

NELCA - Joint Analytical Report on Excellence Implementation and Vision Setting in Educational Organisations

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Executive Summary

This joint analytical report presents the outcomes, implementation processes, challenges, and emerging trends identified through the implementation of excellence approaches and vision-setting activities across nine educational organisations participating in the NELCA project activities and related trainings “Building Excellent Schools” and “Building Visions in Schools”. The participating organisations represent a diverse educational landscape, including universities, primary schools, non-governmental organisations, and educational innovation centres from Latvia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Lithuania, and North Macedonia.

The analysis shows that participating organisations have a strong shared commitment to being learner-centred, reflective, collaborative, and continuously growing learning organisations. Despite disparities in institutional size, structure, and educational background, numerous shared features appeared across all organisations. These include the need for strategic vision formulation, organisational self-awareness, collaborative leadership, stakeholder involvement, digital transformation, and improved internal communication and cooperation.

The implementation of the KNOWLO® self-assessment framework played a significant role in supporting organisations to identify strengths, prioritise development areas, and initiate structured organisational reflection. The self-assessment process encouraged greater participation of staff members, promoted ownership of institutional development, and strengthened cultures of feedback and collaboration.

The findings also reveal challenges/areas for improvement. These include time, workload pressures, resistance to change, insufficient experience with structured self-evaluation, financial limitations, and difficulties in maintaining long-term engagement throughout implementation processes. At the same time, organisations consistently reported positive impacts such as increased staff motivation, stronger teamwork, clearer strategic direction, improved communication, and greater alignment between organisational values and educational practices.

The excellence implementation process contributed significantly to the development of educational organisations as SMART learning organisations. The project supported not only institutional development but also the professional growth of educators and leaders. The identified good practices and recommendations provide valuable insights for schools, educational leaders, and policy stakeholders seeking to strengthen learner-centred and excellence-oriented educational cultures.

1. Introduction

Educational institutions throughout Europe are being compelled to adjust to evolving social, technological, and educational landscapes. Schools, universities, and educational organisations are expected not only to deliver quality education but also to function as flexible, innovative, learner-centred, and sustainable learning organisations. In this context, the implementation of organisational excellence frameworks and strategic vision-setting processes has become increasingly relevant.

This joint analytical report summarises and analyses the experiences of nine educational organisations that participated in the NELCA project activities related to organisational excellence implementation and vision development. The organisations engaged in trainings focused on building excellent schools and establishing shared visions for organisational development. Through the application of the KNOWLO® self-assessment framework and related methodologies, organisations reflected on their institutional cultures, strategic priorities, internal communication, leadership approaches, and learner-centred practices.

The participating organisations represented different educational sectors and institutional contexts:

- Higher education institutions – Ružomberok Catholic University; Mykolas Romeris University;
- Primary schools - Vilniaus Prano Mašioto primary school; Primary school; “StrashoPindjur”; Primary school Sládkovičova; Dobje Elementary School
- Educational NGOs – Biedriba Eurofortis; Dig-Ed;
- Educational innovation organisations – Harmony Academy.

The objective of this report is to identify common trends, challenges, strengths, and good practices emerging from the implementation processes. The report also aims to provide practical recommendations for school management, educational leaders, and organisations interested in implementing learner-centred excellence approaches.

The research is based on organisational implementation reports provided by participating institutions after attending the trainings "Building Excellent Schools" and "Building Visions in Schools". The study takes a thematic analytical approach, focusing on repeating patterns and transferable lessons identified across the partnership.

2. Organisational Motivation for Excellence Implementation

One of the strongest common themes identified across all participating organisations was a clear motivation to improve educational quality, strengthen organisational culture, and create more learner-centred educational environments.

For universities and higher education institutions, the motivation often is a combination of desire to modernise educational processes, strengthen institutional competitiveness, and overcome traditional organisational perception. Organisations highlighted the importance of moving from isolated individual practices toward more collaborative and strategically aligned institutional cultures.

For example, the motivation for the Department of Social Work of Catholic University, is the transition into a "SMART learning organization" by integrating the principles of the EFQM Model, KNOWLO Framework and the Learner-Centered Approach.

Primary schools emphasised the need to better prepare students for future challenges by developing critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving skills. Many schools identified learner-centred education as a key direction for future development and viewed organisational excellence as a mechanism to support this transformation.

Educational NGOs and innovation organisations focused strongly on improving teacher competences, fostering innovation, and supporting educational transformation through professional development and strategic partnerships. For these organisations, excellence implementation was closely connected with strengthening organisational sustainability, increasing visibility, and creating long-term impact within educational communities.

Across all organisations, participation in the project created opportunities to:

- Clarify institutional vision and strategic direction;
- Strengthen organisational self-awareness;
- Improve communication and collaboration;
- Increase staff engagement and ownership;
- Develop more inclusive and reflective organisational cultures;
- Support continuous professional development;
- Strengthen learner-centred approaches.

