Guidance
to VET
Leadership

Guidance to VET Leadership

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index

1. About this booklet

This booklet is one of the four booklets developed in the framework of the Project ´´ VET for Western Balkans ´and it is developed by VET directors of Western Europe and Western Balkans.

The results of the surveys performed among 127 students and teachers in 5 VET schools in Bosnia- Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo and Albania, reflected also in the charts enclosed, are an important part of this guide

The reason behind including **Guidance to VET Leadership** as a booklet and as a course on the learning platform of the project is that leadership is essential for guiding vocational education schools toward excellence, relevance, and impact. Strong leaders inspire innovation, foster collaboration, and champion the success of students and communities in the rapidly changing landscape of workforce development and career education.

Even though good leadership standards are one and for all, the challenges that VET schools and their directors and teachers face in the Western Balkans are different from the ones of Western Europe. We hope that identifying those challenges will better prepare the Western Balkans school leaders of today and the future to undertake and properly fulfil their difficult mission to the improvement of the vocational education system in their countries.

2. Importance of Leadership

Educational leaders play a pivotal role in affecting the climate, attitude and reputation of their schools. They are the cornerstone on which learning communities' function and grow. With successful school leadership, schools become effective incubators of learning, places where students are not only educated but challenged, nurtured and encouraged.

On the other hand, poor or absent school leadership can undermine the goals of an educational system. When schools lack a strong foundation and direction, learning is compromised, and students suffer. According to a Wallace Foundation study, *"Leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student learning."*

When most people hear the word "principal," they think of the noun meaning the chief, the top executive, the head of all others, the person who controls the levers. Not so Dewey Hensley, himself a former principal and today an assistant commissioner in Kentucky's Department of Education. Hensley likes to remind people that when it was first used in connection with school leadership in the 1800s, the word "principal" was an adjective in front of another word, "teacher" (Pierce, 1935, p. 11). **The "principal teacher,"** he says, was a kind of first among equals, an instructor who assumed some administrative tasks as schools began to grow beyond the one-room buildings of yore. The original principal, Hensley stresses, was, like the other teachers in the school, concerned with instruction above all.

5 PRIVOTAL PRACTICES THAT SHAPE INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Principals in the 21st century, he says, could do worse than keep this 19th-century definition in mind as they face the challenges of turning around failing schools and work to live up to the ideals embodied in a more contemporary term, **"instructional leader."** Today's best principals, Hensley says, **"know what good and effective instruction looks like so they can provide feedback to guide teachers."**

This view of the principalship — that it should center on instruction, not building management or other administrative matters — is one that has gained currency in recent years. So has the idea that if instruction is the heart of their job, principals have a **vital role to play in school improvement**. Consider a 2010 survey of school and district administrators, policy advisers, and others in the education world. They named "principal leadership" as second only to teacher quality when they were asked to rank in importance 21 education issues, ranging from special education and English language learning to school violence and reducing the dropout rate (Simkin, Charner, & Suss, 2010, pp. 9-10).

A major reason for the attention being paid to principals is the emergence of research that has found an empirical link between **school leadership and student achievement.** A seminal 2004 study, How Leadership Influences Student Learning, asserted that leadership was the second most important school-based factor in children's academic achievement and noted that there were few, if any, cases of troubled schools turning around without effective leaders (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). In 2010, the authors of that study, a team of researchers from the University of Minnesota and the University of Toronto, published a detailed sequel to probe school leadership in depth. They reaffirmed their earlier conclusion, declaring that: **"In developing a starting point for this six-year study, we claimed, based on a preliminary review of research, that leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student learning**. After six additional years of research, we are even more confident about this claim" (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010, p. 9). And they found, further, that although school leadership does not make its impact directly, its indirect workings have a statistically significant effect on student achievement (Louis et al., 2010, p. 37).

3. Five practices central to effective school leadership

What exactly is it that effective principals do that ripples through classrooms and boosts learning, especially in failing schools? Since 2000, The Wallace Foundation, which has supported projects to promote education leadership in 24 states and published 70 reports on the subject (including the Minnesota/Toronto research), has been trying to answer that question. A recently published Wallace Perspective report that takes a look back at the foundation's research and field experiences finds that **five practices** in particular seem central to effective school leadership (The Wallace Foundation, 2012):

- ▶ **Shaping** a vision of academic success for all students, one based on high standards;

- ▶ **Creating** a climate hospitable to education in order that safety, a cooperative spirit, and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail;

- ▶ **Cultivating** leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their part in realizing the school vision;

- ▶ **Improving** instruction to enable teachers to teach at their best and students to learn at their utmost; and

- ▶ **Managing** people, data and processes to foster school improvement.

