



PROBLEMS OF IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES OF LEADERS OF THE PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Annotation

In this article it is written about institutional leaders in vocational education and training (VET) refer to those who are appointed or employed in a recognised leadership position to oversee VET programmes and institutions and who have responsibility for the goals set by the organisation that offers VET programmes.

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VET leaders manage “complex and knowledge-intensive organisations” – both in the short and long-term (Ruiz-Valenzuela, Terrier and Effenterre, 2017[1]). They set core values and a strategic vision for their institution, and support other staff members to deliver on the objectives. Depending on the country’ context, VET leaders might hire teachers; decide how they are remunerated, provide support and encouragement to their staff; determine the appropriateness of the institution’s core activities; ensure the retention and progression of students; and represent the institution in its contacts with education boards, the relevant ministries and agencies, social partners, and parents. VET leaders manage the central community position that their institution holds, and are linked with other education institutions, universities, employers and local authorities. They need to be aware of new guidance and regulations around the provision of VET programmes. Leaders are also responsible for all aspects of their institution’s performance, including its financial health, and may be accountable for achieving the institution’s goals and efficiently managing its resources (Ruiz-Valenzuela, Terrier and Effenterre, 2017[1]; Greatbatch and Tate, 2018[2]; Böhlmark, Grönqvist and Vlachos, 2016[3]). VET leaders have different responsibilities in different countries and types of institutions. They could be leaders of a single- or multi-field vocational institution, or head a public or private VET institution providing adult learning programmes. They might also be responsible for VET programmes within comprehensive education institutions (that may have also general education programmes). These institutions include upper secondary VET schools in Denmark and Germany; further education colleges, independent training providers





and adult community centres in England (United Kingdom); vocational high schools, colleges of technology and specialised training colleges in Japan; or Career Tech Education programmes in high schools and community colleges in the United States. There may be more than one person in charge of a VET institution (Frimodt, Volmari and Helakorpi, 2009[4]). According to the OECD's Education at a Glance, upper secondary vocational leaders in ten OECD countries have to meet certain requirements regarding teaching hours, while in others it is voluntary (OECD, 2020[5]). The management of VET institutions and the division of responsibilities vary greatly depending on the type and size of the institution. In Finland, for instance, a VET leader (principal) can be head of a single-field vocational school (e.g. the Finnish School of Watch Making with 70 students), a principal of a large multifield vocational institution (e.g. Omnia, a VET institution with 3 000 students), or a director of an education and training consortium in a municipality (Cedefop, 2011[6]). The United States has about 1 100 community colleges, ranging in size from 500 students to over 30 000, and as a result, they have varying requirements for leaders (Eddy and Garza Mitchell, 2017[7]). In England, the median number of learners is around 6 700 students per VET institution (Greatbatch and Tate, 2018[2]). In the Netherlands, there are around 70 VET institutions with on average 7 704 students each, but some have as many as 20 000 students (Thomsen, Karsten and Oort, 2014[8]). VET institutions operate quite autonomously from the central government with a lot of decision-making delegated to the institution level. It is generally acknowledged across OECD countries that institutional leadership is complex with multiple, and at times competing, pressures. This is particularly the case for institutions providing courses at multiple levels such as FE colleges in England or community colleges in the United States. Ruiz-Valenzuela, Terrier and Effenterre (2017[1]) put the management of FE colleges in England at the same level as managing large and complex public institutions such as universities and hospitals. In Australia, a survey of postsecondary VET leaders showed that strong leadership requires acknowledging the complexity of the relationships involved in simultaneous membership of different cultures (e.g. corporate, collegial, managerial and professional) (Mulcahy, 2004[9]). This complexity has required new skills and a different way of looking at the activities and functions leaders carry out. Complex tasks involve many challenges that require input from different perspectives and areas of expertise (Bouwman et al., 2017[10]). In many countries and systems, some of these functions are distributed amongst different individuals and middle management roles are created, such as principals, deputies, team managers and heads of units and teachers (Frimodt, Volmari and Helakorpi, 2009[4]). For instance, due





to their size, Dutch VET institutions usually have three management layers: supervisors or middle managers at the first level, who usually manage between one and four teams of teachers; a middle level of location directors or sector directors, who either manage one of the schools' locations or are responsible for one branch of VET; and the institution's director(s) at the top level (Thomsen, Karsten and Oort, 2014[8]). As highlighted in previous chapters, VET is distinguished from the rest of the education sector by its strong connection to the world of work and the need to keep abreast of changes in the labour market. This means VET leaders have additional roles compared to their peers in general education, such as:

- Ensuring a strong connection to the labour market. This means leaders need to have a strong understanding of the local economy and business.
- Engaging with a wide range of stakeholders, in particular social partners and employers.
- Managing sophisticated business operations, including innovating, adapting learning contents and dynamically changing staff composition in order to keep up with the pace of technological development and changing labour market needs.
- Handling a particular responsibility for social inclusion, with VET often having a large number of disadvantaged students struggling with learning and social difficulties, a high rate of students dropping out and a great diversity of students and training programmes (Cedefop, 2011[6]). This means that VET institutions and their leaders play an essential role in supporting local and sectoral skills development, and the labour markets in which they feed in. They can engage with employers and trade unions, and other stakeholders, at these different levels, including the national one. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic this means that they can open up lines of communication to assess how each sector is affected by the pandemic, leading to greater stakeholder engagement in the future (OECD, 2020[11]). Pedagogical leadership, and tasks such as preparation of learning support materials, can be more complex in VET than in general education (UNESCO, 2017[12]). VET institutions often offer more diverse courses than general education ones, and this has an impact on the leadership role. For example, the teaching staff in a VET institution come from more heterogeneous backgrounds than in a general education institution, which may pose particular challenges for human resource management – hiring them, supporting them in their induction, and ensuring relevant professional development opportunities exist. Quality assurance mechanisms might also need to be more sophisticated, since it has to take into account labour market outcomes (Cedefop, 2011[6]). The global COVID-19 pandemic has forced countries to create and use alternative forms of learning, including digital platforms. However, vocational



programmes, including apprenticeships, are often much more difficult to provide and assess at a distance. This has created additional roles and responsibilities for VET leaders, as leaders are crucial to adapt the operation of VET institutions to increasing use of online and virtual platforms, which allow the continuity of learning, and support teachers in their use. When online learning is not possible, training breaks or extension can also be steered by VET leaders (OECD, 2020[11]). The activities and skills of leaders have an impact on teachers and students. The OECD has done extensive work in the past looking at institutional leadership mainly in general education. The OECD Improving School Leadership publications (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008[13]; Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008[14]) highlighted four core responsibilities of school leadership: 1) supporting, evaluating and developing teacher quality, 2) goal-setting, assessment and accountability, 3) strategic financial and human resource management, and 4) collaborating with other schools. There are strong linkages between institutional leadership, and teachers' motivation¹, students' well-being² and the quality of teaching and learning. Looking at leaders in FE colleges in England, Ruiz-Valenzuela, Terrier and Van Effenterre (2017[1]) found that principals matter for the educational performance of their students, but also that they differ in their ability to enable students to progress³. In general, the work of leaders often involved providing specific feedback and direction to individual teachers about their practice, as well as managing the resources to create conditions within the institution that support improved learning and teaching (Bush, 2018[15]). Institutional leaders can drive organisational changes to build strong, effective and flexible VET programmes and institutions that can adapt to emerging challenges. Today's institutional leaders are not only expected to strategically plan and administer their institutions, but also to lead pedagogical innovation, build collaboration networks with multiple organisations, and keep abreast of new technological developments in industry (Coates et al., 2013[16]; Cedefop, 2011[6]). As discussed in Chapter 4, fostering innovation in VET requires strong institutional leadership to develop organisational change and collaboration. Long-standing research and policy discourse in general education have also stressed the importance of pedagogical leadership, i.e. creating the environments in which teachers continuously improve their ability to support student learning⁴ (OECD, 2016[17]; Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008[13]; Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe, 2008[18]; OECD, 2019[19]). Principals also play a critical role in attracting and retaining talented teachers. Teachers cite their principals' support as one of the most important factors in their decisions to stay in a particular education institution or in the profession (Espinoza and Cardichon, 2017[20]). Pedagogical leadership from institutional leaders is





