

‘School Ethics’ – Responsible School Management: The Application of Business Ethics to School Management (and Governance)

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School leaders need to adapt to a new image of school as an organisation and also have to be aware of stakeholders and the demands and needs of these stakeholders. So, the pressure on school boards and school principals to perform ‘well’ and to be ‘well organised’ has increased. But what does this mean? In addressing these questions, the purpose of this article is to share the key outcomes of new research and to propose a conceptual framework for ethics in school management. The basic methodology for the basic survey is mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) aligned to the Repertory Grid Technique (RGT), based on Kelly’s (1955) Personal Construct Theory. In Flanders school principals base their professional responsibility on the ethical concepts of stakeholder management (and care), corporate governance, interests and rights and duties, effectiveness and efficiency, and norms and regulations.

Keywords: professional responsibility, ethics and educational concepts school management, school leadership, leadership in education

Introduction

School leaders need to adapt to a new image of school as an organisation with a new approach to public administration (known as NPM, New Public Management). They also have to adapt to what could be called the ‘ethical Panopticon’ of society and media. At the same time school leaders have to be aware of stakeholders and the demands and needs of these stakeholders. The pressure on school boards and school principals to perform ‘well’ and to be ‘well organised’ has increased. Related to stakeholder perceptions and leadership behaviour there are some questions to

be raised, such as: ‘What is “good” school management?’ ‘What is an effective or responsible school?’ ‘How can the responsibility of school boards and their principals be conceptualised?’ and ‘How can school boards and their principals achieve a (more) responsible organisation?’

In addressing these questions, we see the function of ‘school ethics’ as being reflective of responsible school management. So we may ask the question what can school boards and principals learn from already established academic disciplines within applied professional ethics, such as business ethics, administrative ethics (for civil services) and care ethics for organisations of health care; and what can school boards and principals learn from applications in these specific sub-disciplines to apply to their specific educational needs and their school.

Situated within this broad context, the purpose of this article is to share with you the key outcomes of new research and to propose a conceptual basis for ethics in school management – one which fully recognises and builds upon current and established academic theory and practice. We will also present a conceptual model for ‘school ethics’ that may be validated upon a customised approach that developed a qualified lens and applied it to Flemish secondary school principals; this paper will focus upon the gained data.

The scope of current academic literature on business ethics and school management is referenced in order to present and communicate the most relevant concepts within both academic disciplines. Review of best practice academic literature led to the identification and selection of nine key concepts for both disciplines, which we then used to construct a custom-made survey for principals of Flemish secondary schools. The basic methodology for this survey is mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) aligned to the Repertory Grid Technique (RGT), based on Kelly’s (1955) Personal Construct Theory.

The third part of this article will present the overall results of this survey, questioning whether our basic conceptual model can stand. This survey will be concluded with some remarks about school management, especially in connection with school leadership.

A New Social Context for Education and School

Stating that schools and their principals have to live up to new expectations means stating that the social context in which they

have to function has changed (Douglas 2001; Vriens 2007; Ballet and Kelchtermans 2009). Over a decade society has changed and schools have to live up to some new contextual phenomena. The traditional and fixed relationship between school and its social surroundings, including that of the school’s relationship with parents, is a shifting dynamic. It is appropriate to state that, within a new loosening social fabric (Taylor 1989; Wickert 1994; Leenheer and Schollaert 2006), the traditional ‘organisation-environment-fit’ has been lost.

Therefore, as is the case in the private business sector, the changing strategic importance of stakeholders influence the world of schools, although it is still ambiguous which stakeholders are involved and what this could imply for the day-to-day organisation of a school. Western society also moves towards a pluralistic world (Opdebeeck 2004; Jones, Parker, and Ten Bos 2005), in which respect for and active dialogue with other persons, cultures, languages, religions and habits are seen as a fundamental necessity for its survival.