When principals put each of these elements in place—and in harmony—principals stand a fighting chance of making a real difference for students.

Successful principals demonstrate a willingness to learn from and work with others. They readily accept **constructive criticism.** These principals work to improve those areas that must be targeted for growth and development. Successful principals are student-centered, always encouraging, and they never hesitate to engage in those most difficult yet often-required conversations. Recall the words of Mary Waldrop: **"It's important that people know what you stand for. It's equally important that they know what you won't stand for!"**

4. How Can School Leaders Promote a Positive School Culture and Climate?

The phrase *"positive school culture"* is often thrown around when discussing academic environments. But what actually is a positive school culture? And how can a leader help create one?

A positive school culture is an atmosphere where students and staff feel valued, respected, and encouraged. According to the US Department of Education, a positive school climate correlates with higher attendance, test scores, and graduation rates.[10] In short, positivity is the key to success.

Educational leaders have immense power to create a positive culture in schools. Here are a few ways that leaders can shape their school's atmosphere: [11]

- **Build relationships** between staff, teachers, and students to establish common respect
- **Establish a shared vision** that creates comradery and establishes expectations
- **Role model values** that staff and students should hold (compassion, respect, etc.)
- **Encourage teamwork** among all individuals academically and administratively

- **Celebrate achievements** for both staff and students
- **Set appropriate consequences** to show a connection between actions and results
- **Create rituals or traditions** that build a unique school culture and identity
- **Value inclusivity** to make every student and staff member feel welcome

5. What Role Do School Leaders Play in Equity and Inclusion for All Students?

Every student deserves a quality education, regardless of their identity. Fortunately, school leaders can help make this dream a reality.

According to research, principals and school leaders are key players—if not the most important player—in creating an inclusive and equitable school environment.[12] By setting their school's values, policies, and culture, an educational leader has incredible power over the inclusion of diverse students and faculty members.

This could include diversity among:

- Gender
- Sexuality
- Race & ethnicity
- Religion
- Nationality

- Mental disabilities
- Physical disabilities
- Economic class
- Age

So, how can school leaders help every individual feel welcome under their roof? From the top-down, a leader can bring these inclusive goals and practices to their workplace:

- Providing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) training to school staff and teachers
- Discouraging and holding accountability for acts of discrimination or prejudice

- Holding student forums on DEI issues related to the student body
- Reaching out to parents of diverse students
- Offering resources, tools, and individual counselling to disadvantaged students

Whether a kindergarten or a university, every school needs its leaders to achieve **school improvement**. Strong, innovative, and considerate transformational leader types inspire future generations. But what is educational leadership?

6. What Impact Does Leadership Have on the Success of a School?

Teamwork is the essence of many institutions, schools included. But without an effective school leader at the forefront, teams can be left directionless, divided, or unmotivated. That's where a strong captain can take the lead and create a lasting positive impact.

It's hard to overstate the importance of leadership in schools.

Not only do strong leaders create a better academic environment for students and faculty, but they also create measurable outcomes that demonstrate improvements. According to research, educational leaders improve school success factors like:

- **Student learning** – Research shows that principals in at least the 75th percentile of effectiveness increase a student's "learning capacity" by four months in a single school year, while ineffective principals lower achievement by the same amount. Similarly, school administrators are found to have the *second greatest effect* on student learning, following classroom instruction.
- **Teacher engagement** – Like all employees, teachers are likely to feel engaged when valued by leaders. Over the course of three years, "highly talented principals" are 2.6 times more likely to have an above-average rate of engaged teachers.[4] As a result, teachers are more likely to stick around. Principals who create collaborative, efficient, and productive environments have better teacher retention.[5]
- **Parent involvement** – The more involved the parents of students, the better students perform. One study found that parent involvement boosts student academic achievements and self-confidence.[6] Schools with strong leaders involve parents more, indirectly supporting these student success markers.[7]

On the flipside, poor leadership often leads to weaker school success markers—low staff morale, high teacher turnover, lower student achievement, and more.[8] Without a strong leader, schools face a stronger battle for success.

We need good leaders to help guide us and make the essential large-scale decisions that keep the world moving.

