Transformational leadership in Slovak teachers compared to Slovak managers

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Abstract: Based on the need to reform the Slovak education system, it is useful to review teachers in the role of potential leaders whose task within the system is to contribute to positive change. The paper presents an analysis of differences in transformational leadership styles between Slovak secondary school teachers and Slovak managers. The research sample, obtained by the method of intentional and available selection, consisted of teachers in secondary education ($n = 142$) and managers in the manufacturing sector at various levels of management ($n = 117$). The data was obtained using the Slovak version of the LPI / Leadership Practices Inventory (Kouzes & Posner, 2017), the five dimensions of which showed satisfactory internal consistency in both groups of respondents (Cronbach α from .65 to .84). The results of the leadership style comparisons using the Kouzes and Posner LPI indicate statistically significant differences in favour of Slovak teachers compared to Slovak managers in all dimensions except 'Enable others to act'. The results are discussed in terms of the respondents' gender, their length of practice and the nature of their job. The research study is limited mainly by the size of the sample, its selection and the use of self-assessment scales.

Keywords: transformational leadership, leadership practices, teachers, managers

Transformacijsko vodenje slovaških učiteljev v primerjavi z vodenjem slovaških managerjev

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Povzetek: Izhajajoč iz potreb po reformi slovaškega šolskega sistema je smiselno učitelje upoštevati tudi v vlogi potencialnih vodij, katerih naloga znotraj šolskega sistema je prispevanje k pozitivnim spremembam. Članek predstavlja analizo razlig v transformativnem slogu vodenja med slovaškimi srednješolskimi učitelji ter slovaškimi vodji (managerji). Vzorec, ki smo ga sestavili s kombinacijo namenskega izbora in dostopnosti, je vključeval srednješolske učitelje ($n = 142$) in vodje na različnih nivojih, ki so prihajali iz podjetij v proizvodnjem sektorju ($n = 117$). Podatke smo zbirali s slovaško različico Lestvice vodstvenih praks (LPI; Leadership Practices Inventory; Kouzes in Posner, 2017). Vseh pet dimenzij lestvice je bilo ustrezno notranje skladnih pri obeh skupinah udeležencev (Cronbachove α med 0,65 in 0,84). Rezultati primerjav vodstvenih slogov z uporabi LPI kažejo na statistično značine razlike v prid slovaškim učiteljem v primerjavi s slovaškimi vodji pri vseh dimenzijah z izjemo dimenzije Omogočanje delovanja drugih. O rezultatih razpravljamo v odnosu do spola udeležencev, njihovih delovnih izkušenj in značilnosti dela. Omejitve predstavljene raziskave lahko iščemo predvsem v velikosti vzorca udeležencev, njegovemu izboru in rabi samoocenjevalnih lestvic.

Ključne besede: transformacijsko vodenje, vodstvene prakse, učitelji, managerji

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Leading people is one of the basic managerial functions. The importance of leadership for any organization is indisputable because it is so clearly linked to its success. According to Schultz (2003), the success or failure of any organization depends to a large extent on the quality of its leaders. This is no different in the case of institutions such as schools. Leadership in schools, as in industry and business, is a process of influence that leads to the achievement of desired organizational goals. Tyson and Jackson (1997) define leadership as "the process of influencing others in the presence of constant interaction between the leader and his or her follower" (p. 77). A business manager manages and operates the enterprise on behalf of and in the interest of the owner(s) of the organization (Prokopenko & Kubr, 1996). The role of the manufacturing business manager is to influence processes and employees towards improving economic results, prosperity and the firm's competitiveness in the marketplace. In educational institutions, teachers help their pupils to construct knowledge, but they also significantly facilitate their personal development. Leadership positions in schools are usually not well defined. In addition to managerial functions (school management), leadership positions tend to be understood more broadly (educational leadership). According to English (2006), even an ordinary teacher can be a leader (teacher leadership). Teachers, as managers of the educational process and leaders at the same time, also contribute to the achievement of school goals. Teachers form an essential element of management in the overall school system. A teacher is the one who organizes and leads a particular class, a particular team and particular pupils. Leadership in the classroom, or school, represents a relationship, an interaction between teachers and students that is based on communication and the connection between individuals (and groups) whose purpose is to build and implement a shared and developed vision of enhanced learning experiences and opportunities for students (Stoll & Fink, 1996). Elmore (2007) argues that successful leaders in school settings collaborate to design and deliver instruction, identify problems of practice and study solutions, lead and assess professional development, evaluate student work, recruit and hire teachers, mentor, coach, and evaluate professional practice outside of the classroom, develop strategic plans that promote diversity, and allocate equitable resources to support student growth. Effective teacher-leaders in schools not only impact students' academic success, but also influence students to improve their life outcomes (Pašková, 2019). A teacher's impact on future generations is profound.

