

The Czech Principal: Competencies, Performance and Good Practice

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In the Czech Republic, a binding formulation as to what competencies a school principal ought to have has yet to be made. The competency model piloted by the National Pedagogical Institute has a chance to change this situation. In the quantitative part of our analysis, we describe which competencies Czech principals are (un)confident in as compared to their foreign colleagues. We document that there is a significant link to better academic performance in those schools and their management where their culture is built on mutual cooperation and an understanding of educational goals by all those involved. In case studies from schools, we describe what specific activities lead to the fulfilment of these areas (e.g., the work of competency teams, teacher meetings in smaller, informal groups that include reflection on the teaching process, etc.). Our findings can contribute to further development of professional education of school principals.

Introduction

Scholarly literature and research findings view school principals as one of the key personalities within the education system, with a fundamental impact on the conditions, course and ultimately results of student education.¹

The main objective of this analysis is to map self-evaluation and professional self-perception of elementary school principals in the Czech Republic within selected competencies. In addition, using consolidated data from TALIS (Teaching And Learning International Survey) and PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) surveys, we will explore the non-causal association between these areas and the academic performance of students.

The second part of the analysis works with two case studies from Trmice Elementary School (“ZŠ Trmice”) and Labyrinth Elementary School in Brno (“ZŠ Labyrinth”). It illustrates the importance of establishing good relations for the achievement of the school’s vision, working collaboration and improvement in teaching.

In our analysis, we assume that the pedagogical and managerial qualities of the principal, which may be defined in professional standards for principals, are the basic prerequisite for successful school management. These standards are piloted by the *Competency Model* for school principals currently being prepared as one of the main outputs from the System of Support for Professional Development of Teachers and Principals (SYPO) project implemented by the National Pedagogical Institute of the Czech Republic (NPICR). We attempt to follow the selected types of competencies described in the model in our analysis.

1) FULLAN, Michael. The Role of the Principal in School Reform. *Occasional Paper Series* [online]. 2000, (6), 19 [retrieved on: 2021-10-15]. Available at: <https://educate.bankstreet.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1254&context=occasional-paper-series>.
FULLAN, Michael. *The Principal: Three Keys to Maximizing Impact*. John Wiley & Sons, 2014. ISBN 978-1-118-58245-9.
BENDIKSON, Linda, Viviane ROBINSON and John HATTIE. Principal Instructional Leadership and Secondary School Performance. *Teaching and Learning* [online]. 2012, (1), 2-8 [retrieved on: 2021-10-15]. Available at: https://www.nzcer.org.nz/system/files/journals/set/downloads/set2012_1_002_0.pdf.
DAY, Christopher and Kenneth LEITHWOOD, ed. *Successful Principal Leadership in Times of Change*. 1. Springer Netherlands, 2007. ISBN 978-1-4020-5516-4.
LEITHWOOD, Kenneth, Karen SEASHORE LOUIS, Stephen ANDERSON and Kyla WAHLSTROM. *How Leadership Influences Student Learning* [online]. The Wallace Foundation, 2004, 90 [retrieved on: 2021-10-15]. Available at: <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/documents/how-leadership-influences-student-learning.pdf>.

Main Findings and Recommendations Stemming from the Analysis

- Compared to principals in neighboring developed countries, Czech principals suffer from administrative overload and have extensive responsibility for procuring the conditions and course of the education process. This is a consequence of the decentralization of the education system at the turn of the millennium and the subsequent strengthening of the autonomy of schools, which was not, however, accompanied by the establishment of a support system for principals. Principals in Czech schools also claim that they are less engaged in the key pedagogical leadership of their schools than their foreign colleagues.
- In our analysis, we used several methods to monitor three areas of the newly developed and piloted *Competency Model* for school principals, specifically, the sub-area of Strengthening of School Culture, which is part of the Value and Vision-based Leadership area, and the areas of Learning and Education Management and School Staff Management.
- Integrated data from the TALIS and PISA surveys, focusing on selected areas of school principals' competencies, show that the following positively relates (not necessarily causally) to academic results: good relations between teachers and students and mutual trust between teachers, and teachers' understanding of the objectives of the school education program ("SEP").
- A mere 22% of Czech school principals strongly agree that there are good relations and cooperation in their schools, both between the teachers themselves and between teachers and students. In contrast, this is reported by 32% of principals in geographically and culturally close countries and as many as 47% of principals in countries with outstanding academic performance. 66% of Czech principals – in line with principals in reference countries – indicate that they try to create a collaborative environment between teachers and hold them accountable for the academic performance of their students. Less than half believe that teachers understand the objectives of the SEP.
- The case studies further demonstrate that prevention of the isolation of individual teachers and fostering an atmosphere of teacher collaboration across grades (within the grade) and subjects (by interest) is one of the driving forces behind the good results achieved at ZŠ Trmice and ZŠ Labyrinth. The principals of both schools concur that the management must have a clear vision of how the school should function, and such a vision needs to be shared by the entire staff.

