

THE MEETING, A MANAGEMENT METHOD IN PRESCHOOL ORGANIZATION

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Abstract

A dynamic and efficient management involves the use of the most appropriate methods and techniques in order to achieve the proposed objectives in a school organization. The main purpose of practicing these methods by school managers is to increase the efficiency of the organization, coordinating the activity of employees and training them to achieve the objectives proposed by the school organization. This paper aims at a rigorous analysis of the most used management method by school managers, the meeting, in order to streamline the managerial act in the school organization. The meeting method is used in all school organizations and is recommended in all managerial situations, the solution of which involves the participation, on an informational, decision-making or action level, of several people. The methodology consisted both in the study of multiple specialized materials in order to outline an overview of the topic, and in an empirical research, instrumented by survey based on a questionnaire applied to employees of a preschool organization in Dâmbovița County. The main conclusions of the study focus on the impact of the meeting method, as a management method, on the level of performance of employees and, implicitly, of the school organization.

Keywords: *leadership, school manager, management method, school organization, meeting.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The intense development of managerial science and practice in recent decades has been reflected in the shaping of many **modern managerial systems**, which cannot be implemented without management methods and techniques.

Management methods are the tools available to decision makers and to achieve the proposed objectives hwo represents "a coherent and rigorous managerial construction, which incorporates phases, components, rules, etc. precisely outlined,..., with localized effects at the level of a small number of managers and compartments in the organization" (Nicolescu, Verboncu, I., 2001, p. 17). A certain applied management method requires that all or almost all school managers use its specific procedures and techniques, in order to be able to quantify the results and establish the effects obtained after its application. In managerial practice, **the management technique** is hardly delimited by the management method, the difference being only in the fact that the management technique has "a simpler construction, through it exercising a certain management task, its impact being limited to the level a manager" (Nicolescu, Verboncu, 2000, p. 24).

2. MEETING METHOD - CONCEPTUAL DELIMITATIONS

The meeting is the most used management method and consists in "the reunion for a short period of time of several people under the coordination of a manager, in order to jointly solve some informational or decision-making tasks" (Bică, 2016, pp.12-13). The meeting is the main way to transmit information and gather feedback at the same time to a large

number of members of the organization. The quality of the meeting significantly conditions the quality of management, being directly involved in the exercise of managerial functions: foresight, organization, coordination, motivation - training and control - evaluation (Nicolescu, Verboncu, 2007, pp. 371-388). Depending on the content, the meetings are classified into several categories: **information, decision-making, harmonization, exploration and heterogeneous.**

The key role for any meeting is held by its leader, who is usually the school manager. This fact is due to the major impact it has throughout the organization of this organizational event, from the preparation to the conclusion and evaluation of the meeting (Lazăr, I, etc. 2004). Conducting a meeting involves a number of specific *managerial qualities and abilities* on the part of the leader, such as:

- Ability to set realistic and mobilizing goals for the meeting;
- Synthesis capacity, necessary in building the meeting agenda;
- Selection of participants who may have important contributions;
- Focusing the participants in the desired direction in order to obtain the expected results.

Particular attention must be paid to the intensity and involvement of the chair of the meeting. The success of any action is also conditioned by **the participation of the right people in the right place and in the optimal period.** The quality of the meeting also depends, to an appreciable extent, on the contribution of those who participate in the meeting. The meeting is one of the methods that can substantially contribute to the knowledge and superior solution of the complex and difficult problems

faced by a school organization and is the key element of the research study conducted in this article.

2.1. METHODOLOGICAL GUIDELINES IN THE ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

O. Nicolescu and I. Verboncu, create a synoptic table of the main managerial methodological elements, 118 in number (Nicolescu, Verboncu, 2001, pp. 18-22). One of these elements is the meeting method, which is used in all school organizations and is recommended in all managerial situations, the solution of which involves the participation, informally, decisively or actionally, of several people. The use of the meeting method involves the obligatory completion of four stages: **preparation, opening, conduct and completion**. In order to have an effective meeting, it is necessary to respect certain rules during each stage:

As it results from the researches carried out by various specialists, **the preparation of a meeting** has a sensitive impact on its effectiveness, requiring a complex of decisions and actions that will ensure the premises for its efficient development, of which the most important are (Hinescu, Dragolea, Fleşer, Oneţiu, 2006, pp. 259 - 260):

