

The Role of School Leaders in Shaping a Socially Healthy Environment in General Secondary Education Institutions

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Abstract: This article focuses on identifying the importance of relationships between the principal and teaching staff in forming a healthy psychological environment within general education school management. It emphasizes strengthening factors such as human relationships, trust, collaboration, and emotional support in management practices. The clarified area of the article is defined as the extent of the principal's influence on the formation of the social environment within the pedagogical team.

Keywords: psychological climate, teaching team, leader, transformational leadership, socio-communicative environment, teachers' professional status, normative criteria, social environment, stress, team spirit, psychological well-being, professional development.

Introduction. Today, the psycho-social environment in general education schools is one of the key factors determining the effectiveness of the educational process. A psychologically favorable environment positively influences relationships between teachers and students, ensuring the quality and stability of the pedagogical process. The moral and ethical climate of the school team forms the internal motivation of each participant and determines their approach to professional responsibilities. Therefore, creating a healthy psychological climate in educational institutions not only encourages the professional development of teachers but also lays the foundation for students' academic success and social adaptation.

Although the stability and consistent development of the school environment depend on many factors, one of the most critical is the professional readiness and leadership culture of the school principal. The principal's sound strategic decisions, effective communication skills, and transformational leadership style strengthen an atmosphere of mutual trust, respect, and cooperation within the pedagogical team. The leader's organizational and moral potential, deep understanding of psychological processes, and activities aimed at supporting team spirit play a decisive role in shaping the school's socio-emotional environment.

This research is aimed at analyzing precisely these factors—leadership competencies and their impact on psycho-social stability in schools. The study develops practical recommendations that help reduce stress, enhance psychological well-being, and accelerate professional growth within the school team. As a result, improved management approaches are proposed for creating an

emotionally and socially healthy internal climate based on human values in general education institutions.

Methodology. The main methodological direction of the experimental work was the collection of empirical data through diagnostic research (surveys, content analysis) and its statistical analysis. In this regard, modern socio-psychological analysis criteria, such as J. L. Moreno's sociometry, the theory of transformational leadership, and other advanced theories in educational management, served as the foundation.

In particular, the following methods were used in the study:

- **Survey:** A special questionnaire was developed for school principals to study relationships between leaders and teachers, management styles, and the state of the psychological climate. The survey included indicators such as teachers' attitudes toward school management, the quality of communication with leaders, challenges in conflict resolution, public perceptions of the teaching profession, satisfaction and stress levels among principals, the impact of current workloads on work efficiency, and principals' psycho-emotional state.
- **Pedagogical observation:** During daily school activities, observations were made of interactions between principals and staff, communication styles, opportunities for professional development, infrastructure conditions, and the psychological environment.
- **Pedagogical experiment:** Measures aimed at improving the psychological climate were developed and tested in practice.

During the experimental work, school principals were divided into three groups:

1. **Group 1** – Principals with high levels of knowledge and skills (actively influence the psychological climate).
2. **Group 2** – Principals with average preparation (operate in certain areas but lack a systematic approach).
3. **Group 3** – Principals with low preparation (lack sufficient competence in managing the psychological environment).

A total of 285 school principals participated as respondents. The questionnaire consisted of 17 questions developed specifically for school leaders and grouped into six key normative criteria:

- Psychological climate and emotional background
- Management style and personal influence of the leader
- Quality of communication and initiative opportunities
- Justice, trust, and motivational support
- Primary sources of conflict
- Professional development and self-awareness

The questions under each criterion comprehensively covered the school's social environment and revealed its direct relationship with the principal's leadership.

Analysis of Results

Healthy Climate and Emotional Background: Diagnostic Results. To the question, *“Do you think the principal has an influence on the formation of social relations in the school?”* posed to principals, 93.2% (233 respondents) answered affirmatively: *“Yes, the principal plays a significant role as a leader in shaping social relations.”* 2.8% of respondents stated that school leaders are already sufficiently burdened with responsibilities. 4% believed that school management has no real connection to this process.