- These findings indicate that for the systemic level of education policy, it is essential to adopt a binding competency framework for the profession of principal and the standards for its implementation by drawing on the areas described above. The *Competency Model* under review as an output of one of the projects of the National Pedagogical Institute of the Czech Republic can serve as a solid basis. All of the above needs to be supplemented with a comprehensive and integrated system of professional training and support for school principals.
- Inspiration and the resulting good practice for school principals comes, among other things, from an emphasis on the connection between the management of pedagogical processes and teamwork at schools. It is particularly important to promote a culture of collaboration. In both the schools under exploration, the principals emphasize good relations and feedback on which they build processes between management, teachers, students and parents. The evaluation of students takes place with their participation (self-evaluation, peer evaluation), as does the definition of further learning objectives and continuous feedback in the learning process (formative assessment).
- Principals can support continuing education of teachers at the individual level through interviews and teacher development plans. In a collaborative culture, it is equally common to set development goals at the level of the entire staff room or in “competency teams”. These include teacher collaboration in groups, tandem teaching and collaboration between the teacher and the teacher’s assistant. The key to success is to create an environment in which teachers can provide feedback to one another and discuss pedagogical and didactic issues. For instance, at ZŠ Trmice, traditional tools, such as faculty meetings, have been replaced by teacher meetings in smaller informal groups which include reflection on teaching.

Problems Encountered in the Pursuit of the Profession of Principal in the Czech Republic

The great demands and problems posed by the pursuit of the profession of principal in the Czech Republic are illustrated by a wealth of data from both domestic and international sources and surveys. They can be divided into several areas:

1. Scope of responsibility and overall overload of school principals

- A comparison of data obtained by the PISA survey shows that after the Netherlands, the school principal in the Czech Republic has the **second highest share of responsibility for decisions** in areas such as the organization of education, HR, planning and content of education or allocation of resources, compared to other European countries and their principals.² Compared to the Netherlands, however, and other countries, **this scope of responsibility is not accompanied by a broader support system.**³
- Data obtained by the TALIS survey shows that Czech principals **spend an above-average amount of time on administrative tasks**, specifically, up to 40% of their total workload compared to the average of 29% in 23 European countries. Analyses refer to an “**administrative inferno**” in this regard.⁴
- In contrast, Czech principals devote less work – according to their own assessment – to pedagogical management of their schools.⁵
- The general overload of school principals in the Czech Republic stems more or less from the transformation of the education system administration and from the process of decentralization and strengthening of the autonomy of schools. This combination, coupled with the growing demands and duties and unsystematic or uncoordinated educational policy measures, **results in many principals distrusting the system as a whole.**⁶

2) Indicator D6 Who Makes Key Decisions in Education Systems? *OECD* [online]. 2018, 11.9.2018, 408–421 [retrieved on: 2021-10-15]. Available at: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance-2018/indicator-d6-who-makes-key-decisions-in-education-systems_eag-2018-33-en.

How Decentralised Are Education Systems, and What Does it Mean for Schools? *OECD* [online]. 2018, 23.11.2018, 2018(64) [retrieved on: 2021-10-15]. Available at: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/how-decentralised-are-education-systems-and-what-does-it-mean-for-schools_e14575d5-en.

3) GARGULÁK, Karel, Václav KORBEL and Daniel PROKOP. Ředitelé škol v ČR: Klíčoví hráči v systému vzdělávání bez dostatečné podpory. *Ředitel naživo* [online]. 2021 [retrieved on: 2021-10-15]. Available at: <https://www.reditelnazivo.cz/files/reditel-skol-v-cr-klicovy-hraci-v-systemu-vzdelavani-bez-dostatecne-podpory.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3qsMc3pysfJN10f7mz9iGsdwejNpFEAHqrmBAsSfPEcghvOsDpnLH8T4A>. VESELY, Arnošt, Jakub FISCHER, Milena JABŮRKOVÁ, Milan POSPÍŠIL, Daniel PROKOP, Radko ŠABLÍK, Iva STUHLÍKOVÁ and Stanislav ŠTECH. Hlavní směry vzdělávací politiky ČR 2030+. *MŠMT* [online]. 2019, 4.11.2019 [retrieved on: 2021-10-15]. Available at: <https://www.msmt.cz/file/51582/display/?lang=1&fbclid=IwAR2X-8L-7Nh3V1p8Y6DYdPmk7LXt9eH0kYZDMGS4ilb3E2lJyNrH-U6l24>.

4) FEDERICOVÁ, Miroslava. *Mezinárodní srovnání ředitelů škol: České administrativní inferno* [online]. IDEA / CERGE-EL, 2019, , 40 [retrieved on: 2021-10-15]. Available at: https://idea.cerge-ei.cz/files/IDEA_Studie_12_2019_Kvalita_reditelu_skol/IDEA_Studie_12_2019_Kvalita_reditelu_skol.html.

