

About Erasmus+ LeadCareer Project

Mihaela Zavašnik Arčnik

National School for Leadership in Education, Slovenia

The article gives an overall view of the Erasmus+ LeadCareer project. It clarifies its main idea, aims and objectives, which were based on the research review claiming that in many public organisations there are usually no clear provisions for career development of employees and that providing good career opportunities is one of key practices which influence organisational performance. Additionally, the article clarifies what is meant by capacity building in the project. Throughout the article the implementation of the project through the provision of intellectual outputs is described. The article also tackles project impact and foresees some future directions.

Keywords: career development, career, teacher, headteacher

Why the Project: Idea, Aims and Objectives

Today's time is marked by risk and deep social change (Rifkin 2001; Wallerstein et al. 2013), which strongly influences the work of school leaders (i.e. headteachers) and other educational staff members (e.g. teachers, school counsellors, kindergarten teachers). The Finnish study on the future of education (*Finska v vrhu znanja 2030* 2014) highlights the fact that the changing social environment will increasingly require flexible working time and the kind of educational staff members who will be more and more responsible for steering their own career development. Moreover, the educational staff should, for reasons of irregular employment and employment variation, know themselves well and identify opportunities for learning and work, be able to make decisions and successfully transfer and shift between their roles as students, staff members, family members and citizens. Therefore it is necessary to offer opportunities to school leaders and educational staff to enhance their career competences – meaning that school leaders should become competent in their career guidance and development.

The main aim of the LeadCareer project was to develop school leadership knowledge and skills for the career development of the educational staff. It was intended to be achieved through two objectives: a 5-day curriculum for a training programme focused on

capacity building for career development, and a strategy for implementing the curriculum into the lifelong learning of school leaders.

The need for such a project derived from different research results and from good practice in other fields outside the educational context. A CEDEFOP review (2008) suggests that there are no clear provisions for career development inside many organisations and that leaders presume that employees will get help and advice informally (not as part of an organisational strategy). Leaders do not normally assume that their staff members are very diverse and that acknowledging and recognising diversity in various career development stages benefits the organisation. Additionally, Purcell et al. (2003) found that providing good career opportunities is one of the key practices which influence organisational performance. OECD handbook for policy makers of career guidance (2004) indicates that policy makers should ensure that career guidance and development are integral parts of adult learning programmes in publicly funded education and training institutions. The project also relates to the two Resolutions of the Council of the European Union (2004)¹ and »Europe 2020« Strategy (European Commission 2010), which highlighted the need for strong career guidance.

In the recent couple of years, the theme of (leadership) capacity building has become one of the most prominent and recurring topics. However, despite its increasing importance (also in public institutions and school leadership contexts), it would be very difficult to claim at this point that there is a universal definition of 'capacity building.' In practice, leadership capacity building means intentional aiming at strengthening a certain field of knowledge and skills to improve its performance and influence at different levels, usually at the individual, organisational and sectoral system levels. This is normally accomplished through the development of a series of instruments, tool and activities, which can be significantly varied, e.g. informing, training, networking, consulting, developing written materials, coaching, technical support, consolidating communities of practice, introducing technological enhancements etc. The LeadCareer project aimed at five such different instruments for capacity building, called 'intellectual out-

¹ 'Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, Meeting within the Council of 21 November 2008 on Better Integrating Lifelong Guidance into Lifelong Learning Strategies.' *Official Journal of the European Union*, 13 December 2008, c 319.

puts,' i.e. a state of the art comparative study of leadership capacity building for the career development of the educational staff, 5-day curriculum, sample pedagogical material for the execution of the curriculum, policy recommendations/guidelines and a publication as a source for relevant stakeholders and the general public with the intention of spreading and disseminating the results of the project.

Implementation of the Project through the Provision of Intellectual Outputs

The five abovementioned intellectual project outputs represent a series of documents supporting the idea and rounding up the aims and objectives of the project. They follow the logical order of the project implementation and the natural order of capacity building instruments (in our case, written materials) needed for the execution of the process of optimising leadership knowledge and skills in the career development of the educational staff.

Career guidance and career development competences as part of guidance are highly related to the current European policies aimed at reaching Europe 2020 targets. The development of career competences contributes to and is foreseen as a tool to support individual career management, supports individuals to make the transition to employment and between employments, increases the flexibility of the labour market, supports individuals to be resilient when facing career transitions etc. The comparative analysis of national documents as the first project intellectual output offers a chance to get a good overview of the field of research and the already existing material in the national policies related to career guidance and career development competences.

