



# MGR. HANSEN ON THE WAY TO A HIGH PERFORMANCE SCHOOL







*Insights and approaches for schools striving for excellence*

***This Quick Insight demonstrates how Mgr. Hansen, a school for children with hearing, speech, and language issues, is on its path to becoming a high performance school (HPS). The article discusses how the school has utilized the HPO framework to enhance its internal organization and educational quality. It highlights the steps the school has taken, such as engaging employees, strengthening professionalism, and increasing transparency in decision-making. This case study offers valuable insights and practical tips for schools aspiring to excellence and sustainable improvement.***

This Quick Insight is a translation and summary of: de Waal, A., Schreurs, M., and Goossens, P. (2024) 'Building High Performance Schools: A case study'.



## MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

-  **Use of the HPO framework:** Mgr. Hanssen has implemented the HPO framework to improve its internal organization and educational quality. This framework focuses on continuous improvement, openness, quality of leadership and employees, and a long-term focus.
-  **Improvement of professionalism and collaboration:** The school has taken significant steps to promote the professional development of employees, such as encouraging feedback, accelerating decision-making processes, and enhancing collaboration and cohesion throughout the school.
-  **Transparency and communication:** Transparency in decision-making and communication has been promoted through structured meetings and a central platform for sharing best practices and knowledge. This has led to a culture of continuous improvement and greater employee involvement.
-  **Importance of continuous improvement:** The HPO framework emphasizes that continuous improvement should be an integral part of daily routines. This helps the school to constantly develop and adapt to new challenges.
-  **Employee involvement:** A key lesson is to involve everyone in the process of organizational improvement. By listening to employees input and making them part of the change, they feel heard and valued, which increases their engagement and motivation.
-  **Start small and focus on one point of improvement at a time:** Addressing one area of improvement, rather than several simultaneously, makes it easier to implement changes and ensures gradual but effective improvements.



# MGR. HANSSSEN ON THE WAY TO A HIGH PERFORMANCE SCHOOL

*Insights and approaches for schools striving for excellence*

The impact of quality education is felt throughout society, contributing to stronger economic growth and greater social cohesion. Schools play a central role in this, and there is increasing focus on high performance schools (HPS). These schools have a strong internal organization and enable students to excel both academically and socially. In this case study, we take you on the inspiring journey of Mgr. Hanssen, a school for children with hearing, speech, and language issues, which is transforming into a high performance school using the HPO framework.

## Research on high performance schools

Research shows a direct link between the quality of education and economic growth. Countries with higher educational outcomes often experience faster economic growth because well-educated people are more productive. High performance schools play a crucial role in this process by providing an environment that encourages students to achieve their best. These schools have inspiring teachers, access to the best facilities, and challenging learning programs. Research indicates that HPS foster innovation and help bridge the performance gap between poor and wealthy groups, leading to greater social progress and inclusion.

Believing that investing in HPS yields significant benefits, we focused on how the internal structure and leadership of a school can be elevated to the level of an HPS. We applied the HPO framework as a comprehensive improvement plan to facilitate and assess this change. The goal of the HPO Center is to provide school boards with a proven framework that enables them to sustainably enhance the quality of their schools.

## The HPO framework: a guide to high-quality education

To improve the quality of its education and internal organization, Mgr. Hanssen decided to embrace the HPO framework. This framework helps organizations assess how well they are currently performing and what steps they need to take to improve their performance. The HPO framework is based on five key factors:



- **Continuous improvement and innovation**

Constantly striving for improvements in processes and innovation.

- **Openness and action orientation**

A culture where opinions and ideas are valued, and everyone is involved in important decisions.

- **Quality of management**

Reliable and ethical leadership that inspires and provides direction.

- **Quality of employees**

Attracting, developing, and retaining talented employees.

- **Long-term orientation**

Sustainable relationships with stakeholders and a safe and stable workplace.

These factors together form a solid framework that allowed Mgr. Hanssen to analyze how far the school was on the path to becoming an HPS and what steps were needed to progress further.

## **The mission of Mgr. Hanssen**

Since 1959, Mgr. Hanssen has been known for its dedication to education for children with hearing, speech, and language problems. The school provides specialized education and support to help students transition smoothly to regular or special secondary education. With four locations in the south of the Netherlands and over 200 staff members serving 950 students, Mgr. Hanssen is a beacon of hope and development for many children and their families.

