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Quality development and knowledge management – a connection?

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Quality Development and Knowledge Management

Abstract for the presentation

Knowledge is the absolute crucial production factor for social organisations and in particular for educational facilities. It relates not only to obtaining specialised knowledge, but also to necessary educational and didactical knowledge, relationship knowledge, knowledge of results, problem-solving knowledge etc. The preservation of existing knowledge and the enrichment and renewal of knowledge thus become a key task for directing and/or developing educational facilities.

Even so this would appear to be clear and evident, for many educational facilities it is not obvious. Many suffer at least from three basic difficulties, which oppose good knowledge flow within enterprises and between operations and surroundings:

1. Schools understood themselves (and partly still understand themselves today) as being an administrative accumulation of more or less autonomous single artists (meaning: teachers). The "autonomy-parity-principle" (Dan Lortie), typical of such schools, means that an equal picture for all teachers prevails and that all teachers are in principle regarded as being the same (which makes collegial exchange uninteresting). Furthermore, the principle signifies that teaching staffs are to some extent autonomous and are not accountable to anyone because they are private scholars. This is naturally poisonous, both for horizontal information flow between teaching staff and for vertical information flow. Where inspection by "strangers" and interference in the conducting of lessons are "prohibited", and where knowledge acquired by teachers in further training is regarded as "secret private issues", to name but two consequences, it is not worthwhile to call this "knowledge management".
2. The school branches have to date not succeeded in developing even a basic principle for a common technical language for all teachers. Everyone talks about lessons according to their own requirements. There are hardly any defined terms, which all teachers understand in the same way. This is a second poison for successful knowledge management.
3. Modern quality management systems (for instance like the ISO 9000 series) rely firstly on standardisation, the classification of knowledge (one could also call this "setting knowledge in concrete" or immobilising knowledge) and secondly on close controlling mechanisms, which are rapidly considered by the teaching staff to demonstrate distrust and threat. This triggers a correspondingly defensive behaviour in both the teachers and entire schools. The delusion to standardise and control is the third poison for good knowledge flow.

I will illustrate how good flow of knowledge is achieved and which endangerments for knowledge flow must thereby be considered on the basis of two key areas in knowledge management, i.e. self-evaluation of schools and personnel development. It is not conceivable to set-up a knowledge management that totally excludes such endangerments and completely avoids conflict of interests and roles. It is, however, possible and also absolutely necessary to handle the system-dependent interest dilemma responsibly and in a friendly manner to enable good flow of knowledge. A helpful instrument for good clarification of both objectives and roles is given in the interest-map of Nisbet.

It is recommendable that the Seminar organisers link the subject of quality management with that of knowledge management. If this linkage was often made or even occurred as a general rule, much nonsense within the area of quality management would not happen. The reason for this linkage need is that there are quality management systems in existence, which lead directly towards total freezing or immobilising knowledge. All systems come into this category and they indulge in the craze to standardise: Up-to-date knowledge or part of the knowledge that is readily classified is put on file and each change results in changes to the documentation. Such systems run the risks that classified knowledge is considered to be the ultimate, the system could become outdated and inactivity is rewarded. Moreover, there are quality management systems where control aspects, which appear to some degree to be threatening, are in the foreground. If control is associated with sanctioning via hierarchical means, then there are considerable dangers that information is "smartened up", unwelcome information is suppressed and "knowledge fraud" is encouraged.

If knowledge management is to mean that in-house- and external relevant knowledge flows as easily as possible and work in synergy, then quality management systems must be set up accordingly. Or in other words: knowledge generation interests in the sense of teaching organisations must be balanced against other interests of quality management. Concerning this, John Nisbet has proposed a most useful interest -diagram on quality evaluation:

(show slide: see schematic in appendix)

The first dimension, and as a result the first area of conflict, is:

Control versus development

Where important goods are concerned, control makes sense. Important goods do not only play a role in road safety, the running of nuclear power stations or intensive care in hospitals, but also in education and training. Among other things they involve people, their dignity and their future chances, use of public funds, state of health of personnel and basic democratic rules.

