

Value-driven training of leaders in the service of Hungarian denominational (Reformed) public education

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ABSTRACT

Our paper focuses on a specific subsystem of the Hungarian public education system, the Reformed educational network. After a theoretical foundation, the study will review the characteristics and legislative environment of Reformed public education management and leadership training, and then examine the concept, reception, results and further development potentials of the accredited training in *Value-Driven Leadership*, a relatively new element of the range of trainings. The training was developed in collaboration between Dutch and Hungarian specialists, taking into account the international context of Christian education. Our study uses a variety of research methods, such as document analysis, statistical analysis and analysis of a questionnaire survey on further needs. Some basic conclusions can be drawn from the survey as: (1) The target group is highly interested in modern knowledge about Christian leadership, which is considered a priority area, which also coincides with the needs of the maintenance. (2) The management powers of headmasters of ecclesiastical institutions are much broader than those of headmasters of public institutions, but their knowledge and interest in these areas are insufficient. (3) More than ever before, the organisation of training should aim at modularity and a variety of organisational methods. The tools of combined training organisation, which have already proved their worth in higher education, should also be applied to 30-h continuing training, possibly with the addition of distance learning elements.

KEYWORDS

inservice teacher training, leadership training, management development, religious organizations

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INTRODUCTION

Can leadership be learned or is it something you are born to do? Or can everyone who learns leadership as a profession become a leader? Many theories try to describe leadership as a system of universally valid rules, but theorists are constantly confronted with the limitation that every leader is an individual, not to be confused with any other, and that every human (co-worker) community has its own unique dynamics, determined by many external and internal influences. Research in leadership theory now agrees on that, although the role of personality traits in leadership is not negligible, leadership methods can be researched, taught and learned. Since the 1960s, forms of organised leadership training have appeared in the private and then in the non-profit sector, and in the 1980s school leadership training was introduced in public education (Halász, 1994). This process led to the professionalisation of school leadership.

An important finding of OECD research on school improvement is that while teachers have a direct impact on student learning achievements, school leadership has an indirect impact. This indirect impact is achieved by providing professional support to teachers, setting expectations, developing common reflection at the organisational level, supporting peer learning and, in general, by making the public school a learning organisation. Supporting the professional leadership of heads of institutions and school management is simpler and more cost-effective than providing individual teachers with personalised, external professional support (Szabó, 2013).

According to the Hungarian Public Education Strategy 2021–2030 for the European Union (2020), Heads of institutions play a key role in the efficient and effective implementation of public education task, in strengthening the preparedness and commitment of teachers, and in creating a motivating learning environment. It is therefore the utmost importance to strengthen the professional support and quality assurance of heads of institutions. The most important development directions related to the provision of institutional heads are the support of the professional work of heads of institutions, the development of leadership training and the strengthening of the measurement and evaluation of the activities of heads of institutions.

International research relevant to our country¹ shows that schools need well-trained and well-informed school leaders to work well. It is an indisputable fact that no training programme can equip leaders with the knowledge and skills to answer all questions (especially in a rapidly changing social, economic, and technological world). Therefore, critical thinking, practical know-how, the ability to learn from each other and networking among practising and future leaders are essential elements of training for school leaders. Preparation of school leaders cannot guarantee that graduates of such a programme will necessarily become good school leaders, but it can reduce the initial difficulties and premature burn-out of new school leaders (Révai & Kirkham, 2013).

Management training must take a multifaceted approach to the subject of the training, personalised training must take into account the requirements of institutional identity, the methodological tools of management and the tensions between the dispositions that arise from the personality of the manager (Hézszer, 2008).

¹The research involved educational researchers from Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden.



In our development, we utilized Kempster's (2009) research, which suggests that leadership strategies typically consist of six fundamental components: 1. Identifying their own context, 2. Observational learning, 3. Trying out leadership roles, 4. Developing their self efficacy, 5. Increasing prominence of the idea of leadership, 6. Aspiring to a leadership identity.

Methodological issues

In leadership training, it is particularly important to move away from the traditional methods used in school-based education to develop leadership skills. This can be best achieved through training courses that focus on experiential learning and use a variety of tools to create situations that promote the development of leadership skills and meet the ever-changing expectations of leaders (Rajcsányi et al., 2022).

International research² draws attention to the importance of continuous training and the incorporation of international experience. In the light of this research, we need to design learning processes that combine intensive pre-appointment training and lifelong learning (Révai & Kirkham, 2013).

The 30-h accredited in-service training course *Value-Driven Leadership* examined in our study focuses on learning supported by training exercises, sometimes online knowledge sharing, along this recognition. In our development, we have taken into account that the intention of adult CPD or career change has created a new clientele with new needs for educational institutions (Szontagh & Tolnai, 2021). Our experience also confirms that the lives of students on our teacher's in-service trainings combine learning, work and leisure, their needs and learning habits are different based on the educational level. Increasing learning opportunities must go hand in hand with taking into account their individual expectations and aspirations. A change of attitude and approach, teaching-learning methods and tools can help to increase motivation, so that learning can become a joyful and successful activity. The role of trainers and teachers in the new learning culture will change significantly (Ambrusné & Hegyesi, 2011).