A particularly significant motivational factor was the recognition that educational organisations must continuously adapt to changing societal and educational realities. The

participating organisations demonstrated strong awareness that excellence is not a fixed outcome, but rather an ongoing developmental process.

3. Thematic Analysis of the Implementation Processes

3.1 Organisational Self-Awareness and Strategic Development

The implementation of the KNOWLO® self-assessment framework significantly contributed to increasing organisational self-awareness in participating institutions. Organisations reported that structured self-assessment processes enabled them to reflect more critically on their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and developmental priorities.

Many organisations highlighted that the self-assessment process provided a clearer understanding of institutional culture and strategic direction. Schools and organisations became more aware of how their values, leadership approaches, communication systems, and educational practices aligned with their long-term vision.

Several institutions used the implementation process to revise or redefine their organisational vision. This often involved collaborative discussions among staff members, leadership teams, and other stakeholders. In many cases, the process helped organisations move toward more clearly articulated, shared, and learner-centred visions.

For example, in Harmony Academy, are actively engaged 10 people in this process. The core team consists of 4 members, supported by an extended group of 6 collaborators who are gradually integrating into the vision and its implementation.

The development of organisational improvement plans was another important outcome. Based on assessment results, organisations identified priority areas requiring further development, including:

- Strategic management;
- Internal communication;
- Team collaboration;
- Staff development;
- Digital transformation;
- Results analysis and benchmarking.

The analysis shows that organisations increasingly understand the importance of strategic planning as a dynamic and participatory process rather than a purely administrative requirement.

3.2 Leadership, Communication, and Collaboration

The implementation processes consistently emphasised the importance of collaborative leadership and open communication cultures.

Many organisations reported that the self-assessment and vision-setting activities strengthened teamwork and increased participation among staff members. The process encouraged educators and organisational members to share ideas, discuss challenges openly, and contribute more actively to institutional development.

Several organisations specifically highlighted the shift from individualistic work cultures toward more collaborative approaches. Regular discussions, reflection sessions, and joint planning activities contributed to stronger team cohesion and greater alignment around shared goals.

Positive impacts included:

- Increased trust among staff members;
- Stronger sense of ownership;
- Improved transparency;
- Better delegation of responsibilities;
- More inclusive decision-making;
- Stronger stakeholder engagement.

At the same time, organisations identified several communication-related challenges. Resistance to change, differing opinions, limited experience with participatory processes, and difficulties maintaining engagement throughout long-term implementation processes were recurring issues.

Nevertheless, the findings demonstrate that organisations increasingly recognise communication and collaboration as essential components of educational excellence and sustainable organisational development.

3.3 Learner-Centred Approaches and Educational Innovation

Learner-centred education emerged as one of the most significant shared priorities across the partnership.

Schools and educational organisations consistently highlighted their commitment to creating inclusive, engaging, supportive, and personalised learning environments. Many institutions reported ongoing efforts to:

- Implement active learning methods;

- Strengthen formative assessment;
- Encourage student participation and autonomy;
- Promote experiential learning;
- Support emotional well-being;
- Address diverse learner needs.

Several organisations emphasised the importance of respecting student individuality and building educational environments based on trust, inclusion, and positive relationships.

Educational innovation was strongly connected with the implementation of digital tools and modern teaching methods. Organisations reported active use of:

- Digital learning platforms;
- Online collaboration tools;
- Interactive educational resources;
- Hybrid learning environments;
- ICT-supported teaching approaches.

Many participants viewed digital transformation not only as a technological issue but also as a broader organisational and pedagogical shift requiring continuous professional development and adaptive leadership.

The analysis demonstrates that learner-centred approaches were most successful in organisations where there was strong alignment between institutional values, leadership practices, and everyday educational processes.

3.4 Professional Development and Organisational Culture

The implementation processes strongly supported professional growth and reflective practice among educators and organisational staff.

Across the organisations, staff members participated actively in:

- Self-reflection activities;
- Professional development trainings;
- Collaborative discussions;
- International cooperation;
- Strategic planning processes.

Many organisations highlighted increased staff motivation and engagement as one of the most important outcomes of the project activities. Educators reported feeling more

empowered, more involved in institutional development, and more open to innovation and collaboration.

The findings also demonstrate that organisational culture plays a central role in excellence implementation. Organisations that promoted trust, openness, support, and respect experienced stronger engagement and more successful implementation processes.

At the same time, maintaining long-term motivation and balancing innovation with everyday responsibilities remained challenging. Time constraints, heavy workloads, and limited resources frequently affected the pace and sustainability of implementation.

4. Common Challenges Identified in Organisations

Despite the many positive outcomes, the participating organisations faced several recurring challenges during the implementation process.