In the first part of the study, the EU documents defining Lifelong Guidance (LG) were studied through desk research methods. This was followed by the analysis of the national documents of project partners. The analysis of national documents was carried out based on two research questions: *What has been implemented on the national level regarding career guidance policies (with a focus on the employed adults, if possible the educational staff, in the public sector)? What kind of trainings or programmes exist in the public sector that cater for the career guidance of the employed adults (if possible in relation to the educational staff members)?*

In the second part of the comparative study, the existing career competence models were studied. The project examined Cana-

dian, Scottish, American and Australian career competence models. After the completion, four sets of overall competences necessary for successful career guidance and development relevant for the educational staff members were determined. Of the four general competences, the different sub-competences that were found in the existing models were discussed and then reduced to a minimum of 40 sub-competences, mainly connected to the career of the educational staff. On the basis of the determined sets of competences, an e-questionnaire was used to find out about the career guidance and development needs of the educational staff members at different educational levels. The questionnaire was distributed to the educational staff of all kinds in schools and kindergartens in different partner countries. After the closing of the online questionnaire, the data were analysed by calculating the average for each competence and for each field of overall competences. Needs identification determined the gaps between what needs to be accomplished through the curriculum development and what is currently being achieved (also judging the competences in relation to one another in participating countries). Based on the results, the partners started to design the curriculum (Intellectual Output No. 2).

Designing a curriculum for the educational staff arose from the analysis of the recent national and international policy papers, other documents and practice related to career guidance and development and needs analysis (Intellectual Output No. 1). The project noted and wanted to draw attention to the importance of career development competences for the educational staff, as there were several indicators in Intellectual Output No. 1 showing that training for the career development of the educational staff has been neglected in most of the countries. The curriculum is intended for all those in the educational field who want to intentionally develop their career competences. It specifically addresses headteachers as leaders being partly responsible for the career development of the educational staff. It is also believed that those educational staff members who are well educated and trained in career development are going to be better able to develop students' career competences, as students are the ones who will be facing difficult and important career decisions and transitions in their careers.

The 40 important career competences were used as a starting point for designing the questionnaire, the purpose of which was to measure to what extent the educational staff have already de-

veloped these competences. In the process of designing the curriculum, this set of competences was likewise reconsidered; some of the competences were rewritten in a more user-friendly language while others, if too similar to stand on their own, were merged into one. For a substantive elaboration of the curriculum, the different career competences within the fields were clustered and for each cluster categories were identified. Finally, 21 basic career competences supporting individuals in their career management were gathered in the curriculum. The curriculum was titled *I Am a Teacher – I Create My Career*. It is structured according to basic career competences, which are arranged in four thematic clusters: basic knowledge, self-potential, self-leadership, and enactment. The curriculum consists of 5 modules. For these five modules the aims, topics and expected outcomes are described and at the end of the document recommendations for the trainers are listed.

At this point, it is worth mentioning that prior to the project, the members thought of basing the curriculum on DOTS and New DOTS analysis model developed by Law and Watts (2005). However, during the state of the art analysis, it was decided to use a different, competency approach, as it seemed more adaptable to employed adults and organisation and system friendly.

On the basis of the curriculum, the project agreed to develop sample pedagogical materials (Intellectual Output No. 3) to serve as a tool for headteachers (and other interested stakeholders) to help them develop the career competences of the educational staff and execute the curriculum. In practice, the curriculum defines the aims, contents, topics and themes. It does not, however, define the approach, as there are many different ways of achieving the aims; the approach is left to headteachers. Sample materials support headteachers in understanding career guidance and development, provide ideas on how to plan and train, they serve as a reference, are a source of stimulation etc. Sample materials are presented to headteachers as examples which can be used to create their own similar materials, to be creative and flexible in achieving the aims of the curriculum. Headteachers as trainers are free to adjust the activities to the professional needs of educational staff members. It is recommended that the maximum number of the educational staff in a group is 20. This ensures an active involvement of everyone in the group. Optimal time for each activity is proposed, but headteachers are free to adjust the length of activities depending on participants' experiences and needs.

The materials were developed during team work with a group of Croatian headteachers. After the preparation of sample materials for each model, the materials were introduced to and ‘tested’ with a group of Croatian headteachers, thus enabling the project members to adjust it for proper use and make final corrections.

The fourth intellectual output developed was the policy paper, i.e. recommendations for policy makers at different levels. The document addresses key issues related to the implementation of leadership capacity building for the career development of the educational staff. The paper is intended to convince policy makers to advocate changes on these specific policy issues. It serves as a specific proposal for action at different levels. The main part of the document describes the potential use of the curriculum for different key stakeholders. Furthermore, the most relevant issues related to underlying assumptions, the effects on and roles of key stakeholders as well as implications of issues are pointed out. The use for selected target groups on supranational, national, organisational and individual levels is presented.

On the supranational and national levels, the curriculum tackles the issues raised by the OECD and EU institutions and governments in the past. The curriculum contributes to good career decisions of headteachers, educational staff and students, and can therefore help improve employability in all areas of the society from youth to the older generation. Being able to influence and decide about career decisions is important to prevent burnouts and other illnesses, which happen very often within this profession due to several challenges. Good career decisions are important for a clear work-life balance and therefore for the health and satisfaction of different people in the society. This has a significant impact on national budgets, as it results in a reduction in the costs related to unemployment benefits and the health system.