The school's philosophy is based on an ecological perspective. The emphasis is on the overall development of the child and interaction with the environment. Key elements include promoting physical awareness and mobility to build self-confidence and well-being, enhancing social skills and a positive self-image for constructive relationships and open communication, and emphasizing both oral and written communication to ensure effective information exchange and mutual understanding.

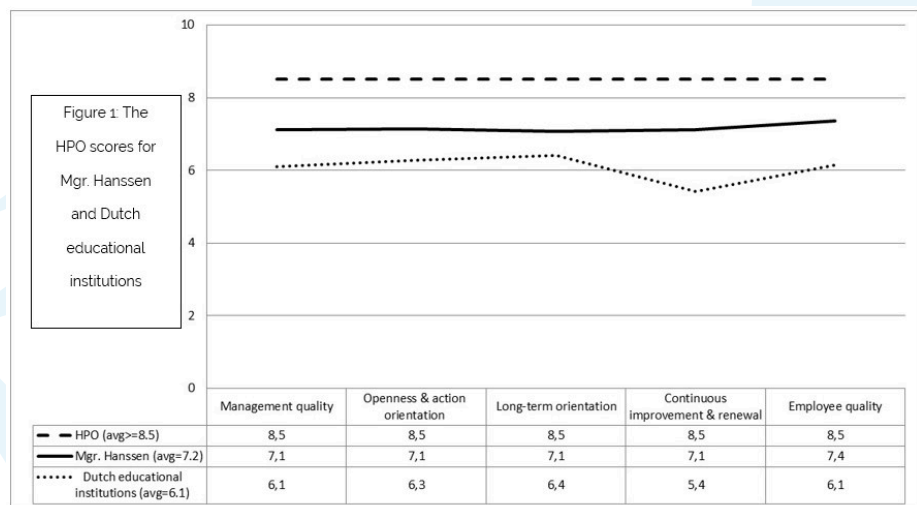


The management of Mgr. Hanssen wanted to build on the already strong foundation. The school had received recognitions such as ISO-9001 and the GOOD rating from the Dutch Inspectorate of Education. However, the team felt there was still more potential to be realized. The choice for the HPO framework was based on previous positive experiences of some management members with this framework. Therefore, the HPO framework was seen as the perfect next step to bring the organization to an even higher level of excellence.

## Measuring is knowing: listening to employees

The journey began with a baseline measurement, an initial assessment of the current situation: employees completed the HPO questionnaire. This questionnaire determined how far their school stood on the 35 HPO characteristics. This first step was crucial to gain insight into the current status of the school and identify the main areas for improvement. In addition to the questionnaire, in-depth interviews were conducted with management, teachers, and support staff. These

interviews provided valuable insights into the story behind the numbers and helped understand what was really happening on the work floor. The data from the interviews were then thematically analyzed along the lines of the HPO factors.



## Above-average HPO score

The good score of Mgr. Hanssen compared to the benchmark is a clear indication of the progress the school has made. The HPO questionnaire, completed by 69.6 percent of the employees, shows that Mgr. Hanssen scores above average in many areas compared to other Dutch educational institutions. Especially in the areas of financial management, personnel policy, and quality improvement, Mgr. Hanssen scores significantly higher.



For example, the school has invested a lot of energy in making processes cost-efficient and obtaining subsidies for quality improvement, leading to a healthy financial base. This has enabled Mgr. Hanssen to quickly and adequately meet its staffing needs, contributing to low turnover and strong team relationships.

Additionally, professionalism and expertise are highly emphasized, resulting in a performance-oriented environment. These factors contribute to the high scores on the HPO characteristics and confirm that Mgr. Hanssen is on the right path to becoming a high-performance school.

## Key focus areas for further improvement

### *Theme 1: Freedom and unity*

Mgr. Hanssen has a management model that emphasizes freedom and responsibility for employees. This so-called Rijnland model promotes autonomy and professional trust. However, there is room for improvement. Employees need more clarity on decision-making processes and more cohesion within the organization. To address these challenges, the following recommendations have been made:

- 1. Clarification of the model:** Regular training and explanation of the Rijnland model so that everyone understands the responsibilities and decision-making processes. Practical examples can illustrate how decisions are made and how employees can influence these processes. A structured, transparent process for sharing decisions and their reasons will increase trust and employee engagement. Effective communication and dialogue training will promote an inclusive and open culture.
- 2. Strengthening organizational identity:** Creating unity through better collaboration and clearer communication. This helps identify synergies and collaboration opportunities, thereby strengthening organizational cohesion. Involving employees in strategic decision-making increases their sense of ownership and engagement. An internal platform for sharing best practices, ideas, and knowledge will stimulate organization-wide collaboration and innovation.