The result of the changing social fabric and growing pluralism is that schools are no longer closed entities but are subject to the same level of scrutiny adopted by media when monitoring companies and public administrations: the ‘ethical Panopticon.’ In turn schools must be more transparent and held more accountable for what they do and need to become ‘self-renewing schools’ (Ainscow, Hopkins, and West 1994; Verwey 2005; Hopkins 2009; Wagner 2011). Society, including media, demands more ‘horizontal’ accountability (Bousché 2008). New Public Management (Lobel 2004; Hess 2007; Verbiest 2009) introduced a new approach for public administrations in the world of public services, i. e. more governmental subsidiarity, easier structures, more client-oriented focus, more internal competition, more public-private partnerships (e. g. consultants), and more attention to quality care. This new approach has introduced real management into the world of education. As in private companies, teachers and other employees in the school are changing their attitude towards their employer. A new psychological contract is coming into existence. Vandenberghe (2005) determines the overall situation as ‘a turbulent environment for policy,’ also pushing schools to enhance their ‘license to operate’ by creating an optimal school-environment-fit.

Given this new, dynamic social environment, in which schools operate, they must adhere to the following rationale for ethics in an organisation (see the self-determination theory: Deci et al.

1982; Deci and Ryan 1985; Deci and Gagné 2005; Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, and De Witte 2008):

1. *Economic value*: schools with a clear and distinct policy on ethics realise more educational quality than others. So they become more attractive for pupils and their parents (reputation). This is the strategic heart of the school policy and the school management;
2. *Legal necessity*: schools (as do private companies) have to align to a number of laws, as much about education itself as about organisational issues, such as human resources or safety. In case of non-compliance the school may face penalties and this may damage its reputation;
3. *Social assignment*: schools aiming for ethical governance and management have to realise high-level social educational assignments, including those educating responsible young citizens. They have to be more transparent and accountable in society and its government, which finances the school. Therefore they become socially more acceptable and improve their reputation;
4. *Ethical duty*: a more ethical governance and school management responds better to the basic ethical duties, expectations, interests and needs of all stakeholders. When this includes being more reliable in terms of integrity, this in turn supports the economic, legal and social profits of being ethical.

In addition, this rationale reflects the multitude of intentions behind decisions, evaluations and policy-making by school principals, board members and school teams, changing the strategy, policy and management of the school into an ethical issue.

According to Ouali and Tilman (2001) three domains are subject to significant change: the mission of the school, the pedagogical practice and the organization of practices. This means that all schools have to change very profoundly. Today schools are confronted with concrete issues and questions that are common in well-known business and administrative ethics and in ethics of care. This implies that the school organisation must take a stance considering the fundamental constructs (Kelly 1955; 1963) behind applied professional ethics and its concepts, amongst others items such as common interest vs. individual needs and interests, direct vs. indirect policy and management, short-term vs. long-term

policies, top-down vs. bottom-up management (high vs. low road), outside-in vs. inside-out policy, technical vs. cultural management (cold vs. warm), reactive vs. proactive management (negative vs. positive), instrumental vs. holistic policy and management (management vs. leadership), hierarchical control, social control and self-control. Every school has to consider which leadership style is most appropriate to realise a responsible school management (Conley and Goldman 1994; Covey 1989; 1992; 2004; Eynikel and Thompson 2011; Greenleaf 1977; 1991; Hord 2004; Maak and Pless 2006; Senge 2005; Siebens 2005a; 2007a; 2011; Smith 2003; Verstraeten 2005) and what the consequences of a responsible school management imply for school governance (Siebens 2003; 2007b; 2007c). As for companies, non-for-profit organisations and public administrations the ethical issue, involving transparency and accountability, integrity, sustainability or social responsibility, has become crucial for schools too. In equal measure, ethics in schools are becoming an integral issue that cannot be solved by simple, traditional morals.

Now that schools and their educational leaders are confronted with ethical expectations and questions, they have to work on ‘school ethics’ as the application of ethics to the management of schools. This includes the leadership style of the school leader, the way (s)he treats his/her colleagues (people management), the importance and role of participation, integrity in all relationships and communication, and quality care. How to apply the basic principles and rules of participation in a school culture and organisation aiming for efficient and effective educational quality? What to decide when students or teachers do not co-operate or do not perform to the norms? How to realise the equilibrium between care and output? How to implement a culture of change and innovation? How to initiate policies relating to anti-stress and positive well-being?