Transformational leadership is one of the most influential current leadership theories not only in management theory generally (Felfe & Schyns, 2010; Judge & Bono, 2000; Procházka & Vaculík, 2015) but also in education (Dababneh et al., 2021; Kaliská, 2019; Lopez-Perry, 2020; Sollárová et al., 2019). Already Leithwood (1994) has suggested that there is some empirical support for using the transformational leadership model in school restructuring initiatives. These claims were subsequently supported by two studies of transformational leadership in public school settings (Thompson & Lunenburg in Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2012; Pagani & Lunenburg in Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2012), which found three dimensions of transformational leadership to be related to ratings of leaders' effectiveness. Burns (1978) claimed that this type of leadership has the ability to elevate the behaviour and aspirations of both leaders and followers, and thus has revolutionary effects on both parties involved. In other words, transformational leadership occurs when one or more people communicate with others in such a way that leaders and followers elevate each other to a higher level of motivation and morality. Burns summarized the observed differences of transformational leaders into the following four categories: 1. charismatic/idealised influence (model), which expresses a situation where the leader serves as a model for others to imitate, 2. inspirational motivation, i.e. the ability to evoke enthusiasm and team spirit and share a common vision, 3. intellectual stimulation, which is a constant case of striving to discover one's possibilities and innovative approaches, 4. individualised stimulation/approach, which is an expression of respect and appreciation to all individuals in the organisation. If a leader has these characteristics, they "transform followers to prioritise organisational goals over their own, and 'transform' them by changing their values, goals, needs, beliefs and aspirations" (Buelens, 2011, p. 631). The nature of the social environment in such an organisation can be described as inspiring, mobilising, encouraging or "full of enthusiasm" for a common cause. Followers, resp. supporters of this leader type have retained the possibility of influence and mutual support in achieving a common vision (Lukas & Smolík, 2008).

There is evidence to suggest that transformational leadership exhibits similar characteristics, whether in the academic or business environment (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). Bennis and Nanus (2007) who surveyed 90 innovative leaders in industry and the public sector found that articulating a vision for the future, an emphasis on organizational and individual learning, and the development of commitment and trust were factors that characterized transformational leaders. As Hargreaves and Fink (2004) note, even successful and dynamic schools can slide back quickly with the departure of a successful leader. The study of Ndiritu et al. (2019) shows a positive relationship between school management leadership skills in terms of transformation theory, and academic performance as an indicator of secondary school success. Competency models for transformational leaders in education (developed primarily in the US and Canada) include references to the knowledge, skills, and competencies that teachers, principals, and other leaders need to develop in leadership roles in school settings and in their profession. Most of the competency models relate specifically to management skills (Sollárová et al., 2019).

Attention has been paid to leadership in the context of reforms for a long time. The literature identifies characteristics important for effective leadership at all levels of the education system (e.g. Balcerek, 1999; Fullan, 2005; Hall & Hord, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Research in general in the past has focused more on the personality characteristics of a leader (Hu et al. 2012; Judge & Bono, 2000; Khoo & Burch, 2008; Lussier & Achua, 2007; Resick et al., 2009; Rubin et al., 2005). However, gradually, the behaviour of leaders, as well as situational and integrated leadership has become more important.

The behavioural approach to leadership is represented, e.g., by Kouzes and Posner (2002). They devoted a substantial period of time towards researching the behaviour and skills of effective leaders, arriving at five domains of leadership practices which are further specified by ten corresponding measurable behaviours in the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI):

– Model the way: clarify values and provide an example,
– Inspire a shared vision: visualise the future and motivate others,
– Challenge the process: look for opportunities, experiment and take risks,
– Enable others to act: strengthen cooperation and provide strength,
– Encourage the heart: recognise and appreciate the benefits and create a community spirit.

