

IMPLEMENTATION OF MODERN MANAGERIAL STRATEGIES IN ROMANIAN PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

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Abstract: *This article explores the transition towards modern managerial strategies within the pre-university education system in Romania, illustrating how this evolution responds to the dynamics of contemporary social changes. At the center of the discussion is the implementation of the concept of "new management" in education, an emerging paradigm that distances itself from traditional hierarchical approaches, moving towards a more fluid, adaptable and participative organizational framework. The article analyzes the key features of this new management model, such as distributed leadership, decentralization of decision-making and the emphasis on the development of key skills, as well as the benefits it brings to the current educational context. In addition, the study examines the role of institutional actors in this transition, from the Ministry of Education to individual educational units, highlighting how each contributes to the implementation and adaptation of these strategies. Particular attention is paid to the specific tools used to increase organizational performance, including the Institutional Development Plan (IDP), the School Action Plan (SAP) and the Management Plan.*

Key words: *new management; participatory leadership; pedagogical innovation; educational reform; educational management; organizational performance.*

1. Introduction to modern educational management

Within the contemporary educational landscape, the pre-university education system in Romania is in a continuous process of evolution and adaptation. This transformation is driven both by demographic and socio-economic changes and by accelerated technological progress. These dynamics have generated an acute need to reevaluate traditional educational management methods, putting in the foreground the need to adopt modern, more flexible and innovative managerial strategies, starting from the premise that "the purpose of the school at the present

time is to prepare students for society not just for exams" (Alexe, 2017: 14).

In this context, the concept of "new management" in education has become a central point. It represents an emerging paradigm that distances itself from the hierarchical and rigid approaches of the past, moving towards a more fluid and adaptable organizational structure (Child, 2015). The new management in education assumes a participative and open leadership, which encourages autonomy and individual initiative, both on the part of teachers and students. This approach promotes a dynamic learning environment where collaboration, creativity and innovation are not only encouraged but essential.

The principles of new management include the decentralization of the decision-making process, thus providing greater flexibility and capacity to adapt to the specific needs of each educational institution (Altrichter et al, 2014). This transformation is not only limited to administrative methodology, but also extends to pedagogical practices, promoting a diversified curriculum and assessment methods oriented towards the development of key skills.

The adoption of these modern managerial strategies in pre-university education is a trend as well as a necessity dictated by the rapid changes in contemporary society. Integrating these innovative approaches is vital to ensure that the education system not only keeps up with these changes, but also anticipates them, thereby preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the future. In this context, the new educational management aims at "the timely identification of the needs of the labor market for the formation of the necessary educational programs, the mastery by the educational institutions of innovative methods and management tools to eliminate outdated inefficient structures" (Al-Ababneh & Alrhaim, 2020: 777i). By promoting an educational environment that values critical thinking, creativity and adaptability, modern managerial strategies can significantly contribute to the development of a robust educational system capable of forming well-prepared citizens for a dynamic future and a constantly changing labor market.

Thus, the new management approach in the Romanian educational context is both a response to current needs and a strategic investment in the future of society, ensuring that future generations will be equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge and competences to navigate and thrive in a constantly changing world ((Alexe, 2017: 14)). This approach requires a clear vision, courage and commitment from all actors involved, from politicians and administrators to educators and parents, to transform education into a process not just of knowledge accumulation, but of holistic development of the individual.

2. Characteristics of modern management in education

In the contemporary educational context, modern management is distinguished by a number of essential characteristics that significantly separate it from traditional practices. This new management model is based on a holistic and integrative approach, emphasizing continuous development and adaptation to rapid changes in society and technology. One of the most important characteristics of modern management is participative and distributed leadership. It involves a more democratic approach to leadership, where different actors in the school community - including teachers, students, parents and other stakeholders - are actively involved in the decision-making process. This form of leadership favors the development of a sense of ownership and shared responsibility over the educational process, contributing to the creation of a more open and inclusive environment.

In terms of practices associated with successful leadership models in new school management, Day et al (2020) discuss transformational, pedagogical/instructional and distributed leadership. Transformational leadership focuses on motivating staff by cultivating awareness of the importance of the organization's goals and inspiring them to transcend their own interests in favor of the organization. It includes setting vision and directions, restructuring and realigning the organization, developing staff and curriculum, and engaging the external community (Day et al, 2020: 15-17).