Our society is usually quick to identify a bad leader, but how can you identify a good one? What would most people say are the qualities of a good leader?

7. What Good Leadership Looks Like

Based upon our decades of research and experience working with leaders at organizations around the world, we've found that the best leaders consistently possess certain fundamental qualities and skills. Here are 10 essential leadership traits.

10 Essential Leadership Qualities

1. Integrity
2. Delegation
3. Communication
4. Self-Awareness
5. Gratitude
6. Learning Agility
7. Influence
8. Empathy
9. Courage
10. Respect

1. Integrity

Integrity is an essential leadership trait for the individual and the organization. It's especially important for top-level executives who are charting the organization's course and making countless other significant decisions. Our research has found that integrity may actually be a potential blind spot for organizations, so make sure your organization reinforces the importance of honesty and integrity to leaders at various levels.


INTEGRITY
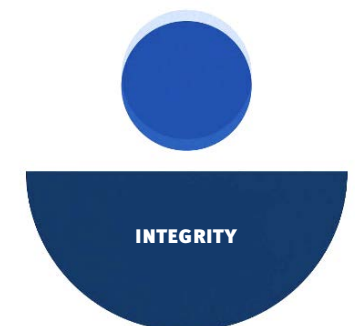
2. Delegation

Delegating is one of the core responsibilities of a leader, but it can be tricky to delegate effectively. The goal isn't just to free yourself up — it's also to enable your direct reports to grow, facilitate teamwork, provide autonomy, and lead to better decision-making. The best leaders build trust in the workplace and on their teams through effective delegation.
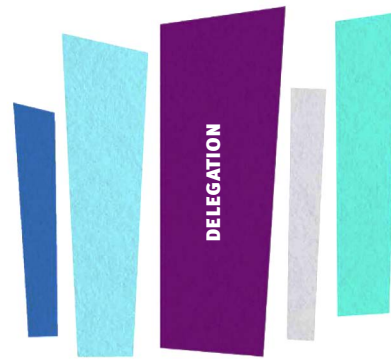
3. Communication

Effective leadership and effective communication are intertwined. The best leaders are skilled communicators who are able to communicate in a variety of ways, from transmitting information to inspiring others to coaching direct reports. And you must be able to listen to, and communicate with, a wide range of people across roles, geographies, social identities, and more. The quality and effectiveness of communication among leaders across your organization directly affects the success of your business strategy, too.
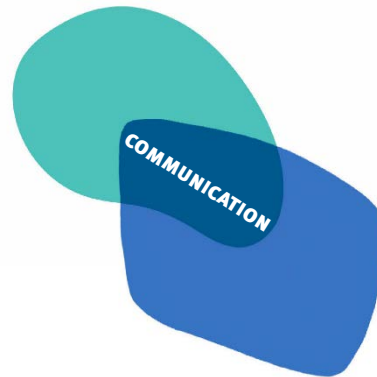
4. Self-Awareness

While this is a more inwardly focused trait, self-awareness and humility are paramount for leadership. The better you understand yourself and recognize your own strengths and weaknesses, the more effective you can be as a leader. Do you know how other people view you or how you show up at work? Take the time to learn about the 4 aspects of self-awareness and how to strengthen each component.
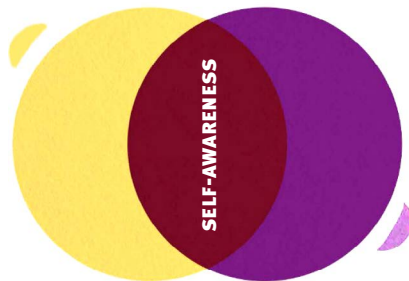
5. Gratitude

Being thankful can lead to higher self-esteem, reduced depression and anxiety, and better sleep. Gratitude can even make you a better leader. Yet few people regularly say "thank you" in work settings, even though most people say they'd be willing to work harder for an appreciative boss. The best leaders know how to show gratitude in the workplace.