All of the above clearly implies that school ethics are no longer limited to the traditional question as to how schools implement values and norms in their education (Starrat 1994; Haynes 1998; Leleux and Rocourt 2010). School ethics cover a much wider area than only the curricula. Integrating the issue of responsible behaviour in courses can be one of the objectives of education in general and for a school in particular. School ethics also have to embrace the integration of ethics into policymaking and management in the school itself. After all, the ethical message of the school must be visible to and experienced by staff and students. In par-

allel to ethics-related education – e. g. through courses in religion – ethics on a school organisational level are pivotal to the thinking of young citizens, their decision-making and ethical behaviour. The mission for a school to be an ethical organisation itself includes much more than realising a legally correct, effective and efficient use of the available means and avoidance of some very specific ethical hot items like unfair competition, political messages into the classroom and activities for profit, sponsoring and advertising. School ethics focus upon the relationship between the school and its social and ecological environment – an issue already well-known in Flemish education as the ‘broad school,’ and which is broader than CSR. With school ethics, we aim to support a new sub-discipline within applied professional ethics that is policy and management oriented as concerns the individual school as an organisation.

This raises some questions: to what extent do we currently relate or even reduce this sub-discipline of academic research to parallel issues and opinions in the other sub-disciplines of applied professional ethics in profit and social-profit organisations as well as in civil services (see Fink and Hargreaves 2006)? To what extent are and should school ethics be a completely separate ethical discipline? Do we really need a new sub-discipline for this research issue?

Before simply inventing a brand new discipline, based on brand new concepts, we extensively studied existing academic and best-practice literature on ethics and on school and educational management to identify where and how we can or cannot realise a transfer of insights, concepts, models and theories from business ethics, administrative ethics and ethics of care to the world of managing the education of young people.

Exploring the Intuition of Flemish Principals

Within the context of school ethics our research aimed at a description of the conceptual framework in which school leaders think intuitively about the ethical dimension of their organisation and their management. However, building a cluster of concepts from literature on ethics may be one thing (theory-espoused), but what about the real thing (the theory-in-use), e. g. the intuition of principals in Flemish secondary schools? Among others the intuition of the school leader(s) determines the interest in and the content of ethics in the school and in its team. Therefore, this re-

search was specifically designed to confront theory with practice and to render a targeted approach to research the intuition of principals of Flemish secondary schools.¹ Using the Repertory Grid Technique (RGT) (Kelly 1955; 1963) a selection of 35 principals from all types of secondary schools, different genders, and different backgrounds, were interviewed.² RGT consists of a qualitative interview technique, designed in such a way that respondents cannot predict answers preferred by the interviewer. The research approach respected all formal technical and ethical requirements of the Repertory Grid Technique.

This is unique research. No other research has been performed in the world of education to determine the conceptual basis of professional responsibility amongst school principals.

Ethical Concepts and Basic Constructs

Before applying Repertory Grid Technique, one has to determine those concepts and constructs with which the researcher will confront his/her respondents. Our preparation phase included an extensive, thorough and in-depth review of academic literature focussing upon the central sub-disciplines within applied professional ethics: business ethics, administrative ethics and the ethics of care. Additionally, academic literature on school management was screened to focus upon the central concepts and constructs expressing the professional responsibility of school leaders.

Throughout history, a multitude of classic and new concepts have tried to formulate the core question and core content of responsibility in individual, collective and organisational decision-making and handling. This is already case in work in the form of values, virtues, stakeholders, deontological principles, utilitarian longing for efficiency and effectiveness, sustainability, needs, interests, care, rights and duties, legacy, integrity, norms etc. In the course of time each of these concepts has proven to be worthwhile, but also to be limited, a reason as to why so many concepts came into existence. Research by Siebens (2005b; 2006) also

¹ As it was the initial limited goal of this research to understand the intuitive meaning of professional ethics amongst principals in Flemish secondary education, the results are only significant for this target group. Whether or not the results can be extrapolated to other target groups at other levels of Flemish education or other regions may be subject of future research.

² Principals with a soft, basic or hard degree of discipline; small and large schools; grammar schools; technical or vocational schools; catholic, community or Go!-school.

revealed how people in day-to-day practice combine single concepts into complicated clusters, e.g. ethics of care and the stakeholder approach, the concept of social responsibility with the idea of sustainability and the concept of quality care with notions of efficiency and effectiveness (output, profitability). Year reports, leaflets, websites and other non-academic documents reveal a clear link between the concepts of CSR, sustainability, stakeholder approach and profitability.