- *establishing a judicious agenda*, a task that must belong mainly to the manager who organizes the meeting; optimally it is indicated to approach a single problem, being admitted maximum 3 or 4 problems;
- *clear formulation of the issues on the agenda*, so that each person summoned to know precisely the objective and the field to be addressed;

- *designating the persons to prepare the materials* on the basis of which the work of the meeting will be carried out in the areas addressed;
- *establishing the persons who will be invited to the meeting*, being recommended to participate the manager and the employees involved in the approached issues;
- *elaboration of materials as short as possible*, for the meeting, strictly limited to information unknown by the participants, formulating decision alternatives, working hypotheses, concrete proposals, explanatory memoranda, opinion reports and reports of the various appearances, being sent to participants with at least 1-2 days before;
- *the establishment of the venue and the ambiance of the meeting* is necessary to be carried out according to the objectives pursued, not being indicated that a meeting with all employees should take place in the office of the school manager; regardless of the type of meeting, the furniture must be comfortable, not to disturb disturbing noises, to have audio-visual equipment, Internet connection;
- *designating the person in charge of recording the discussions at the meeting* and announcing in advance the date and place of the meeting.

The consideration of the elements presented above ensures the human, organizational premises for an adequate start in the development of the meeting. The capitalization of these premises depends on the *content and the concrete turn that the meetings take* (Nicolescu, Verboncu, 2007, p. 389).

In order to achieve in the best conditions the objectives pursued, it is recommended to the manager of an organization to consider the observance of several requirements or rules **in the opening of the meetings** (Nicolescu, Verboncu, 2007, p. 389) .:

- The opening of the meeting will be made at the time previously communicated to the participants;
- Clear formulation of the objectives of the meeting;
- Expressing the procedures and the way of working;
- Presenting ideas in a positive way and using attractive language to bring the ideas presented to the participants' attention;
- Limiting the introductory exposure for an interval of 1-2 minutes;
- Establishing, in agreement with the participants, if any, the danger of excessively long speeches, the total duration of the meeting (1-1.5 hours) and the maximum duration of each speech.
- Appointment of a time manager for speakers;
- Mentioning the absentees from the meeting, mentioning the cause of their absence.

Regarding **the conduct of the meeting**, it is necessary to observe the following actions (Gavrilă, Lefter, 2005):

- Control of the meeting based on the agenda items and the corresponding objectives;
- Establishing the contributions in new ideas, efficient solutions so as to stimulate the active and as substantial participation as possible of those present in the fulfillment of the pursued goals;
- Calming heated spirits, intervening tactfully but firmly to prevent or eliminate unwanted conflict;

- Prompt intervention, in order to stop the digressions from the subject, of the expositions that do not represent a contribution, but only a highlighting of the knowledge, the merits of some persons;
- Printing a rhythm that ensures the framing in the established duration, simultaneously with the achievement of the proposed goals.

The last stage is **the closing of the meeting**, which in turn has some characteristic rules:

- The final intervention of the chairperson of the meeting must be concise and refer to the main decisions, agreements, points of view expressed, facilitating their retention by all participants, including the position of management towards them;
- Reviewing in the minutes the items on the agenda and some unresolved issues, noting whether they are expected to be placed on the agenda of the next meeting or whether they have, in the meantime, been resolved.
- Checking the correctness of recording the discussions during the meeting;
- Signing of the minutes by all participants.

Although meetings are considered among the most expensive management methods that can be used in an organization, it is very rare for them to be evaluated.

The evaluation of the meeting is done by: drafting the plan of measures; checking the fulfillment of the resulting tasks until the next meeting; putting the unresolved issues on the agenda of the next meeting.

All the rules of the meeting stages presented above are valid, in general, for all types of meetings (Nicolescu, Verboncu, 2007, p. 390).

3. RESEARCH ON IDENTIFYING THE ORGANIZATION AND THE CONDUCT OF MEETINGS AND ON THE LEVEL OF MEETINGS EFFICIENCY IN THE PRESCHOOL ORGANIZATION

Due to the increasing complexity of the environment in which the organization operates and the large volume of information needed to make decisions or carry out activities, "Alexandrina Simionescu Ghica" Kindergarten with extended program decided that on the last working day of each month, most of the times starting with 12:00, in the destined hall, to hold the ordinary, monthly meeting with its staff. This organization is subordinated to the Ministry of Education and Research, being a state kindergarten, in the urban area, in Târgoviște Municipality.