Christian leadership theory

"Much educational leadership theory is now more rooted in practice – adaptive, imaginative and tolerant of complexity and ambiguity. However, it lacks, and may fundamentally reject, any sense of an over-arching coherence or meta-narrative. Christian faith offers such a coherence." (Cracknell, 2018, 230)

In the Christian interpretation, leadership is a charism given to a person by God. He who receives it is given it to enrich, to develop, to use it well. It is no coincidence that the theory of servant leadership is particularly prominent in Christian leadership theories (Szontagh, 2019). Becoming a servant leader starts from the self-evident sense that one wants to serve first and foremost. Then a series of considered decisions leads one to a place where one is already fit to lead (Greenleaf, 1973; van Dierendonck, 2011). This leadership model focuses on enriching and building up those being led. Servant leadership results in changes in the personalities of employees, developing their aptitude, confidence and relationship building skills, and in the organisation's ability to achieve better results. The theory of servant leadership is dominant in

²The research involved educational researchers from Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden.



Christian leadership theory, but is now far from being confined to the religious sphere (Barbuto et al., 2014; Young, 2002). In the development of our leadership training, we heavily relied on the work of Northouse (2018), who described the ten characteristics of servant leadership as follows: Listening, Healing, Awareness, Persuasion, Conceptualization, Foresight, Stewardship, Commitment to the growth of people, Building community. According to the literature (e.g. van Dierendonck, 2011) Northouse describes the behavior of servant leadership as follows: Conceptualizing, Emotional healing, Putting followers first, Helping followers Grow and succeed, Behaving ethically, Empowering, Creating value for the community.

McMaster’s results make a “strong statement on the value of Christian education for leadership and for leadership development. Three truths are evident, which, when combined, emphasize the importance of Christian education. First, the narratives of the participants of this study show that educational experiences have a shaping influence on leadership development. Second, Christian schools provide an educational context that models and teaches ethical and moral values. Third, leadership theories and research indicate that ethical and moral characteristics are important to leadership.” (McMaster, 2013, p. 80)

Krispin summarizes the foundational areas of Christian leadership development in an overview chart (Fig. 1). “The inner two circles present foundational areas of Christian leader

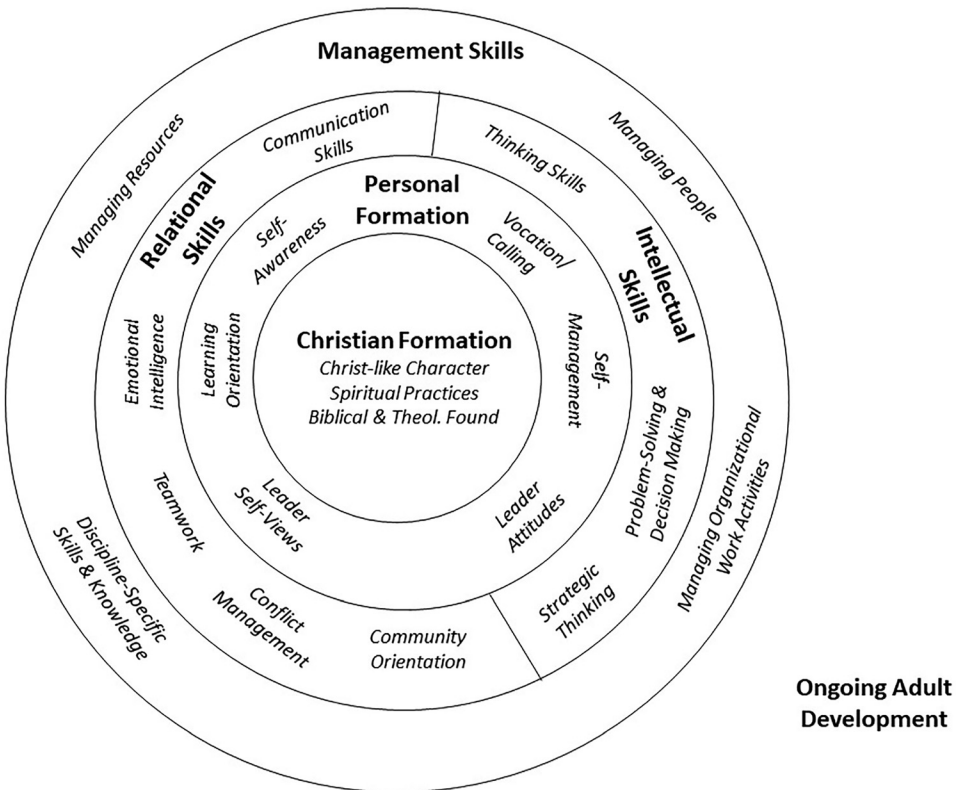


Fig. 1. Christian leader development outcomes framework (based on Krispin, 2020)



development, areas that if well-developed enable growth in the outcomes included in the outer levels. If left underdeveloped, these deficiencies could negatively impact leadership effectiveness, retard further development, or even derail a person's involvement in leadership roles. Outer levels of the diagram focus on the external skills needed for effective Christian leadership in groups and ministry organizations. Growth at each level is ongoing, as the leader can and should continue growth in these areas throughout life. Two categories, relational skills and intellectual skills, are included in the same level of the diagram, reflecting their parallel importance and process of development." (Krispin, 2020, 26)

In their leadership model, Gulyás, Koncz, Lázár, and Siba (2016) analyse the three dimensions of leadership, namely **spirituality**, **management**, and **professionalism**.

As in other models, it is important here that the three leadership functions are not mutually exclusive but mutually reinforcing in an effective leader.

This model also highlights the need for an interdisciplinary approach beyond the narrowly defined management science, confirming the claim of the international management theory literature that management science and practice has reached its limits and can only evolve further if it takes into account the lessons from other fields such as biology, political science and theology (Tomka, 2022). Unless we can take a holistic view of the mental and professional challenges leaders face, and only consider social capital, social justice, human rights and ethics in isolation from each other, without exploring their links to each other and to education, we cannot deliver practical knowledge that can be used in everyday life (Potgieter, van der Walt, Valenkamp, & Wolhuter, 2013).