5) GARGULÁK, Karel, Václav KORBEL and Daniel PROKOP. Ředitelé škol v ČR: Klíčoví hráči v systému vzdělávání bez dostatečné podpory. *Ředitel naživo* [online]. 2021 [retrieved on: 2021-10-15]. Available at: <https://www.reditelnazivo.cz/files/reditel-skol-v-cr-klicovy-hraci-v-systemu-vzdelavani-bez-dostatecne-podpory.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3qsMc3pysfJN10f7mz9iGsdwejNpFEAHqrmBAsSfPEcghvOsDpnLH8T4A>.

6) TROJAN, Václav and Zuzana SVOBODOVÁ. Subjektivní vnímání proměny role ředitele školy a obtížné prvky výkonu této profese v současné době. *Pedagogická orientace* [online]. 2019, 29(2), 203–222 [retrieved on: 2021-10-15]. Available at: <https://journals.muni.cz/pedor/article/view/12382>.

SEDLÁČEK, Martin. *První učitel. K roli ředitele školy v pedagogickém vedení*. 1. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2020. ISBN 978-80-210-9718-6.

2. The absence of quality standards and a professional training system, cooperation and support for school principals

- Despite the long-standing declarative commitments found in the strategic documents of the education policy, **the competency requirements for the position of school principal have not yet been formulated in a binding manner** in the Czech Republic.⁷
- The current legislative framework **does not provide for formal preparation to be undertaken by a prospective principal for the pursuit of his/her profession.**⁸
- The actual statutory qualification minimum, a 100-hour “School Principals Course”, is considered inadequate and focused more on other areas than on the pedagogical management of schools.⁹
- According to Trojan,¹⁰ there is currently no **comprehensive and integrated system of professional education for school principals**. The existing training programs for educators in management positions are not organized to form a comprehensive logical system and are often isolated and unlinked. Moreover, there is currently no clear career ladder for principals (this equally applies to the teaching profession). Furthermore, principals are under no obligation to obtain further education in the area of pedagogical management of schools.¹¹
- As described in the analytical part of the *Strategy for Education Policy of the Czech Republic 2030+*, despite minor initiatives, **the systematic creation of conditions for the cooperation of principals, networking and sharing of inspiring practice examples is still lacking.**¹²
- According to Trojan, **the precarious position of the school principal is also caused by the strong politicization of education.** “In small municipalities in

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- 7) VESELÝ, Arnošt, Jakub FISCHER, Milena JABŮRKOVÁ, Milan POSPÍŠIL, Daniel PROKOP, Radko SÁBLÍK, Iva STUHLÍKOVÁ and Stanislav ŠTECH. Hlavní směry vzdělávací politiky ČR 2030+. *MŠMT*[online]. 2019, 4.11.2019 [retrieved on: 2021-10-15]. Available at: <https://www.msmt.cz/file/51582/display/?lang=1&fbclid=IwAR2X-8L-7Nh3VIVp8Y6DYdpMk7tXt9eH0kYZDMGS4iIb3E2ljyNrH-U6124>.
- 8) TROJAN, Václav. *Ředitel školy jako základní faktor pedagogického vedení*. 1. Praha: Pedagogická fakulta UK, 2019. ISBN 9788076030329.
- 9) FEDERICOVÁ, Miroslava. *Mezinárodní srovnání ředitelů škol: České administrativní inferno*[online]. IDEA / CERGE-EI, 2019, 40 [retrieved on: 2021-10-15]. Available at: https://idea.cerge-ei.cz/files/IDEA_Studie_12_2019_Kvalita_reditelu skol/IDEA_Studie_12_2019_Kvalita_reditelu skol.html.
- 10) TROJAN, Václav. *Ředitel školy jako základní faktor pedagogického vedení*. 1. Praha: Pedagogická fakulta UK, 2019. ISBN 9788076030329.
- 11) TROJAN, Václav and Zuzana SVOBODOVÁ. Subjektivní vnímání proměny role ředitele školy a obtížné prvky výkonu této profese v současné době. *Pedagogická orientace*[online]. 2019, 29(2), 203-222 [retrieved on: 2021-10-15]. Available at: <https://journals.muni.cz/pedor/articel/view/12382>.
SEDLÁČEK, Martin. *První učitel. K roli ředitele školy v pedagogickém vedení*. 1. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2020. ISBN 978-80-210-9718-6.
- 12) VESELÝ, Arnošt, Jakub FISCHER, Milena JABŮRKOVÁ, Milan POSPÍŠIL, Daniel PROKOP, Radko SÁBLÍK, Iva STUHLÍKOVÁ and Stanislav ŠTECH. Hlavní směry vzdělávací politiky ČR 2030+. *MŠMT*[online]. 2019, 4.11.2019 [retrieved on: 2021-10-15]. Available at: <https://www.msmt.cz/file/51582/display/?lang=1&fbclid=IwAR2X-8L-7Nh3VIVp8Y6DYdpMk7tXt9eH0kYZDMGS4iIb3E2ljyNrH-U6124>.

