



## **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS TO THE FOUNDATION STUDY**

In the preparatory phase of the project implementation, we addressed the question of what it means, how it can be measured, and how to support workplace engagement in the economy and education: generally - based on literature sources - and specifically in partner countries with the help of interviews. In the four partner countries, we contacted 35 leaders, among them 16 company leaders and 19 school leaders. The organizations were selected so that they were diverse in terms of type and size.

### **The concept of workplace commitment**

Commitment to the workplace as a key factor affecting the effectiveness of the organization, began to receive increasing attention worldwide at the end of the 20th century. Interpreting the complex concept of commitment has changed a lot during the past decades. Its content - especially in the field of economy - has been constantly improved and refined. Nowadays, an approach that considers people's commitment to work as a result of a positive psychological and social workplace environment, based on workplace relationships and roles, and rewards received, can be considered general. Today, a number of corporate executives believe that the results of a business can be increased by focusing on people. Although, research on the topic and the development of support systems in the business sector have begun and are completed, the issue in education is just now becoming increasingly important.

Based on well-known sources, it can be stated that commitment to work both in the business world and in education is an important factor for good organizational performance. It was an interesting encounter, however, that this thought was not emphasized very strongly in the interviews. The business executives interviewed were more conscious of the topic than the school leaders, but on the whole, there was no major difference between the views. Answering the question of what would be the most important steps to improve their own organization's situation, no one mentioned commitment in the first or second place. The majority considered this to be the most relevant for the development of skills in the framework of trainings and the increase of investments. Generally, engagement is enhanced through the 4-6 ranked in the ranking of the six options offered.

### **Common features in the world of business and education**

Commitment to the workplace is rooted in workplace experiences in both spheres. Being satisfied with one's state of mind, leads to better performance, and primarily takes the following behavioural forms: (1) positive manifestations of the organization, (2) feeling of belonging, and perseverance with the organization, (3) willingness to make extra efforts to achieve the common goals.

Commitment to work is based on the benefits of work in both areas: job and work safety, quality of working conditions, good pay and evaluation of work, opportunity for development, and work-life balance. However, it is important to note that teachers' commitment - along with the other conditions - can no longer be increased by the increase of salary. It is likely that the improvement of material conditions in education does not directly affect the quality of professional work. Rather, it influences the attraction of the right people to the profession - it is strengthened by higher salaries and hindered by low ones.



The decisive factor in both spheres of work is the nature of work. How meaningful, enjoyable, and challenging is the activity to be done. How much freedom and autonomy does it offer, how much power does it provide? How transparent and clear its goals are? How much flexibility is possible when making decisions related to a given activity?

Workplace practices, among which people work, are equally important. Everyday relationships, sense of reception, respect for thoughts and opinions, different forms of cooperation, atmosphere of communication and trust, and quality of leadership are also important.

Essentially, the same features characterize committed employees in both areas. They show a positive attitude and behaviour, are proud of their work, loyal to the organization, and represent it externally. They participate in shared thinking about the organization. They understand the ideas and goals for the future of the organization, they know what is expected of them in their tasks and are ready to make extra effort if needed. They have good working relationships and are looking for opportunities for learning. Committed employees in both spheres are more productive, raise the level of organization performance and encourage innovation.

It is also a common feature that the first three years are critical to the foundation of engagement - though this is more important in education than in the business sector. As for teachers, the most important aspect of this period is to experience the joy of their activities and a sincere interest in the children studying in the institution. In addition to formal career advancement, collegial support is the most rewarding commitment at this time.

The **opportunity for professional development** is also important in both areas to raise commitment, as is the need for this opportunity to be continuous. In the business sector, what the most appropriate and attractive way of professional development is, depends on the sort of activities of the company (production, service provider, or farm). In the case of classroom work, learning processes that fit into practical activities and work in smaller professional communities tend to be the most effective. The knowledge gained in this way strongly builds on the existing experience, while the group members constantly reflect on the practices of themselves and their peers. During cooperation, values, knowledge and professional skills of the group develop as a whole. New knowledge is deeper integrated into professional capital and is more likely to be applied, compared to traditional courses.