The description and analysis of the history and the specific meaning of concepts used in applied ethics results in a list of essential constructs about professional ethics (Kelly 1955). By means of a preliminary survey with 8 respondents the list of essential constructs was limited to a list of 18 constructs:

- Classic vs. hype;
- Pro-active vs. re-active;
- Significant/necessary/essential vs. irrelevant/free of obligations/marginal;
- Concept vs. instrument;
- Long vs. short term;
- Addressing many stakeholders and the common good vs. exclusively one, individual interest;
- Broad vs. small range of action;
- Objective vs. means;
- Towards the maximum vs. the optimum;
- Output vs. process;
- Explicit vs. implicit policy;
- Bottom-up vs. top-down;
- Self and social control/internal evaluation vs. control/external evaluation;
- Theoretical/cultural/reflection vs. operational/instrumental/action;
- Innovation vs. gradual improvement;
- Care vs. effects;
- Addressing inwards oriented change vs. outwards oriented accountability.

This list of essential constructs can be summarized as the fundamental construct ‘warm’ vs. ‘cold’ approach or ‘soft’ vs. ‘hard’ approach, such as care vs. quality. Both poles of this fundamental

ethical construct are actually inherent in each other: care for quality vs. qualitative care. To take care of the efficiency and effectiveness in one’s school implies that the principal takes care of both care for quality and qualitative care in his school – the so-called ‘educational quality’ – and at the same time it is necessary to be efficient and effective in one’s care – for students and their parents, for the personnel and for society at large.

With this fundamental construct of care and quality in place, other ethical concepts may come into play and may be positioned around the core concepts of care and quality. However the fundamental construct must be sustainable for all stakeholders in the long term. For a responsible school principal or member of the school board it must be obvious that school governance and school management implies a distinct, careful, efficient and effective use of the available means, keeping in mind the needs and interests of all stakeholders in the long term.

Educational Concepts

During the last decade much has been published about the discipline of school management, within a broader European movement of academic research on (non)-effective, ‘good’ vs. ‘bad’ schools and school management practices (Dang Kim et al. 2005; Vermaas 2010; Siebens and ten Have 2012; Deneire, Vanhoof, and Van Petegem 2011).

The aim in schools nowadays is to become a ‘broad school.’ This way schools express their will to create active and constructive links between the school and its environment, such as neighbourhood, environment, and youth work. When schools adopt social responsibility they aim for good communication and a positive relationship with the neighbourhood and therefore they establish and nurture a good reputation. In this respect the idea of a good school runs parallel to the well-known concept of CSR in the private business sector.

According to the results of PISA research, Flemish Education aims for educational quality (Van Petegem 1992; 1998) in an international context. Mensen (2007) described educational quality as ‘the sum of personal qualities of the teachers, the quality of the educational context and the quality of the educational content.’ Siebens (1997) defined quality care as ‘the continuous, integral care of all personnel for all aspects, in all the stadia of the creation of a product, a service or a relationship of care, in order to

meet the needs and expectations of all stakeholders as much as possible, first of all the clients.’ All in all, educational quality care is about meeting the expectations of clients: pupils and their parents, government, economy and society as a whole.

Literature in Flanders’ education promotes the idea of an *effective school* ‘that actually realises what it aims for’ (Van Petegem 1991; 1998; Vanhoof and Van Petegem 2006). Vanhoof and Van Petegem mention the following aspects for a school in order to be effective, and place emphasis upon 1–3:

1. effective communication;
2. supportive professional and personal relations;
3. shared leadership;
4. collective purposefulness;
5. the competence to start a dialogue with the environment of the school: ‘responsiveness;’
6. competence to innovate;
7. an integrated policy;
8. competence of reflection to learn from mistakes.

To date, the *policymaking competence* of schools – and their principals – is the most powerful concept about school management (Jongmans and Slegers 2000; VLOR 2005; Dang Kim et al. 2005; Deneire, Vanhoof, and Van Petegem 2011). It may be defined as a condition with a lot of internal tuning, coordination and constant adjusting – although so far a clear definition does not exist. Policymaking competence implies openness towards the dynamic world outside the school, with its ever-changing expectations, needs and interests. So this notion aims for a continuous process of change, focusing on the quality of educational processes.

Though in one way or another (social) responsibility must be the final answer to the question (see rationale under New Social Context for Education and School) as to why a school has to build this policymaking competence, why effectiveness and quality in education are crucial and urgent, why a school has to be broad to be good, none of these concepts directly mention responsibility – nor integrity nor a value-based attitude etc. Though all educational concepts seem to be based on an intuitive emotion and an intention of responsibility, up until now there has not been an academic answer to the issue of ethical meaning and content in educational concepts. This is one of the objectives of our research.