6. Learning Agility

Learning agility is the ability to know what to do when you don't know what to do. If you're a "quick study" or are able to excel in unfamiliar circumstances, you might already be learning agile. But anybody can foster and increase learning agility through practice, experience, and effort. After all, great leaders are really great learners.
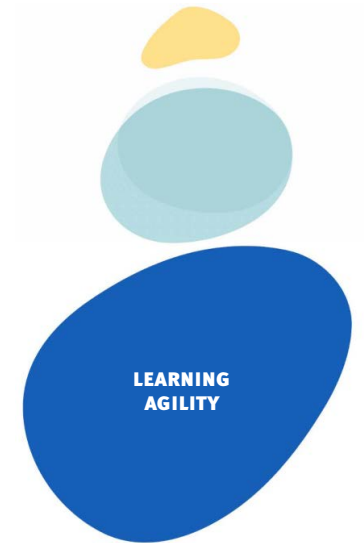
7. Influence

For some people, "influence" feels like a dirty word. But being able to convince people through the influencing tactics of logical, emotional, or cooperative appeals is an important trait of inspiring, effective leaders. Influence is quite different from manipulation, and it needs to be done authentically and transparently. It requires emotional intelligence and trust.
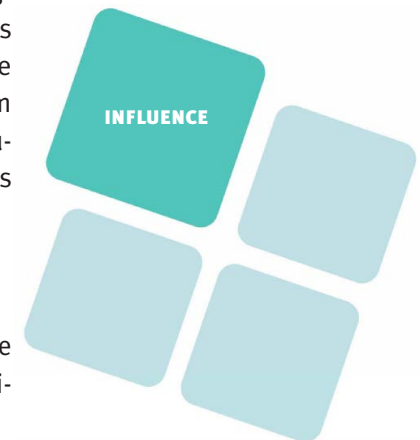
8. Empathy

Empathy is correlated with job performance and is a critical part of emotional intelli-

gence and leadership effectiveness. If you show more inclusive leadership and empathetic behaviours toward your direct reports, our research shows you're more likely to be viewed as a better performer by your boss. Plus, empathy and inclusion are imperatives for improving workplace conditions for those around you.

9. Courage

It can be hard to speak up at work, whether you want to voice a new idea, provide feedback to a direct report, or flag a concern for someone above you. That's part of the reason courage is a key trait of good leaders. Rather than avoiding problems or allowing conflicts to fester, having courage enables leaders to step up and move things in the right direction. A workplace with high levels of psychological safety and strong conversational skills across the organization will foster a coaching culture that supports courage and truth-telling.
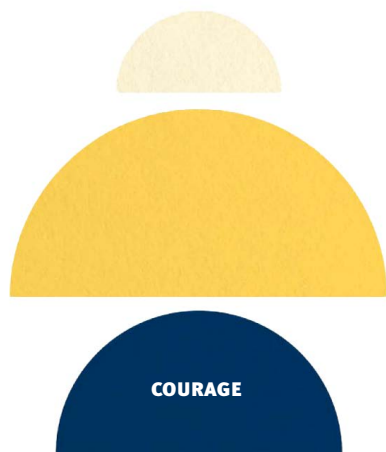
10. Respect

Treating people with respect on a daily basis is one of the most important things a leader can do. It will ease tensions and conflict, create trust, and improve effectiveness. Creating a culture of respect is about more than the absence of disrespect. Respectfulness can be shown in many different ways, but it often starts with simply being a good listener who truly seeks to understand the perspectives of others.

EMPATHY

COURAGE

RESPECT
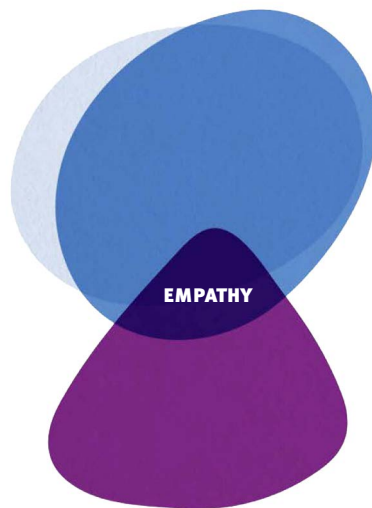
8. Three Core Beliefs About Leadership & Leadership Development:

▶ *Good leaders are made, not born.*

First, we believe that leaders are made, not born. Put another way we believe that **leadership is a skill that can be developed.** Good leaders are molded through experience, continued study, and adaptation. So you can strengthen any of these 10 characteristics of a good leader, if you're open to growth and you put in the time and effort toward self-improvement. Similarly, organizations can help their people hone these leadership qualities by providing ample opportunities for training, offering support for learning from challenges, and by using experiences to fuel development.

▶ *Collaboration builds stronger leaders.*

It's also essential to recognize that **leadership is a social process.** It's less about one strong or charismatic individual, and more about a group of people working collectively to achieve results *together*. If you demonstrate several of the characteristics of a good leader, but fail to grasp this key point, chances are you won't get very far on your own. You may be well-liked and respected, but it will be challenging to accomplish team or organizational goals. At CCL, we like to say that the outcomes of leadership are about creating direction, alignment, and commitment, or DAC, within a group.