### **Role of the leaders**

The key role of the leader and the management can also be considered a common factor. Many of the experts in the topic believe that the key to employee engagement is specifically in the hands of the leader, who can influence this basically in two ways. On the one hand, directly - through his/her own personality and behaviour and, on the other hand - indirectly - by creating supportive working conditions.

Leaders who are committed to believing in organizational goals and people, are able to commit to their colleagues. Their behaviour stimulates, stabilizes others, builds trust, develops and connects them. Experience shows that if such a leader comes to the head of an organization, employee engagement often increases exponentially. The personal programme of a good leader is linked to the strategy of the organization.

Leaders in both spheres have a number of opportunities to help their colleagues increase their commitment and with this an increase in organizational success by creating effective working conditions.



Providing the right atmosphere, exploiting the resources of collegial relations and networks, building a shared vision, community-based problem solving, risk-taking and implementing various joint projects can play an important role in this. For the self-fulfilling development of colleagues, it is of great importance that the workplace is transformed into a learning organization - which, of course, also requires time for stakeholders. It is essential that performance indicators are clear to workers and the environment - in line with market needs and, in the case of education, with the needs of learners. It is important that the expectations are accompanied by regular management feedback, and that the evaluation and reward system is in line with the common organizational values. Last but not least, in both areas, there can be a serious positive impact on the division of managerial responsibility and leadership, which can play a role in building mutual trust and freeing up creative energies.

The leader has a decisive role in developing a culture of commitment, but it cannot be treated as a one-off action in any sphere. The rise of it depends mostly on what is done day after day. Experience has shown that there is a motivating effect on methods that focus on individuals, positive feedback, and moral and financial recognition of work well-done. But good teamwork, effective communication, supportive leadership style, employee involvement in decision-making, clarity of goals and responsibilities, and professional development opportunities can be very important. On the other hand, the lack of communication within the organization, the lack of clarity of goals, the monotony of work, the lack of professional development opportunities and the lack of managerial support, as well as the inadequacy of wages and the lack of rewards severely weaken the attachment to the workplace.

### **Differences concerning engagement between the world of business and education**

Business organizations are companies competing for the same pool of consumers, therefore, uniqueness for them is essential. A brand and reputation that distinguishes one job from another is often an important element of affiliation for successful businesses. There is significantly less importance of this kind of competition among schools - although good image in education can be an important element of commitment also.

In the business world, financial success can play a direct role in attachment, and indirectly, through performance-based rewards and recognition can be even more important. In education, however, although the differences in performance can be perceived as well, this dimension can hardly arise. At the same time, it is less conducive to exactly determine what achievements are considered to be outstanding and to what it is compared to, in the world of education.

The fundamental differences in the mode of operation result in more potential and more transparent career paths in the business sector and a closer relationship between career progression and performance. Educational organizations are basically horizontal. Progress in one's career does not necessarily mean ramp-up and is often not very visible. Teachers' good performance usually speaks less for themselves and is influenced by more external conditions than working within business. School career building is also hampered by the fact that a significant proportion of teachers do not want to take a higher position on the one hand, because they feel that higher pay is not proportionate to the increased responsibility, and on the other hand, because promoted posts usually take you out of the classroom and into more managerial/administrative roles, which many teachers do not want.

An important difference is also found in the issue of partner satisfaction. In the economy sector satisfaction of business partners and of customers can be clearly perceived as successful, which generally has a positive effect on employee commitment. On the other hand, in education, along with value-driven goals and a more stratified partnership, a situation can easily arise where the satisfaction of a part of this circle can only be achieved at the expense of another, which can even cause severe tensions.