4.1 Time and Workload Pressures

One of the most frequently mentioned challenges was balancing implementation activities with existing educational and administrative responsibilities. Teachers, academic staff, and organisational leaders often struggled to find sufficient time for self-assessment, reflection sessions, meetings, and professional development activities.

For example, Primary school; “StrashoPindjur is mentioning time and workload pressure among the most important challenges:

Finding time within the school day for ongoing professional development was challenging, particularly since teachers already had full schedules. Some expressed concerns about balancing professional growth with their regular teaching duties.

4.2 Resistance to Change

Several organisations reported varying levels of resistance to change among staff members. In some cases, educators felt uncertain or overwhelmed by new approaches, evaluation systems, or strategic expectations.

For example, Mykolas Romeris University is mentioning possible resistance to change among some stakeholders and the need for continuous communication and follow up during the implementation phase as one of the main challenges.

4.3 Limited Financial and Human Resources

Financial limitations were particularly visible in smaller schools and NGOs. Limited resources affected the speed of implementation, opportunities for professional development, and the ability to scale innovative activities.

4.4 Lack of Experience with Structured Self-Evaluation

Some organisations had limited prior experience with systematic self-assessment and reflective organisational evaluation. This created uncertainty during the implementation of the KNOWLO® framework and required additional facilitation and support.

4.5 Sustainability and Results Measurement

Several organisations identified difficulties related to measuring long-term impact, benchmarking results, and establishing clear performance indicators. While organisations demonstrated strong commitment to improvement, systematic monitoring and evaluation practices often remained underdeveloped.

5. Good Practices and Emerging Trends

The analysis identified several transferable good practices and emerging trends relevant for educational organisations.

Inclusive and Participatory Vision Development

Successful organisations actively involved staff members, learners, parents, and stakeholders in vision-setting processes. Inclusive participation strengthened ownership, commitment, and shared understanding.

Collaborative Leadership

Shared leadership models and distributed responsibilities contributed to stronger teamwork, improved communication, and increased institutional resilience.

Reflective Organisational Culture

Regular reflection, open discussions, and self-assessment activities supported continuous improvement and organisational learning.

Integration of Digital Innovation

The effective use of digital tools strengthened communication, collaboration, teaching innovation, and organisational adaptability.

Learner-Centred Educational Practices

Organisations increasingly prioritised personalised learning, active participation, emotional well-being, and inclusive educational approaches.

International Cooperation and Networking

Participation in Erasmus+ projects and international cooperation created valuable opportunities for professional growth, exchange of practices, and institutional development.

For example, the Primary school “Sladkovičova”, is mentioning that overall, the results show a balanced profile of the school, with strong student orientation and positive internal relations, while also clearly identifying priority areas for future development and improvement.

6. Conclusion and Future Implications

The implementation of excellence approaches and vision-setting processes across the participating organisations demonstrates the growing importance of reflective, learner-centred, and collaborative educational cultures within European education.

The analysis confirms that organisational excellence is not achieved through isolated initiatives but through continuous processes of reflection, participation, learning, and adaptation. The participating organisations showed strong commitment to improving educational quality, strengthening organisational culture, and aligning institutional practices with learner-centred values.

The KNOWLO® self-assessment framework proved to be a valuable tool for increasing organisational self-awareness, supporting strategic development, and fostering collaborative reflection. The process enabled organisations to identify development priorities, strengthen communication and teamwork, and initiate meaningful organisational changes.

Although organisations faced important challenges related to workload, resistance to change, financial limitations, and sustainability, the overall impact of the implementation process was highly positive. Participants reported stronger engagement, clearer strategic

direction, increased collaboration, and greater readiness for innovation and continuous improvement.

The findings of this report suggest several important remarks for educational organisations:

- Excellence implementation should be understood as a long-term developmental process;
- Learner-centred approaches require strong alignment between vision, leadership, and everyday practice;
- Organisational culture is a critical factor in successful educational transformation;
- Continuous professional development and reflective practice are essential for sustainable improvement;
- International cooperation and networking significantly strengthen institutional learning and innovation.

For example, the Dobje Elementary school's long-term goal is to create a school community where all stakeholders – students, teachers, parents, and partners – actively contribute to the vision of excellence and continuous growth.

Eurofortis representatives are mentioning *“We believe that the KNOWLO® framework offers a comprehensive perspective on organisational assessment, similar to other excellence models, but with a simpler and more user-friendly methodology”*.

The experiences of the participating organisations provide valuable inspiration for schools, educational leaders, and policymakers seeking to create more inclusive, innovative, resilient, and future-oriented educational environments. The NELCA project has demonstrated that even organisations operating in different educational contexts can successfully build shared cultures of excellence based on collaboration, reflection, and continuous learning.