▶ *Good leadership never stops.*

Also, we believe that **leadership isn't a destination, it's a *journey*** — it's something that you'll have to work at regularly throughout your career, regardless of what level you reach in your organization or what industry you are in. Different teams, projects, and situations will provide different challenges and require different leadership competencies to succeed. So you will need to be able to continue to apply these leadership characteristics in different ways throughout your career. Just continually keep learning and growing, and you'll be an agile learner with a long career.

Strong leaders in education are more than figureheads—they're also the visionaries that shape a school's entire culture, mission, and success.

It is hard to think of an industry where constant learning is more applicable than education.

The Harvard Business Review put it perfectly when they said: "It takes a real sense of personal commitment, especially after you've arrived at a position of power and responsibility, to push yourself to grow and challenge conventional wisdom. Which is why two of the most important questions leaders face are as simple as they are profound: **Are you learning, as an organization and as an individual, as fast as the world is changing? Are you as determined to stay interested as to be interesting? Remember, it's what you learn after you know it all that counts."**

The report also quotes the noted writer and professor John Gardner, who observed, **"The best leaders I've gotten to know aren't just the boldest thinkers; they are the most insatiable learners."**

REMEMBER:
S-U-C-C-E-E-D is more than a word or an acrostic
when it comes to principal leadership.

S eize your goal, no matter how difficult or challenging.
U nderstand the ever-present pitfalls and obstacles.
C reate positive solutions to overcoming the many campus complications.
C lear your mind of any self-doubt.
E mbrace the challenges presented.
E nhance your focus and stay on track.
D emonstrate to yourself and everyone else that you can do it!

S-U-C-C-E-E-D is all about extending effort. When a principal brings effort to the school leadership role, visionary ideas and creative inventiveness happen. Then, student-centered instruction becomes an attainment within a leader and team's grasp. And that is how positive and enlightened organizational change and student achievement occurs! So, YOU ROCK, and while you are at it, ROCK ON!

9. What are the main challenges of VET education in the Western Balkans?

One of the main objectives of VET education is to contribute to the fight against young unemployment by increasing their skills level. In the Western Balkan countries, the employment of this category and their qualifications are problems that require solutions. At this point, it has been stressed that VET is the kind of education for which Western Balkan countries need as it represents an important factor to deal with these issues.

▶ **The large discrepancy between demand and supply in the labor market:** At this point, it is necessary to emphasize that vocational education would be a solution to this problem. It can be a tool to ensure youth employment and sustainable economic development of the country.

▶ **Lack of equipment suitable for training:** One of the most prominent challenges regarding cooperative or dual education in the Western Balkan is the under-equipment of VET institutions.

Due to the lack of financial resources, VET schools struggle to keep up with the **technological level of companies in the region.** Using outdated technologies and inadequate equipment prevents students from developing skills that meet labour market needs putting an issue into their later employment opportunities.

Many of vocational schools do not have enough laboratory for professional practices. Due to lack of tools and devices, professional practices are realized with difficulties, which has negatively impacted the qualitative preparation of students.

▶ **VET doesn´t keep up with the trends in the world of work- digitalization and automation:** Together with providing resources for the equipment, implementing new technologies and provide support through digitalization is another challenge that the centres face. The development of digital skills of both students and teachers is essential. In addition to developing practical skills, the development of soft skills (such as creativity and critical thinking) is as important.

▶ **Internship in companies:** Many VET schools still have difficulty finding enough suitable partners in the world of work. As a consequence, most of the vocational practice still takes place in VET school workshops. They often struggle to secure sufficient work-based learning opportunities for their students because of a lack of interest from employers. There are also significant regional disparities. Most of the VET schools in the centre and the coastal areas of the countries have been able to conclude cooperation arrangements with companies, mainly from the tourism sector.

Monitoring and evaluation of the quality of internships has been identified as another major challenge.

▶ **Lack of qualified teachers and administrators:** Although a significant part of professional specialists are supported with training, within the implementation of various projects, the quality of specialist teachers remains a problem for many schools.

▶ **More learning opportunities are to be provided on environmental topics:** Greening VET, and designing sustainable environmental-friendly solutions for VET in the Western Balkans is another important aspect.