Methodology of the Research

Based upon the review of academic literature two main hypotheses were presented. Management in whatever organisation demands professional responsibility by the manager. This aspect of management has been adequately articulated in a multitude of concepts and clusters of concepts.

1. Management in education is based on educational concepts that intuitively, albeit indirectly, reveal certain opinions about professional responsibility. The (intuitive) preference for ethical concepts correlates with the (intuitive) preference for educational concepts. So both can be linked, while respecting their content.
2. Professional ethics in school management, as an academic discipline as well as day-to-day practice, are based on a cluster of educational and ethical concepts, defined in our research.

All school principals were confronted with nine ethical concepts and nine educational concepts.

1. 35 principals of Flemish secondary schools were interviewed, which is above the methodological norm of 15 to 25 respondents considered to be significant. This group included:
 - 17 men and 18 women;
 - 12 from a school with a small number of pupils (<300), 8 with a medium number of pupils (300–600) and 15 with a great number (>600) of pupils;
 - 10 with less than 4 years and 25 with 4 years and more of seniority;
 - 20 with a Degree in Science and 15 with a Degree in Human Sciences;
 - 12 working in a non-denominational school, 7 in a community school and 16 in a Catholic school.

Each principal was confronted with two overviews of exactly nine concepts, one being ethical concepts and the other being educational concepts (from school management).

Ethical concepts:

- Values and virtues;
- Interests; rights and duties;
- Norms; regulations;

- CSR;
- Sustainability;
- Stakeholders; needs;
- Care;
- Integrity; conscience; spirituality;
- Effectiveness; efficiency.

Educational concepts:

- School culture;
- Participative and communicative people management;
- Open/broad school;
- Good reputation;
- Job satisfaction;
- School leadership;
- Policy-pursuing competence; educational quality; the effective school;
- Safety and health;
- School governance.

These concepts are the outcome of the preliminary research with 8 respondents that required their analysis of a broad range of concepts referred to within academic and best-practice literature. This preliminary phase entailed the identification of those concepts that were almost synonymous to theirs together with those which were clearly not important to them.

In conformity with the Kelly Repertory Grid Technique (1955) both overviews of concepts were simultaneously presented to the interviewees.

2. The chosen concepts were noted on identical separate cards.
3. In both interviews, the interviewees made a blind choice of three cards/concepts (cards face down) out of a total of nine. After turning them and reading the concepts, the interviewees made a choice as to which two concepts they intuitively considered to belong together and which one did not. During this decision-making process the researcher did not so much focus on the two 'united concepts,' but upon how the third concept card differed from them. All the differences were plotted on a custom-made structural format, e.g. small against large, white against black, etc.

4. After three rounds, the whole procedure was repeated, but this time one concept card out of every trio of the first three rounds was chosen. And again the answers were plotted on a custom-made structural format. Some of these constructs appeared to be similar to the constructs in the studied academic literature (see figure 1), but some were completely new and were a welcome addition to the first. From then on both lists were treated equally.
5. In a third phase, the interviewee had to evaluate both lists of concepts on a scale from 1 to 7 (Likert scale). When a concept scored a '1' it was bound to belong to the left pole of the construct, in case of a '7' a link with the right pole of the construct was assumed.

The data illuminated the amount of intuitive content in professional responsibility amongst the selected sample of principals. With the help of Idiogrid software (see www.idiogrid.com) and SPSS (15), information was collected about the constructs and the concepts: i.e. which are the most important constructs, which are the favourable concepts, how do these concepts link together (cluster of concepts), if a link exists between the favourite ethical concepts and the favourite educational concepts, and what could be the ID of each of these concepts in ethical terms.