required to sustain changes and improvements in teaching practice over time (UNESCO, 2017[12]). Among different management tasks, the most important for quality are professional development of teachers and trainers, ensuring adequate facilities and equipment for teaching and learning, and last but not least, efficient management of financial resources (Cedefop, 2015[21]). In order to improve teaching and learning within their institutions, leaders in VET need to be actively involved in their teachers' professional development process. VET leaders provide teachers with structured autonomy and productive feedback on their career development so that teachers can identify and target their own professional needs and drive improvements (O'Leary et al., 2019[22]). A study of VET institutions⁵ in the Netherlands found that teachers' engagement in learning activities (e.g. self-reflection, asking for feedback and sharing information) is influenced by their leaders' attitudes and perceived interdependence. The study also showed that leaders who provide individual support and intellectual stimulation to teachers contribute to their collaboration (Oude Groote Beverborg, Slegers and van Veen, 2015[23]). In Slovenia, principals receive training from the National School for Leadership to carry out teacher appraisal processes (OECD, 2016[24]). Teacher appraisal is especially important in a context in which teachers may not receive much professional development or where teachers are ageing and therefore may have issues keeping up with innovation (Radinger, 2014[25]). The role of VET leaders varies depending on the degree of institutional autonomy. Leadership roles are contingent on local context, and therefore a multiplicity of possible leadership approaches is used by VET providers across OECD countries (see (Greatbatch and Tate, 2018[2]) for England, (Aidla and Vadi, 2008[26]) for Estonia, (Brauckmann, Pashiardis and Ärlestig, 2020[27]) for Sweden). Concretely, this means that leaders need to adapt generic leadership practices (e.g. goal setting, or supporting teachers) to meet the needs and constraints of each institution's context. The governance of VET institutions, and how much autonomy and accountability VET leaders have, define their roles (Hallinger, 2016[28]). The argument to decentralise decision-making is that local actors at all levels, professors, teachers, parents, students, -if well prepared and supported-, are often best able to judge how to achieve learning goals in the light of local circumstances, and to align educational goals with different student and school needs. Many OECD countries are moving towards decentralisation and increased autonomy for education institutions coupled with greater accountability. In countries where institutions are held to account for their results through publication of achievement data, institutions that enjoy greater autonomy in management tend to do better than those with less autonomy; but in countries where there are no accountability



arrangements, the reverse is true (Wossmann, 2003[29]; OECD, 2013[30]). It is therefore widely accepted that autonomy has to go together with accountability mechanisms, and even more importantly, with support structures that help institutional leaders to use newly devolved powers. Education systems should hold institutions for realising learning outcomes, and build leadership capacity and a strong culture of evaluation and transparency (OECD, 2018[31]). Data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) shed light on the responsibilities of upper-secondary institutions in two areas: (1) resource allocation; and (2) curriculum and instructional assessment within the institution. The first area includes elements such as the appointment and dismissal of teachers, the determination of teachers' salaries, and the formulation of budgets and their allocation within the institution. For example, PISA data show that in many countries, leaders of upper-secondary educational institutions are responsible for the hiring policies of their institutions, which means they need to have the human resources capacity to carry them out (Figure 5.1, Panel A). In most countries, the share of VET and general education leaders who report having these responsibilities is similar. When VET leaders have responsibilities for hiring policies, they need to have the human resources capacity to do so. The second area includes the establishment of student-assessment policies, textbook choice and the decisions about which courses to offer and the content of those courses. PISA data show that the extent to which principals in upper secondary institutions have the responsibility for determining course content differs widely between countries (Figure 5.1, Panel B), but also that in many countries these responsibilities are more common in VET institutions than they are in general education ones.

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