Although the meetings are scheduled at a relative time interval, the school organization wants to observe its evolution closely, thus being able to act when irregularities are encountered and can more easily and clearly inform employees about its objectives, changes and possible regulations. The manner of using the meeting is the responsibility of the school manager, who is assigned the tasks of preparing the meeting, opening, conducting, finalizing and evaluating the meeting.

The present study was based on an empirical research, instrumented by the survey based on a questionnaire (Ristea, AL Ioan-Franc, V. Popescu, C. (2007) applied to the employees of the above-mentioned school unit, which aimed to identify the The results of this research are a starting point for

future decisions regarding the wider or smaller use of the meeting method, depending on the needs of the school organization.

The objective of the empirical research is to identify the way of organizing and conducting the meetings, as well as their efficiency within an organization of preschool education in Dâmbovița - Kindergarten with extended program "Alexandrina Simionescu Ghica" Târgoviște. The following were identified as **research hypotheses**:

H1: The more rigorous the way of organizing and conducting a meeting in kindergarten, the better the results of the employees!

H2: Is there a relationship between the organization and conduct of a meeting and the degree of involvement / responsibility of kindergarten employees?

In the context of the current epidemiological situation, the questionnaire was sent online, via Google Forms and contains closed-ended questions alternating with open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions were formulated so that the subjects could answer clearly and concisely, so as not to leave room for interpretations, and the open-ended questions allowed the subjects to express their own opinions.

The sample subjected to research included 26 of the 31 employees of the Kindergarten with extended program Alexandrina Simionescu Ghica Târgoviște, aged between 22-30 years - 5 respondents (19.2%), between 31-40 years are 9 respondents (34 percent) , 6%), between 41-50 years old there are 8 respondents (30.8% percentage), between 51-60 years old there are 4 respondents (15.4% percentage), and 100% are women. Out of the 26 respondents, 2 have a kindergarten work experience of over 20 years, while 9 are in the range of 10-20 years, 7 respondents are between 5-10 years old, 5

are in the range of 2-5 years, and 3 have less than 2 years of experience in this kindergarten. Regarding the employment of respondents, 16 of them are employed as teachers-preschool teachers (61.5%), 2 are employed as auxiliary teachers (7.7%), and the remaining 8 are employed as non-teaching staff (30.8%).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The information gathered using the questionnaire was processed in the S.P.S.S. The results of the processing were analyzed, interpreted, and the hypotheses were verified. The questionnaire aimed in **the first part to analyze the preparation, organization and conduct of the meeting with kindergarten employees**. The questionnaire allowed respondents to select one or more answers on **how to announce a meeting** they need to attend. All respondents are notified before a meeting is organized in kindergarten, either by signing a convening notice, 16 respondents (61.5%), or by phone, 8 respondents (30.8%), or by sharing a written message via email or social network Facebook or WhatsApp application, 17 respondents (65.4%) or learn from other colleagues, 2 respondents (7.7%). The secretaries of the school council or the Board of Directors, the heads of the Kindergarten Commissions or compartments, and the extraordinary ones, most of the times, the principal, are in charge of announcing the ordinary meetings to be held at the school unit level. The respondents were unanimously satisfied (100%) that the staff are **informed about the agenda of the meeting** before its organization, being announced in advance what will be discussed.

As for **the distribution and receipt of materials related to the agenda of the meetings**, prior to their conduct, only one respondent (3.8%) stated that he does not receive them. Table 1 shows that the school

organization is concerned that employees are informed prior to the meetings, for their effectiveness. This item would have been answered unanimously if all respondent employees had had personal electronic accounts to receive these materials.

Table 1. Receipt of agenda items before a meeting

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid yes	25	96.2	96.2	96.2
no	1	3.8	3.8	100.0
Total	26	100.0	100.0	

Regarding **the location of the meetings**, the answers vary. As can be seen in Table 4, from the perspective of the respondents, the answer with the highest frequency (61.5%) is the principal's office, which is usually a meeting room, 16 answers, in the educational unit, 5 answers (in percentage of 19.2%), in a group room, 6 answers (23.1%), depending on the agenda of the meeting, and recently, due to the pandemic, online on the Zoom platform, recording 3 answers (11.5%).

