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## THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL IN CROATIAN EDUCATION

### Manager, Leader, or Administrator

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The purpose of this study is to examine problems in the fields of educational management and instructional leadership in Croatia that could serve as possible starting points for future studies or research. This study examines the role of the school principal within the context of modern-day schooling in turbulent surroundings, growing responsibility and overloaded schedule. According to findings we can explain eight different roles principals perform in Croatian education: a) information collector and disseminator, b) communicator, c) strategist and planner, d) executive manager, administrator and organiser, e) educational leader and educator, f) evaluator, g) student and h) community liaison. The principal's roles are oriented toward: a) people, b) tasks/goals, c) school as organisation, and d) processes inside the school. Tasks generated from such orientation belong to an ideal administrative process: planning, decision-making, organising, coordination, communication, influence and evaluation effective in five tasks of school management: school program, pupils, staff, and relations with community, physical preconditions, and management.

**Keywords:** school, management, education, leadership, instruction, principal's responsibilities

**Rollen von Schulleitern in Kroatien: Bildungsmanager, Geschäftsführer oder Büroangestellter:** Die Studie untersucht Fragen in den Bereichen Bildungsmanagement und Leitung von Bildungsinstitutionen in Kroatien, die als Ausgangspunkt für weitere Forschungen und Untersuchungen dienen können. Die Studie analysiert die Rolle des Schulleiters unter heutigen schulischen Rahmenbedingungen, zu denen ein turbulentes Umfeld, wachsende Verantwortung und ein übervoller Terminkalender gehören. Den erhobenen Daten zufolge müssen sich Schulleiter in Kroatien in acht unterschiedlichen Rollenbereichen behaupten: a) Sammlung und Weiterleitung von Informationen, b) Kommunikation, c) Strategie und Planung, d) Leitung der Organisation, administrative Aufgaben und Organisation, e) Leitung der Bildungsinstitution und Unterricht, f) Evaluation, g) Lernen und h) Kontakte zum Gemeinwesen. Die Rollenbereiche des Schulleiters richten sich an: a) Menschen, b) Aufgaben/Ziele, c) Schule als Organisation und d) Prozesse innerhalb der

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Schule. Von den Rollenbereichen lassen sich folgende Aufgaben für den idealen administrativen Prozess ableiten: Planung, Entscheidungsfindung, Organisation, Koordination, Kommunikation, Beeinflussung und Evaluation, und zwar in fünf Teilbereichen der Schulleitung: Schulprogramm, Schüler, Personal, Kontakte zum Gemeinwesen, physische Voraussetzungen und Management.

**Schlüsselbegriffe:** Schule, Management, Bildung, Leitung, Bildungsmanagement, Aufgaben des Schulleiters

## 1. Introduction

During the last twenty years, there have been several studies and articles both in the profit and the non-profit sectors dealing with the roles of managers and leaders as well as those of the principals in the educational system. This study deals with the answer to the following question: ‘What do principals really do and what is their role in the Croatian educational system?’ The purpose of this study is to examine problems in the fields of educational management and leadership in Croatia that could serve as possible starting points for future studies or research, explained by Bird and Little, cited in GLICKMAN (1990, 19). They explain the difference between educational and instructional leadership, and suggest that educational leadership describes the initiatives that would like to preserve or produce the acceptable educational ethos (the morality), while instructional leadership belongs to a specific field of educational leadership, and is directed to curriculum and teaching.

The idea of this study is based on the premise that the role is realised through acting. This study examines the role of the school principal within the context of modern-day schooling in turbulent surroundings, growing responsibility and overloaded schedule. The theoretical explanation of the principal’s role in the Croatian educational system was analysed through the available literature based on management, administration and leadership, and through the analysis of documentation.

## 2. Definition of the term ‘role’

Many doubts arise in this field based on terminology and taxonomies. The first problem we faced during this work came from the definition of role. The term ‘role’ is ambiguously defined in Croatian literature. The meaning of ‘uloga’ includes both role and function according to the *English–Croatian dictionary* (FILIPOVIĆ 1970, 846). ‘The term “role” usually refers to the function performed by someone’ (ZVONAREVIĆ 1978, 276, our trans.).<sup>1</sup> ‘“Role” means specific expectations from other people of the person who carries a particular function’ (BAHTIJAREVIĆ-ŠIBER & SIKAVICA 2001, 616, our trans.).<sup>2</sup> We may conclude that the term ‘role’ in the Croatian language is synonymous with function. Furthermore, the term ‘function’, to which we adhere, is explained by

<sup>1</sup> Original text: ‘Pod ulogom se obično misli na funkciju koju netko vrši.’