Quality assurance is, however, only a part-aspect, because control aims to adhere to values being within tolerance; its nature is, therefore, stabilising, conservative and preserving. This is just as inadequate for schools as it is for dynamic businesses.

At least equal interest must be given to changes and development: To recognise where basic conditions (of society, students etc..) change in such a way that the school must abandon the existing framework of practices and standards and must develop new answers / solutions.

In this area of conflict we (Anton Strittmatter, together with the umbrella organisation of Swiss teachers LCH) take the following stance:

- **Balance between control and renewal:** It is necessary to demand a carefully planned balance between control and development-orientated evaluation. The balance has to be critically examined regarding its actual effect.
- **Recognised control interests:** It must be recognised that there are legitimate control interests in the area of schooling too. All school partners have a right to expect that their co-partners satisfy certain minimum performances or minimum qualities. The definition of such minimum qualities, which are subsequently exposed to performance control or at least some control of effort, must be, however, negotiated very carefully. Control processes that are broad¹ and randomly laid down must be rejected because they would

¹ "broad" signifies: extensive, filigree, control processes that aim to include all possible aspects of schools and which inevitably lead to over-exertion or superficiality. "Randomly" means that the

devalue serious and effective control. Controls within the area of teaching qualities are quite difficult and demanding. They must, therefore, concentrate on a few core demands as, for example, described in the LCH rules or as proven by research on effective schools.

- ***Distrust has a destructive effect:*** In the area of education, quality evaluations and the steering of development-orientated quality have significant priority. We do not share the view of mankind that control, the search for deficiencies and commendation points promote development. Indeed, it is possible to have both control and development-oriented evaluation but in reality there is tension within their relationship: If control is prevalent, the given standards are not fully taken into account and as a consequence new perspectives are not readily discovered. Such a control often results in reflexes that are defensive, covered up or glossed over. As a result, readiness for innovative thought and action is inhibited.

External accountability versus honouring of professional self-obligation

Whether in state owned or private schools, the supervisory body is obliged through their authorities, i.e. the supporting bodies or tax payers, to be accountable concerning compliance with school mandates, appropriate use of funds and adherence to ethical principles. Moreover, there is a mandate for the early recognition of development needs and the successful guidance of school developments. If the school supervisory body is to give good reasons for its guarantee declaration and for directional decisions (and not only a vague feeling), it must be in possession of, among others, reliable information concerning the schools. As a consequence, the supervisory body has both the right and the obligation to carry out evaluations.

Furthermore, school is a venture, which primarily exists from the quality work of individual teachers and individual schools. Their work within different grades or courses can only be subjected to outside guidance and control to a limited degree. It is not worthwhile to make highly qualified specialists that are in everyday life continuously forced to take autonomous decisions into closely managed officials. According to all experiences, including those of the private enterprises, both their commitment and work quality would drastically decrease. As a consequence, nothing remains but to appeal to the professionalism of the specialists and to have confidence in professional self-obligation and the ethical sense of responsibility of both teachers and school management.

- ***Recognised accountability:*** Both teaching staff and school management recognise their duty to account for the actions of both teachers and schools. However, the professional association states in both the occupational guidelines and rules that the professional self-obligation of teachers and schools are the main factors to rely on.
- ***Priority of self-evaluation and self-development:*** The compelling consequence from this is the clear priority of self-evaluation and self-development of teaching staff and schools, together with an actively handled and controlled accountability.
- ***Exceptional case inspection:*** Externally arranged foreign evaluation by inspection (must be differentiated from external evaluation summoned within the framework of self-evaluation) must remain limited to cases where insufficient self-evaluation exists or where there is insufficient problem solving (Indicator: existence of continuous complaints concerning teaching staff or schools).

content validity regarding quality criteria is insufficiently- or not at all demonstrated.

- ***Self-evaluation must not be inhibited:*** Any inhibition to the priority of honest self-evaluation, e.g. by degrading self-evaluation into an unimportant prelim to an "always know better" external inspection₂ or by excessive amounts of documentation, must be decidedly rejected.

