LEADERSHIP ACADEMY: Generation I
Executive Summary

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1. Background

In 2004 the Austrian Ministry of Education, Science and Culture started an initiative to enhance innovative capacities of educational management on all levels of the school system. The Minister of Education invited two internationally well-known experts, Prof. Dr. Wilfried Schley, University of Zurich, and Prof. Dr. Michael Schratz, University of Innsbruck, to design an innovative concept for the professionalisation of 6.500 school leaders and other executives in leadership positions in the Austrian school system in a very short period of time on the basis of the latest scientific findings on innovation and change.

The *Leadership Academy* thus addresses heads of Austrian schools as well as executives in the ministry, school inspectorate and in-service training. It is geared towards managers in leading positions and requires proven qualifications in the area of school management, school law or school administration as application permit.

The *Leadership Academy* comes alive through *generations*. Each *generation* is composed of 250 to 300 participants from the educational system who come from all provinces and school types as well as the ministry and regional education authorities (e.g. inspectorate). This ensures right from the beginning that a systemic impact on change and transformation is possible and that the "whole system" is involved in a joint learning process. The *Leadership Academy* is designed in compliance with the principles of a learning organisation and cooperates closely with responsible decision makers in the ministry.

2. Philosophy

The *Leadership Academy* (LEA) creates an intellectual as well as practical focus within a new paradigm of both personal and institutional improvement in leadership capacities on all levels of the school system. The programme for the *professionalism in leadership* works along a new understanding of theory and practice which transforms the educational system by taking the quality of leadership as the starting point for systemic innovation. The *Leadership Academy* creates a learning context aiming to influence the *patterns* and habits of professionals in leading positions with regard to their capacity of developing and transforming their organisations.

The *Leadership Academy* functions as a project organisation and is constituted through *generations* which form a nation-wide network of change agents after graduation. The participants have to complete a leadership programme which consists of four *Forums*. At every *Forum* all participants of the respective *generation* meet at the Alpbach Congress Centre reaching a new milestone on the way to the membership of the Academy. In between *Forums* the emphasis is put upon individual school-based project work and learning group meetings before the final graduation from the *Leadership Academy* at the fourth *Forum*

The *Leadership Academy* is carried out through a project management team, a scientific research team, an organisational support team linked with the Universities of Innsbruck and Zurich and the Ministry of Education. Network co-ordinators in all Austrian provinces function as the regional support system assuring regional networking. The website www.leadershipacademy.at is the central communication platform which offers participants of the *Leadership Academy* immediate and project focussed support in the members sections.

3. Goals

The *Leadership Academy* serves the capacity building, qualification and empowerment of leaders in the Austrian educational system. Leaders are motivated to strategically target complex development tasks through priority setting, focussing on solutions, individual development projects and creating organisation profiles. The participants learn to translate *challenges* into innovative development processes and entice and empower staff in their work environment to achieve top performances. The *Leadership Academy* aims at creating a new mentality of leadership which rather draws on trust and authenticity than on power through position. The ultimate goal of the *Leadership Academy* lies in sustainably improving the preconditions and processes of young people's learning in all educational institutions.

4. Principles

The *Leadership Academy* is committed to the following principles:
– Offering self-organised learning learning opportunities in a strong learning environment.
– Enforcing individual and collective learning through co-operation and collaboration in work-based learning projects.
– Combining personal initiative and responsibility with ownership and pro-active participation.
– Motivation through active participation in a demanding and sophisticated qualification process, which renders the whole system immediate profit through systems thinking in action.
– Diversity through the pluralism of leaders from different school types, regions and levels of the hierarchy, which enhances system learning both horizontally and vertically.

5. Social Architecture

The *Leadership Academy* is composed as a network building its foundation on the smallest organisational entity, the *learning partnership*. This *learning partnership* is the home base for two participants each who align in a trustful reciprocal coaching partnership. They support each other through explorative questions, help to define project milestones and guide each other through their individual learning processes.

Three *learning partnerships* respectively merge in *collegial team coachings* (CTCs) forming learning groups of six, who consult and coach each other collegially.

The collegial team coaching works along a solution-oriented approach, through which working in a "*problem space*" is transferred towards a "*solution space*". This goal oriented, creative and inventive work is the foundation and philosophy of the CTC. The heterogeneous coaching groups of six are combined together on a regional level. These regional groups are co-ordinated by their respective network co-ordinators who co-ordinate all *LEAGenerations* in the Bundesländer. One *LEA Generation* consists of 250 to 300 participants forming the *learning partnerships*, *CTCs* and *regional groups*.

6. Processes

Interested leaders can register online at the LEA homepage www.leadershipacademy.at. According to the regional contingents they are nominated by the regional school authority to the ministry which processes registration and participation.

The kick-off takes place in the *First Forum*, which gives the participants orientation on the philosophy, organisation and structure of the *Leadership Academy* and the underlying processes. They are introduced to the approach of setting their own goals and choosing their personal professional projects which build the heart of their individual development. Centre stage takes the creation of trust into the network, the forming of *learning partnerships* and CTCs and the elaboration of possible innovation themes.

All participants of the same *generation* meet in three *Forums* of three days each, and a final two days *Certification Forum,* which is dedicated to the presentation and appraisal of the results. With the certification process the participants become *members* of the *Leadership Academy*. Between *Forums* the *learning partnerships* and the *CTC*s meet regionally or locally. They reflect on the reactions of their stakeholder groups in their schools, education authorities and inspectoral systems or in-service training institutions considering their individual development projects. These processes develop through cycles of anticipation, action and reflection. The principle of ownership and responsibility is combined with a goal and result, which demands respect, openness and flexibility from everybody involved.