<sup>2</sup> Original text: ‘Uloga je je označena očekivanjima koja druga osoba ima od osobe koja nosi određene funkcije.’

ANTIĆ as follows: ‘The principal as “the first person in the school” is entrusted with the function of the “main commander” whose work in school can be understood as the state representative governed by their delegated functions’ (2000, 297, our trans.).<sup>3</sup> According to the explained definition the assigned functions include: a) planning and programming, b) managing, c) keeping, d) organising, e) routing, f) monitoring, g) controlling, h) evaluating and i) a range of administrative and financial activities called the administrative jobs. We have agreed that the term ‘role’ could be defined as the behaviour expected of a person possessing a certain position in a group (PENNINGTON, 2001, 279). The principal’s role is realised in the organisation we call school. On the other hand, organisation is also a group in which social power and responsibility exist in unequal distribution, as ZVONAREVIĆ (1981, 323) extracted.

### 3. Explanation of management and leadership roles

The term ‘role’ is explained within two fields: economy and education. Throughout history theoreticians and pragmatists have tried to define the role of chairpersons primarily in the profit and non-profit sectors. This study does likewise, but in the wider context of the roles of managers and leaders belonging to the field of economics. BAHTIJAREVIĆ-ŠIBER (1999) lists eight different roles that successful managers must perform, namely: a) leader, b) producer, c) coordinator, ‘monitor’, d) mentor, e) promoter, f) innovator, g) middleman, h) coach. KRECH and colleagues (1962, 428) point out the key roles of leaders: a) executive, b) planner, c) policy-maker, d) expert, e) external group representative, f) supervisor of internal affairs, g) implementer of reward and punishment, h) arbitrator and mediator, i) example, j) group symbol, k) a person who replaces individual responsibility, l) ideologue – one who serves as a source of beliefs, values and standards or behaviour for each member of the group, m) father/parent, n) sufferer for others – serves as a target for external aggression, accepting blame for the school’s results. We believe that an acceptable explanation of the managers’ role in the non-profit sector, to which education belongs, was expressed very early by MINTZBERG (1975, 12): a) formal role, b) interpersonal role, c) informer, d) decision-maker. We can conclude that the manager’s role is that of an agent who uses many different competences. ZALEZNIK (1977, 61) suggests two main roles of principals: acting with the purpose of realising other people’s requests, and initiating acting that covers strategic and operational planning and leading as well as other kinds of acting with the purpose of achieving plans. It seems that Zaleznik points out two different kinds of action on the part of principals: managerial action and leading action. The principals provide the conditions for finding teaching resources: material, financial and human, and model them through managing and leading, by manifesting various forms of behaviour towards their environment (LEITHWOOD & JANTZI 1999, 451).

<sup>3</sup> Original text: ‘Ravnateljku kao “prvom čovjeku u školi” povjerena funkcija “glavnog upravljača”, čiji posao u školi možemo shvatiti kao posao izaslanika države koji školom upravlja u okviru povjerenih funkcija.’

#### 4. Managing role in the school

The managerial role of principals derives from exercising governance in schools – ‘management is realised in four specific groups of activities: planning, organising, leading and evaluating’ (STANIČIĆ et al. 2002, 149, our trans.)<sup>4</sup> –, but also from the fact that principals perform certain parts of the administrative processes and the processes prescribed by legislation, one of them being reporting. According to STANIČIĆ (2006, 143) it is obvious that principals exercise a managerial role. The role of a principal may be compared with the role of a captain in a storm, where quick and independent decisions are required and there is no time for planning (ROSENBLATT & SOMECH 1998, 505). ERÄTUULI and NYLÈN (1995, 13) explain both managerial and leading actions more accurately and include the term ‘administration’ when explaining a principal’s role. With STANIČIĆ and his colleagues (2002, 149) this aspect is expressed when dealing with administrative processes. Principals, according to ERÄTUULI and NYLÈN (1995), accomplish their roles through the following parts of an ideal administrative process (*Figure 1*): planning, decision-making, organising, coordination, communication, influence and evaluation that affect five elements of school management: school programs, pupils, staff and relations with the community, physical preconditions and management. We can conclude that principals perform managerial, leading and administrative jobs when accomplishing their roles.