The undeniable advantage of this leadership theory is that it is based on the thesis that successful leadership is not the exclusive prerogative of a select few, but that these specific practices and manifestations can be developed and trained in an individual. For this reason, it was chosen, in order to meet the needs of this study.

Posner (2016), when verifying the psychometric properties of both LPI versions (Self/self-assessment inventory & Observer/assessment inventory), states the sufficient robustness of the tool and its applicability within different environments and populations, including education and teachers. The study, aimed at an intercultural comparison of the leadership practices of secondary school principals in the United States and Thailand (Srisaen et al., 2014), was also used as evidence of this. Stone (2003) focused on the school managers' evaluation from the perspective of teachers (LPI – Observer) and found that in terms of the management position level (basic, intermediate, high) there was no significant difference between them in the use of leadership practices regarding LPI. The study of Waite and McKinney (2015) discusses the importance of including transformational-leadership skills training in the undergraduate preparation of nursing students. The transfer of leadership skills into practice in healthcare after completing postgraduate training is again addressed by the studies of Middleton et al. (2021).

Research objective

Slovakia's transforming society has long called for changes in an education system that does not reflect its needs. Transformational leadership and its tools can be a possible way to change the Slovak school system. Since the most effective and lasting changes come from below, from an individual, and a teacher can also be perceived as a manager (given the number of management activities included in the role), it was decided to focus on ordinary teachers. Particular interest was taken in the leadership behaviour of teachers with respect to transformational leadership theory, in relation to their followers-students. The aim of this study is to assess the teacher's perception of his/her own leadership style using the concept of Kouzes and Posner, in comparison to another occupational group, namely managers, for whom the art of

leading others is an expected competency. Given the limited research on this issue, the following research question was formulated:

RQ: Are teachers comparable to managers in leadership behaviours in terms of LPI?

Method

Participants

The research sample was obtained on the basis of intentional (teachers, managers) and available selection and it consists of Slovak teachers at the secondary level of education ($N = 142$, $n_{men} = 20$, $n_{women} = 122$, $M_{age} = 40.04$, $SD_{age} = 9.37$, $M_{practice} = 12.89$, $SD_{practice} = 9.10$) and Slovak managers in the manufacturing sector at various levels of management ($N = 117$, $n_{men} = 55$, $n_{women} = 62$, $M_{age} = 38.03$, $SD_{age} = 9.61$; $M_{practice} = 7.16$, $SD_{practice} = 3.76$).

Instrument

The data were obtained using the Slovak version of the LPI – Self / Leadership Practices Inventory – self–assessment (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). It contains 5 domains: MOD/Model the way *(I set a personal example of what I expect of others)*, INSP/Inspire a shared vision *(I describe a compelling image of what our future could be like)*, CHALL/Challenge the process *(I actively search for innovative ways to improve what we do)*, ENAB/Enable others to act *(I involve people in the decisions that directly impact their job performance)*, ENCO/Encourage the heart *(I publicly recognize people who exemplify commitment to shared values)*. A respondent evaluates their behaviour in 30 statements on a scale from 1: almost never – 10: almost always. Each domain is covered by just 6 items (score from 6 to 60). Their sum represents the respondent's raw score in that domain. The wording of the individual items was carefully adjusted for the needs of a group of teachers such that the general concepts of 'people' and 'organisation' were replaced with terms such as pupils/students and class/school (eg. I develop cooperation between the pupils/students I work with). The reliability of the LPI scale and the internal consistency of its individual subscales show acceptable values of Cronbach's alpha coefficient in both groups of respondents (T = teachers / M = managers): MOD (6 items): $\alpha_T = .67$ / $\alpha_M = .65$; INS (6 items): $\alpha_T = .84$ / $\alpha_M = .84$; CHALL (6 items): $\alpha_T = .67$ / $\alpha_M = .79$; ENAB (6 items): $\alpha_T = .66$ / $\alpha_M = .69$; ENCO (6 items): $\alpha_T = .81$ / $\alpha_M = .75$.

Procedure

The research has a quantitative, comparative design. Data was collected in February and March 2020 by direct contact. The study covered teachers at the second stage of primary schools, secondary school teachers from the Košice district, and managers in the manufacturing sector of several Slovak regions. The questionnaire was completed using the classic paper-and-pencil method after working hours. The research was anonymous and voluntary. The obtained results were processed using MS Excel and the statistical program JASP and IBM SPSS version 21.

