialists in: school or professional counselling, psycho-pedagogues for speech therapies, general or dentistry health in the institution, ecologic communication, entrepreneurship, respect for the environment, children's rights, dealing with issues concerning the access to and especially the setting up of the conditions for fulfilling children's options or equal chances for all pupils/ children.

4.9. Unbalanced concern and poor ability of school managers for projects and activities concerning the development in their teaching career, managerial route and/ or personal development

4.10. We also mention the necessity of training the managers from the perspective of the three pillars identified as necessary in shaping a professional managerial conception:

a) education – training sessions, workshops, self-study;

b) support – coaching, feedback, mentoring;

c) genuine experience – projects, publications, additional responsibilities, undertaking new roles, a list which is obviously incomplete, but supported also by the American experts (3).

The list containing such landmarks can be continued.

## 5 The profile of a schoolmaster: a combination between leadership and manager

In terms of a genuine autonomy and under the expected constraints generated by the current global social and financial crisis, the schoolmaster tries new positions and exhibits new qualities. Firstly, he becomes a genuine holder of a reforming message, thus being a pillar of applying the principles of school autonomy at different levels: organisational, functional, administrative, financial and jurisdictional, becoming a role negotiator, a therapist, an originator of confidence and responsibility, a forecaster of new solutions to serious problems concerning human potential formation, development of useful knowledge, IT&C, online management.

If we ask ourselves the rhetorical but at the same time reflective-projective-acting question “how do we design/ outline the schoolmaster's model and modelling portrait?”, our answers contain, even if hypothetically, four essential characteristics. We reckon that the personality of the school manager involved in the reforming changes reveals at least two potential status values:

a) the leadership value;

b) the actual manager value.

His quality of being a leader incorporates four major features, which have become acknowledged as competences (see I. Neacsu, 2008):

(1) a personal, sensibly and carefully planned vision, with relevant and motivated options for some everlasting educational values;

(2) the continuous substantiation of his actions based on the latest results and acquisitions of research in education sciences, psycho-sociology, cultural and inter-cultural studies, scientific and strategic top management;

(3) relevant mastery, proved in intelligent leading and self-leading acts by means of the intricate labyrinths often caused by the theoretical-methodological and operational-pragmatic steps of managerial theory and practice;

(4) intersecting competences defined by what we call “team spirit”, autonomy and genuine leading abilities to lead, collaborate, apply and transfer basic competences for the benefit of inter-discipline cause, of social learning, of spreading the positive experiences, the good practices, as in the case of modern school management or the management put into practice in some good private schools.

By balancing and synchronizing these qualities, which have become competences by practice, correlated with other characteristics that are as



important, teachers acquire the motivation to aspire to the status of efficient school managers, thus becoming change agents. This fact is positive, and it is due to the fact that changes in education intrinsically imply sets of positive, powerful attitudes towards school, towards profession, towards the members of the community they work for, a community which is viewed as both an object and a subject of the reforming change.

Starting from these landmarks, the schoolmaster's personality, which is viewed as a combination of leadership and performance management, will be ready to create projects, to ensure the transition from the role of script creator to that of actor and director, from the role of initiator and generator of adaptive changes, to that of director of his own social game. By the status of leadership, the schoolmaster gives another meaning to school's missions, he becomes the spokesperson of the values and directives that inspire and motivate the conduct of school members. By his status as a manager, the schoolmaster applies, together with the members of the organisation, the leadership line he established – "leaders do the right thing, managers do a thing right." (Fullan and Stiegelbauer, p.158).

The two sides will be seen not as being separate, but as simultaneous, interactive, continuous, articulate, they will decisively aim at change, transformation, formation of school's and its actors' adequate responses to the challenges imposed by structural reforms, crises, functional or systemic instability.

The understanding, increase and mapping of the schoolmaster's power will ensure the quality achievement of managerial and professional standards. Prestigious research projects that were carried out in the USA (Hall and Hard, 1988, Fullan, Stiegelbauer, p. 155), in Europe (see the documents of the European Commission 2003), and in Romania (Iucu, 2009, Potolea, 2007, Neacșu, 2006) confirm the idea that when talking about the major roles and functions of a good manager, the following things are necessary:

- (i) organisational arrangement;
- (ii) consultation and reinforcement;
- (iii) monitoring and evaluation;
- (iv) training and ongoing information support; developing supportive;
- (v) support for using innovation".

## 6 Repositioning the mechanisms/ processes of (self)training

An effective and efficient public school management should be based on the functional

mechanisms of the local community. The valorisation of such a conception has at its root the axiom of the reciprocal advantageous openings. What does this consist in?

School is a conservative system, in theory, but permanently open to its exterior environment. The community and its institutions offer to school a great deal of its human, material, logistic, informational and financial patrimony.

Counselling services and medical assistance is co-present for pupil and family caring and protection, for the preservation of the physical, emotional and spiritual integrity, for spending the leisure time. Without exception, all presume "educogonia", dynamic, cooperative fluxes of values, life styles, roles and evaluative criteria, social and personal ethical codes, order and peaceful, participative cohabitation climate.

In our opinion, school managers should be permeable to the training and self-training processes. One needs substantiation, which should be a clear, functional, modern epistemological, psychological and socio-pedagogical conception. A conception that should be built rather in alternatives and that takes into account the configuration and interactions between the elements of the axiological and ideological-cultural context, the co evolution of the formal, no formal and informal institutional values, the managerial experience and the dominant organizational culture.

On such a factorial background one feels the need of (re)designing the curricula models for initial and continuous training, of the integration of the managerial culture in a conceptual and strategic-actional network, able to optimize the professional practices, to synergic-formative develop the codes and training programs, fending the manager of the methodological errors, but sensitizing him to flexible, complex, implicit constructivist managerial theories.

In the mean time we will plead for: the rationality of the intelligent **management** and **self management** towards the pessimism or illusory optimism; under- or over estimation of difficulties; the increase of communication space with socio-educational actors compliant to a simplified grid, close to the one that Pascal Weil (1990) was naming "strategic intentionality"; the exercising of the entrepreneurial spirit, consultative and democratic; the transition from the managerial profession, seen as a power centre, to the school management seen as a public function/ structure that takes responsibilities that are examined congruent with the ratios between urgency and necessity versus pressures, group interests, between priorities

complementarities, coordination, innovation, credibility versus emotionality, interest, non-competences.

## 7 Preliminary conclusions

Professionalism is looked for and wanted in Romanian schools. The logic of professional standards is connected to the development in teaching and managerial career. Fundamentally, our view and option join the “school based management” paradigm (SBM). Their level resides in decentralising authority levels in school, responsibility in making decisions regarding the actions and procedures which are formally or subsidiary transferred to schoolmasters, teachers, parents (by authorization), as well as to other members of the community.

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