Given that **the key role** for any meeting is held by the chair of the meeting, the employees, who answered the questionnaire, appointed the director / manager of the kindergarten with 26 answers.

The degree of satisfaction of the respondents regarding **the way the meetings they attended were conducted** is unanimous, all being satisfied with the qualities and competencies of that person.

As for **setting / recalling the rules of the meetings**, only one respondent (3.8%) stated that this does not happen, the remaining 26 confirming with a very good percentage of 96.2%.

The next item asked the respondent employees to specify how was **the climate during the meetings**, registering only their unanimous appreciation as a stimulating climate. No employee said they were tense, rigid, indifferent, or authoritarian.

The next item asked respondents to specify **the extent to which the expected result was obtained for the sessions organized in kindergarten**, they stated that it was very high, 17 answers (65.4%), high, 8 answers (in percentage of 30.8%) or that I do not know, 1 answer (in percentage of 3.8%).

As for **the appreciation of their own activity during the meetings** they participated in, the respondents categorized it as very good: 8 answers (30.8%), good: 15 answers (57.7%) or average : 3 answers (11.5%). None rated their activity as weak or very weak.

The **timing of a meeting** is another indicator of its proper conduct. Therefore, respondents were asked, at this item, to confirm or deny if this happens: 22 of the responding employees answered yes (84.6%), the remaining 4 of the 26 respondents saying that the meetings do not end on time (15.4%).

A meeting is valid only if, after its conclusion, a **report is drawn up by the secretary** appointed by the director, in which the issues discussed or the decisions adopted are recorded, minutes that are signed by each participant. The respondents unanimously confirmed that at the level of the school organization, of which they are part, a report is drawn up for each meeting held.

Decisions taken at meetings are often followed by the assignment of work tasks to employees, to be completed within a given timeframe. Asked about this, the respondents unanimously confirmed that the employees of

the kindergarten **are assigned work tasks following the decisions taken during the meetings.**

Regarding **the fulfillment of these work tasks** distributed following the decisions taken during the meetings, the responding employees stated that they are fully fulfilled and within the specified deadline, 23 answers (88.5%) or that they are fulfilled in full, exceeding the specified term, 3 answers (in percentage of 11.5%), no respondent indicated that the work tasks were not performed at all or partially performed.

In **the second section of the research** it was wanted to identify the possibilities to improve the meetings that will be organized in the future at the level of the school unit.

For this, 3 open-ended items were addressed to the employees, items that allowed them to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the meetings they attended, but also to propose suggestions for their improvement. Table 2 presents some of **the strengths of the meetings organized** at the kindergarten, specified by the employees responding to the research. Of these, the most frequent, **accurate and clear transmission of information to participants is indicated.**

Table 2. Strengths of school organization meetings

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	cooperativity	1	3.8	3.8	3.8
	transmission of information	12	46.2	46.2	50.0
	consulting employees	4	15.4	15.4	65.4
	favorable climate	4	15.4	15.4	80.8
	punctual and clarifying	2	7.7	7.7	88.5
	organization and fairness	3	11.5	11.5	100.0
	Total	26	100.0	100.0	

Other strengths specified by the respondents refer to the fact that all employees are consulted in solving problems or supported when needed when they have doubts about the given work tasks, the favorable / stimulating climate is appreciated, but also the pleasant environment.

Organization, correctness, punctuality, cooperativity, coordination, participation, communication, compliance with the agenda, clear tracing of employees' tasks until the next meeting, how the meetings take place, they are classified as dynamic, clarifying and effective.

Table 3 presents some of **the weaknesses of the meetings** organized at the kindergarten, specified by the employees responding to the research. Of these, the most common (over 40%) is the answer that there are no weaknesses. We do not know if the answer is a subjective one (the respondents want to complete the online questionnaire as soon as possible), or even an objective one, declaring their satisfaction with the sessions they have participated in so far in kindergarten.