Overall Data and Analysis

Analysis of the overall data, gathered from all the principals, results in the following conclusions:

1. Eighteen constructs from literal reviews in ethics were chosen by 83.25%. Only 16.75% of the respondents reported new constructs, that is a ratio of 5.05:1. As a conclusion, the principals of Flemish secondary schools recognise the constructs as their own intuition in the professional responsibility of their job. In other words, the constructs correctly articulate the ethical intuitions of the respondents.
2. Out of 18 constructs, selected from academic literature, the following 6 constructs represent the parameters of the research project within which the concepts were plotted (see figure 1):
 - manifold stakeholder directed (vs. one stakeholder directed);
 - long term directed (vs. short term directed);

TABLE 1 Scores of the Main ('Core') Constructs

Construct	Educational concepts			Ethical concepts			(4)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)	
Directed to the common good and/or a multitude of stakeholders vs. directed towards the interests of a sole stakeholder	164 (1st)	1.876 (1st)	1.200 (2nd)	109 (2nd)	2.114 (2nd)	1.171 (2nd)	1.61 (1st)
Relevant vs. irrelevant	119 (2nd)	2.079 (2nd)	1.162 (1st)	114 (1st)	2.054 (1st)	1.093 (1st)	2.17 (3rd)
Intrinsic (personal) conviction vs. influence and pressure from outside	80 (4th)	2.724 (4th)	1.445 (5th)	105 (3rd)	2.797 (6th)	1.257 (4th)	2.70 (6th)
Proactive vs. reactive		2.737 (5th)	1.231 (3rd)		2.696 (4th)	1.221 (3rd)	
Wide area action vs. narrow (specific) area of action	97 (3rd)	2.410 (3rd)	1.533 (11th)	82 (5th)	2.575 (3rd)	1.529 (15th)	2.70 (5th)
Long vs. short term	78 (5th)	2.822 (6th)	1.745 (16th)	90 (4th)	2.587 (5th)	1.372 (6th)	2.57 (4th)
Inclusive vs. exclusive							2.13 (2nd)

NOTES Column headings are as follows: (1) number of scores, (2) average score, (3) standard deviation, (4) preference score.

- wide-action radius directed (vs. narrow-area action directed);
- relevant (vs. irrelevant);
- intrinsic element (vs. extrinsic element)
- basic (vs. secondary).

The first three combinations can be linked to one basic construct: inclusive, that is integral and integrated (vs. exclusive, that is specific and specialised).

3. Two new constructs, collected from the respondents, appear to be relevant:

- basic, goal, condition (vs. result, effect, consequence);
- warm, emotional, human, social (vs. cold, business-like, technical).
- The more the average score of a concept or construction approaches score '1,' the more the meaning of the concept or structure of the interviewees coincides with the preferences in existing academic literature.

Keeping in mind that these findings do not automatically imply the interviewees' personal preference for this meaning, it became obvious that double-checking their personal prefer-

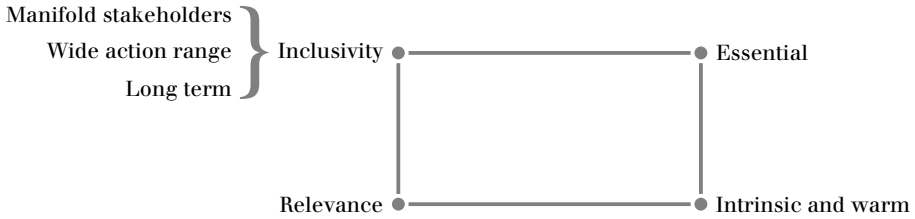


FIGURE 1 Cluster of Basic Constructs

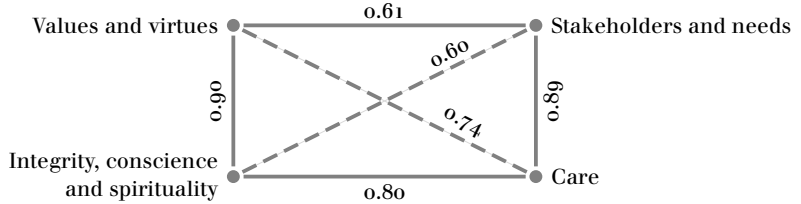


FIGURE 2 Cluster of Ethics Concepts

ence on both poles was equally important. The results convincingly prove their preference for pole 1. And so they confirm the existing ethical theory on school management. See table 1. How a set of 6 score constructs coincide with their findings can be seen in figure 1.

4. From the correlating data we can also induce a core conceptual cluster including 4 of the 9 ethical concepts (see figure 2):

- values and virtues;
- integrity, conscience and spirituality;
- caring;
- stakeholders and their needs.

Flemish principals of secondary schools therefore seem to have a rather traditional – within the specific Flemish cultural context even to be considered as being catholic – view of their professional responsibility, stressing the individual and intrinsic aspects; neither the formal organisational nor the social aspects.

