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# WORKING WITH EUROPE COMMENT #

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ON **LEADERSHIP** IN ERASMUS+

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# COORDINATION IS NOT ENOUGH

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The paper is not addressing any specific project or coordinator in particular, but represents a general comment to Erasmus+ strategic partnerships

Many Erasmus+ projects suffer from a lack of [clear leadership](#).

In Erasmus+ we talk about and use the terms “coordinator” and “coordination”. One of the partners are expected to, and funded to, “coordinate” the project activities towards its results.

The idea is: all partners implement the project, based on the application, and the role of the coordinator is to “coordinate” these implementation activities.

The idea of such “coordination” is, however, unfortunately based on a number of [illusions](#):

- that all partners are “equal”
- that all partners understand the project and the innovation in the project
- that all partners have the capacity to implement the project
- that project implementation almost happens automatically
- that partners take action based on the application

Just to mention a few of the unfortunate illusions.

Some coordinators receive a “reality chock” when trying to “coordinate” an Erasmus+ project for the first time: [nothing simply happens](#); everything is a result of struggling, constant empowering and hard work - far beyond what is foreseen and recognized in Erasmus+ applications.

And worse: the more innovative the project, the more “coordination” falls short. In truly innovative projects, coordination will not at all do the job. Strong [leadership](#) is needed...



### *Why is coordination not enough?*

For very many and very important reasons:

- partners cannot be expected to understand the project innovation, even though they signed a contract; the understanding needs to be built along the project
- partners might not have the capacity to implement the project innovation; the capacity needs to be built along the project
- partners will not simply start implementing the project; they need instructions, guidance, empowerment and inspiration
- partners come from very different countries and cultures and understand things in very different ways and work in very different ways
- partners might even come from very different sectors between which a mutual language must be developed
- partners might have very different levels of English
- the participating institutions and people might have very different mentalities as to collaboration

So, in very many Erasmus+ projects there is very little to “coordinate”! At least for 3 months, 6 months - or even for 12 months or more...

This giant empowermental period is not recognized in Erasmus+ applications or projects.

The very idea of “coordination” in this context, of course, appears as a big and quite [dangerous illusion](#): sometimes it takes many months for the coordinator and the project to realize that coordination is not what is needed. [Leadership](#) is what is imminent.



## What is “leadership” in Erasmus+?

Leadership is precisely about all what coordination (management and administration) is not about:

- constant initiative-taking
- substantial empowerment of partners in long periods
- developing user-friendly guidance material when needed
- fluent and continuous communication with partners between transnational events
- transnational events as powerful capacity building, inspiration and empowerment
- facilitating progression, binding project phases together and navigating flexibly through obstacles and roadblocks
- directing partners differently according to their resources and potentials
- creating solid linking between practice and knowledge production towards project results
- and “things like that”...

These coordinator roles go far beyond “coordination”, obviously. Such leadership performance calls for constant attention, constant presence on the project scene, [constant visibility](#) and constant helping partners move forward...

In too many Erasmus+ projects such leadership is not taking place. Too many coordinators only “coordinate” (manage and administrate), sometimes leaving the project scene for long periods and very often not delivering what partners need to implement a project with quality.

The lack of leadership can create serious problems for the projects, in particular if the need for leadership is realised too late.

The problem might be that a coordinator is [not able](#) to deliver such leadership in a project. In this case the coordinator will need to team up with partners in the project who *are* able - or to engage external support.

Even worse: the Erasmus+ does not have a place for “leadership funding” in its discount budget, only for project management and implementation, none of which include leadership performance.

Of course, this is a major problem: [leadership is not funded in Erasmus+](#) even though leadership is the most complicated and time-consuming activity in the projects...

*The 12.000 euro the coordinator receives for coordinating a 2 year project will not buy much leadership!!*

The first 6000 is for project implementation, like any other partner, and the last 6000 is for management, administration and reporting at project level. So, no leadership funding...

In other words: the most important role in Erasmus+ innovation is not funded.

Leadership therefore has to be performed out of the coordinators' [good-will](#). Coordinators *must* be aware of this: the more innovative the project, the stronger the need for qualified and constant leadership not funded by the project.

It should, despite this hidden and never acknowledged co-financing, not be an option to neglect or disregard the need for leadership: innovative projects are continuously damaged by lack of leadership.

This leads to a clear conclusion: coordinators should only accept the role of coordinator in case they are willing to invest the needed leadership in the projects, no matter if this leadership is not directly funded in the project budgets.

In many Erasmus+ projects this calls for a change of mentality among coordinators: they must move from coordinating (managing and administrating) to leading the projects and this might in some cases represent a considerable change and challenge.

In case the coordinator is not able to provide the needed leadership, the coordinator should feel obligated to provide such leadership from other sources, such as from other partners or through external resources.



*However, leadership should not be an option, but an obligation.*