particular, schools are managed by non-experts, and the assessment of school principals by their founding institutions is random and unsystematic.”¹³

3. Low attractiveness and satisfaction with the profession of principal

- In an international comparison, the above-described facts lead to the **overall lower satisfaction** of Czech school principals **with the pursuit of their own profession**.¹⁴ Having said that, Czech principals are generally fairly satisfied in various categories of their work, with the exception of the aforementioned area of perceived administrative overload.¹⁵
- This is supported by the very **low interest in pursuing the profession of principal**. According to Czech School Inspectorate data, in half of the selection processes for school principals held (48%) in 2018, only a single candidate turned up for the interview.¹⁶
- Federičová also describes that the Czech Republic is in the group of European countries where **principals' salaries are significantly below the average salaries of university-educated staff**.¹⁷ Despite this fact, the situation in recent years – across the entire education sector – **can be described as improving**.¹⁸

SYPO Project Outputs and the Competency Model

The output from the SYPO project, i.e., the *Competency Model* material, contains an inventory of competencies presumed to be necessary for a school principal's work. It is one of the responses to the problems of the profession of principal, described in the previous chapter. All this corresponds to the wording of the current *Strategy for Education Policy of the Czech Republic 2030+*, according to which the principal's competency profile is one of the key measures for strengthening the role of the principal as a leader of the pedagogical process.

13) TROJAN, Václav. *Ředitel školy jako základní faktor pedagogického vedení*. 1. Praha: Pedagogická fakulta UK, 2019, s. 146. ISBN 9788076030329.

14) GARGULÁK, Karel, Václav KORBEL and Daniel PROKOP. Ředitelé škol v ČR: Klíčoví hráči v systému vzdělávání bez dostatečné podpory. *Ředitel naživo* [online]. 2021 [retrieved on: 2021-10-15]. Available at: <https://www.reditelnaživo.cz/files/reditele-skol-v-cr-klucovy-hraci-v-systemu-vzdelavani-bez-dostatecne-podpory.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3qsMc3pysfJN10f7mz9iGsdwejNpfEAHQrmbAsSfPEcghvOsDpnLH8T4A>.

15) SEDLÁČEK, Martin. *První učitel. K roli ředitele školy v pedagogickém vedení*. 1. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2020. ISBN 978-80-210-9718-6.

16) ČŠI. *Konkurzy na ředitele škol a školských zařízení v období od 1. 3. 2018 do 31. 7. 2018* [online]. Praha, 2018, 5.9.2018 [retrieved on: 2021-10-15]. Available at: <https://www.csicr.cz/cz/Dokumenty/Tematicke-zpravy/Informace-Konkurzy-na-reditele-skol-a-skolskych-za>.

17) FEDERIČOVÁ, Miroslava. Mezinárodní srovnání ředitelů škol: České administrativní inferno *IDEA/CERGE-EI* [online]. 2019, 40 [retrieved on: 2021-10-15]. Available at: https://idea.cerge-ei.cz/files/IDEA_Studie_12_2019_Kvalita_reditelu_skol/IDEA_Studie_12_2019_Kvalita_reditelu_skol.html.

18) MÜNICH, Daniel and Vladimír SMOLKA. Platy učitelů v roce 2020 a výhled: Usne Česko na vavřínech? *IDEA/CERGE-EI* [online]. August 2021, 32 [retrieved on: 2021-10-15]. Available at: https://idea.cerge-ei.cz/files/IDEA_Studie_7_2021_Platy_ucitelu/IDEA_Studie_7_2021_Platy_ucitelu.html.

The model should become the initial basis for the preparation of principals and, more importantly, “...a tool for (self-)evaluation, education and self-education of principals in order to define what knowledge, skills and personal qualities ought to be honed, in order for principals to attain the expected professionalism.”¹⁹ The *Competency Model* will be further piloted and improved.²⁰

The *Competency Model* works with **three stages of professional development of a school principal**, which describe different levels of development needs:

1. Stage A: Entered the profession (for the prospective principal, for the novice principal).
2. Stage B: Has developed his/her aptitude for the role of principal, knows what to do, and is gathering experience (no longer a novice principal, but not yet very experienced).
3. Stage C: Experience and self-reflection have given him/her insight and perspective, shares and collaborates with and supports those around him/her (an experienced principal who can be a master in his/her field).

The areas covered by the *Competency Model* of the school principal are divided into six main areas which are further subdivided. Each sub-area describes the expected product of the principal’s activities in the aforesaid A–C stages. The following chapters – quantitative analysis and case studies – are devoted to the first three areas mentioned.