CONTEXT

The formal-legal framework of leadership training

The establishment of compulsory management training also raises serious professional dilemmas. Training should not be too subordinated to the demands of leadership careers and recognition, because then there is a risk that participants will enrol primarily for career reasons rather than to enhance their preparedness. At the same time, it is unthinkable to have a training system that is not directly linked to the advancement and recognition of leadership (Halász, 1996).

Since 1993, in Hungarian public education, management training has not been part of the basic training but has been provided in higher education institutions in the framework of further education leading to a professional examination. From 2002, completion of further training was a preference among applicants for the position of headmaster of an educational institution, and from 2005 it became a prerequisite for reappointment, and from 2013 it became a prerequisite for the first management appointment. In the international classification system, postgraduate specialist training courses are assigned to ISCED level 5, as practice-oriented specialisation courses that deepen or broaden the professional knowledge certified by the Bachelor's Degree (Vereckei & Benedek, 2022).

The **Government Decree No. 277/1997 (XII.22.)** on teacher training, the teacher qualification examination and the benefits and advantages of participants in further training also contains provisions on management training (emphasis added – by the author).



Article 4 (1) In-service training serves to renew, expand and develop the knowledge and skills needed to deal directly with children and pupils in the context of educational and teaching work, to organise the activities of the public educational institution, to provide specialised pedagogical services and pedagogical-professional services, to operate the examination system, to *perform the tasks of measurement and evaluation*, and to *perform the management and leadership tasks of the public educational institution*.

(4) *The head of a public educational institution shall participate in a training course which contributes to the acquisition of leadership knowledge and skills (hereinafter referred to as “leadership training”).*

According to the database of the National Higher Education Information Centre, (Felvi) there are currently seven teacher qualifications in higher education that qualify teachers as public education/public school leaders. Two of these are currently not offered by any institution. In terms of content, all seven courses are 4-semester, 120-credit courses ending with a certificate.

In addition to training leading to a professional qualification, leadership skills can also be acquired through accredited teacher’s in-service training, but currently only eight of the 1,431 accredited teacher’s in-service training programmes are currently training for leadership development.

Specificities of the reformed public education subsystem

One of the specialised, but in our country becoming more and more common, areas of public education is denominational education. Looking at the characteristics of the educational systems, we can conclude that the Reformed school system is a subsystem of the Hungarian public education system (Kopp, 2007, 2020). The Reformed public education network, in contrast to the highly centralised state system, has relative autonomy, is characterised by institutional specificities, has different functions, is organised and sustained in different ways and is characterised by a particular self-movement.

Although the post-2010 period has brought an era of centralised control in public education in Hungary, in the subsystem of Reformed public education, because of the fragmented maintenance structure (parish, diocese, church district level), Halász’s (1996) statement is still valid: Local autonomy can bring great advantages, since it can create mechanisms of self-development and self-regulation that are generally not possible under centralised control. However, the internal cohesion and effective functioning of a decentralised education system can only be maintained if autonomous local institutions operate in a predictable way and if their behaviour is characterised by quality and performance orientation. This is only possible if the management of the institutions has certain skills. For example, they are intelligent enough to understand the messages conveyed by the indirect management tools used by central management. It reacts rationally to changes in external conditions. It is able to identify its own long-term interests and act accordingly. Last but not least, it is committed to its own mission, the mission of the institution.

Today the content of the managerial role has become different depending on whether the manager is at the head of a public or a non-public institution, since in the case of non-public (but for example municipal, private or ecclesiastical) maintenance, there have been no significant changes in the managerial tasks (Vereckei, 2021).



Reformed leadership training

Denomination-specific leadership training is not unprecedented in the Reformed institutional system. Such courses, typically post-graduate, have been offered mainly by ecclesiastical universities, but they have not been widespread among heads of public education institutions, mainly because they did not fit in with the requirements of the teacher training system.

From Kopp's (2020) research we know that Reformed heads of institutions develop their own leadership competences mainly through conference participation, visits to institutions, informal knowledge sharing. In comparison, organised teacher's in-service training, especially participation in accredited leadership training, is pushed into the background in everyday practice. One fifth of respondents attended formal leadership training, one quarter had attended formal in-service training.

We also know from Kopp's research that there is a fairly high demand for more modern professional development activities. Their introduction can be encouraged at the level of the individual institutions, so it is worthwhile to increase the professional knowledge of headmasters in professional development and knowledge sharing therefore integrate that solutions into organisational learning processes at the institutional level (Kopp, 2020).

The Synodal Council of the Reformed Church in Hungary ordered the creation of a Reformed Education Strategy (Ábrám, 2019, 2020) by its resolution No. ZST-103/2016.1.214. In relation to Heads of Institutions, the strategy has set out the following vision element (Ábrám, 2018):

The head of a Reformed public education institution is a teacher with a professional qualification as a Christian head of a public education institution, in accordance with the statutory schedule.

This priority allowed the preparatory work leading to the accreditation of the postgraduate specialist training of Reformed Public Education Manager to begin. The Reformed Pedagogical Institute has been looking for the possibility to start a Reformed Christian value-driven training for public education managers since the mid-2010s. As a first element of this, we organised an international leadership training conference in cooperation with the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI),³ then an international leadership training conference in cooperation with ACSI and the Lutheran Pedagogical Institute (EPSZTI).⁴ Taking advantage of our growing professional relationships, we piloted our international leadership training conference "Value Driven Leadership" in the spring of 2018 in cooperation with Dutch Driestar Christian College (Driestar Educatief) with the intention of moving forward. Based on the experience and detailed professional analysis of this conference, we decided to further develop the training and to accredit it as a 30-h teacher training course.