## Theme 2: Strengthening the PDCA cycle

The Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle is an essential method for continuous improvement. Although the cycle is already applied within Mgr. Hanssen, there is a need for more consistency and integration into daily processes. The focus is on:

1. **Integration of the school vision:** The vision must be actively applied in daily decision-making and operational processes so that it is not only known but also practically applied.
2. **Standardization of the PDCA cycle:** Training and regular application of the cycle in all projects and initiatives, with extensive training for all involved. Its application should be a fixed agenda item in meetings.
3. **External orientation:** Participation in national and international initiatives should be encouraged to further innovate and improve school processes.
4. **Regular announcements:** A formal feedback mechanism should be introduced to increase the effectiveness of communication.
5. **Status information:** A feedback system should be implemented to verify whether the shared information is understood and valued by employees. Collective meetings should be more frequently used for organization-wide knowledge sharing and dialogue.
6. **Structured improvement meetings:** Improvement meetings can be held in a more structured manner, especially at management level and across different functional groups.
7. **Knowledge sharing:** It is advisable to create a central platform for employees to easily share best practices, insights, and knowledge.



### ***Theme 3: further enhancing professionalism***

The professional development of employees is a priority for Mgr. Hanssen. Regular development meetings and mandatory training sessions are already held. However, employees see room for more proactive follow-up on their development needs.

- 1. Encouraging feedback:** Integrating feedback into the PDCA cycle and promoting the giving and receiving of feedback. It is crucial to promote the idea that receiving feedback is a valuable learning moment. Regular feedback training sessions, focusing on constructive feedback handling, are essential.
- 2. Accelerating decision-making processes:** Implementing an expedited process for less complex decisions, such as weekly stand-up meetings, to help speed up the decision-making process and reduce delays.
- 3. Proactive follow-up on development needs:** Creating a platform where employees can track and discuss their development needs. This platform should be linked to monthly check-ins with managers to discuss progress and ensure development opportunities are actively pursued.
- 4. Transparency in decision-making:** Creating a monthly overview, distributed via email or intranet, explaining recent (management) decisions and the reasoning behind them. Employees are encouraged to post questions or comments, which can be addressed in a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section.

## **The beginning of the transformation to a High Performance School**

The management team of Mgr. Hanssen was pleased with the results of the HPO diagnosis and saw the collection of focus areas as a 'big list' of improvement opportunities for the coming years. The first step after the diagnosis was to deliver the HPO Coaches Masterclass. In this course, a group of employees was trained to become coaches to promote the HPO ideas and gather information within their teams. Those asked to become coaches had a broad overview, were well-liked in their teams, and saw coaching as an exciting challenge.

Each job group was represented. The group of coaches immediately named themselves the





'Organizational Improvement Working Group'. This name better fit the existing improvement structure within Mgr. Hanssen. Their activity was not so much coaching but collecting and exchanging information. They promoted the HPO ideas within their teams, served as a point of contact for colleagues, and gathered information. Increasing transparency, especially in communication, was chosen as the first focus area to work on.

Within the working group, a discussion arose about what 'transparency' actually entailed and in which areas transparency should be achieved. The answers to these questions are currently being collected within the teams, i.e., from the employees. Management noticed that employees greatly appreciated that issues they raised were actually being addressed. They found the daily work at the school more pleasant and became increasingly proud of Mgr. Hanssen.

The initial results of implementing the HPO framework are promising. The school saw an increase in employees engagement and satisfaction. A culture of continuous improvement is currently being created, where everyone feels responsible for the collective progress. Employees feel more heard and valued. There is a noticeable improvement in collaboration between different departments.

## **Inspiring lessons for other schools**

Mgr. Hanssen's experience with the HPO framework offers valuable lessons and tips for schools striving for excellence. A key lesson is to involve all employees in the process. Listening to their input and making them part of the change helps them feel heard and valued, increasing their engagement and motivation.