19) FRYČ, Jindřich, Zuzana MATUŠKOVÁ, Pavla KATZOVÁ, et al. *Strategie vzdělávací politiky České republiky do roku 2030+* [online]. MŠMT, 2020 [retrieved on: 2021-10-17]. ISSN 978-80-87601-47-1. Available at: https://www.msmt.cz/uploads/Brozura_S2030_online_CZ.pdf.

20) *Kompetenční model* (to be published). Národní pedagogický institut, 2021.

Table 1: Division of the SYPO Competency Model of the school principal into areas and sub-areas

Source: NPI ČR, 2021

Value and vision-based leadership	Management of school staff	Self-leadership and management	Management of learning and education	Management of the school as a legal entity	Communication and work with information
School development concept	School curriculum	Team collaboration	Management functions and style	Self-management and time management	Work with information
School culture	Management of pedagogical process	Communication as a people leadership/management tool	Data-based management and decisions	Health and quality of relationships (wellbeing)	World and foreign language
Equal opportunities	School self-evaluation	Motivation and development of staff	HR activities		Presentation skills
Safe and healthy school	Academic performance		Collaboration with partners, networking		Digital literacy
Ethical management			Legal and economic aspects of management		

The Connection Between Principals' Competencies and Academic Performance

Two parts of the *Competency Model* under review, specifically, the Strengthening of the School Culture sub-area included in the Value and Vision-based Leadership area, and the Management of Learning and Education area – are surveyed among elementary school principals in the TALIS 2018 international survey. We are thus able to compare how Czech principals evaluate themselves in these two areas compared to their foreign colleagues. Although the TALIS survey and the SYPO *Competency Model* do not stress exactly the same competencies, the general areas of interest do overlap. We have defined two country groups for the purpose of comparison with the Czech Republic:

- **geographically and culturally close countries:** Slovakia, Austria and Hungary;
- **countries with above-average academic performance according to international surveys:** Denmark, Estonia, Finland, England, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Sweden.

Self-evaluation of Principals

In our analysis, we compare the competencies under review in the relevant areas or sub-areas of the *Competency Model* of school principals using self-reported questions from the TALIS 2018 survey of principals; as regards composite indicators, we calculate the average percentage for all the questions. We have defined the areas expertly so as to come as close as possible to the SYPO *Competency Model*, while conforming to the TALIS survey batteries. The first area of the SYPO competency framework is measured using two groups of questions. The second area of the SYPO framework is measured by means of four groups of questions and one separate question:

1. Value and Vision-based Leadership and the sub-area of Strengthening of the School Culture

- **School environment** – engagement in school affairs (teachers, students, parents), the principle of joint responsibility for the functioning of the school, atmosphere of mutual support and collaboration, shared commitment to learning and teaching, supporting staff in the implementation of new ideas.
- **Collaboration** – teachers and students getting on (relations), teachers getting on among themselves (relations).

2. Management of Learning and Education

- **School Education Program (SEP)** – the teachers understand the objectives of the school education program.
- **Feedback for teachers** – monitoring of the teaching process and provision of feedback based on the observations made.
- **Education process conditions** – conditions for collaboration between teachers and creation of new teaching processes, effort to make teachers responsible for their own development and the performance of their students.
- **Assessment of teachers at school** – internal (school principal, management), other protagonists (mentors, teachers who do not hold management posts, individuals or bodies outside the school).

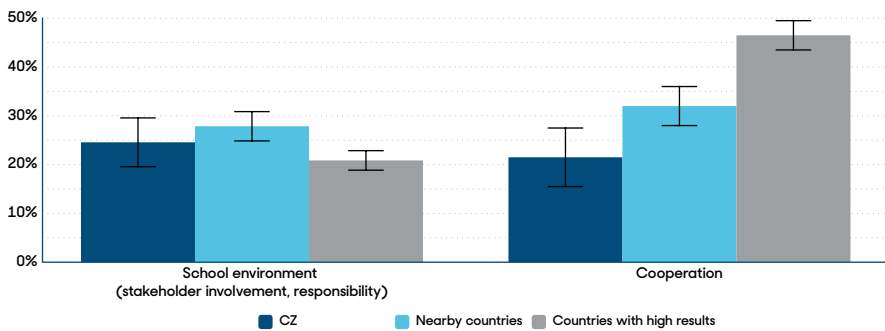
We always compare those principals who perceive themselves in a positive manner, or, as regards assessment, those who use the relevant tools (see the comments under the individual charts). Higher values denote the better self-perceived (self)evaluation of the principals.

Czech principals report, to an extent similar to that reported by foreign principals (20–30%), striving to open the school environment to the participation of various personages,

and to strengthen the atmosphere of mutual support and cooperation. This means that they provide room to anyone who wants to be involved in decision-making at the school and give teachers responsibility for the pedagogical process. Principals in the Czech Republic declare, however, that **there is a lower level of collaboration within the school. Only around 20% of principals report that teachers get on well with students and among themselves. In close countries, the figure is 32%, and in high-performing countries 47% (a statistically significant difference).**

Chart 1: Strengthening school culture (this falls under Value and Vision-based Leadership)

Source: TALIS 2018, battery 26.