A very strong correlation exists between the concepts of values, virtues, integrity, conscience and spirituality. As is also the case between the concepts of stakeholders, needs and care. Furthermore there is a very strong correlation between

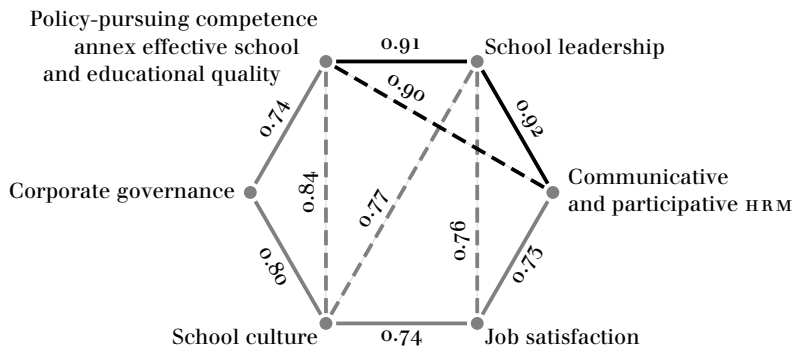


FIGURE 3 Cluster of Educational Concepts

the CSR concepts and sustainability (very strong correlation of .95) and between the concepts of interests and duties and of norms and regulations (strong correlation .96).

5. From the data of correlations we can induce a core educational conceptual cluster including 5 (even 5) of the educational concepts (see figure 3):
 - school leadership;
 - competence, annex effectiveness and educational quality;
 - communicative and participative personnel management;
 - school culture;
 - job satisfaction.

These educational concepts can also be situated on the individual and intrinsic level, except for the policy pursuing competence.

The strong correlations between the concepts of main importance (with very strong correlations) in the cluster of educational concepts imply that the principals of Flemish secondary schools are strongly convinced of the importance of their autonomy and leadership in their school management.

6. Based on the correlation data of the concepts in both conceptual clusters in the research, we can induce a core conceptual model for the intuitive professional ethics of Flemish school leaders in secondary schools (figure 4). Basically the intuitive opinion of the interviewees can be analysed on two axes:
 - intention and motivation (an intrinsically vs. extrinsically determined opinion on responsibility);

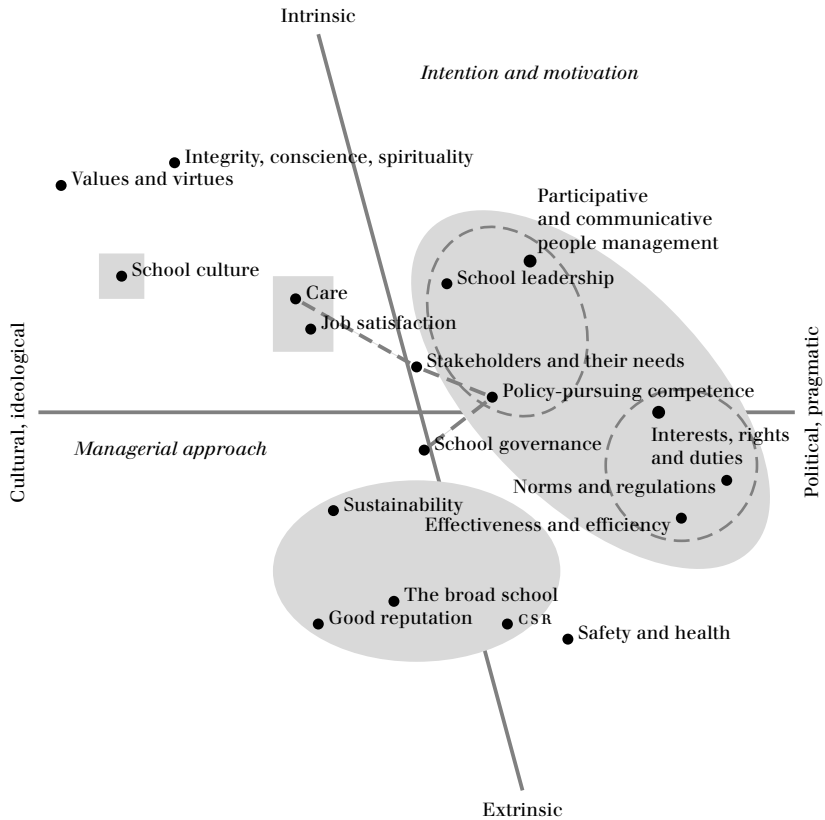


FIGURE 4 Visual Representation of Overall Ethical Clusters and Educational Concepts

- managerial approach (an opinion stressing the cultural/ideological dimension vs. the political/pragmatic/technical dimension of the school organisation).