#### 5. Leading role in the school

Most authors who describe a principal’s managerial role point out the role of the leader as being an additional part of the managerial job. STANIČIĆ and his colleagues (2002, 149), for example, refer to leading as a specific group of activities, and ERÄTUULI and NYLÈN (1995, 13) mention communication and influence as components of the action of leading. It seems that both leadership and management constitute parts of the principal’s role, but where the difference is between the two remains undecided. KOTTER (1990, 38) explains that management and leadership are two distinctive and complementary terms. Both are necessary for today’s success, the author concludes, and adds that most American firms are *over-managed and under-led*. Explanations are close to the conclusion given by ZALEZNIK (1977, 61), namely that managers and leaders are two different types of persons and, furthermore, the managers’ tasks arise from necessity rather than from a desire. ZEPEDA (1999, 130) concludes that the main role of a principal is working with teachers for the development of a school as a learning community, which, keeping the core purpose of schools in mind, seems a logical conclusion. Principals motivate and empower their staff (SERGIOVANNI 1999, 10). WIGGINS and MCTIGHE (2006, 27) describe the role of a principal as the role

<sup>4</sup> Original text: ‘menadžment proizlazi iz ostvarivanja četiri skupine aktivnosti: planiranje, organiziranje, vođenje i vrednovanje’.

of a main leader, leading by their behaviour, which is an important part of influence spreading. BLASE and BLASE (2002, 256) highlight the communicational role of the principal. SERGIOVANNI (2001, 343) suggests that the role of the leader in an educational system consists of three dimensions: heart, head and hands, which correspond to values, knowledge and action. Leadership in this case has to be described as a specific skill expressed through communication, motivation, empowering, behaving, influence, competence and acting.

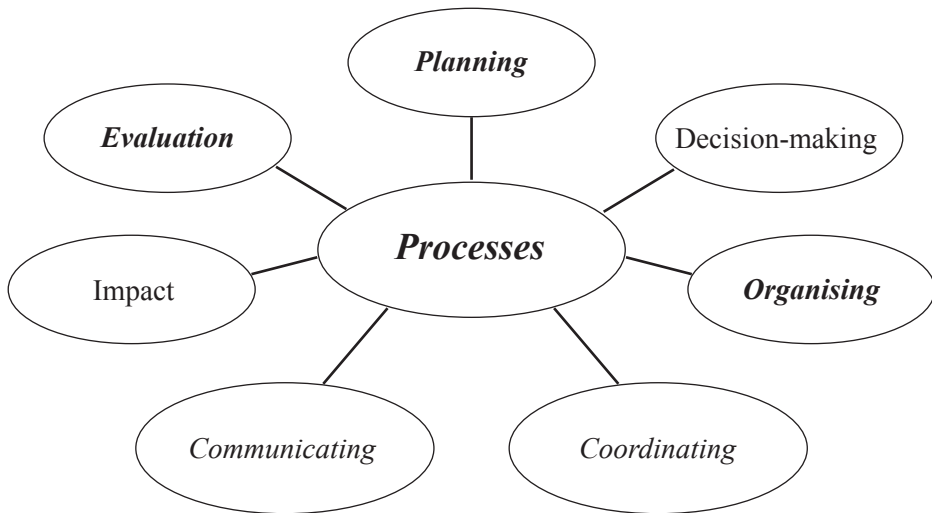
## **6. Historical continuum of the principal's roles**

From the analysis of the historical continuum one may conclude that the principal is no longer a manager and his role is no longer of the dominant organiser, rather it transforms into the role of an instructional leader (BOVALINO 2007, 16). This conclusion is quoted in AINSCOW (1999), in HIPP and HUFFMAN (2000) and in SARASON (1990). Nevertheless, some authors, for example Grace, Ball, Gerwitz and Ball, Harold, Smyth and Blackmore advocate a different opinion and explain that the role of principals in recent years has increasingly transformed from educational leaders to business managers, quotes MCINERNEY (2003, 22). BURCAR (2010) expresses doubt about the direction of the transformation of the principal's role but concludes that some authors advocate a different opinion and argues that it is apparent that the role of principals in recent years has increasingly transformed from educational leaders to business managers and administrators on account of the many new administrative tasks.