These results confirm Kurt Lewin's idea that “*psychological climate is the product of a balance between external and internal forces.*” The position, approach, and behavior of the leader strongly influence the internal climate.

Leadership Style and Socio-Psychological Influence. To the question, “*What leadership style do you usually use?*”,

- 64.4% (161 people) said they follow a democratic style based on cooperation;
- 11.6% (29) stated that they mostly delegate tasks to others (liberal style);
- 22% admitted to using an authoritarian style, believing employees need constant control.

These figures indicate that democratic leadership approaches are not yet fully established in schools. This may lead to reduced teacher initiative, indifference to problems, and increasing formalism in work attitudes.

Communication Quality, Evaluating Initiatives, and Feedback. To assess how freely teachers express opinions and how leadership responds, the following questions were asked:

- “*How do principals and senior staff respond to teachers' ideas and initiatives?*”
- “*Can teachers freely express their opinions?*”

Responses:

- 68% stated that leaders consult with them regularly and support their input;
- Over 20% noted existing obstacles — initiatives are ignored or evaluated superficially;
- 12% said decisions are made only based on leadership's initiative.

This reflects D. McGregor's Theory X and Y: many school leaders still operate under *Theory X*, based on control and distrust, which hinders the development of a healthy psychological climate.

Main Sources of Conflict. When asked, “*What types of conflicts in the pedagogical team concern you most or are hardest to resolve?*”,

- 43.9% cited problems with lesson distribution;
- 13.7% mentioned conflicts arising from salary and bonuses;
- 26% pointed to excessive workload;
- About 9% identified personal rivalries and factionalism.

These data show that cultural cohesion, value orientation, and mutual respect systems are weakening in school management. There is a need to review workload policies and financial support systems to improve the current environment.

Professional Growth and Self-Actualization. To the question, “*Do you consider evaluating principals through a certification system effective?*”,

- 67% found the system very useful;
- 33% believed it was inadequate or caused misunderstandings.

Among the participating principals, about 38% were over 40 years old with more than 20 years of experience. 24% had 10–20 years of experience.

37% of teachers also had over 20 years of experience, while another 37% had 10–20 years. This shows that most responses came from individuals with long-term involvement in school environments.

Indicators Used to Evaluate Principals' Performance. Additional questions were included to determine what indicators are currently used to assess school leadership. Results (Figure 1) revealed that 77.9% of principals are evaluated mainly on academic outcomes

(i.e., university admission rates). From the perspective of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, this shows a dominance of **hygiene factors** — i.e., external pressures and metrics like certification — whereas **intrinsic motivational factors**, such as teacher enthusiasm and leadership communication, are underrepresented. Leadership's influence on the socio-psychological environment is rated as secondary.

Further Findings and Figures. In addition to the core questions, supplementary items were included to determine:

- *“Who is primarily responsible for the following tasks in your school?”*
- *“How frequently were you involved in the following activities over the past 12 months?”*
- *“Are psychological counseling and support services available for teachers in your school?”*
- *“What methods do you use to encourage and motivate teachers?”*

Figure 2 outlines the responsibilities assigned to identify principals' workload. Tasks included:

- a) Hiring and appointing teachers
- b) Dismissing or suspending teachers
- c) Determining teachers' base salaries and setting tariff rates
- d) Deciding on salary increases
- e) Allocating school budget funds
- f) Developing school disciplinary policies
- g) Setting student assessment policies, including national and regional evaluations
- h) Approving student admissions
- i) Choosing teaching materials
- j) Deciding curriculum content, including regional standards
- k) Determining which subjects are taught

According to Figure 2, the primary workload falls on the principal. The school council, management team members, parent committees, and teachers play significantly smaller roles in task distribution. This correlates with responses to questions about how principals perceive their roles (see Figure 3):

Key Findings (Table 1)