The Office of Education has accredited the 30-h training course "Value-Driven Leadership" under the number 9/307/2018.

The accredited training, with renowned Dutch and Hungarian lecturers, was held for the first time on 11–12 April and 16–17 May 2019, and was subsequently organised 8 times until the finalisation of our manuscript. Between 2019 and 2023, a total of 160 participants attended the training courses and 151 received certificates.

³18–19 February 2016: *The Christian as Leader - The Leader as Christian* Conference

⁴22–23 February 2018.: *Tools for Christian Character Formation in our Institutions* Conference



Taking into account the topics of the training, the feedback received and the satisfaction results, according to point 1 of decision No. ZS.53./2019.11.20 of the Synod of the Reformed Church of Hungary takes note that the Reformed Pedagogical Institute (RPI) in cooperation with the Driestar Christian College (Netherlands) has accredited the 30-h accredited teacher training course “Value-Driven Leadership” and accepts it as a Christian (Reformed) leadership in-service training course. At the same time, the maintainer has made participation in the training compulsory for heads of Reformed institutions in an ascending system. According to the implementing instruction of the Synodal Decision No. ZS.53/2019.11.20. from 1 September 2025, participation in Reformed public education leadership training will become a condition of leadership assignment. The Synod also decided that the Reformed qualification for public education managers can be obtained within the framework of a specialised further training course leading to a professional examination. According to points 2–3 of the Synod’s decision No. ZS.53/2019.20.11.2009, the Synod decides to establish and launch a 120-credit specialised further education course for the “Reformed Public Education Managers” teacher qualification.

In the present study, we restrict ourselves to the study of the Value-Driven Leadership training, with the understanding that the content of two courses is consistent in that the 23 credits of the elective modules of the CPD include the professional material of the accredited teacher training course on value-driven leadership. Since the training is an integrated module of the teacher education programme, our findings are also partly valid for the specialised training.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In the early stages of our training development, we formulated research questions aimed at facilitating continuous improvement. We sought to answer whether there is a justification for a distinct, religious-based leadership training alongside secular leadership training. Is there a demand among leaders in Reformed public education for the integration and contextualization of spiritual content with managerial and financial knowledge?

METHODS

After a **theoretical foundation** based on a review of the relevant literature, the study will review the characteristics and legislative environment of Reformed public education management and leadership training, and then examine the concept, reception, results and further development potentials of the accredited training in *Value-Driven Leadership*, a relatively new element of the range of trainings. Our study uses a variety of research methods, such as **document analysis**, **statistical analysis** of daily feedback forms ($n = 634$) and end-of-course satisfaction questionnaires ($n = 160$),⁵ and analysis of a **questionnaire survey** on further needs ($n = 65$).

Since the data collection was completely anonymous, we did not have the opportunity to analyze independent variables in our research. Due to the relatively small number of participants

⁵Thanks to Aniko Bánné Mészáros for her assistance in the analysis.



and the limited scope of participants to leaders in Reformed institutions, it was ethically unacceptable to include questions that could potentially identify respondents.

In our research we focused on a specific subsystem of the public education system, the Reformed educational network. Data provision within this sub-system was also largely voluntary (the online questionnaire was entirely self-selected, end-of-day feedback forms were given to all participants of the training courses, but their completion was not compulsory, only the completion of the end-of-course satisfaction questionnaire was compulsory conditions for obtaining the training certificate).

Due to the above, our results can by no means be considered representative for the whole of the public education in Hungary, but in our opinion, they serve well the data-driven development of Reformed public education leadership training, according to the needs of the parties concerned.

Content elements

In 2018, the Reformed Pedagogical Institute accredited the *Value-Driven Leadership* training course at the Office of Education (Foundation Licence No.9/307/2018). The aim of the training is to raise awareness of leaders of public educational institutions based on biblical principles, using the results of modern leadership theory. Participants shall learn about the theoretical foundations of Christian leadership, and the relationship between Christian core values and modern leadership theory. The participant will also be able to carry out the biblically based organisational development and operational management tasks of a secularly committed institution.

The training is designed to help formal and informal leaders of public education institutions with a worldview to become more effective leaders in their own situation. The in-service training is justified and necessary primarily because of the needs of the maintenance and management of the Reformed public education system. The subject matter has been developed in cooperation with the Driestar Educatief Christian Teacher Training College in the Netherlands, and the trainers are Dutch and Hungarian experts. The focus of the training is on modern leadership skills, national and international good practices and the specificities of Christian pedagogy.

The content requirements are: The participant shall: know the basics of modern leadership theory (with a focus on servant leadership); know the biblical foundations of Christian leadership theory; be able to consciously self-reflect on their own leadership personality; know the theoretical foundations of organisational development, management and school marketing and their Christian aspects; bring his/her personal experience to the training implementation process; integrate new information into their own experience.

The main content modules of the 30-h training are: *The essence of Christian leadership; The Christian leader; The raison d'être of Christian education; What makes a school Christian?; Value-driven leadership; Leadership ethics; Balancing religious and financial issues in school governance; Christian financial thinking; Biblical approach to organisational development; PR and school marketing in denominational education.*

In response to changing needs and external circumstances (e.g. the Covid-19 state of emergency), training has been delivered in full attendance, full online and blended formats over the years (Table 1).