## **7. The Croatian situation**

Theoretical analyses of the Croatian situation show that principals realise their roles in schools – that are organisations with their own specific organisational structure – in which the educational and administrative processes take place. All stated definitions of the term 'organisation' suggest the conclusion that a school is an organisation in which many people have common goals and cooperate in common and mutually coordinated actions. The objectives of a school are incorporated into tasks realised through the implementation of numerous programs in specific material, physical and financial conditions, through the engagement of many professionals with different specialities, through the interaction of different subjects, of specific climate and culture, and of numerous processes and procedures. A school is an organisation of planned and rationally organised education (SILOV 1993, 85). From the results obtained through theoretical analyses it can be concluded that in schools as educational institutions two types of processes are conducted: a) business processes and b) the specific processes that are related to education. Principals are involved in the following processes: planning, decision-making, organising, coordinating, communicating,

impact and evaluation (*Figure 1*). These conclusions point to our analysis of management and leadership in schools as organisations. School is an organisation that has its structure, and principals have their roles as managers and leaders, achieving these roles through the activities related to the organisational structure and through the harmonisation and coordination throughout the organisation conditionally called departments.



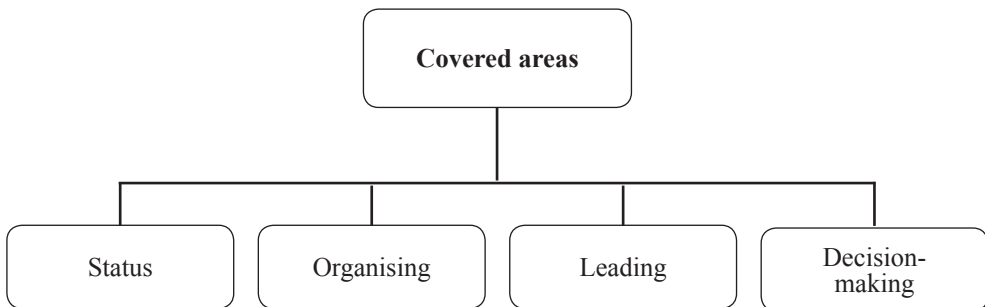
*Figure 1*

Processes principals are involved in. Modified by Burcar from ERÄTUULI and NYLÈN (1995, 5).

Similarly, STANIČIĆ and his colleagues (2002, 149) identify four specific groups of the principals' activities: planning, organising, evaluating (***bold/italic*** in *Figure 1*) and leading. According to this taxonomy, compared to ERÄTUULI and NYLÈN (1995, 5), arising leading processes are: communicating, coordinating, decision-making and impact (influence).

Management and leadership as concepts and their theoretical explanation found their place in the Croatian educational system, and it can be concluded that principals realise their roles more through administrative, managerial and financial work, and somehow less through educational activities. Results from many different researches about the principals' roles guide us to the conclusion that in the educational system the role of managers and that of leaders are complex, layered and multi-dimensional.

The principals' roles covered four areas (*Figure 2*): status, organising, leading and decision-making. It can be concluded that the principals' roles are manifested through the following guidelines: (1) concern for students' achievement and teaching quality, (2) decision-making, (3) creating a vision, (4) creating a positive climate, (5) concern for the resources (including IT), (6) actions in the field of leadership, (7) actions in the field of management, (8) actions in the field of administrative and legislative tasks.



*Figure 2*  
Areas covered within principals' roles

Through synthesising theoretical knowledge, a theoretical construct based on the jobs principals perform has arisen with which tasks are realised and through which goals are achieved. The realisation of the principals' roles are based on the principals' actions. This theoretical construct indicates thirteen groups of jobs principals perform: 1. informing (11 jobs), 2. reporting (7 jobs), 3. communicating (15 jobs), 4. planning (17 jobs), 5. organising (16 jobs), 6. teaching (11 jobs), 7. administrating (24 jobs), 8. leading (5 jobs), 9. managing (10 jobs), 10. pedagogical leading (12 jobs), 11. evaluating (39 jobs), 12. learning and developing (16 jobs), 13. empowering local communities (9 jobs). Altogether 192 jobs of the theoretical construct were included in the empirical research of BURCAR (2010), providing data on N = 119 Croatian principals. The results of this research confirm that principals perform not only duties that are required by law but much more. On the other hand, the role of the principal in the Croatian educational system does not differ from the theoretical role of the principal described in recent literature and relevant legislation. Furthermore, the author indicates an extracted model of the principal's role in the Croatian educational system (*Figure 3*).