Table 3. Weaknesses of school organization meetings.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid the space in which it takes place	3	11.5	11.5	11.5
large volume of information	2	7.7	7.7	19.2
delayed feedback from some employees	1	3.8	3.8	23.1
there are no weaknesses	11	42.3	42.3	65.4
short time	3	11.5	11.5	76.9
poor internet	1	3.8	3.8	80.8
too long interventions of some colleagues	4	15.4	15.4	96.2
absence of colleagues due to motivated reasons	1	3.8	3.8	100.0
Total	26	100.0	100.0	

However, there were also respondents who specified as weaknesses the following: the inadequate space in which the meetings take place (the director's office is too small and the group rooms lose their usefulness during a meeting), the too long interventions of some participants in the meeting (does not fall within the time allotted by the chair of the meeting or deviates from the subject), which lead to prolongation of the time allocated to the meeting, large volume of information, delayed feedback from employees, absence due to reasons or unjustified delay of some participants (punctuality is not met or the quorum required for decision-making is not met), poor Internet connection (during the pandemic, meetings are held using the Zoom application), the choice of the allotted time slot (most often for teachers coincides with group teaching program), the division of labor is not equitable for all employees and is not specified and concrete about the tasks of each one.

In order to find **the most suitable solutions for the future meetings**, the respondent employees were asked, at the end of the questionnaire, to offer suggestions for their improvement. As with the previous item, the highest frequency (over 60%) has the answer that I have no suggestions. Table 4. shows that the rest of the respondents identified some weaknesses: involvement and perseverance from all, clarity in presentation from participants, more frequent meetings to review any issues, transmission of decisions taken on the group of employees or in writing on the notice board, a room meetings, the sharing of tasks fairly and the assumption of responsibilities by employees, the existence of feedback after each meeting for what has been done, the conduct of meetings outside school hours or in less busy times, for information meetings would be all you have to do is send all the information in writing because you lose time,

explain the tasks more clearly, carry out the meetings only online because the school lacks a meeting room.

Table 4. Suggestions for improving school organization meetings.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid clarity in presentation from participants	1	3.8	3.8	3.8
more frequent meetings to review any issues	1	3.8	3.8	7.7
I have no suggestions	16	61.5	61.5	69.2
involvement and perseverance from everyone	3	11.5	11.5	80.8
transmission of decisions taken	1	3.8	3.8	84.6
a meeting room	1	3.8	3.8	88.5
sharing tasks fairly	1	3.8	3.8	92.3
feedback after each session	1	3.8	3.8	96.2
taking place outside teaching hours	1	3.8	3.8	100.0
Total	26	100.0	100.0	

LIMITS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following can be identified as research limitations:

- the limited research horizon - this was applied only to the employees of the school organization;
- the subjectivism of the respondents and their emotional state;
- some employees did not have a personal electronic account or e-mail to access and answer the questions of the questionnaire applied;
- the static nature of the questionnaire;

- the time of application of the questionnaire, in the context of the current situation.

It is obvious that in the school organization the meeting is mainly used as a management method. All respondents participate in the announced meetings, are satisfied with their duration and climate, receive the agenda, but also the necessary materials, in due time, to study them before the meetings start. The rules of the stages of the meeting are known and respected: preparation, opening, conduct, completion and evaluation. The leader of the meetings is the school manager. In this sense, the investigative approach highlighted the idea that confirms the first hypothesis, namely that the results of employees are more efficient the more rigorous the organization and conduct of meetings, given their content or theme.

All meetings end with decisions that assign certain work tasks to employees, depending on the department in which each one works. As it emerged from the analysis and interpretation of the respondents' opinions, the work tasks are fully fulfilled, even if sometimes they exceed the given deadline, until the organization of the next meeting. It is observed that employees are interested in the school organization to achieve outstanding results, and have a high degree of involvement or responsibility thanks to the way meetings are organized and conducted, validating the second hypothesis of the research.

CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusions of the study focus on the positive impact of the meeting method, as a management method, on the level of performance of employees and, implicitly, of the school organization.

Analyzing the results obtained, it can be deduced that the school organization subject to research is competitive because it has a well-defined purpose in its activity, employees being interested in the results obtained with the school manager. The elements with major implications on the effectiveness of the meeting largely depend on the attention paid to this event and the seriousness with which such a meeting is organized between the members of the school organization.

The research can be continued at the level of other school organizations, its results being a starting point for establishing the most appropriate management methods and techniques in Dâmbovița preschool education. It is also possible to implement in the future the introduction of online meetings with the participation of all employees, in order not to disrupt the work schedule with preschoolers, carried out within a reasonable time.

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