Table 1. Locations, dates and number of participants of the accredited training in Value-Driven Leadership⁶

Year	Location	Participants
2019	Budapest (attendance)	12
2020	online	25
2021	Budapest (blended)	25
2022 (March)	Budapest (blended)	19
2022	Miskolc (blended)	24
2022	Debrecen (blended)	24
2022 (November)	Budapest (attendance)	12
2023	Nagykőrös (attendance)	19
2019–2023	Summary	160

In 2018, the training was delivered in conference format, and between 2019–2023, eight 30-h accredited training sessions, of which one (November 2020) was delivered online due to the pandemic. 39 people attended the conference and 160 people attended the accredited training courses.

70% of the teachers in training are women and 30% are men. Most of them (45%) have a secondary school teacher qualification, 33% are primary school teachers or teachers and 22% are kindergarten teachers.⁷ The participating leaders are typically from the 40–60 years old generation.

RESULTS

Satisfaction data, reflections

We place particular emphasis on student feedback and partner needs and satisfaction measurement during our training. Participant satisfaction was measured on each training day. Completion of the feedback questionnaire was voluntary, but the willingness to complete it is also an important indicator of the success of the training, the mood and the commitment of the participants. As the training sessions were usually four days long, except the March 2022 Budapest training session, which was five days long (four in-person and one online), and the 2018 conference, which was two days long, the number of completed questionnaires was several times higher than the number of participants.

A total of 634 feedback questionnaires were collected during the period under review. The completion of the questionnaires was characterised by the fact that the participants answered in all areas (rated from 1 to 5), with only a negligible number of incomplete answers, so the number of items is taken as 634.

The completion rate was high in all training courses. The average completion rate for the period under review was 86.6%, with the lowest rate being 66.7% (on day 2 of the training in April 2019 and day 4 of the training in November 2022). Maximum (100%) completion rates occurred on 5 of the 35 training days.

⁶Training courses with Dutch lecturers highlighted in bold

⁷Qualifications are based on highest level of education and not on current job.



The daily feedback asks about four main characteristics of the training (usefulness of the training, appropriateness of the method used, objective of the training and intensity of the training) (Table 2).

Student and participant needs

It is true for all teacher (in-service) training that it is a never-ending task, but a dynamic one to be developed, constantly shaped by the satisfaction of the participants, measurable results, and the constantly changing expressed and latent needs. In the renewal of our training, we felt that it was insufficient to make corrections solely on the basis of the participant feedback analysed above, which is why we addressed the most prominent target group of the training, the heads and deputy heads of Reformed institutions, in a short questionnaire survey. We received 65 responses to our online questionnaire ($n = 65$), of which 37 (56.9%) were heads of institutions and 24 (36.8%) were deputy heads of institutions, heads of member institutions or heads of institutional units.

In terms of highest tertiary education qualification, the relative majority of respondents are secondary school teachers (38.5%), but almost all sectors of public education are represented among the respondents (Fig. 2).

In terms of their motivation, the respondents can be considered the primary target group of the training(s), as the vast majority of them have ambitions and plans to become heads of institutions, with only 11 (16.9%) being reluctant to take on a leading position in the future.

Almost all respondents have some kind of leader qualification (62 in total, 95%), with only one respondent not planning to obtain such a qualification.

The respondents were asked to rate the content modules of the accredited training in *Value-driven leadership* according to how much they consider them necessary, how they consider their own preparedness in the given field, and how much they feel the need for further training and knowledge acquisition in each field in their personal career.

Overall, the current structure of the training is well suited to the needs of the participants, with respondents rating the usefulness of the modules 4.63 out of 5. Their own preparedness was rated 3.87 and their personal needs 4.07.

The correlations between importance, preparedness and need are illustrated in Table 3, which shows the average per domain.

Table 2. Perception of the usefulness of value-driven management training, the appropriateness of the methods and objectives, and the intensity of training 2018–2023

Place, time	Usefulness	Method	Objective	Intensity
2018 Budapest (conference)	4.82	4.76	4.98	4.93
2019 Budapest	4.89	4.77	5.00	4.91
2020 online	4.86	4.80	4.91	4.86
2021 Budapest	4.93	4.93	4.96	4.95
2022 Budapest (March)	4.89	4.87	4.96	4.86
2022 Debrecen	4.92	4.89	4.93	4.89
2022 Miskolc	4.93	4.93	4.95	4.91
2022, Budapest (November)	4.97	4.98	4.98	4.98
2023 Nagykőrös	4.90	4.87	4.96	4.84



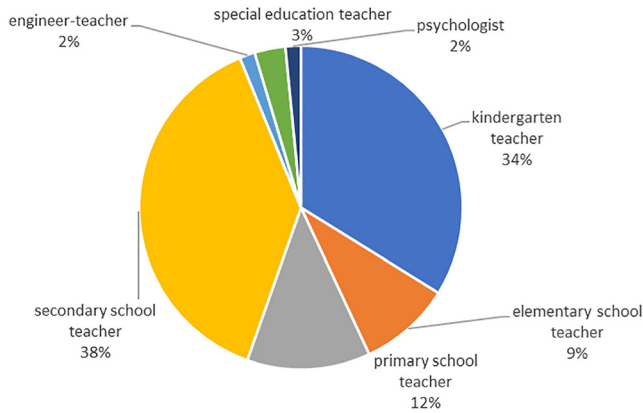


Fig. 2. Respondents' highest level of education ($n = 65$)

Table 3. Evaluation of the modules of the accredited training in Value-Driven Leadership (2023)

Module	Need in general	Own preparedness	Own need
The essence of Christian leadership	4.60	3.82	4.00
The Christian leader	4.66	3.88	4.15
The raison d'être of Christian education	4.74	4.00	4.11
What makes a school Christian?	4.68	4.08	4.09
Value-driven leadership	4.82	4.25	4.12
Leadership ethics	4.78	4.29	4.08
Balancing religious and financial issues in school governance	4.40	3.45	4.00
Christian financial thinking	4.38	3.49	4.02
Biblical approach to organisational development	4.69	3.72	4.18
PR and school marketing in denominational education	4.51	3.69	4.00

If we compare these results with the results of the participant satisfaction measurement we can see a high degree of similarity (Fig. 3). As the own preparedness data cannot be validly compared with the satisfaction data, it has been omitted from the graph.