Table 1
Descriptive statistic of measured variables in sample of teachers (n = 142)

Variable	M	Mdn	Mod	SD	skew.	kurt.	Shapiro-Wilk p-value	min	max
Model the Way	50.20	50.00	50	3.74	−0.52	2.61	.001	33	58
Inspire a shared vision	47.29	50.00	53	7.48	−1.72	3.42	.001	22	57
Challenge the Process	45.58	46.00	46	5.53	−0.29	−0.15	.001	34	57
Enable others to act	50.40	52.00	52	4.23	−0.56	−0.57	.001	41	58
Encourage the Heart	51.58	53.00	56	5.55	−1.19	1.77	.001	30	60

Table 2
Descriptive statistic of measured variables in sample of managers (n = 117)

Variable	M	Mdn	Mod	SD	skew.	kurt.	Shapiro-Wilk p-value	min	max
Model the Way	46.90	48.00	49	7.18	−0.66	0.40	0.007	22	60
Inspire a shared vision	39.29	40.00	47	10.81	−0.46	−0.41	0.014	10	59
Challenge the Process	42.53	42.00	40	8.81	−0.18	−0.43	0.269	20	60
Enable others to act	48.18	50.00	50	7.34	−1.06	1.47	0.001	19	60
Encourage the Heart	44.56	46.00	53	9.12	−0.52	−0.24	0.003	19	60

Table 3
Results of comparison of LPI variables in teachers and managers

Measure	Teachers		Managers		Man-Whitney test		
	Mdn	SD	Mdn	SD	Z	p	d_{Cohen}
Model the Way	50.00	3.74	48.00	7.18	−3.875	< .001	0.576
Inspire a shared vision	50.00	7.48	40.00	10.80	−6.547	< .001	0.861
Challenge the Process	46.00	5.53	42.00	8.80	−2.819	.005	0.415
Enable others to act	52.00	4.23	50.00	7.33	−2.054	.040	−
Encourage the Heart	53.00	5.55	46.00	9.11	−6.604	< .001	0.930

Results

The results of the normality test and values of skewness and kurtosis (Tables 1, 2) show that that the data does not meet the conditions of a normal distribution, so the decision was made to use a nonparametric variant of the statistical procedure (Man-Whitney U test) in the further analysis.

With regard to the comparative intention of the presented study, other descriptive characteristics of the monitored variables were also presented within the professional groups of respondents. As this is an adapted tool, standard scores were not available. However, based on the arithmetic means, it can be concluded that both occupational groups score above average on the individual leadership manifestations (Tables 1, 2).

With regard to the established research question, it was interesting to note the extent to which the medians and standard deviations converged in the individual leadership manifestations of the occupational groups studied. Even on the basis of descriptive indicators (Tables 1, 2) of individual variables, there were differences between the leadership manifestations of teachers and managers. Therefore, the

decision was made to calculate based on the Mann-Whitney U test (Table 3), which confirmed the significance (at the Bonferroni-corrected alpha level of .01) of all differences in favour of teachers except the ENAB dimension. In addition to statistical significance, the effect size (Cohen's d) indicates a small effect in the Challenge the Process variable, an intermediate effect in the Model the Way variable, and a large effect in the Inspire and shared vision and Encourage the Heart variables (Table 3). For illustrative purposes, a graphical representation of the differences in LPI dimensions between teachers and managers is provided (Figure 1).

Discussion

The presented research study is focused on the comparison of leadership behaviours within Kouzes and Posner's conceptual framework applied to Slovak teachers and managers. Although these two professional groups differ in their goals, ways of working and followers, it is the need to lead others that unites them. Thus, it was interesting to investigate whether teachers are comparable to managers in terms of LPI leadership behaviours. Although a hypothesis could not be