In the *Second Forum* the individual development projects of participants are defined, developed and outlined, using project management methods and tools. In this phase the CTCs are responsible for collaborative reflection on the individual development processes with a view to innovative ideas for changing the patterns of thinking along old solutions. In the *Third Forum* the participants reflect on their mutual experiences of the implementation of their development projects. This is the creative space where scepticism, resistance, conflicts and tensions come to the fore just as much as agreement, motivation and enthusiasm. Different workshops on communication, motivation, conflict resolution and decision making are offered as a support for individual learning and capacity building. Art workshops, dance or survival camp techniques support the holistic learning approach.

In the *Certification Forum* the participants present their professional learning processes and their results – first in the intimacy of their collegial team coaching groups. They then decide collaboratively on one project of their CTC to be presented to the others in a final phase of parallel sessions. For successful certification each participant of the *Leadership Academy* has to hand in a thesis on individual personal and professional development process in written form.

7. Generation I: The Pioneers

System wide learning in a highly structured environment of an educational system, applying large group settings, self-organized learning and participants' ownership demand new ways of thinking on many levels as well as trust in a new social architecture of learning by individuals and organizations. The pioneer generation of the *Leadership Academy* was the test for this innovative social architecture of the *Leadership Academy*. The experiences with *Generation I* should help to find answers on the feasibility and sustainability of such an approach through questions like the following.

- How can an application modus be found that serves the initiatives and voluntariness of future participants as well as the steering demands of the provincial, inspectoral and ministerial systems?
- Does the active and self-regulated individual learning process through innovative development projects sustain learning concept within the *Leadership Academy?*
- Can a self-responsible modus of collegial coaching through CTCs be achieved, which supports learning and development between the *Forums*?
- Do the networking phases among participants within the provinces in the regional groups foster interaction between the LEA *generations*?
- Does collaboration and co-operation between the project management team of the Ministry of Education and the *Leadership Academy* project team work out to be aligned and beneficial?
- Are the overall project design and the time allowance efficient for the planning, design, implementation and evaluation of innovative development projects?
- Are the infrastructure of the conference venue concerning large group settings, technical equipment, journey to and from conference venue, accommodation and catering up to the needs and expectations of both participants and *Leadership Academy* scientific team?
- Does the communication concept stand the test, working primarily via electronic distribution and targeted mailings preparing the participants for the *Forums* via newsletters and the uploading of relevant literature or other materials on the website?
- Does the *Leadership Academy* core team prove sustainable co-operation between the Ministry of Education, the Universities of Innsbruck and Zurich, the Institute of Organisation Development and Systems Consulting in Hamburg and Kulturkontakt Austria in Vienna?

8. Conclusions

The *Leadership Academy* as a **network** organisation:
Following the concept of network organisations as loosely coupled systems which are kept together through communication and identification, the *Leadership Academy* can be seen as a successful example. The participants easily adopted the network **culture** and integrated it in their (inter)actions.

They practice "sharing and caring" in a successful way, communicate openly with a high level of trust and develop mutual respect and understanding in heterogeneous entities. The notion of innovation and „next practice" is well anchored, even though not all participants arrived at a *change of pattern* with the same intensity. A qualitative change within the mind set has taken place and becomes visible in new ways of thinking and action. Leadership has become an attitude which is mirrored in their behaviour, and the participants do not see leadership as a status entitlement but a willingness of servant leadership and taking up responsibility. Thus a strong culture of acceptance and mutual support has developed.

The **structure** of the network can be seen in a variety of relationships. The most intimate one is the *learning partnership* as a chance of true dialoguing and mutual coaching and counselling, and each participant is part of such a *learning partnership*. The next bigger network entity is the *collegial team coaching* group (CTC), which supports the reflection and development of the individual innovation projects. The *regional networks* constitute an even bigger entity and connect regional projects, form strategic alliances and create regional publicity.

The **processes** in the *Leadership Academy* network are methodologically defined and give clear orientation. As a LEA member each participant is familiar with the workings of a CTC and is able to conduct collegial team coachings. Each participant can distinguish between the different phases of an innovative development project and can design such phases. The processes of „next practice" and *pattern change* are standard procedures for them. They can also systematically plan communication processes and apply them strategically.

An *identity* can grow from the culture, structure and processes of the network, which defines the strategy of the *Leadership Academy*. This can be the springboard for vision building towards future perspectives. The following *LEA Generations* have shown how much potential, energy and attraction the *Leadership Academy* enfolds. The following quotes from a feedback round after the *First Forum* of *Generation IV* proves this impressively:

> *"Never before I was at such a professional event. Excellent presentations, an excellent team. LEA has been a real enrichment. I was able to make experiences in another dimension. Thanks to the whole LEA team!"*

> *"Great [groß-Art-ig] – Lea IV is a piece of art, leaving more than its footprints in the (hi)story of education."*

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„Many impressive people. Openness. I was able to let go and let come – captivating inputs which arouse my curiousity, inspired me, confirmed me. The level of professionalism in the teams was congenial and fostered learning. A lot of resonance. The facilitation and organisation team was just great!"

"I fully appreciate the beneficial facilitation (co-operative and egalitarian, humorous, competent, flexible, and adjusting to situational needs) and the climate you succeed in creating on all levels."

"When I arrived, my boat was already well equipped. Nevertheless I learned what kind of extra supplies I need, how I can detect the direction of the wind faster and more accurately, and what kind of language I have to elaborate, to be able to communicate well with my crew."

Leadership Academy
ein Projekt von klasse:zukunft