DISCUSSION

Satisfaction data, reflections

The average of utility and implementation method is very high for all nine courses, at least 4.76 on a scale of 5. There is little difference between the averages of the two areas, possibly a few hundredths in favour of utility. For each respondent, the scores for utility and method of implementation were, as expected, barely different, with a correlation close to 1.00. There were a few exceptions, e.g. when a participant described that utility was only a level 2 for him because



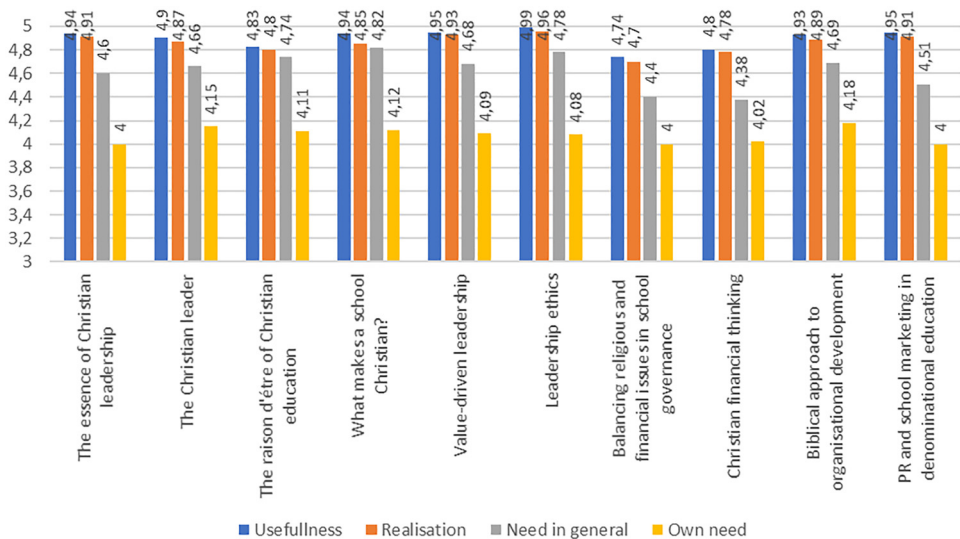


Fig. 3. Comparison of module perceptions based on trainee satisfaction ($n = 634$) and needs assessment ($n = 65$)

he had recently studied the subject (financial literacy) in another course, from which he had taken an exam.

The objective and intensity of the training are also very high on average. On a scale of 5, they achieved an average of at least 4.84. There is little difference between the averages in the two areas. With the exception of the training in November 2022, the objective always scored a few hundredths higher than the average.

In the case of the eight accredited training courses, participants also completed a satisfaction questionnaire at the end of the training, as required by the accreditation, which includes the following questions:

- Did the training meet the objectives set? Did it meet your expectations?
- Has the training provided new information?
- How do you judge the practical usefulness of the training?
- How appropriate were the teaching methods used?
- Were the requirements of the training achievable?
- Was the way the knowledge was checked appropriate?
- How did the participants rate the work and expertise of the trainer(s)/demonstrator(s)?
- Were the material conditions (general conditions, tools, aids, compulsory literature) adequate?
- Was the training properly organised?

Participants were obliged to answer the questionnaire. Eight of the nine questions were answered with an average of at least 4.82 on a scale of 5 for all training sessions.

For the ninth question, "Has the training provided new information?", the averages were generally lower, but even these were still very high - scores of 4.17 or higher.



The relatively lower values can be explained by the fact that the vast majority of the participants in the training already had some form of education (typically in public education management at a public university), so many elements of the training may have been known in terms of content, but were only novel in their approach. This is indicated by the fact that we could read some of these in the textual evaluations:

- “New information at system level.”
- “I already have a good deal of knowledge from experience, and it is already part of my practice, but it was definitely a novelty in this form.”
- “There was a lot of new information and the practical approach was new to me.”
- “I got more than I expected. We really needed that.”

Participants also highlighted their satisfaction with the lecturers, the organisation and the conditions in the additional text evaluations.

The *usefulness of each module* scored very high averages on a scale of 5 (between 4.74 and 4.99). The average for all modules was 4.90. The lowest score in November 2020 was 4.48 for the module *Balancing religious and financial issues in school management*, with a maximum score of 5.00 in 38 out of 90 cases!

The modules with high overall averages (*PR and school marketing...*, *Leadership ethics*, *Value-driven leadership*, *Biblical approach to organisational development*) do not naturally show large variations across courses. The average values of the modules with lower averages (*Balancing religious and financial issues in school governance*, *Christian financial thinking*) showed greater variations across the courses, which, as can be deduced from the participants’ reflection essays, could generally be due to the different attitudes of the audience, as the lecturer and the topics did not change over the period studied.

Another area examined was the **method of implementation of the modules** (*Implementation of the presentation, appropriateness of the method used*).

Participants were highly, almost maximally, satisfied with the way all 10 modules were dealt with. On a scale of 5, the averages were very high, ranging from 4.70 to 4.98.

The implementation method of each module scored very high on a scale of 5. The average for all modules was 4.86. The lowest score in 2019 was 4.21 for the module *Balancing religious and financial issues in school governance*.