Pedagogical/instructional leadership, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of setting clear educational goals, curriculum planning, and evaluating teachers and teaching. This model emphasizes promoting better outcomes for students, emphasizing the importance of teaching and learning and improving the quality of the instructional process (Day et al, 2020).

Finally, distributed leadership is a concept and set of practices that emphasize that the leadership function spans the activities of multiple individuals, groups, and situations. This model suggests that decision-making is improved by involving multiple stakeholders, contributing to organizational change and development (Day et al, 2020).

Another distinctive feature is flexibility and adaptability. Modern management in education continuously adapts to the changing needs and demands of students, the community and society as a whole. This entails not only adjusting the curriculum and teaching methodologies, but also the ability to integrate emerging technologies and respond to socio-cultural changes. This adaptability is crucial to maintaining the relevance and effectiveness of education in a dynamic world. Beycioglu & Kondakci (2021) identify the following dimensions of change specific to the new educational management:

- The paradigm shift (Beycioglu & Kondakci, 2021: 795-796): The authors emphasize the need for a paradigm shift in educational management to respond to the dynamic needs of modern society. This implies the transition from a traditional management, based on planning and predictability, to one capable of responding quickly to changes in technology, economy and society.
- Continuous change (Beycioglu & Kondakci, 2021: 796-797): The concept of continuous change is presented as a process integrated into the daily activities of the organization, not as large and separate events. This means a constant adaptation to small changes, which, accumulated, lead to the evolution of the school institution.
- The social dimension of managerial change (Beycioglu & Kondakci, 2021: 795-802): Change is seen as a product of social interactions and conversations within the organization. This aspect emphasizes the importance of organizational culture and communication in facilitating and directing change.
- Participative leadership (Beycioglu & Kondakci, 2021: 795-802): A leadership model is promoted where responsibility for initiating and managing change is shared between different levels of the organization. This type of leadership supports innovation and allows for greater adaptability at the grassroots level.
- Essential process factors (Beycioglu & Kondakci, 2021: 795-802): such as participation, communication and coordination, are fundamental to the success of continuous change in organizations, including education. These factors facilitate the adaptation and integration of changes, allowing the organization to respond effectively to external and internal challenges. For example, the active participation of all members of the organization in the change process increases commitment and acceptance of the proposed changes. Open communication ensures that all stakeholders are informed and engaged, which helps align visions and goals. Effective coordination between different departments or groups ensures that changes are implemented cohesively and consistently. Together, these factors help create an organizational culture where change is viewed as an opportunity for growth and continuous improvement.

In addition, modern management focuses on competency orientation and personal development (Nahaba, 2016). In contrast to traditional approaches, which often emphasized the accumulation of theoretical knowledge and standardized assessment, the new model values the development of transversal skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and self-learning. This approach prepares students not only for academic success, but also for efficient and adaptable integration into modern society and the labor market.

Comparing these practices with traditional educational management

methods, we notice fundamental differences. Traditional models were often based on a centralized system, with decisions made at higher levels and applied uniformly across institutions. In contrast, modern management promotes a decentralized and personalized model, adapted to the specific needs of each educational institution and its students. This transition to modern educational management brings a number of significant benefits. Through these innovative approaches, an educational environment is created that not only meets the immediate needs of students, but also prepares them for future challenges. Students become more engaged in the learning process, developing their skills and ability to think critically and creatively. Furthermore, teachers are encouraged to explore new teaching methods that stimulate students' curiosity and interest (Simeretçhii, 2015).

Moreover, this approach leads to the continuous improvement of academic performance and the development of essential skills for the age of technology. By promoting a collaborative and adaptive learning environment, it facilitates not only the accumulation of knowledge, but also the development of social and emotional skills, thus preparing students for a constantly changing world.

Thus, the implementation of modern management in education represents a crucial stage in the evolution of the educational system. Through its innovative and adaptable approaches, it promotes not only academic excellence but also the integral development of students, providing them with the competencies and skills needed to successfully navigate the complexities of contemporary society. This transformation process requires a deep and collaborative commitment from all educational actors, representing a significant step towards the formation of a more informed, adaptable and innovative society.

3. Institutional actors and their role in educational management innovation in Romania

In the context of the implementation of modern management in pre-university education in Romania, the role of institutional actors is fundamental. This complex and multidimensional process involves a number of entities and organizations, each with specific responsibilities and contributions.