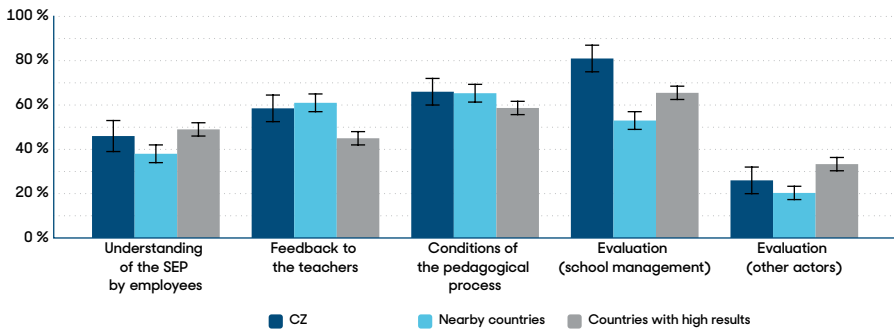


The chart shows the average percentage of principals who responded "Strongly agree". The sections show a 95% confidence interval (confidence interval indicates where the value may lie with a 95% confidence as it was estimated with uncertainty from a selected sample). The value given for the reference countries is an unweighted average.

66% of Czech principals, the same as those in reference countries, report that they create a collaborative environment among teachers and make them responsible for academic performance. **Less than half believe that teachers understand the SEP's objectives.** On the other hand, Czech principals report more frequently that they provide their teachers with feedback at least once a year and that they assess teachers. They utilize external bodies (mentors, founding institutions) for school assessment to a slightly lesser degree than in high-performing countries. The difference, however, is quite small.

Chart 2: Management of Learning and Education

Source: TALIS 2018, battery 22 (Conditions, Feedback), 23 (Assessment), 27 (SEP)



The chart displays the average percentage of principals who answered "Often"/"Agree moderately" or "Very often"/"To a large extent" (SEP, Feedback, Conditions) and who answered at least "Once a year" (assessment). The figure shown for the groups of reference countries is an unweighted average.

Overall, judging by the answers provided in both areas of the *Competency Model* under review, Czech principals do not differ significantly from their foreign colleagues. They differ slightly only in that fewer of them report good relations between teachers themselves and between teachers and students. In contrast, they report more frequently that they assess their teachers and provide feedback to them. Self-reporting answers do not, however, always necessarily have to reflect reality. Particularly those principals who are not often confronted with quality school management and competency framework concepts may tend to overestimate in their answers.

The Connection Between Competency Areas and Academic Performance

The aim of quality school management for principals is its ultimate impact on academic performance. Long-term observation of principals and subsequent evaluation would be required to determine the effects of the individual areas of the *Competency Model* on such performance; data of this kind is not available in the Czech Republic at this time.

The TALIS–PISA link of 2018 data at least allows for the exploration of the connection between academic performance and perceived competencies of principals at a particular moment in time. Although we are unable to determine the effect of competencies on performance, we can point out areas which strongly relate (correlate) to performance.

The data couples the academic performance of Czech students from PISA testing with the TALIS principal questionnaires in 2018. For our analysis, we use data obtained from 3,933 15-year old students from 182 elementary and secondary schools in the Czech Republic with 182 principals. We use the same areas of perceived competencies as defined

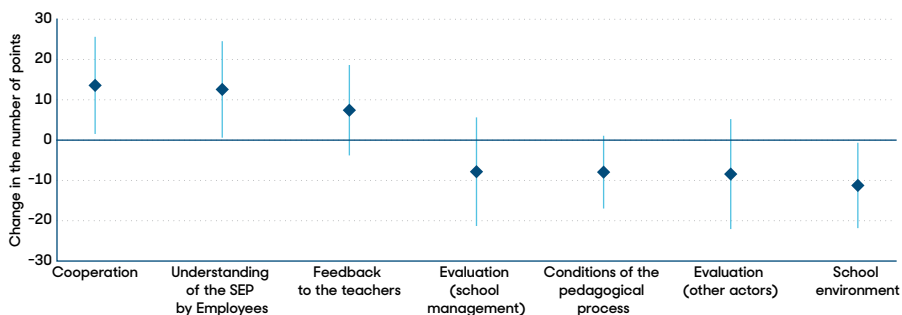
above. Using factor analysis, we create a single factor from each area in order to capture a latent variable which defines the relevant area.

Chart 3 shows the relationship (correlation) between the areas of principals' competencies and academic performance, where we examine the impact of characteristics of students (gender, grade, socio-economic status), the principal (gender, age, experience as principal) and the school (number of students, size of seat, public versus private).