The modules with high aggregate averages (*Leadership Ethics*, *Value-driven Leadership*, *PR and School Marketing*, *The Essence of Christian Leadership*) do not naturally show large variations across courses. The average values of the relatively lower average modules (*Balancing Religious and Financial Issues in School Governance*, *Christian Financial Thinking*, *The Raison d’être of Christian Education*) showed greater variation across courses.

We compared whether **utility or method scored** higher on average. Of the 90 pairs of data generated over the period, in 40 cases (44.4%) the utility and method ratings for the module were the same for the course (typically a score of 5!).

In 37 cases (41.1%), the usefulness of the method came first, while in the remaining 13 cases (14.4%) the respondent considered the method of implementation to be appropriate (score 5), while for some reason (e.g. prior knowledge of the topic) it could not provide the maximum benefit for his/her personal/professional development.

We also received a good number of text responses to the satisfaction questionnaires. We also found text responses on a total of 476 of the 634 questionnaires collected from 199 participants



on the training days and 476 of the questionnaires completed in the online training sessions. The following three questions were asked:

- *What did you like most?*
- *What would you definitely change?*
- *Other comment*

There were respondents who answered only one or two of the three questions, but majority of respondents answered all three. (On average, there were 1.3 text responses per satisfaction questionnaire.) There was no statistically significant correlation between writing a text response and the numerical scores given for each module. It was typical that words of praise were found on the sheets where the respondent gave a maximum rating for the module(s) of the day and felt that they would like to add a text rating. Those making suggestions for change also tended to give maximum marks for the modules. Almost three quarters of them mentioned the things they liked most and praised them.

Only over a tenth of the responses included a suggestion for change, and 14% made other comments. Other comments on the last day of training generally included thanks and gratitude for the training as a whole (Fig. 4).

As an example, some answers from these sheets:

“The vision is a formative endeavour, which has indeed given us new impetus to develop a systemic mindset, in which the positive values of innovation and leadership attitudes are strongly expressed.”

“The ‘anecdotes’ told during the lecture - which always managed to keep the audience interested.”

“With a colourful presentation, varied examples and exercises, motivated by clear explanations, spiced up with a little humour, I was able to see and hear a very meaningful presentation. Thank you!”

“The atmosphere of the training and the depth that touched my soul here.”

“The lectures were very valuable. The lecturer’s style was engaging and kept the audience interested.”

“Passion, delivered in a fantastic way by the lecturer. Insight, personal examples, authenticity.”

“Clear explanations, varied examples. Good training exercises, the joint processing of which triggered many valuable ideas. Common thinking.”

“Good atmosphere, common thinking. Thought-provoking questions that can be implemented in your own institution or that need to be implemented.”

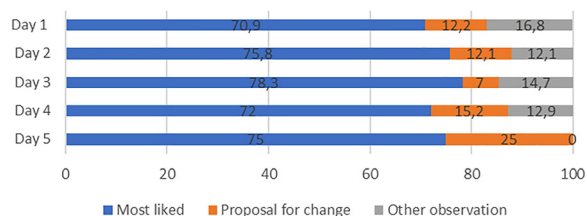


Fig. 4. Percentage of text responses to feedback forms on each training day ($n = 626$)



The final (online) session of the three joint training sessions in spring 2022, which covered the least popular finance modules, also had a response rate of over 90% (94%).

“Beyond the professionalism of the lecturer, he has a spiritual - intellectual - faith message.”

“A thematic overview of for-profit and non-profit systems, and of course the role of loyalty.”

“The spirituality I got from it.”

“Engaging students, collective thinking.”

Some of the amendments received responded to the training tasks. More people would like to see the time allocated to the training increased and would welcome more practical exercises. Some suggestions were received to redesign the time frames. Many found the training days tiring, suggesting more breaks between modules. These have been addressed by changing the themes of the training days.

The online training (2020) and the online module (2022) lacked personal presence and were considered tedious to attend online. Some suggestions were made about the organisation of the training, such as a more accessible location in Budapest, accommodation offered by RPI, and the suggestion to provide hot meals instead of sandwiches.

Student and participant needs

It can be seen that the values of the ex-post evaluation (usefulness; implementation) are in all cases higher than the previous expectations (necessity in general; own need). Although the respondents are not the same, the higher value of the ex-post results still indicates the quality and effectiveness of the training. The largest difference between the need and usefulness scores was for the modules *PR and school marketing in denominational education* (+0.44) and *Christian financial thinking* (+0.42). It is therefore most striking that the training can impart knowledge that (potential) participants had previously thought less necessary. The smallest difference between the prior needs assessment and the post-assessment of satisfaction was measured for the modules *The raison d'être of Christian education* (+0.09) and *What makes a school Christian?* (+0.12), where the high scores indicate that the training confirms the prior high expectations.

In general, respondents rated the modules *Value-driven leadership* (4.82) and *Leadership ethics* (4.78) as the most important modules.

Based on North American research, this result is not surprising. The experience of McMaster's narrative interviews with Christian leaders is that when participants talked about the spiritual environment, it was integrated into the context of other things that were part of the educational experience. The connection between the integration of the Christian worldview and other topics seemed unconscious and natural, as if everything else was an eminence, expected and assumed part of everything else. At the same time, similar to our findings, it was confirmed that ethical and moral characteristics are of paramount importance for leadership (McMaster, 2013).