The Ministry of Education is the central institution in this equation, setting strategic directions and providing the legislative framework and resources necessary for educational reforms. Recently, the Ministry launched the SMART.Edu strategy, an ambitious plan aimed at digitizing education in Romania for the period 2021-2027 (<https://www.smart.edu.ro/>). This strategy proposes an integrated and comprehensive approach, emphasizing accessibility, connectivity, community, the digital educational ecosystem, innovation and

sustainability. The role of the Ministry is to coordinate and supervise the implementation of this strategy, ensuring that the objectives set are achieved efficiently and effectively. It aims to develop digital skills at all educational levels, improve digital infrastructure and promote inclusive and quality education. The strategy includes collaborations with various stakeholders and is aligned with European initiatives for digital education. The main objectives are to create a flexible and digitized educational system, prepare citizens for a digital economy and strengthen the resilience of the educational system in the digital age (<https://www.smart.edu.ro/>).

The Smart Edu strategy, dedicated to the digitization of education in Romania, presents both strengths and challenges. One of the most important assets is the emphasis on the development of digital skills, essential in an increasingly technological world. The strategy also promotes equal access to education and aims to improve the quality of education. On the other hand, its effective implementation is a major challenge, requiring adequate resources and continuous adaptation to technological changes. Monitoring and impact evaluation are also essential to ensure the long-term success of the initiative.

School inspectorates, as decentralized public services of the Ministry of Education, have an essential role in the implementation of educational policies at the regional and local level. They methodologically coordinate the teaching staff's homes and the county educational resource and assistance centers, facilitating the continuous training of teaching staff and supporting the development of the necessary skills for a modern educational environment. Through this coordination, inspectorates ensure that changes and innovations within the educational system are implemented uniformly and efficiently in all pre-university education units. The duties of school inspectorates in the implementation of educational management, according to Order No. 5530 of October 5, 2011, include (Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports, 2011):

1. Application of the policies and strategies of the Ministry of Education at county or Bucharest city level.
2. Controlling the application of legislation and monitoring the quality of teaching-learning activities and national standards.
3. Evaluation of the quality of the management of educational units and institutions.
4. Coordination of high school admissions, national assessments and school competitions at the level of educational units.
5. Monitoring the implementation of national programs and projects in the field of education and youth.

Educational units with legal personality, led by boards of directors and directors, are also crucial actors in this process. Their primary

responsibility is to implement educational policies at the local level, ensuring compliance with national and international standards. School principals and teaching staff have a direct and active role in applying new managerial and pedagogical strategies, adapting them to the specifics and needs of the school community they serve (Feroiu, 2018). They are also responsible for maintaining a constant dialogue with students, parents and other stakeholders, ensuring that all measures adopted meet the real needs of students and improve the quality of the educational process.

The interaction between these institutional actors is essential for the successful implementation of the new management in education. The Ministry of Education, by establishing the strategic and legislative framework, ensures the general direction and the necessary resources. School inspectorates play a role in the implementation and monitoring of these policies, providing assistance and support to educational establishments. At the same time, the pre-university education units are the ones that implement the initiatives at the level of the school community, adjusting them to the specifics and local needs. Through this collaboration and coordination at all levels, the aim is to create a modern, adaptable and efficient educational system, capable of responding to the needs of students and contemporary society.

This complex interaction requires constant commitment and effective communication between all actors involved.

4. Specific tools in the current educational management in Romania

In modern educational management, specific tools, such as the Institutional Development Plan (IDP), the School Action Plan (SAP) and the Managerial Plan, have a significant impact on increasing organizational performance. These tools facilitate the process of strategic and operational planning, enabling educational institutions to adapt and respond effectively to the ever-changing challenges and demands of the educational environment.

The Institutional Development Plan (PDI) is a strategic document that defines the development directions of an educational institution in the medium and long term. The PDI includes the institution's vision, mission and strategic objectives, being developed following a careful analysis of the internal and external environment. This plan is essential for identifying educational needs and resources, laying the foundation for subsequent strategic and operational decisions, containing the following:

- "a) presentation of the unit: history and current state of human, material and financial resources, the relationship with the local community and the organizational chart;
- b) needs analysis, made up of internal environment analysis (SWOT

type) and external environment analysis (PESTE type);
c) the vision, mission and strategic objectives of the unit;
d) planning all the activities of the educational unit, namely managerial activities, objectives, deadlines, stages of achievement, necessary resources, responsibilities, performance indicators and evaluation" (Ministry of Education, 2022, Art. 33)

The School Action Plan (SAP), on the other hand, focuses on the detailed planning of educational activities for the coming school year. It includes resource allocation, curricular and extracurricular organization, and strategies for improving school performance. The PAS is a vital tool for ensuring that resources are allocated effectively and that educational objectives are aligned with the demands and expectations of the educational community (Ministry of Education, 2022, Art. 33).