Serious self-evaluation

Whoever is insisting on the absolute primate of self-evaluation - as it is in our case - must pay for this with an appropriate price. It is impossible to have both control/quality *assurance* and high development orientation without having restrictions. It is obvious that for organisations with high safety requirements and/or with a very high damage potential, should malfunction occur (for example a nuclear power station or an intensive care unit in a hospital), the control aspect is very important. There, the control aspect has indeed conscious priority over a high potential for innovation. It is obvious that educational facilities also possess a damage potential. But here, it makes more sense to focus quality management on learning, development, constant adjustment to new requirements and on optimising learning conditions etc. In a professional culture with a flat qualification hierarchy, this is best achieved through prioritising self-evaluation. The following short description of the self-evaluation system FQS may demonstrate to you the meaning of this. It is not my intention to sell you this system; there are other similar systems available. In this case, however, it is used as an illustration to support the above statement.

The Formative Quality Evaluation System FQS®

FQS means: To develop within the school an honest culture of evaluating, which aims at continuously improving individual behaviour and the effectiveness of the entire school.

The teaching staff, together with the school management and school administration, discovers their real influence on others (e.g. the students), their real strengths, their development potentials and which problems they should urgently deal with. The entire school becomes aware of where it fulfils its mandate, where its strengths are situated and which deficiencies need to be addressed urgently - or how changes affect the resources, whether accomplished reforms develop as planned (process control) or how society views and evaluates the school.

The "hard" part in applying FQS is to pay attention to procedure standards and accountability. The "soft" part is the onset in striving to investigate and develop educational qualities that are not all quantifiable and the consistent protection of humans from the effects of unnecessary public exposure.

The effects of respectable self-evaluation:

- The school personnel receive valid control knowledge for their personal development and the development of the school/department. Due to meaningful feedbacks, it is clear, which strengths are worthwhile looking after, which tendencies need strengthening further and which perceived problems require steps to solve them.
- Both apparent changes (e.g. concerning students, vocational areas) and problems, are promptly recognised, interpreted correctly and appropriately answered. Therefore, problem situations are being avoided or mastered before they reach too large proportions.
- Due to dense, high-quality feedback, professional satisfaction / manpower is retained. Long and hopeless quests are avoided. Self-evaluation not only searches for

deficiencies, but also makes successes apparent and conveys satisfaction regarding self-effectiveness.

- School authorities and/or the supervision receive knowledge resulting from accountability. This enables them to deliver their guaranteed performance. The professional self-evaluation and its reporting create the necessary confidence in the school and teaching staff.

The most important principles:

1. Basic attitude is the decisive factor: the desire to know, to be curious, to look into a mirror with self-confidence and simultaneously possessing Socratic modesty, the striving to honour the fourfold professional obligation – towards oneself, towards the recipients of services, towards colleagues and towards the employer.
2. Primate of self-evaluation (including self-obtained external evaluations); external inspection as Meta-evaluation and only subsidiary as a contents evaluation.
3. Clear relationships between individual *and* operational evaluations, i.e. parallel / combined
4. Alternation between “broadband data collections” *and* “focussed evaluation”.
5. Contingency evaluations (target – actual) *and* exploratory studies (shedding light on open questions).
6. Primate of validity: 360° - or triangular principle, also qualitative data collections, communicative validation, "ownership" instead of "naming and blaming".
7. Dynamic quality term: standards grow and are constantly adapted.
8. No evaluation without purpose and consequences.

The FQS® elements:

1. *Development of quality standards and/or research questions*; preparation for evaluation (criteria, indicators, assignment of inquiry methods)
2. *Individual feedback*: at set intervals; 360°-feedback (students, customers, colleagues, management, external specialists); critical interpretation in the Q-group.
3. *Research on school quality*: On important topics of focus; periodically also broadband collections; on important topics also by means of 360°-feedback; communicative validation.
4. *Meta-evaluation*: ongoing and periodic, internal and external evaluation of the evaluation regarding meaningfulness, validity and economics (CH-standards)
5. *Implementation and reporting*: Drawing of consequences & subsequent evaluation. Functional reporting regarding accountability, supply of control knowledge and conveyance of learning opportunity for others.