Figure 1

Graphical representation of the differences in LPI dimensions between teachers and managers.
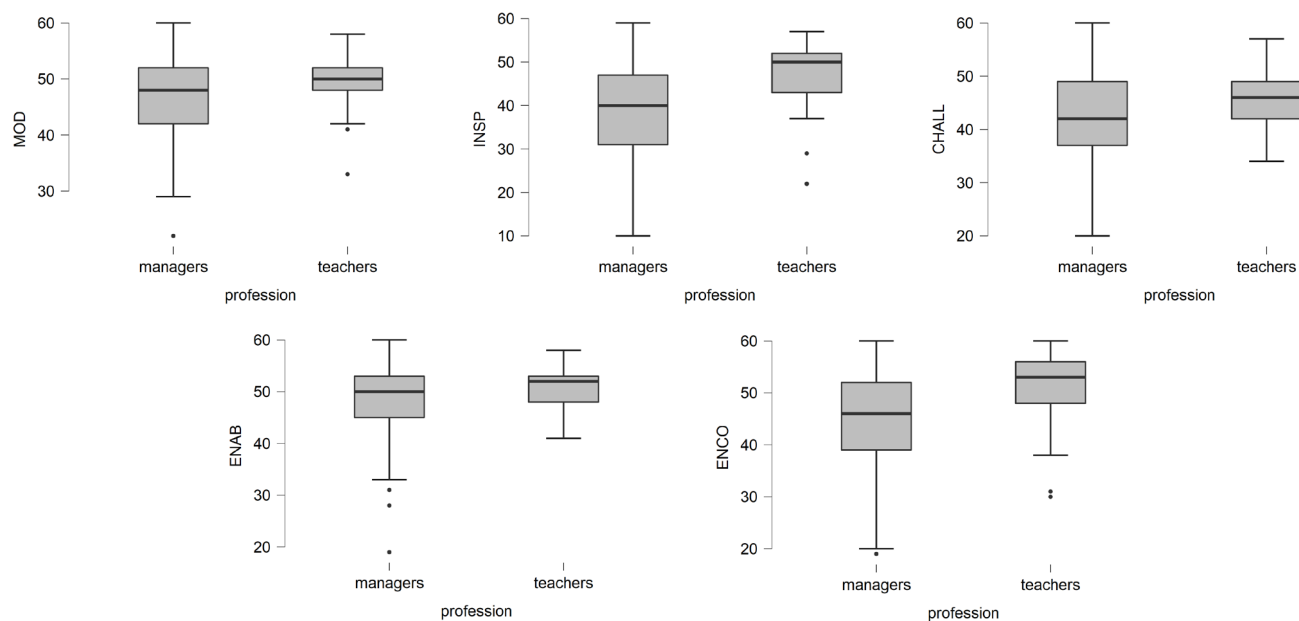
Notes. MOD – Model the Way, INSP – Inspire a shared vision, CHALL – Challenge the Process, ENAB – Enable others to act, ENCO – Encourage the Heart.

formulated due to the lack of comparative studies on this issue, it was assumed that managers would show more significant leadership skills (in terms of 'leadership transformation style'), as this is directly required by the nature of their work, and leadership is one of the basic managerial skills. On the other hand, modern education, the pillars of which are the teachers themselves, requires leadership skills from not only the leaders of the pedagogical staff, but also from ordinary teachers. The research study showed significant differences in all measured LPI variables in favour of teachers as opposed to managers, except in 'Enable others to act'. Teachers scored higher than managers in seeking opportunities, in willingness to experiment and take risks, and in clarifying values and setting an example for their students. However, the effect size of these differences compared to managers was only small to intermediate. The large practical effect of the difference was evident in the other two dimensions, namely 'Inspire a shared vision' and 'Encourage the heart'. That is, compared to managers, teachers are more likely to inspire and motivate their followers by sharing a vision, visualizing the future, and are also more likely to acknowledge, praise, encourage, and reward their follower-students.

In order to answer these questions, the contextual variables that may have contributed to these differences were examined. The sample was significantly gender disproportionate. The group of teachers was significantly female-weighted (which, however, reflects the long-term situation in primary and secondary education), the research group of teachers consisted of only 20 men and 122 women, and the selection of managers was 55 men and 62 women. The low representation of men in the group of teachers made it impossible to make a comparison from the point of view of gender. However, research on gender differences in LPI