At the organisational level, the career curriculum can facilitate changes in educational institutions, support quality management in organisations and help set goals in organisations dealing with the career development of the staff. Preschools and schools were identified as the main beneficiaries of the curriculum. The identification of strengths and weaknesses of the staff can help headteachers delegate tasks and activities and plan their career development better. This leads to a more conscious approach in leading a career and to better recruitment. Additionally, the curriculum offers a chance to be implemented as a whole or in parts in other organisations, e.g. at the university in teacher training

courses, headteacher associations, headteacher training institutions. It could also be used by private organisations for further education or by other employment service institutions, e.g. the national employment office. At the individual level, by knowing and using the curriculum, headteachers get a chance to learn more about career guidance, which enables them to design and advance their own careers. Furthermore, they are empowered to help educational staff members develop career competences. Those staff members who participate in the curriculum learn to take on their own career and discover more about the basics of guidance, which gives them a chance to plan and manage their careers.

Project Impact

The main aim of the Key Action 2 Strategic Partnerships, through which the LeadCareer project was supported, is to develop innovative outputs and/or to engage in the intensive dissemination activities and use of existing and newly developed products or innovative ideas. Priority is given to strengthening the profile of the teaching professions, especially teachers and headteachers.

What effect can be claimed and seen in the LeadCareer project? Looking at the impact of the project helps us judge whether a project has been successful or not, to what extent and in what way. It could be said that impact assessment relates to the process of examining project activities, supports the effectiveness of the project, allows space to be critical, creates value, helps us in telling a story to different stakeholders etc. On the basis of the rationale and policy context, resources available, activities carried out and intellectual outputs produced there, several effects can be identified at this stage.

At the partner organisation level, the following examples were identified . . . First and foremost, access to a readymade curriculum and sample materials that can be used immediately by any of the partner organisations bears a profound impact. In practice, this means that partner organisations can use the curriculum as a source for training programmes and immediately start with its implementation. Also, in some partner organisations it was noticed that the LeadCareer project activities became related to and interwoven with other activities of partner organisations, e.g. other projects with similar topic/theme. Increased awareness of other staff members in partner organisations through regular communication channels and information sharing was also marked, i.e.

the topic and the theme became more prominent in several other discussions apart from the project discussion. It is also believed that through dissemination activities the sectoral system level was reached. This will enable decision makers to make necessary actions for further developments in the field of career development and guidance.

In Conclusion

At the final stage of the project it can be, on the one hand, claimed that the project reached its aims and objectives. On the other hand, this does not imply that the work has been finished. It is the responsibility of partners that the results get implemented into work practice and that their availability at local, regional and national levels is thus ensured. With such a perspective in mind, the project partners will try to encourage policy makers at different levels to channel more resources towards leadership capacity building for the career development of the educational staff. However, a significant difference will in fact take place when the curriculum is finally implemented and evaluated in practice. This means reaching the stage where the curriculum is internationally applicable and carried out. In 2018, such a training course will for the first time be offered by the Slovenian partner through Erasmus+ mobility projects.

References

- CEDEFOP. 2008. *Career Development at Work: A Review of Career Guidance to Support People in Employment*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- Council of the European Union. 2004. »Draft Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States Meeting within the Council on Strengthening Policies, Systems and Practices in the Field of Guidance throughout Life in Europe.« 9286/04, Council of the European Union, Brussels.
- European Commission. 2010. »Europe 2020: A European Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth.« COM(2010) 2020, European Commission, Brussels.
- Finska v vrhu znanja 2030: študija o prihodnosti izobraževanja; poročilo finskega sindikata vzgoje in izobraževanja OAJ*. 2014. Ljubljana: CEPS.
- Law, B., and A. G. Watts. 2003. *The DOTS Analysis: Original Version*. Elsworth: National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling.
- OECD. 2004. *Career Guidance: A Handbook for Policy Makers*. Paris: OECD.

- Purcell, J., N. Kinnie, S. Hutchinson, B. Rayton, and J. Swart. 2003. *Understanding the People and Performance Link: Unlocking the Black Box*. London: CIPD.
- Rifkin, J. 1995. *The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era*. New York: Putnam.
- Wallerstein, I., R. Collins, M. Mann, G. Derlugian, and C. Calhoun. 2013. *Does Capitalism Have a Future?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

O projektu Lead Career, Erasmus+

Sestavek prinaša splošen pregled projekta Lead Career v okviru programa Erasmus+. Pojasnjuje glavno idejo, namene in cilje, izhajajoče iz povzetka predhodne raziskave, češ da v mnogih javnih zavodih navadno ni nedvoumnih določb za karierni razvoj zaposlenih in da je zagotavljanje dobrih kariernih priložnosti ena ključnih praks, ki vplivajo na uspešnost organizacije. Poleg tega v članku razložimo, kaj mislimo v projektu s krepitvijo zmožnosti. V vsem sestavku popisujemo izvajanje projekta in predstavljamo intelektualna spoznanja. Članek obravnava tudi vpliv projekta in predvidi nekaj smernic za prihodnost.

Ključne besede: razvoj kariere, kariera, učitelj, ravnatelj

- Mihaela Zavašnik Arčnik is Programmes and Projects Manager at the National School for Leadership in Education, Slovenia.
mihaela.zavasnik@solazaravnatelj.si