Internal organisation of work evaluation within FQS®

The persons involved (teaching staff, school management, authorities, possibly external consultants) agree by **contract** on their interests, expectations regarding the effects of the quality evaluation, the rules and mutual obligation for co-operation between partners, and on the internal work organisation. The contract grows organically.

Q-Groups as "the heart" of FQS®

All training staff are organised into "quality groups" comprising 5-6 persons. The groups are formed on a limited timeframe basis (e.g. for 2 years) and can be set up according to different *criteria*:

- sympathy/confidence groups
- existing teams (grade, subject or class related teams)
- grade- and/or subject overlapping "contrast groups"
- topic-related interests

The Q-Groups look after *six tasks*

1. Common preparation of the individual feedbacks (topic choice, determination of quality standards, development of feedback instruments e.g. for pupil or parent questioning).
2. Mirror imaging and critical commentary on feedbacks submitted by the individual members.
3. Common learning and processing of realisations; collegial practice consultation.
4. Organisation of collegial feedbacks (sitting in during lessons, team teaching etc. in groups of two or more where expectations, observation aspects, place, time etc. have been prearranged).
5. Meta-evaluation: Evaluation of experiences according to the selected proceedings, methods and instruments of the evaluation (based on the procedure standards).
6. Reporting: Conveyance of experiences to other Q-Groups; report of directional knowledge to the school management and authorities; conveyance of authorised knowledge via the school management to the authorities and the public.

The Q-Groups are bound to the quality evaluation contract and sign a confidentiality agreement, enabling the highest possible openness to be secured within the group.

Special project groups

Either existing Q-Groups or special project groups that are provided with a time-limited mandate are assigned to evaluation projects, which concern the entire school or individual departments (so-called quality research).

School management and steering group

School management has the ultimate responsibility for the execution of quality evaluation according to the official minimum regulations. A steering group with representatives from the school management, the Q-Groups and possibly the authority, is used for operational control of the process. The steering group ensures, among other things, good information flow between the Q-Groups (and the special project groups) and between the school and its partners or the authorities respectively; it organises the Meta-evaluation and co-operation with external consultancy/training. A Q-Group representative of the school is head of the steering group and provides training- and coaching contributions for the teaching staff and/or the Q-Groups.

Internet addresses for FQS or related systems

www.lch.ch/pa_quali_eval.htm (LCH-platform "quality evaluation and school supervision")

www.qis.at (A number of questionnaires and qualitative instruments together with process references)

www.erz.be.ch/qes/projekte (Many examples and much material, among others of FQS pilot schools)