generally points to their non-existence. Clisbee (2004) did not find gender differences in LPI among school superintendents. Even more recent studies (Diaz, 2018; Garrett-Staib & Burkman, 2015; Pedraza Melo et al., 2015) did not find any significant gender differences in LPI dimensions. Another difference in the samples was the average age. The average age for teachers was 40.04 and for managers 38.03. From the ontogenetic point of view, in both cases this is a period of middle adulthood, where a significant degree of stabilization and routine procedures in the work performed is assumed. A more significant difference between the compared groups is shown in the years of practice, where teachers reported, on average, 12.89 years in teaching practice and managers, on average, only 7.16 years. However, teachers usually look for and find a job in the teaching field immediately after graduating from university, while there is a gradual career growth for managers in the manufacturing sector. A possible justification for the findings may also lie in the very nature of the work activity and its focus. Managers in the manufacturing sector have to manage not only people, but also production processes, (and are therefore more focused on technological processes, provision of materials, etc.) Teachers work with pupils/students and manage the educational process – where intuitive transformational leadership can be a very effective tool for coping with everyday work challenges. In the case of the teacher-leader, it is almost exclusively about human resource management. It is a helping profession in which the teacher has the opportunity to cultivate his/her leadership practices in a close and intense relationship with the pupil, which, at this ontogenetic stage of the followers, is approaching a parent-child relationship. In this close daily interaction, the educator can develop concrete tools of transformational leadership, such as clarifying values and

setting an example for the pupils, visualizing the future and motivating them, rewarding their efforts and encouraging them, and fostering the initiative and innovative practices of their pupils.

The importance of transformational leadership in education was also highlighted by Rosenberg's research (Rosenberg, 2013), which used LPI and the Purdue Teacher Opinionaire methods to uncover the relationships between the qualities of administrative leadership and teachers' morale, and enriched them with interviews and focus groups. Teachers from 3 different grades and 5 subjects took part in her research. Its findings revealed that school management which used elements of transformational leadership such as trust and relationship building created a positive school climate and improved teacher morale. Saka (2018) also confirmed a significant relationship between leadership practice and teacher morale. Path modelling in terms of LPI has proven to be the most important element in relation to teacher morale. A new study by Dababneh et al. (2021) confirms transformational leadership as a mediator between teacher personality and job satisfaction.

The results of the study cannot be generalised due to the size and selection of the research sample, which is not representative. This was an occasional, somewhat intentional choice. Therefore, it would be desirable to further verify these findings empirically. Although the internal consistency of the research tools has proven to be good, the respondents' answers may be marked by social desirability despite the respondents' anonymity. The use of self-assessment methods is risky in this respect, so it is strongly suggested that further research be carried out using the LPI Observer, and that the behaviour of superiors (teachers) could be evaluated by their staff and students.

Conclusion

The theory of transformational leadership, on which the LPI methodology used by this study relies, is based on leadership behaviours. A transformational leader is one who clarifies their personal values and sets an example. They imagine the future and inspire others. They look for possibilities, experiment, and take risks. They encourage cooperation and strengthen others. They appreciate the contributions of others and celebrate common values and victories. These are all ways of behaving that are usable and desirable in the managerial as well as in the teaching professions. The transformative manager is able to see higher goals, they are aware of the importance of their work. They can connect the needs and goals of an organisation with the needs and goals of an individual. They are very active in their position, they increase their efforts and they are at the forefront of transformation. The transformative leader influences their surroundings not only with experience and knowledge, but also with their charisma and strength of personality. Their style of leadership is based on respect for co-workers, persuasion and the ability to gain followers. Transformative managers will find situations where it is necessary to appropriately respond to changing conditions and where it is necessary to change the concept and to enforce

significant strategic changes in an organisation (Mika, 2006), which is necessary in the process of reforming Slovak education. Therefore, the results of this study on teachers' leadership skills in terms of transformational leadership are encouraging, even though it is only a pilot study and thus its limits prevent generalisation.

It is considered as a significant positive that transformational leadership skills can be developed through training, as shown by the studies of Waite and McKinney (2015) and Middleton et al. (2021). For this reason, each organisation has the opportunity to invest in its employees (managers, teachers) in the form of education (courses and training).

In education today, it is imperative to highlight the need to build and develop a strong leadership base of teachers who can bring a new paradigm to education. Their intrinsic motivation, willingness to accept and implement change, together with other tools of transformational leadership, can bring about more effective and lasting change in Slovak education. Therefore, in the future, it is recommended to pay attention to the leadership behaviour of teachers in different categories (according to their level of education, age, length of teaching experience, etc.).

Acknowledgment

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