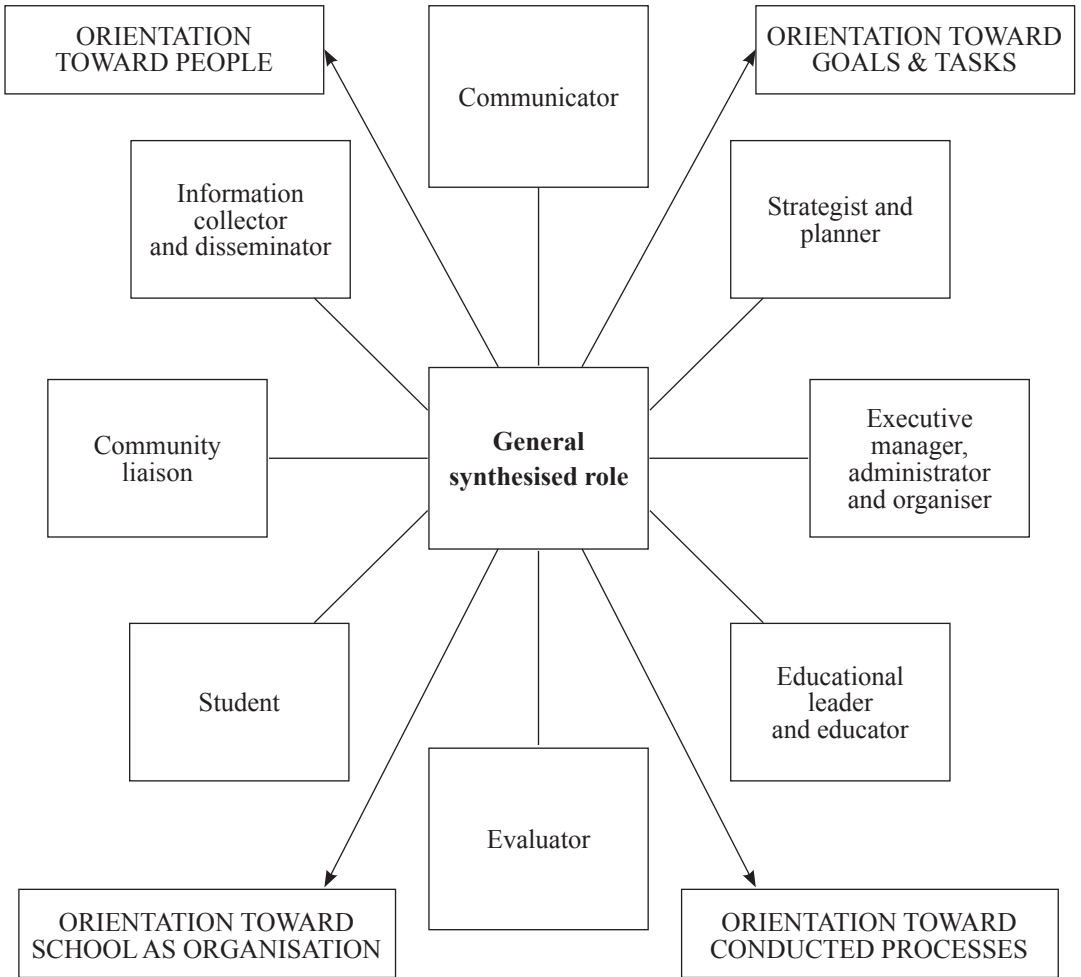


Figure 3  
 Extracted model of the principal’s role (BURCAR 2010).

We can conclude that there are too many different taxonomies and definitions of the principal’s role for the economic and educational sciences have developed a chaotic or multi-modelling theoretical explanation of the principal’s role. However, conclusions can be made based on these studies. According to the findings provided by BURCAR (2010) we can explain eight different roles principals perform in the Croatian educational system: a) information collector and disseminator through various media; b) communicator with the staff, pupils, parents, superiors and local com-



munities, directly or by using technology; c) strategist and planner in relation to human resources, teaching and other resources, and pupils; d) executive manager, administrator and organiser the way chairpersons, responsible persons, and skillful persons are; e) educational leader and educator by building relations, motivating, educating, and supporting highly educated staff to facilitate strong students performance; f) evaluator through analysing, monitoring and evaluating processes and results; g) student through continuous investment in their own knowledge, skills and behaviour; and h) community liaison through various protocol activities.

Principals' roles are oriented toward: a) people, b) tasks/goals, c) school as organisation, and d) processes inside the school. Tasks generated from such orientation belong to the ideal administrative process explained by ERÄTUULI and NYLÉN (1995, 13): planning, decision-making, organising, coordination, communication, influence and evaluation that affect five tasks of school management: school programs, pupils, staff and relations with the community, physical preconditions and management. Consequently, the principals' competences have to cover interpersonal skills, strategic management, project management, professional teaching competences and administrative competences (legislation, finance).

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