

Key Recommendations for Training Activities Designed for School Leaders

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ABSTRACT

The professionalization of pre-university educational institution management constitutes an infrastructural imperative for ensuring quality and equity in contemporary educational systems. The shift from an administrative-bureaucratic model to one centered on instructional leadership represents the fundamental vector through which school management directly and measurably influences students' academic performance and progress, an aspect rigorously documented in the specialized literature by leading authorities in the field such as Bush (2011) and Fullan (2014). Effective school governance requires a profound transition toward collaborative leadership structures capable of responding to macro-educational reforms.

This study draws on first-hand professional involvement over a six-month period in both the comprehensive training and structured evaluation of school managers and school board members. Utilizing a robust mixed-methods research design that combines quantitative questionnaire data with qualitative feedback from semi-structured interviews, the research establishes a set of key actionable recommendations designed to optimize the framework of future professional development initiatives for educational leaders. The empirical inquiry specifically assesses the convergence between institutional expectations and current leadership competencies.

The findings emphasize the critical need to bridge the persistent gap between theoretical administrative knowledge and the practical, highly contextualized challenges faced by modern school boards. Data indicates that targeted modules focusing on conflict resolution, strategic financial planning, and organizational culture significantly enhance administrative resilience. Ultimately, this paper proposes an operational framework for institutional capacity building, arguing that continuous, tailored professional development for educational leaders is paramount to fostering sustainable school improvement, driving innovative teaching methodologies, and achieving long-term systemic equity across pre-university education.

Keywords: school management, professional development, management competencies

INTRODUCTION

This paper substantiates a series of strategic training and coaching recommendations, having as empirical support a diagnostic research applied to a sample of school managers and members of the Board of Directors. In order to validate and triangulate the data obtained through the questionnaire technique, a complementary monitoring instrument — a structural observation sheet — was administered to a focused sub-sample ($n = 35$ participants).

The general objective of the approach aimed at evaluating the sub-competencies circumscribed to Module VI: Increasing the managerial capacity to lead pedagogical transformation oriented towards student progress. The results reveal a cognitive-attitudinal asymmetry: although there is high technical compliance and optimal conceptual receptivity in the post-delivery phase (98% presentation quality, 92% relevance of exemplification), substantial gaps are emerging in the deep operationalization phase and structural resistances correlated with the volatility of macro-educational policies.

METHODS

We used a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods to extract these recommendations. Initially, questionnaires were applied regarding training needs, then observation sheets completed by the trainer following the configuration of relationships and those vulnerabilities of the trainees.

RESULTS

Diagnosis of training needs. Descriptive statistical analysis of the collected data highlights a polarized skills profile, in which theoretical assimilation successes contrast with phenomena of resistance to change and analytical limitations in implementation.

Dimension of applied statistical literacy (Statistical Literacy).

According to data extracted from the observation sheet ($n = 35$), the general level achieved is assessed between Competent and Advanced (estimated average ranging from 2.8 to 3.3 points on a 4-point performance scale). Strengths: Managers demonstrate an optimal capacity for selecting key performance indicators (KPIs), operating correctly with metrics such as absenteeism rates, academic progress indicators and inter-disciplinary discrepancies. Identification of time series trends is stable in the absence of major disruptors. Analytical vulnerabilities: There is an inability to detect subtle correlations or seasonal patterns (for example, the correlation between the peak of absenteeism in the fall and family or psychological dynamics factors). The main cognitive barrier identified is the formulation of investigative questions: 40% - 50% of managers cannot construct two distinct and complementary research questions based on the same data set. They show a tendency to reduce the analysis to a single linear variable, which limits the ability to generate a coherent data culture within the school (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

Evidence-Based Decision Making and SMART Design

Although the formal structure of SMART objectives is integrated (over 75% of the sample correctly using the indicators of measurability "M" and time-specificity "T"), a critical gap is manifested in their dynamic calibration. The phenomenon of target polarization: Managers oscillate between setting excessively modest objectives (out of the desire to secure their achievement) and formulating utopian, unrealistically high objectives, decoupled from the real resources of the school unit. This faulty calibration shows a purely technical assimilation, without its correlation with the real and empirical progress indicators analyzed in educational impact studies (Hattie, 2014). Assumption of controllable variables: There is a residual tendency to externalize the causes of school failure to uncontrollable exogenous factors (e.g. the family's socio-economic environment), although there has been progress in identifying internal levers such as remedial courses or continuous training of teachers.