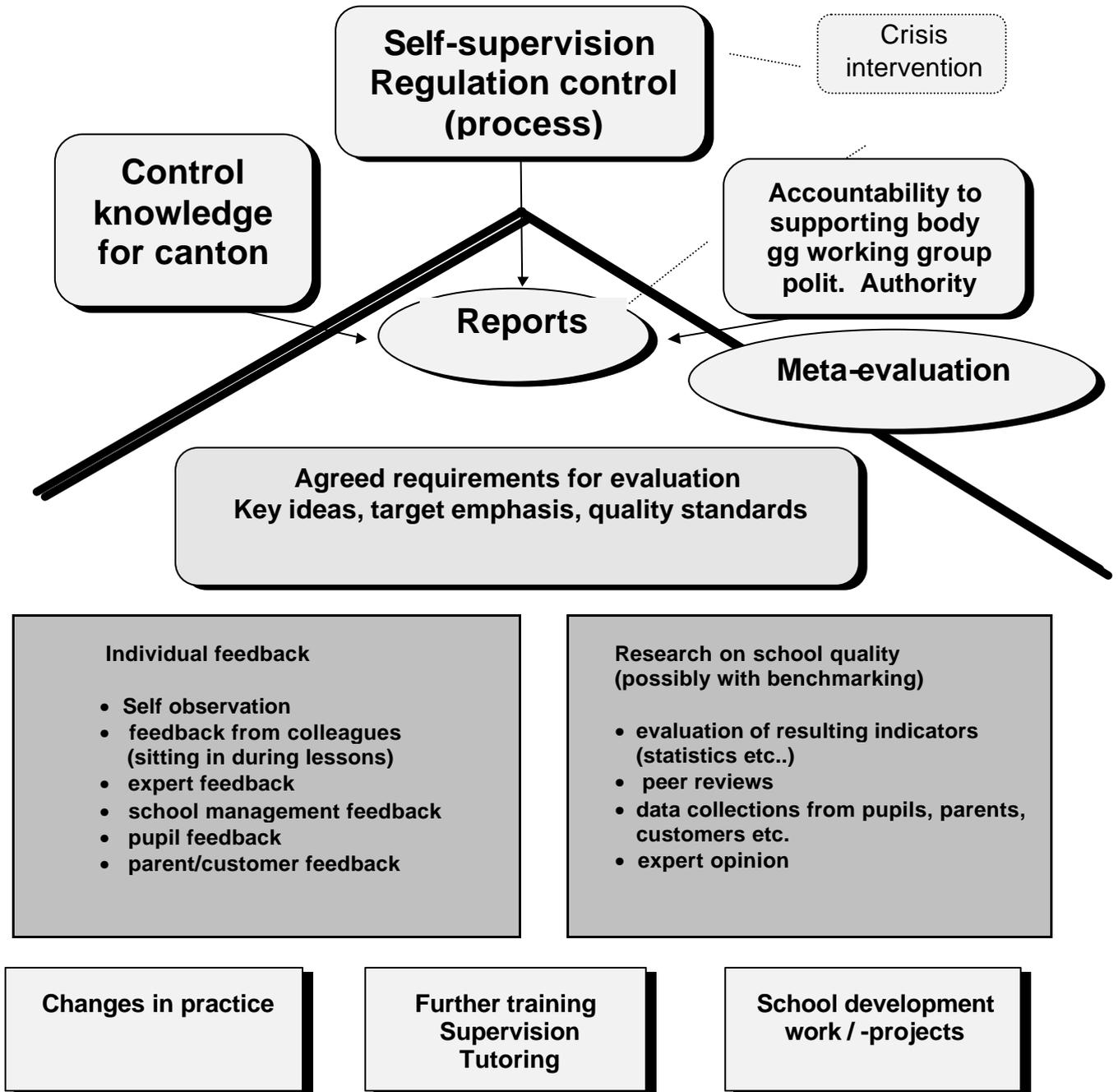
www.ipsbe.ch/inhaltgesamt.htm (Material on Bernese self-evaluation projects)

www.heideschule.de (Under the heading of QueK. A good example of transparent Q-policies)

www.nwedk.ch/projekte/q2e/Index.htm (FQS-comparable system of the NW EDK)

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The Formative Quality Evaluation System FQS®



For the records: the FQS also includes external evaluation. Here, it is an instrument of procurement and not a forcefully imposed external inspection. The procedure quality of the FQS is also subjected to external control. The FQS also produces accountability knowledge and control knowledge for both the macro system and the body responsible for education and its financing. Emphasis is, however, focussed on producing in-house directional knowledge and impulses for further training, both for individual teachers and for the whole educational facility.

This situation, however, is proven to be vulnerable if quality management elements, which are perceived as being threatening, are simultaneously implemented. This can easily be demonstrated with the second focus, the onset of personnel development.

Personnel development and knowledge management

For a long period of time, schools of all kinds understood themselves as being an administrative accumulation of single artists, who, to a large extent, were ultimately responsible for their subject-related further training and their professional well being. During the last one hundred years, the national education authorities have indeed developed opportunities mainly in the areas of further training of teachers and to some extent also in consultancy. These were, however, only opportunities. A systematic policy of personnel development, as has been standard practice over a long time in larger companies, was not even considered (Occasionally, however, school inspectors of the patronising, good and traditional kind provided functions for personnel development.) The school management was trapped by the collegial equality requirements and had neither the mandate nor the collegial permission to operate a systematic personnel development policy.