▶ **Financial dependency:** The majority part of VET's financing is done by the state budget for education, but compared to the real needs of the sector, vocational education funding is inadequate. Donor projects have had an important role in the financing of VET, in contrast to the economic activities of schools and business sponsorship. From the financial standpoint, this has brought significant inequality between vocational schools of the country.

▶ **Prejudgment for this kind of education:** As a result of little information about vocational schools, there is a huge bias for this sector in the WB society. Most parents consider vocational education as unfit and prefer for their children to study in university courses. However, here it should be noted that this negative perception is related to the fact that schools do not offer an attractive environment since they do not possess the necessary resources both material and human.

▶ Finally, **the necessity to further develop the labor market** with the aim to reduce the unemployment rate. In this context, the cooperation with business is an important factor for the development of rapid and sustainable VET, etc.

A part from the main challenges mentioned above it is important to emphasize that the Western Balkans region is characterized by a rich tapestry of ethnic and cultural groups. This diversity can be a source of strength, but it also presents considerable challenges, as historical tensions and conflicts have sometimes strained inter-ethnic relations. **These complexities make the creation of a harmonised atmosphere at school an important challenge for the directors as shown by the graphs below:**
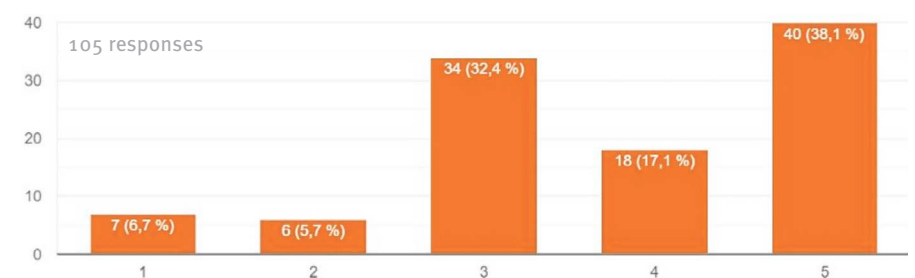
1. WHAT IS YOUR PERSONAL OPINION OF YOUR PRINCIPAL REGARDING:
Build relationships between staff, teachers, and students to establish common respect
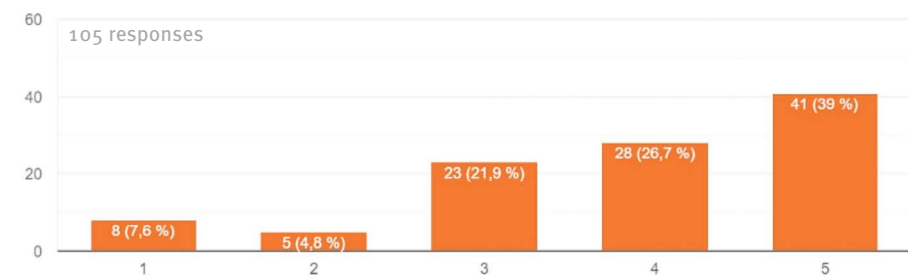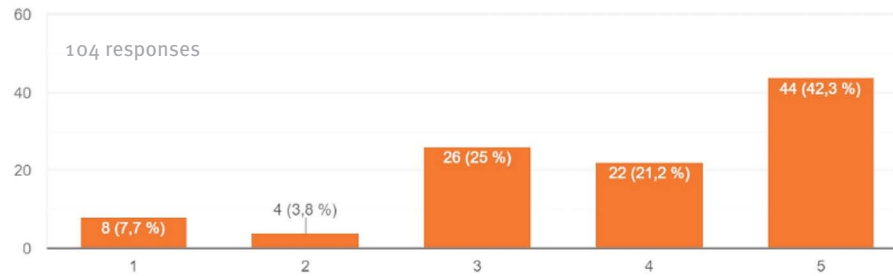

2. WHAT IS YOUR PERSONAL OPINION OF YOUR PRINCIPAL REGARDING:
Establish a shared vision that creates comradery and establishes expectations?

3. WHAT IS YOUR PERSONAL OPINION OF YOUR PRINCIPAL REGARDING:
Role model values that staff and students should hold (compassion, respect, etc.)?

104 responses

8 (7,7 %)	4 (3,8 %)	26 (25 %)	22 (21,2 %)	44 (42,3 %)
1	2	3	4	5

4. WHAT IS YOUR PERSONAL OPINION OF YOUR PRINCIPAL REGARDING:
Create rituals and traditions that build a unique school culture and identity?