Attitudinal dimension and change management

An under-weighting of the general impact index (89%) is determined by a psychological resistance manifested in the form of neutrality or skepticism. Institutional skepticism: A significant proportion of the sample adopts a neutral position regarding the applicability of managerial theories in the context of current educational policies. They perceive the internal effort to optimize school performance as vulnerable or insignificant in relation to the unpredictable legislative changes at the macro-systemic level. Fear of operational failure: Lack of confidence in the sustainability of internal reforms betrays a defensive organizational culture dominated by fear of punitive assessment and resistance to pedagogical innovation, classic symptoms of systems that have not yet been transformed into authentic learning communities (Senge, 2016).

Pillar I: Recommendations for training activities (Training)

To ensure the translation from theoretical competence to practical performance at the classroom level, future training programs must be restructured on applied intervention modules, abandoning the expository model in favor of clinical management laboratories. Marzano et al. (2005) demonstrate through extensive meta-analyses

that the optimization of pedagogical leadership behaviors directly influences student performance, if the training is contextualized.

Module A: Multivariate Analysis and Querying Educational Data (Advanced Statistical Literacy)

Conceptual content: Going beyond the stage of simple data visualization by implementing problematized questioning techniques. Training should focus on techniques for correlating heterogeneous educational data (eg correlation between selective absenteeism, classroom climate and grades obtained on formative assessments). The goal is to move from simple observation to issuing predictive working hypotheses (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Format: Hands-on Data Hackathon workshops where managers work on their own schools' real data sets to generate predictive models and complementary investigative questions.

Module B: Calibrating strategic objectives and assessing impact (SMART Alignment)

Conceptual content: Sessions dedicated to the benchmarking technique. Managers will learn to determine the area of next institutional development, setting ambitious but achievable targets (e.g. the argumentative transition from a generic target to setting an increase of exactly 15% in the pass rate in national simulations), avoiding the traps of managerial utopias (Hattie, 2014). Organizational form: Management design hubs based on peer-review of Institutional Development Plans (PDI).

Module C: Monitoring and supportive pedagogical assistance

Conceptual content: Reorienting class assistance from the bureaucratic verification of teacher documents to evaluating how instructional design cognitively activates the student. The training will target tools for monitoring activating methods (discovery learning, experiment-based strategies or projects), providing clear tools for the efficient management of classroom dynamics in moments of transition (Iucu, 2006). The correct evaluation of how teachers transpose these methods in the classroom must be directly correlated with individual performance indicators and good applied pedagogy practices defined by Pânișoară (2015). Organizational form: Micro-teaching and video analysis of lesson sequences, using observation grids focused on the cognitive behavior of the student.

Module D: Optimization of logistical infrastructure and asynchronous learning

Conceptual content: Considering the request of students regarding access to post-course recordings, it is recommended to fully digitize the course support through Micro-learning architectures. Organizational form: Creation of an LMS (Learning Management System) platform with permanent access to short video resources to refresh concepts, facilitating assimilation at one's own pace.

Pillar II: Recommendations for coaching programs

Coaching in school management should not be understood as a remedial intervention, but as a strategic device for attitudinal transformation, unlocking leadership potential and overcoming self-imposed emotional barriers.