## **Unique features influencing commitment in the world of education**

The professional capital of teachers is the toolkit that they mobilize in their work, never consists only of their own skills, abilities, talents and commitment. An important component is social capital, which is created by linking to others, different groups and networks. It also has the power and autonomy within which they can make decisions. All this is strongly reflected in the individual elements of their professional capital. On one hand, by shaping their personal knowledge, on the other hand, teachers working with others, believe in their own efficiency, which protects them from stress and burnout.

The way in which an institution, a region, or a teacher in a field works together, significantly influences their well-being. The simpler version of cooperation typically involves the exchange of teaching materials in education, participation in discussions and conferences, and the development of common standards. A more complex and rarer form is what can be called collaboration, which means direct involvement, reflection, concerted work with children and joint studies.

The extent to which different forms of cooperation exist in an institution, depends on the organizational culture. In extreme cases, though not uncommon, teachers work in isolation or only give occasional and formal feedback, which basically does not support commitment at work. But even if the co-operation takes place only within competing small groups, in the bureaucratic form of collegiality, trust and acceptance are lacking. From the point of view of commitment, the development of a professional community is a quality leap within which relatively constant groups work doing work-related learning. Organizational culture has a fundamental impact on the professional development of teachers and indirectly, on student performance.

A special feature of the work in the field of education is the context of diversity. Pedagogical activities mean different things in different environments. What a teacher needs to do in a workplace, is determined by the students in many ways. They change from time to time, and even the same pupils may need something different in other situations or at other times. Therefore, the key element of successful pedagogical work is adaptability, the ability to make adequate professional decisions and continuous readiness.

In addition to contexts, personal values also have a fundamental impact on teachers' professional decisions. What a teacher does or how he/she follows an instruction, depends on what they consider to be a point of alignment. There are some for whom the commitment to vocation is based on the love of children. In their professional decisions, they primarily identify what they feel is in the interest of the children. For others, delivery of a specific subject knowledge is at the heart of their thinking. Their aspirations are mostly guided by their practice, but not by the quality of this task. And there are those for whom teaching is first and foremost a livelihood, and their most important aspect is to keep the job - while these aspects naturally blend with each other. Therefore, in connection with the personal value system, teacher work often appears as a moral issue. It follows from the self-reflective nature of more or less self-directed, autonomous professional decisions that pedagogical work always involves the open or hidden rejection of external management intentions that employees cannot identify internally.

A particular feature of education is that the well-being of employees - much more than in the business world - is directly related to high performance. Good teacher well-being is the basis for a good relationship with students, and at the same time it is also a driver of student performance.

## **Conclusions and suggestions**



- On the basis of the analysis, it can be clearly seen that although the prominent role of employee engagement seems to be universally valid in the world of work, it has not been deeply integrated into professional thinking in any country in the educational field. Therefore, it is an important task to share knowledge about the subject and raise awareness - primarily among the heads of institutions. This activity can be a new, partial goal of the project.
- Since organizational climate and culture are of paramount importance for engagement, the evolution of which is greatly influenced by managerial preparedness and character, it is important to pay attention to direct support of managers by helping them to
  - develop self-reflection on their own leadership practices,
  - continually improve the personal skills needed for successful leadership, and use the opportunities provided by their position (eg with the practice of regular feedback, the power of non-financial recognition)
  - being able to share effectively with others, and at the same time control, the management tasks.
- As staff feelings and professional capital growing as part of collegial cooperation, have a direct impact on their individual effectiveness and institutional efficiency, it is important that management by learning, becomes able to
  - create an atmosphere of mutual trust based on cooperation,
  - ensure that colleagues in need are always given the necessary collegial support,
  - efficiently operate the various channels of organizational communication, problem solving and knowledge sharing,
  - guide the joint formation of the institutional vision and the functioning and continuous development of the organization as a professional community.
- The elements of material recognition, physical needs, and the environment mentioned above should not be left out as important points in compiling the questionnaire.

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