105 responses

7 (6,7 %)	12 (11,4 %)	19 (18,1 %)	18 (17,1 %)	49 (46,7 %)
1	2	3	4	5
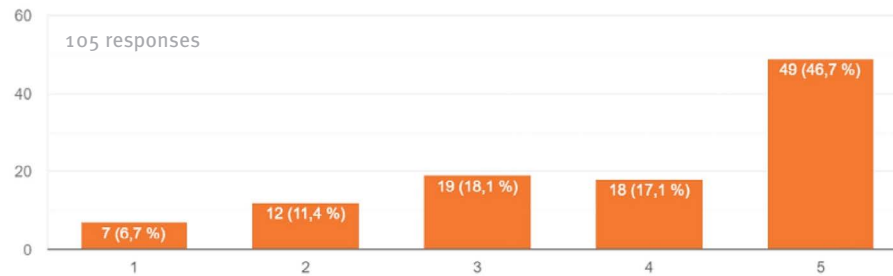
THEIR WORDS:
´´Create a climate hospitable to education in order that safety, a co-operative spirit, and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail´´
´´Seek a high standard of respect for individuality and "freedom" for all teachers and staff´´
´´My primary goal was to establish harmonized relationships in the school among all staff, students, and parents while respecting each individual´´
´´By developing empathy, we understand each other - respect is based on that, and then respect further "builds" if we set "rules of the game" that contribute to appreciating the other person´´.
´´Therefore, maintaining trust and good interpersonal relationships is the greatest asset of a collective´´

On the other side the generational shifts demand reconciliation in the Western Balkans schools as there is a considerable gap between the old and young generation of teachers when it comes to knowledge, soft skills and digitalisation.

´´ Over the past three years, there has been a generational shift in the school (colleagues retiring). A major challenge has been how to reconcile the generations that have come in and harmonize relationships´´

In the broader community, not just in the schools, there is a general sense of apathy and depression due to the economic and political situation in the WB countries, **which directors try to overcome with their peers and teachers and try to find ways to boost morale.**

As for the students, the resetting of the societies after Covid has made it more difficult to engage them at work, behave responsibly, and have the desire for knowledge and success. Obviously the general not promising WB environment doesn´t help as it is filled with depression, dissatisfaction, poverty, etc,.

On the other side **parents often are engaged long hours at work** and even though the biggest role in this context lies with them, they are not capable to fully accomplish it. Directors try to collaborate with various parenting centers/institutions for support as it is important to carry on with their work.
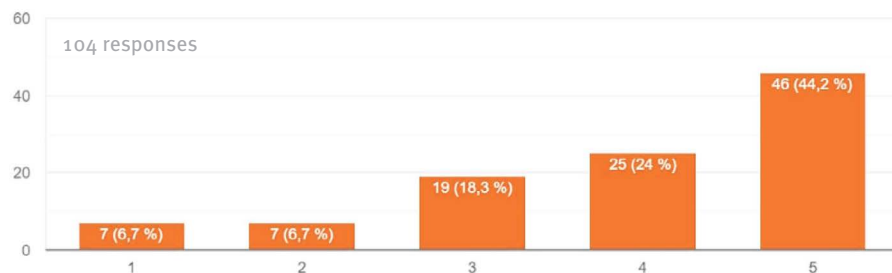
5. WHAT IS YOUR PERSONAL OPINION OF YOUR PRINCIPAL REGARDING:
Involve parents of students to boost the academic achievements and self-confidence of the students?

104 responses

|				
10 (9,6 %)	6 (5,8 %)	24 (23,1 %)	24 (23,1 %)	40 (38,5 %)
1	2	3	4	5
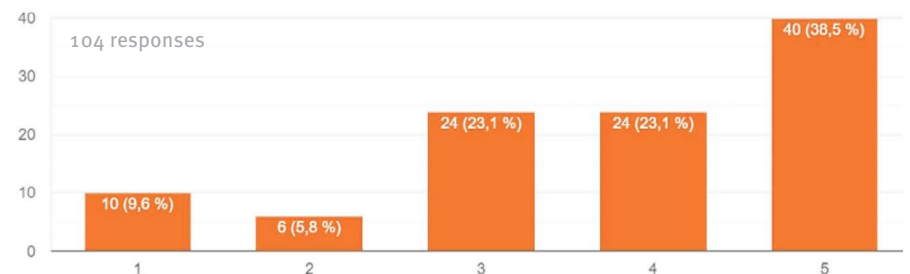
6. WHAT IS YOUR PERSONAL OPINION OF YOUR PRINCIPAL REGARDING:

Value inclusivity to make every student and staff member feel welcome?