Need / Recommendation	Share of Respondents	Diagnosis
Institutional support for professional growth	30%	“Retraining is formalized,” “No practical support”
Reducing principals' workload	8 out of 11 tasks handled	Distribution shows low engagement from councils or teachers
Broadening evaluation indicators	78% focus on student outcomes	Based on Herzberg — emphasis on external motivators
Fair pay and additional compensation	13.7% highlight salary conflicts	Points to inequality and source of tension
Lack of socio-emotional support services	>20% said “Not available”	Indicates institutional gap in staff well-being

Discussion. The experimental research demonstrated a direct impact of leadership style on the psychological climate and team capacity in schools. Several modern educational management theories and models were applied to interpret this connection:

1. Transformational Leadership (James MacGregor Burns, Bernard Bass):

This model encourages internal motivation, professional growth, and commitment to organizational goals. 17% of principals reported relying on authoritarian leadership, indicating incomplete adoption of transformational principles.

2. Participative Leadership (Likert Model):

According to R. Likert (1967), effective leaders involve staff in decision-making. However, 32% of teachers stated that their initiatives were ignored, suggesting a need to shift teachers from passive observers to active contributors.

3. Motivational Management (Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory):

Herzberg emphasized recognition and reward as key to a positive psychological environment. 21% of teachers felt evaluation and incentives were unfair, weakening internal motivation.

4. Total Quality Management (TQM):

This model promotes quality improvement, shared responsibility, and effectiveness. 23% of teachers reported no conditions for self-development, contradicting TQM expectations and indicating poor quality management practices.

5. Contingency Theory (Fiedler, Vroom & Yetton):

This theory holds that leadership style should adapt to the organizational context. The study revealed widespread use of command-style leadership, contrary to the flexible approach recommended.

Scientific-Methodological Conclusions:

- The human factor remains secondary in the internal school climate.
- Some leaders still follow bureaucratic and command-oriented styles.
- Teacher motivation, participation, and social support are insufficient.
- Development of psychological climate requires transformational leadership, participative management, and socio-emotional culture.

Conclusion and Recommendations. Improving the professional competencies of school leaders is a decisive factor in enhancing the effectiveness of the education system. Research findings confirm that school administrators directly influence the professional development of teachers, educational quality, and institutional performance through continuous improvement of their leadership competencies. For effective school management, leaders must master the following aspects:

- **Strategic Management and Decision-Making:** Leaders must develop and implement long-term strategies for institutional growth.
- **Deep Understanding of Pedagogical Processes:** Awareness of modern teaching methodologies and the ability to implement innovative approaches enhance teacher effectiveness.
- **Team-Based Management and Communication Skills:** The ability to maintain open dialogue, support teacher initiatives, and communicate effectively contributes significantly to education quality.

- **Developing Motivation and Incentive Systems:** A fair and transparent system for evaluating and rewarding teacher performance is crucial for encouraging professional growth.
- **Problem Analysis and Innovative Solutions:** Leaders should possess the skills to systematically analyze issues and use modern management technologies to develop creative solutions.

Practical Recommendations (Table 2)

Level	Recommendation	Basis
Policy (Beyond Schools)	Evaluate principals through a multi-indicator portfolio (teacher satisfaction, professional growth metrics); limit academic results' weight to $\leq 50\%$	Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, OECD broad guidelines
School Management	Implement distributed leadership; increase teacher involvement in decision-making	Meta-analysis results ($r \approx 0.32$) \rightarrow higher satisfaction
HR and Motivation	Manage internal motivators (recognition, encouragement) and external factors (salary, workload) in parallel	Herzberg
SEL Services	Introduce psychological consulting and "teacher well-being week" calendars	UNESCO SEL Initiatives (2025)

Professional Development Organize ≤ 15 -hour mentorship modules; conduct "Coaching & Ethical Leadership" training for principals International practices; Hargreaves & Fullan

Thus, enhancing the professional competence of school leaders serves to increase teacher motivation and performance, ultimately improving the quality of education. To achieve this, leaders should prioritize lifelong learning, experience exchange, and the adoption of modern management strategies.

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