This model confirms the basic model soft/warm vs. hard/cold in academic literature. Also the concept of governance takes a central position in the overall representation, though it is not equally crucial to the respondents. In addition three other clusters appear to be important:

- The concepts of care and of job satisfaction (very strong correlation .89). This reveals that, according to the school principals, the concept of job satisfaction correlates with the notion of care. To the respondents this cluster is an intrinsic and cultural aspect of their professional responsibility;

- The concepts of policy pursuing competence and of effectiveness and efficiency (very strong correlation .85);
 - The concepts of interests, rights and duties and of norms and laws. This cluster is situated entirely on the pragmatic side of the representation (with an equilibrium between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation).
7. There are no significant differences between the several examined subgroups (male vs. female, small vs. high seniority, small vs. big schools, basic degree in human sciences vs. basic degree in technology).

Except however for the ideological subgroups Catholic vs. pluralistic and so non-denominational (former state-owned, but nowadays free) schools: the Catholic schools articulate a somewhat more individual and intrinsic interpretation of responsibility – this may be identified as a classic approach – vs. pluralistic schools who are more supportive of external interpretation and the expectations of the school's environment and society.

Overall Conclusions

The data in the research drives the conclusion that the principals of Flemish secondary schools have a very consistent opinion of their professional responsibility, with little to no difference between the analysed subgroups.

Secondly the respondents in the research agree with the point of view that responsibility is:

- an essential and relevant issue;
- must be inclusive (to all stakeholders and the common good, in the long term and within a wide action range) and intrinsically motivating.

Finally, for those principals who have a more traditional opinion, their responsibility is essentially an individual and intrinsic matter (values and virtues; integrity, conscience and spirituality).

Most of these ethical concepts can be situated in the intrinsic-cultural quadrant (see figure 4), but also some other very strong clusters find their place in the extrinsic practical fields of the model. Among the essential educational concepts only the policy-pursuing concept is – more or less – a stand-alone on the edge of the extrinsic field.

All of this means that Flemish principals understand their professional responsibility first of all as a personal, intrinsically motivated phenomenon, and in second order a duty of transparency and accountability to the external society and school environment. Their construction of responsibility ensures taking care of all stakeholders and the common good, in the long term and oriented towards all aspects of their school organisation and management. For the majority of the principals this intuition of responsibility is anchored in their values and virtues, their integrity, conscience and spirituality.

Added Value and Discussion

This new research into the conceptual basis of professional responsibility in school management – 'school ethics' – and into the intuitive experience of principals of Flemish secondary schools about their professional responsibility underpins the basic conceptual clusters found in literary reviews, in particular the set of basic constructs. Also awareness of the multi-stakeholder principle and the concept of care, as well as the ethical content in concepts such as policy pursuing competence and effective school are receiving increased recognition.

Additionally school ethics give a specific impetus to government policy about quality in education. A decade ago the government decided to withdraw as a regulator in the New Public Management Approach in the ethical principle of subsidiarity – amongst others, the inalienable responsibility of a school (and its principal). However, it remains the duty of the government to act firmly in facilitating and stimulating schools, their principals and board members to accept this responsibility. Therefore an added-value of school ethics is to serve both as a confirmation and as a correction of the new role and relationship between the government and individual schools.

In connection with the training and development of school principals we conclude:

- That as it cannot be contested that school principals must reflect upon their opinions and the basis of their professional responsibility, training and development should familiarise school principals with the concepts and insights of (school) ethics and upon how they can be recognized in their educational concepts;
- Considering the intrinsic complexity and the multi-layered

character of professional responsibility of school leaders, their teams and schools, it is highly important that principals understand this complexity and how to deal with it in concrete situations and discussions;

- As principals regard their professional responsibility rather traditionally, stressing the intrinsic and individual aspects somewhat more than the managerial and extrinsic aspects, training and development should pay more attention to the formal, structural and the extrinsic, social aspects of school responsibilities.

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