Q1.**Which of these 5 five practices that seem central to effective scool leadership does your principal follow?**

- Shaping a vision of academic success for all students, one based on high sta...
- Creating a climate hospitable to education in order that safety, a coope...
- Cultivating leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume teache...
- Improving instruction to enable teache...
- Managing people , data and processes...
- None
- Other
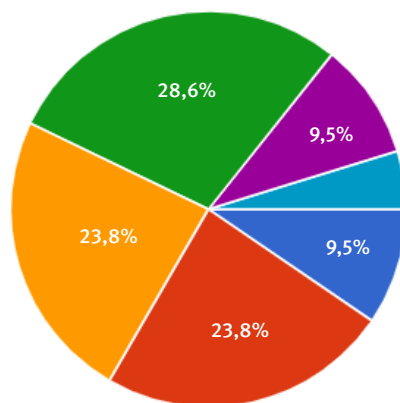
10. What are some of the main concerns and challenges of teachers in WB VET schools to be addressed by the leadership?

Teachers´concerns to be addressed by the leadership

1. An urgent need for training for the administrative staff
2. More interships in companies
3. More international and local cooperations, especially with mobilities
4. Improvement of equipment in labs
5. More innovative ways of teaching and interactive learning
6. Worsening of students´behaviour in class
7. Demotivation, less interest for knowledge
8. A lack of skills in some staff, including management
9. More training needed for management
10. Sometimes work is not appreciated adequately
11. Lack of parental involvement
12. Taking into account colleagues opinions
13. More teamwork
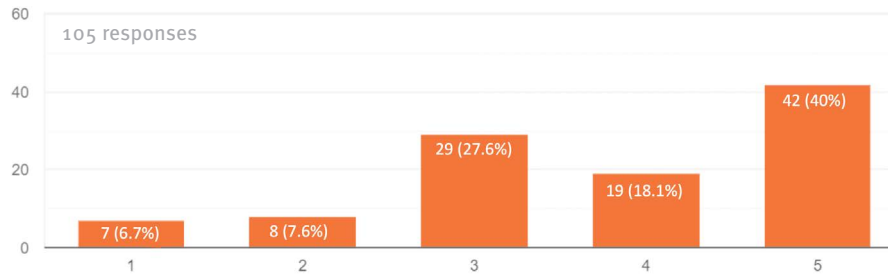14. **Heavy** beaurocracy

7 WHAT IS YOUR PERSONAL OPINION OF YOUR PRINCIPAL REGARDING:

Role model values that staff and students should hold (compassion, respect, etc...)?
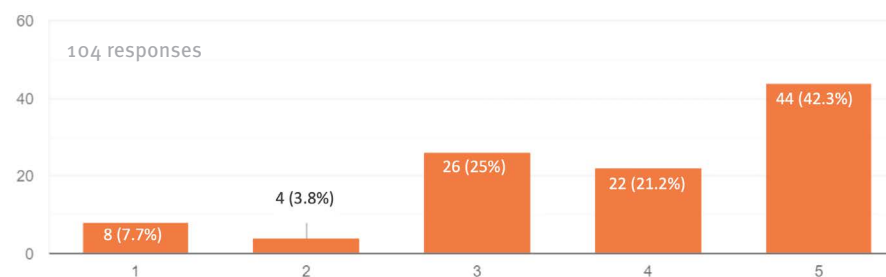
8. WHAT IS YOUR PERSONAL OPINION OF YOUR PRINCIPAL REGARDING:

Encourage teamwork among all individuals academically and administratively?

105 responses

- 1: 7 (6.7%)
- 2: 8 (7.6%)
- 3: 29 (27.6%)
- 4: 19 (18.1%)
- 5: 42 (40%)

Teachers´challenges to be addressed by the leadership:

1. Insecurity at workplace, temporary contracts
2. Creating lessons despite the lack of equipment
3. Making class more motivating for students
4. Raising interest for knowledge among students
5. Adapting to educational trends with little means
6. Getting parents involved
7. Students´behaviour

ORDS:
The construction managers, without a university degree, make more money than the architects´´

El Pais newspaper,
Instagram, 3rd May, 2024

SOURCES:

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