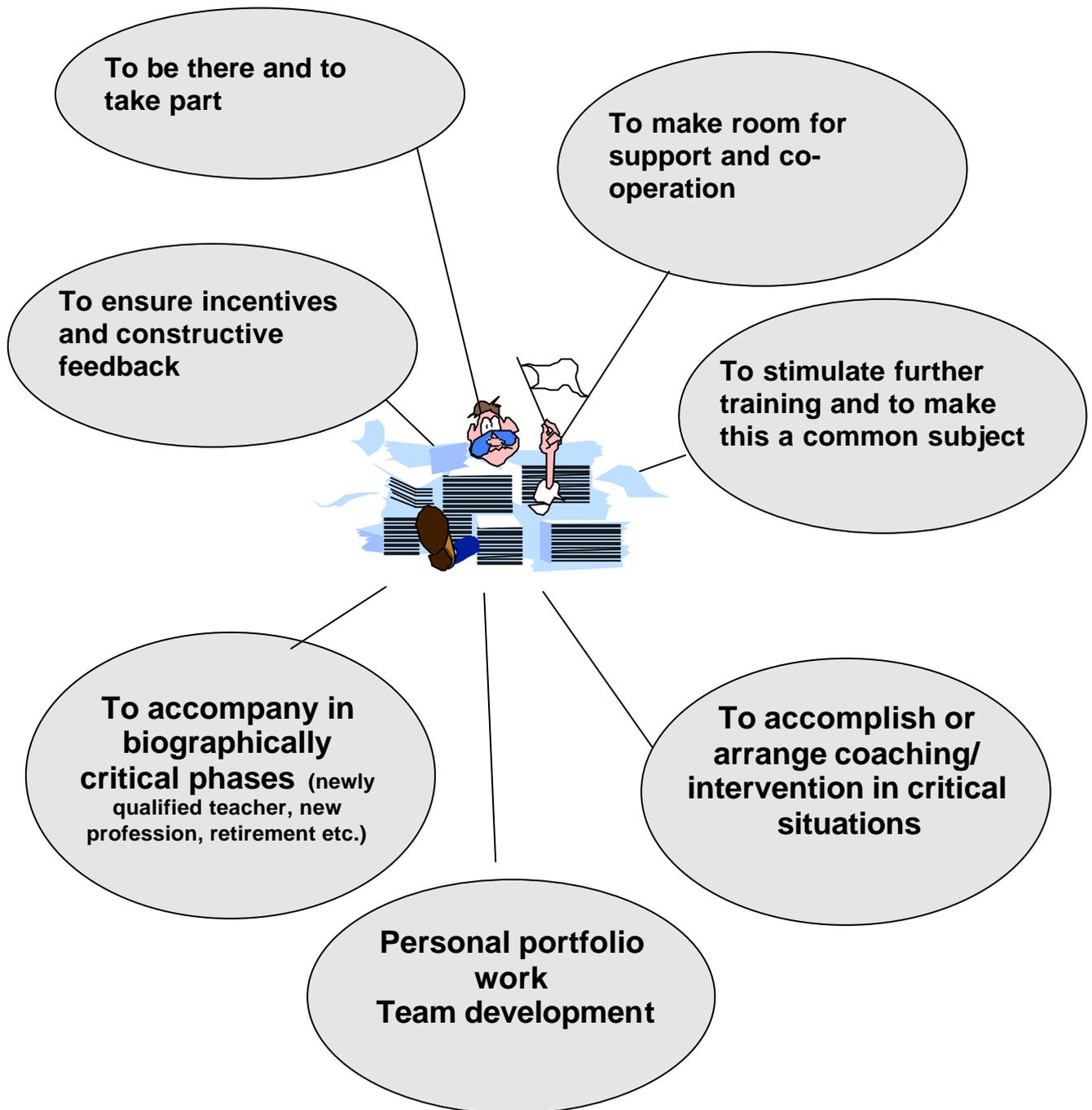
Over the last decades, however, the situation for teaching staff has changed dramatically. Presently, it is characterised by a multiplicity of challenges or stress factors:

- high complexity of task situations
- constant and rapid change in the area of social surroundings and, as a consequence, in the school
- the previously unquestioned confidence in schools is now being questioned in conjunction with increasing accountability duties and duties of both teachers and schools for explanations. All this has to be achieved with a relatively small possibility to standardise achievements and with a lack of a recognised technical language
- increasing contradictory expectations of both the social environment and customer field of the schools
- as a consequence of economy measures, albeit simultaneously increasing demands, resource shortage started during the recession years, restricting teaching staff- and school equipment

More and more teaching staff has a feeling of being inadequate due to conventional- and to large extent sole responsibilities, causing isolation in both vocational work and problem solving. Increasing working hours together with high work intensity, high conflict occurrences in everyday life, uncertainty concerning fulfilment of requirements, the constant need to change and learning needs lead to high physical and mental stress, together with a constant feeling of insufficiency or a feeling of lack of self-control. To be burnt out, ill or to take early retirement are the logical consequences of this situation and will result in increasingly high costs, if there is no intervention. Support functions for personnel have become more important than ever.

The umbrella organisation of Swiss teachers wrote a concept for personnel development, aimed at the suitability for schools. The concept has been tested and optimised during many Seminars for school management. The concept covers seven areas of action:

Personnel "care" as a school management task



Bianca Ender/Anton Strittmatter (Innsbruck/Biel) 2002

Some of the seven areas of action are particularly relevant concerning our topic of "knowledge management".

Action area 1: To be there and to take part

Here, we are talking about a "social walk-about" by school management, its daily interest in teaching staff, their class/departments, their working conditions etc. As a result of the in-depth attitude in participation, the interest shown in the work of the teaching staff, their isolation and, as a consequence, their defensive "hedgehog" attitude is stopped, communication is promoted and information starts to flow in an atmosphere of trust.

The possible conflict potential is already apparent in this first action area: If the school management simultaneously has an attitude of "in-house policing", of a controlling body with sanction potential, the teaching staff will find it difficult to differentiate between genuine sympathetic understanding and more or less hidden control and will keep a defensive attitude.

Action area 2: To make room for support and co-operation

The teaching profession has become so demanding that hardly anyone is able to remain without short or lengthy "lows" in morale and without situations of excessive demand. Teachers do not require continuous support! It is, however, important that offers of support are available when needed and that the support is available and easily accessible. Such offers come in the form of intervision- and supervision groups, possibilities to have consultancy discussions, mentors or coaching relationships, subject related working teams etc.

The personnel usually feel that information flow within a company is a "give and take" action. When there is a feeling of giving and only little receipt, giving will stop after a very short period.

For knowledge management, support structures are, therefore, very important to enable reconciliation between giving and taking. If reconciliation is correct, individual teachers themselves will become very active in providing experiences and feedbacks. The duty to feed information to the higher hierarchical levels or the gathering of information at the highest level from subordinates is rapidly felt to be a one-sided exploitation, leading to blocking or distortion of information flows.

Action area 3: To stimulate individual further training and to make this a common subject

For a long time, individual further training of teaching staff was an "intimate private affair". Currently, there is an increase in realisation that it is worthwhile exposing individual further training, own plans and experiences through a dialog with "critical friends" and that the knowledge within the collegiums could be even better used as a solution source to problems and for further training.

During individual career discussions between teaching staff and school management or mentors, personal development perspectives, learning needs, the need for role change and further training are discussed. This aims to increase the planning quality of individual further training.