The management plan is an annual operational tool that details the actions and initiatives that must be implemented to achieve the objectives established in the PDI and PAS. It includes detailed plans for the professional development of teachers, improving the educational infrastructure and promoting a conducive learning environment (Ardelean, 2017). The management plan is adaptable, allowing school principals to respond quickly to changes in the educational environment. These tools play an essential role in improving organizational performance in education. By setting clear directions and facilitating planning and decision-making, they help align educational activities with strategic and operational objectives, enabling institutions to respond effectively to student and community needs. Moreover, they ensure efficient management of resources and support the continuous development of educational quality.

5. Challenges and obstacles in school management reform

Reforming school management in the context of modern education is a complex and challenging process. One of the most significant challenges in reforming school management is resistance to change. This can occur both from the teaching staff and from the administration or other interested parties. Resistance to change is often fueled by familiarity with existing procedures, fear of the unknown, or a lack of confidence in proposed new methods (Enache, 2019: 25-27). To overcome this barrier, it is crucial to implement training and continuous professional development processes that facilitate adaptation to new approaches and increase confidence in their effectiveness.

Another major challenge is the lack of resources, both financial and human. Limited resources can prevent the implementation of new management strategies or reduce the ability of schools to respond effectively to the needs of students (European Commission, 2020: 5).

Solutions to this problem include seeking alternative funding, such as grants or partnerships with the private sector, and optimizing the use of existing resources.

Also, discrepancies within the educational system, between urban and rural areas or between different regions, represent a major obstacle (,oc, 2019). These discrepancies can lead to inequities in access to quality education and affect the uniform implementation of reforms in school management. An approach focused on equality and equity is essential to ensure that all students benefit from a quality education, regardless of their location or context.

Rapid changes in technology and the need to integrate it into the educational system also represent a major challenge (Mihăilă, 2021). The adoption of educational technologies requires not only financial resources, but also the training of teachers to use them effectively. The solution lies in continued investment in educational technology and teacher training to ensure that schools are properly equipped to meet today's educational needs.

Reforming school management requires complex and adaptive approaches that take into account the diversity of existing challenges. Effective solutions require close collaboration between all stakeholders, including school administration, teachers, students, parents, and the local community. Through innovative approaches adapted to the specific context of each school, it is possible to overcome obstacles and achieve an effective reform in school management.

6. Conclusions

The implementation of modern managerial strategies in Romanian pre-university education presents a significant evolution within the educational landscape. This transformation process, driven by demographic, socio-economic and technological changes, underlines the need to re-evaluate traditional methods and adopt more flexible and innovative approaches. With an emphasis on "new management", education is moving towards a more fluid and adaptable structure, putting in the foreground the autonomy and individual initiative of teachers and students.

Central to this new model is participatory and distributed leadership, which encourages the active involvement of all members of the school community in the decision-making process. This type of leadership fosters a dynamic and collaborative learning environment where creativity and innovation are essential. By decentralizing the decision-making process, each educational institution can adapt management strategies to the specific needs of its community, promoting a diversified curriculum and assessment methods oriented towards the development of key competencies.

Modern managerial strategies in pre-university education are not just a trend, but a necessity dictated by the rapid changes in contemporary society. This type of educational management aims at the timely identification of labor market needs and the acquisition by educational institutions of innovative methods and management tools. By promoting an educational environment that values critical thinking, creativity and adaptability, it contributes to the development of a robust educational system capable of training well-prepared citizens for a dynamic future and an ever-changing labor market.

In addition to these innovative approaches, the implementation of specific tools, such as the Institutional Development Plan (IDP), the School Action Plan (SAP) and the Managerial Plan, play a crucial role in improving organizational performance in education. These tools facilitate strategic and operational planning, enabling educational institutions to respond effectively to the challenges and demands of the changing educational environment.

However, the school management reform process faces various challenges and obstacles, including resistance to change, lack of resources and systemic discrepancies. Overcoming these barriers requires constant commitment and effective collaboration between all stakeholders, including school administration, teachers, students, parents and the local community. Through adapted and innovative approaches, specifically adapted to the context of each school, it is possible to achieve an effective reform in school management, thus ensuring a modern and efficient educational system, capable of responding to the needs of students and contemporary society.

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