Of the seven areas, three display a positive association – collaboration, SEP understood by employees and feedback for teachers; the first two associations are statistically significant. Higher self-evaluation of principals with a standard deviation (from the median to the 66th percentile) is associated with academic performance which is 10–15 points higher. In contrast, assessment of teachers by the management or external personages, the conditions of the pedagogical process and the school environment have a negative association, although the school environment itself relates to academic performance in a statistically significant manner.

Chart 3: Connection between competency framework areas and academic performance

Source: TALIS–PISA link 2018 (15-year old students of elementary and secondary schools)



The chart shows regression coefficients (diamonds) and a 95% confidence interval (sections) for the Czech Republic. The value indicates how much higher/lower the school's average score is when the principal's assessment in a particular area is increased by a standard deviation. We examine the impact of characteristics of students (gender, grade, socio-economic status), the principal (gender, age, experience as principal) and the school (number of students, size of seat, public versus private). Standard errors are clustered at the school level.

What might these results suggest? **Positive associations are found in areas related to shared awareness of learning objectives (understanding of the SEP), school culture and interpersonal relationships.** These are elements often associated with the

functioning of the school as a learning organization.²¹ If teachers are able to collaborate and learn from one another (plan, reflect on the teaching process), have a clear and shared understanding of learning goals, and if they are able to give and receive quality feedback, better results follow.

The negative associations of other areas with performance may mean that these areas are not as essential to school development. These results have to be approached with caution. There are several other explanations that may play a role and that we cannot refute due to the nature of the data. They would merit, however, further analysis in future evaluations. One of these explanations is that the actual implementation might matter more than the formal principles and conditions.

In questions pertaining to the conditions of the pedagogical process and the school environment, principals typically assess whether they are taking steps to establish a quality school environment. They often do not address, however, whether they successfully employ the processes to improve the functioning of the school with an impact on the course of the students' education and academic performance (to refer to only one, mention should be made of the not infrequent formalistic approach to the self-evaluation process). This does not mean that the areas in question are irrelevant. The mere presence of processes is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition. Their meaningfulness and the quality of their implementation is of key importance.

The importance of individual areas of principals' competencies may vary in different types of schools. While our sample does not permit a detailed analysis, we observe different associations for small and large schools, for instance. Schools with fewer students (up to 250) exhibit a positive association between performance and school environment support, while in larger schools (over 500 students), the association between the school environment and performance is negative, but positive with the SEP grasp. Collaboration is important at schools with various student numbers. There are also minor differences in the importance of individual areas in larger and smaller municipalities. This suggests that although the principals' competency framework (*Competency Model*) may operate as an umbrella for the entire education system, it needs to be utilized in harmony with the relevant school's context. Large numbers of staff have a greater need for uniform vision and education goals, so that every educator knows the direction followed by the school and the expectations placed on him. In contrast, there is more individuality in smaller schools

21) DVOŘÁK, Dominik. Pedagogické vedení školy: hledání zdrojů a obsahu pojmu. *Orbis scholae* [online]. 2011, 5(3), 9–25 [retrieved on: 2021-10-17]. Available at: <https://karolinum.cz/casopis/orbis-scholae/rocnik-5/cislo-3/clanek-5231>.
FULLAN, Michael. *The Principal: Three Keys to Maximizing Impact*. John Wiley & Sons, 2014. ISBN 978-1-118-58245-9.

and what is important is the definition of the principles of the school environment, i.e., the school's culture and climate.

These results indicate that a school culture built on mutual collaboration and grasp of the education goals by all the protagonists within the school may be important for efficient management of the school, with a significant association with better academic performance on the students' part.

Good Practice Examples

In the qualitative part, we conducted structured interviews with two principals of successful inclusive elementary schools (one private, one public), in order to describe their activities and views as good practice examples validating the *Competency Model* of school principals.

Following the quantitative analysis, we once again examined the Learning and Education Management part. Furthermore, we posed questions relating to the School Staff Management area (for the topics, see Tab. 1). As the individual sub-areas are interconnected by definition, both interviews also spontaneously yielded statements relating to the Value and Vision-based Leadership area. For convenience, we present the outputs separately, area by area, although they collectively comprise the functional ecosystem of every school.

The online interviews were conducted in September 2021 with:

- **Břetislav Svozil**, principal of the private Laboratorní škola Labyrinth v Brně (“ZŠ Labyrinth”). A relatively new, innovative school partner with Masaryk University, it emphasizes students' personal responsibility for their education. Some 220 students attend the school.
- **Marie Gottfriedová**, principal of Základní škola Trmice u Ústí nad Labem. The school became more widely known thanks to the quality inclusion of students in its catchment area or its collaboration with Babington College in the UK. Some 320 students attend the school.

Value and Vision-based Leadership

Both principals manage their schools with a clear vision, according to which both schools are open to joint education, are student-oriented and build on quality relations. School management is driven by their strong belief as to how a school should function. They believe that **a clear, shared vision is essential**.