In contrast, *Christian financial thinking* (4.38) and *Balancing religious and financial issues in school governance* (4.40) were rated the least useful. In this light, it is perhaps not surprising that they also feel most confident in *Leadership ethics* (4.29) and *Value-driven leadership* (4.25), and least confident in *Balancing religious and financial issues in school governance* (3.45) and



Christian financial thinking (3.49). Financial management issues also ranked lower when it came to indicating their own needs, with the least preferred modules being *Religious and financial issues...* (4.02) and *Christian financial thinking* (4.00), while the areas where respondents felt the most in need of further training were *Biblical approach to organisational development* (4.18) and *Christian leadership* (4.15).

According to the literature, leadership ethics and inter-organisational relationships are central to leadership training. Managing people ethically, treating them with trust and respect is one of the keys to unlocking innovative talent and creating a culture of innovation (Witzel, 2018). An organisation is resilient if it can adapt to constant environmental changes, if its goals are clear and all members of the organisation can identify with them, if members can think in teams, are able to cooperate, there is a smooth flow of information, and there is a high level of trust (Ferencsik, 2019).

In denominational institutions, the relationship between leader and led is often specific, so the Christian aspect of leadership and organisational development is understandably important to respondents. Role clarification is important: the leader cannot delegate to the teacher what is his or her responsibility: nor the teacher to the leader (De Muynck, Vermeulen, & Kunz, 2018).

It seems that a large majority of respondents would prefer to acquire additional, more in-depth knowledge in areas that are generally considered important, regardless of their personal level of preparedness. However, the difference between the average of personal preparedness and the average training needs is the largest in the areas of *Religious and financial issues* (+0.55) and *Christian financial thinking* (+0.53), i.e. respondents perceive the need for improvement in these areas.

We separately examined modules that achieved the weakest results. Although there is very little variance among the data, based on the independent variables, it can be observed that the *Christian financial thinking* module garnered the highest demand among primary school teachers (4.74 vs. the overall average of 4.38), while their own preparedness was rated the lowest by kindergarden teachers (3.41), although the difference here is not significant from the overall average. In the case of the *Balancing religious and financial issues in school governance* module, practicing headmasters consider their own preparedness slightly lower than the overall average (3.42). Although the difference is not significant here either, we assume that they encounter their shortcomings more directly in their practice. No differences were found in the other modules based on the independent variables.

All in all, our results **demonstrate** the need for leadership training adapted to the specific circumstances of denominational public education. Since there is currently no accredited leadership training that takes into account the specificities of Reformed (or even denominational) public education, the market for this service seems to be secure, especially in light of the fact that the Reformed Church of Hungary, as the school provider, explicitly advocates the maintenance of leadership training adapted to the Reformed public education network. This coincides with the needs of students who have already completed the training and those planning to participate, who expect the training to synthesise modern leadership theory with biblically based spiritual content.

In the field of financial management and labour law, both the feedback and the needs expressed confirm that the prior knowledge of the parties concerned in these areas is incomplete and needs improvement.



CONCLUSION

Some basic conclusions can be drawn from the survey, which should be taken into account when developing training material:

The target group is very interested in modern knowledge about Christian leadership (servant leadership, leadership ethics, value-driven leadership, etc.), which is considered a priority area, which also coincides with the needs of the maintenance. As this element of the training is a gap filling and unique in the range of Hungarian public education leadership trainings, this distinctive element of the training should continue to be emphasised.

The management powers of headmasters of ecclesiastical institutions are much broader than those of headmasters of public institutions, but their knowledge and interest in these areas are insufficient. These areas need to be given even greater emphasis in training.

More than ever before, the organisation of training should aim at modularity and a variety of organisational methods (attendance, online, blended methods, varied locations, flexible timetables, etc.). The tools of combined training organisation, which have already proved their worth in higher education, should also be applied to 30-h continuing training, possibly with the addition of distance learning elements (Szontagh, 2021; Szontagh & Tolnai, 2021; Tolnai, 2021). Blended learning combines the online delivery of educational content with the best features of classroom interaction and live learning in a way that personalises learning without alienating the student community and exploits the synergies of peer learning (Kaur, 2013).

Leadership training in denominational education presents its own challenges. In many areas, these are similar to the challenges of national and international educational leadership training, but they also presuppose a spiritual dimension that has a profound impact on the attitudes of the participants, the attitudes of the training/trainers and the application of what is learned in the training to leadership work. Whilst legal, organisational and management methodology skills cannot be neglected, the spiritual and interdisciplinary dimension must also be integrated into training. While the legal-administrative content of training courses is constantly changing due to dynamic changes in external circumstances, the biblically based spiritual content remains essentially constant.

It is important that the spiritual content of the training is not an end in itself, not simply a philosophical or theological surplus, but a Christian dimension of the understanding of leadership. Spirituality is not techniques to be applied at a certain time and place. Spirituality is living one's whole life with God in mind. The spiritual man also does his work with God in mind and lives his relationship with others with God in mind (Abromeit, 2001).

On the basis of the narrative interviews with Christian leaders in the USA, McMaster, already cited, formulated three basic principles in the relationship between Christian education and leadership, which can be interpreted in the domestic context. First, he found that educational experiences shape leadership development, which points to the importance of embedded leadership (in-service) training in the process. Second, his research suggests that Christian schools provide an educational environment that models and teaches ethical and moral values. This organizational development-focused approach to training is also evident in the reflections in our research. Finally, the US findings also underscored the importance of the ethical aspect of leadership training (McMaster, 2013). This ethical dimension is also important for denominational institutions because reputable organizations are to some extent prisoners of their



reputation; if an ethical slip-up occurs, it has a greater impact because people expect better from them (Witzel, 2018).

The Reformed pedagogical-professional service and higher education have a shared responsibility to develop and maintain training to help meet the high quality and ethical standards expected of leaders of Reformed public education institutions.

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