By creating locations where individual further training experiences can be exchanged, the know-how acquired during further training is made available for the horizontal transfer between teaching staff. As a result, the teachers mutually instruct one another. This is probably the largest knowledge potential in schools that has been unused to date. Simultaneously, it is an available means to a job-enlargement: Teachers are acknowledged for their specialised knowledge and are allowed to "live them to the full" within collegiums, to be addressed and used as specialists within the field of their competence.

Action area 4: To ensure a dense and high-quality feedback environment

To some extent, feedback processes are the basic unit of knowledge management: Humans act, observe the effect of their action on others, allow society to report and draw conclusions

for their future action. In the chapter dealing with self-evaluation, I have described in more detail how this can be applied in reality to schools.

Concerning the personnel development aspect as part of knowledge management, it must be particularly emphasised that teachers, which are in an unfavourable feedback situation, must be well cared for. This has two meanings: Firstly, paying attention to persons who receive critical, negative feedback and to give them support for dealing constructively with such feedbacks. Secondly, it also means paying attention to persons who, for whatever reason, have very limited feedback situations or who actively avoid feedback situations. Here, sympathetic coaching work by the management responsible is called for. In most cases, it is the threats that are subjectively felt, which prevent the creation of good feedback situations. A condition for successful corrective action by school management is, however, when the management is not also perceived as being a threatening institution.

Action area 7: Personnel portfolio- work/team development

This action area deals with the school management taking account of existing strengths, weaknesses, potentials and dangers within the collegiums and of the planning of good and complementing collegial structures: What is a good mixture for our team? Which specialised field do we want to strengthen? Which unused potentials are dormant or can be brought to the surface? Which dangers are foreseeable? What is needed for the people or the company?

- for example, regarding gender or age/experience?
- for example, regarding special competence that is important in the field?
- for example, regarding special presentation competence (leading of project groups, mediation during conflicts, presentation of large group events etc..)?
- for example, regarding special abilities for public work, for managing tasks or for quality evaluation?

Such a personnel portfolio development distances itself from the traditionally and affectionately held equality myth that is present in most collegiums. This can cause fears (sub-division of the team, privileged management). The prospective advantages of a step into a culture of “equivalence within a multi-colourful inequality”, however, by far surpass the disadvantages of a possible conflict potential.

In practice, personnel portfolio work is carried out in two basic forms: Firstly, bilaterally, during discussions between school management and teacher regarding actual position and perspectives; and secondly, together with the team in as open as possible team diagnostics, processes of team development (for example in the form of SOFT-analyses), potential maps and the establishment of speciality inventories etc.

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To pay attention to both interest- and role confusions

Axioms:

- **mixing of both functions and roles creates confusion**
- **confusion results in defensive information behaviour**
- **the management alone does not control this dynamic; the subordinates make out of the role mixing what *they* want!**
- **Mixing of roles cannot always be avoided but can be reduced**

Therefore:

- **define the functions/purposes of an action**
- **avoid mixing functions and do not wear several hats at the same time**
- **define clearly and simply the current role**
- **understand as a permanent task the diagnosis of role confusions and negotiation of solutions**

Rule of thumb: Everything that restrains or falsifies knowledge flow requires corrective action

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Anton Strittmatter (1948) is head of pedagogics of the umbrella organisation for the Federation of Swiss Teachers LCH. In addition to this, he works as a freelance consultant for schools in development projects and problem situations.

After training as a grammar-school teacher, teaching activities at various levels and education-scientific studies (graduation 1973). Teaching activities in the area of school pedagogy and didactics at the University of Fribourg, University of Berne, University of Klagenfurt, Academy for Adult Education Lucerne. For 12 years, head of the Central Swiss advisory service for questions on schools in Lucerne. During 10 years, president of a local school administrative board. 5 years, Editor-in-Chief of the Swiss journal for teachers. Since 1994, head of pedagogic at the umbrella organisation for the Federation of Swiss Teachers LCH. Since more than 10 years, head of further training for head teachers of all levels. Since 25 years, school advisor concerning team developments, elaborating role models, didactical projects, quality evaluation, development of school management and also advisor for schools with crisis situations. Several hundred publications concerning these and other topics.

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