Individual coaching for pedagogical leadership and resilience

Strategic objective: Supporting the manager in managing the fear of failure and combating the skepticism generated by the volatility of macro-educational policies. Thematic focus: Psychologically decoupling school performance from external uncontrollable factors and focusing resources on internal controllable variables. The sessions will aim to develop the leader's emotional resilience and self-efficacy, facilitating the assumption of visionary decisions under conditions of uncertainty, according to the impact leadership model described by Fullan (2014).

Team coaching for management teams and boards

Strategic objective: Aligning the values of the board members and transforming an administrative structure into a coherent leadership team. Thematic focus: Eliminating role ambiguity, optimizing internal

communication and establishing collectively assumed organizational performance indicators. This approach will counteract the phenomenon of institutional division reported in the feedback, building a shared responsibility at the level of the entire management structure (Bush, 2011).

Implementation of peer-coaching and support groups

Strategic objective: Post-course sustainability and combating professional isolation of school principals. Thematic focus: Creating methodological networks in which managers meet periodically to collectively analyze difficult case studies from current practice. The structured technique of reflective inquiry is used to generate evidence-based group solutions, transforming isolated educational units into true “learning schools” (Senge, 2016). In the Romanian context, these networks will serve as analysis spaces for the applied resolution of educational crisis situations or the management of the organizational micro-climate (Iucu, 2006).

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this diagnostic study highlight a critical divergence within pre-university educational management, characterized by a highly polarized competency profile. While school managers and board members demonstrate robust theoretical comprehension and structural compliance—evidenced by strong conceptual receptivity and the technical adoption of foundational management frameworks—substantial operational gaps persist in deep implementation and dynamic data execution.

In terms of applied statistical literacy, although leadership teams show proficiency in monitoring isolated key performance indicators (KPIs) such as absenteeism and basic academic progress, their capacity for advanced data diagnostics remains constrained. The systemic inability of nearly half the sample (40%–50%) to formulate complementary investigative questions on identical data sets illustrates a linear analytical approach. This single-variable reductionism restricts the establishment of an authentic, institutionalized data culture capable of detecting complex macro-educational patterns or seasonal dependencies.

Conclusively, bridging this gap requires a paradigm shift in professional development architectures. Moving forward, traditional expository training models must be fully replaced by context-driven, applied clinical management laboratories and strategic coaching frameworks. Only by anchoring professional development in multi-variate data analysis, realistic benchmarking, and supportive pedagogical monitoring can educational systems foster the leadership resilience required to drive systemic equity and sustainable institutional transformation.

Limitations of the Study

While this research provides valuable empirical insights into the competency profiles and training needs of educational leaders, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the geographical and institutional scope of the study may limit the generalizability of the findings. The data was gathered from a localized sample of pre-university educational institutions (Bacău, Neamț and Iași counties), which may not fully represent the structural, socio-economic, or regional diversity of the entire national educational ecosystem. Consequently, the polarized competency profiles and organizational resistance observed here might manifest differently in regions with distinct historical training frequencies or varying administrative supports.

Second, methodological constraints inherent to the sample size and data collection instruments warrant caution. Although the use of a mixed-methods approach provided essential data triangulation, the structured observation sheet was restricted to a smaller, focused sub-sample ($n = 35$ participants). This relatively small sample size for the qualitative component limits the ability to perform advanced statistical stratifications, such as analyzing variations based on the managers' years of experience or the specific size and typology of the school units (the average years of experience was 15).

Finally, the study is bounded by its temporal and contextual framework. The evaluation was conducted over a fixed six-month period, capturing a cross-sectional snapshot of participant responses immediately following the delivery of Module VI. This timeline does not account for long-term retention or the gradual attenuation

of institutional skepticism as managers adapt to macro-educational policy shifts over time. Furthermore, because a significant portion of the data relies on self-reported questionnaires regarding training relevance and presentation quality, the results may be subject to social desirability bias or temporary post-training enthusiasm, which does not necessarily guarantee permanent behavioral translation at the institutional level.

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