A baseline measurement is crucial to understand the current status and identify key focus areas. This provides a clear starting point and helps measure progress. Transparency in decision-making processes and accountability is also important. Clarifying roles and responsibilities ensures everyone knows who is responsible for what and how decisions are made.

Continuous improvement should be an integral part of daily routines. By constantly striving for improvement and innovation, the school can continue to develop. Investing in professional development ensures that employees can continue to grow and develop in



their roles, helping them reach their full potential. Additionally, there are some practical lessons from Mgr. Hanssen's experience (next page):


- **Ensure a healthy financial foundation:** This is essential to fund both daily activities and quality initiatives, enabling the school to achieve its goals and continuously improve.
- **Start small and focus on one area at a time:** This makes it easier for everyone to adapt to changes and ensures gradual improvements.
- **Adopt a bottom-up management style:** Involve employees in decision-making to increase buy-in. This ensures that employees feel heard and valued.
- **Integrate the HPO framework into the existing school structure:** This increases acceptance among employees and makes it a natural part of daily operations.
- **Communicate clearly that the HPO framework is not an end goal:** Emphasize that the framework is a tool for continuous improvement. The main goal is to achieve improvements in various areas, not to reach a final status. This keeps employees motivated and engaged in the process.


These lessons and tips provide a blueprint for schools looking to shape their journey to becoming a high performance school.




# ARE YOU READY TO TRANSFORM YOUR ORGANIZATION INTO AN HPO?

Then insight is essential. Our **HPO diagnosis** (short validated questionnaire and in-depth interviews) provides you with this insight. You will get a clear picture of the current situation within your organization or department and receive practical improvement themes that managers and employees can tackle together. The HPO diagnosis is not just a mirror; it is a compass that guides you in taking crucial steps to achieve your strategic goals and become an HPO. Do you want to elevate your organization to a higher level? The HPO Center can support you in this. We combine over fifteen years of practical experience with hundreds of organizations worldwide with scientific research to provide you with the knowledge and focus that result in demonstrably better performance. HPO is not a project, but a mentality that makes your organization more resilient, flexible, and future-proof. It helps you identify the 'hard nuts' and provides a basis for measuring the effectiveness of the HPO transition. It also strengthens the solidarity within your organization (or part of it) by identifying and addressing shared, supported improvement themes.

 **Customer Focus:** An HPO is invaluable to its customers. The primary goal is to boost customer value and satisfaction.

 **Employee Engagement:** Aiming for high performance re-energizes your team. It leads to increased job satisfaction as HPOs concentrate on what genuinely drives organizational success. It's not a new project; it's a new mindset and approach to work.

 **Adaptability:** An HPO is designed to evolve. It thrives in our ever-changing, competitive world, making your organization more resilient and future-proof. This is achieved through ongoing adjustments, learning, and improvements.

## Our Offer

- ✓ Customized **HPO Diagnoses**
- ✓ Interactive **Lectures and Workshops** on the HPO Framework
- ✓ Comprehensive Interviews, **Articles, Books**, and Networking Opportunities
- ✓ Guidance in Implementation Led by our **HPO Experts**



## Why choose the HPO Center?



### Experience & Credibility

With over 15 years of practical experience combined with rigorous scientific research, the HPO Center is at the global forefront of organizational improvement advice.



### Global Knowledge Center

Based in the Netherlands, the HPO Center collaborates with partners, including in emerging markets, with the aim of fulfilling its mission to improve organizations worldwide.



### Unmatched Expertise

HPO doesn't stop at diagnosing organizations. We also explore, investigate, and delve deeply into related topics such as High Performance Leadership, Silo-busting, Futurizing, Social Value Creation, and High Performance Business Ecosystems—evidence of our commitment to continually expand the HPO universe.



### More than Just an Organization

With a passion for inspiring, stimulating, and networking, the HPO Center is not just an organization; it's a movement. Through scientific and professional publications (all freely available at [hpocenter.com](http://hpocenter.com) and [www.hpocenter.nl](http://www.hpocenter.nl)), books, seminars, and roundtables, we continually disseminate the knowledge of the HPO Framework and unite professionals interested in continuous improvement and excellence.

## Considering an HPO transformation?

The HPO Center is ready to support and guide you on your journey toward high performance. Contact us today for an inspiring conversation or to experience an HPO workshop. Together, we'll redefine your performance.



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