I think that for work to be efficient, you need to start off by thinking about where the school works, with what children, in what overall context. Quite logically – and this is part of the competency model – you first need to clarify your vision – what the school is like now, what we want it to be, with what students we are currently working and where we want to get them. (Gottfriedová)

New staff members are presumed to be already familiar with the vision when they join the school and are interested in implementing it. Marie Gottfriedová adds that **nobody should be excluded from the discussion of the school's direction**: this goes even for temporary assistants of the teachers, administrative staff, such as the janitor, or the cafeteria staff. In their answers, both principals repeatedly returned to the principles on which their schools are built and which serve as a fixed point for them.

Part of the vision is always a little hazy. What is important is for people within and around Labyrinth to know the direction we are taking. And – knock on wood – I can confirm that we are managing to avoid veering off course. So it is about working with people so that we can both fulfill our common vision and work with the team. When the team keeps growing, we have to try hard to keep it all together. (Svozil)

Learning and Education Management

There is naturally a close relationship between the school's vision and its school education program. SEP offers both schools a platform for discussion on the materialization of their ideas. The Covid-19 pandemic and distance learning made both the Trmice and Brno principals **update the SEP**. In Trmice, the school's goal is to reduce the amount of material taught and to introduce core material that can be grasped by all the children. In Brno, the SEP is reflected on by the school council and an emphasis is placed on the utilization of disposable lessons for elective subjects.

Both schools work with the notion of competencies. While in Trmice, competencies (understood as skills) are synonymous with the importance of the activity component of education, Principal Svozil set up the organization structure of the school using competency teams (understood as a combination of soft skills and knowledge according to OECD). These serve as a **“middle link inside the school”** – they enable teachers of various grades to meet based on their interests and propose amendments to the SEP. Grade assemblies and evaluation for inspiration and for unification of academic results are also set up.

Competency teams have their budgets and do not have to discuss its parts with me. They take care of matters ranging from material to human resources – what we need, whether we have it within the team or need to approach another institution or outside experts. (...) Our teachers have reduced working hours so as to be able to jointly plan, plan at grade level, and assess the teaching process. (Svozil)

During the analysis of the interviews, **a strong link between the management of pedagogical processes and team collaboration emerged.** The principals of both schools stress good relations and feedback on which they build the processes between the management, teachers, students and parents. Principal Gottfriedová was satisfied with the transformation of traditional faculty meetings into smaller group meetings conducted in a pleasant atmosphere – “complete with a pie” par for the course, in order to eliminate the stress experienced by the teachers on account of meetings.

We now meet in logically organized groups – junior elementary school teachers and middle school teachers. We discuss all kinds of things in those groups: how to work with the children, how to evaluate them, anything concerning the education process. The meetings are a fountain of inspiration and cooperation. We foster an awareness that no man is an island, that our experience is similar, we can find inspiration in the successes of others. Human conversation about our work, joys and sorrows in a trusting and open spirit. (Gottfriedová)

Formative evaluation is entrenched in both schools. In the laboratory school, children record **learning evidence and goals in special diaries on a weekly basis** starting from the first grade. This involves shared responsibility of the student and the educator. The school in Trmice also evaluates individual progress in the children’s competencies once every two weeks. A 3-track concept – fast and gifted learners, regular students and students requiring support – is a long-standing concept applied in the teaching process and in evaluations. Principal Gottfriedová adds that the spirit of streaming is actively communicated to the children and the children are happy with it. The children in her school also **evaluate their teachers annually**, and this gives the management the students’ perspective on the education process.

School Staff Management

The team collaboration described above is applied in teacher development as well. Principal Gottfriedová described how the ability to work together leads to the school's improvement, for instance, in the close **collaboration between the teachers and their assistants**, or in tandem teaching. Tandem teaching was collectively chosen in the preparation week as one of the three 'accents', i.e., education priorities – challenges – for the entire school year. School-wide seminars are based on them.

One of Labyrinth school's goals is to **prevent teacher isolation**. Meetings are school-wide, at grade and competency team levels. As a result, the teacher is part of several 'networks'. Principal Svozil believes that added value and fulfillment of the other interests of the teachers can be achieved by expanding the competency teams from without:

A psychologist, sociologist, people from the business sphere are added to the teams. It is about interaction and the scope of the team. We strive to have the teachers teach what they feel good about, what helps them grow, and not where they lack confidence. We are into relationship-oriented leadership and we are therefore interested in the personal interests of the individual teachers. (Svozil)

Both schools practice teacher development and communication at the **principal – teacher** level. Principal Gottfriedová uses one on one interviews with the teachers, although they are time-consuming, in order to understand not only pedagogical needs, but also human and mental ones. Her teacher plans and the actual evaluation of the functioning of the faculty are based on them.

A great degree of honesty relates to good interpersonal relations. The quality of a one on one interview (principal and teacher) stands and falls with a good climate at the school. It can easily become a formal affair, but we know how to go deep, and it is a source of great progress. (Gottfriedová)