Who am I?
Exploring school leaders' professional identity in secondary education

Janine Mommers

Promotor: Dr. Piety Runhaar
Co-promotor: Prof. Dr. Perry den Brok
Motivation

- Less school leaders available
- Also, school leaders lack the quality that is required to meet new challenges in the job
  \( (OECD, 2010; \text{Staat van de schoolleider, 2023}) \)
- Research and training mainly focus on competencies
  \( (Crow \ G, \ Day \ C \text{ and } Møller \ J, \ 2017) \)
- \textbf{Who you are} as a school leader matters:
  - The school leader determines the decisions made
  - The school leader decides what action is taken
  \( (Burke \text{ and Stets, 2009; Cruz-González et al., 2020}) \)
Research on teacher professional identity

- Shows the importance of knowing one's professional identity to reduce the problems associated with being a teacher (Burke en Stets, 2009; Day en Leithwood, 2007; Gee, 2001)

- Probably also with school leaders:
  - understanding PI helps **identify frictions** and problems and relate them to one's own professional standards.

- **Reducing problems and tensions** (as with teachers) can help to retain school leaders.
Our goal is to explore the professional identity of school leaders in secondary education

1) Which guiding standards do school leaders mention related to different professional roles?

2) What professional roles do school leaders identify with?
THEORY
Professional identity: product and process

(Beijaard D, Meijer P C and Verloop N, 2004)
Dynamics of professional identity

Personal dimension
Contains guiding values from a personal view

Professional dimension
Contains guiding values that concern the profession

Outcomes

Self-esteem
feelings regarding
- Authenticity
- Self-worth
- Self-efficacy

Identity verification process
through appraisals from self and others

(Burke and Stets, 2009)
Professional roles based on international professional standards and the Dutch Beroepsstandaard Schoolleiders VO

C. Beroepsrollen

Als schoolleider oefen je beroepsrollen uit. Dit zijn meestal meerdere rollen die je tegelijkertijd uitvoert en die jou in meer of mindere mate kenmerken. De beroepsrollen worden hieronder kort uitgelegd. Ze sluiten aan bij de Beroepsstandaard schoolleiders.

Inspirator in het leiding geven aan visiegestuurde werken
Als schoolleider geeft je leiding aan het ontwikkelen, concreteren en communiceren van een gezamenlijke inspirerende visie op leren, onderwijzen en pedagogisch handelen. Deze concrete visie ontwikkelt je vanuit gezamenlijke waarden zodat deze sturing geeft aan het primaire proces. Je geeft daarmee richting aan de toekomst van de school.

People manager in het leiding geven aan ontwikkeling van medewerkers
Als schoolleider stel je het leren centraal in de hele school en creëer je een rijke leeromgeving voor professionals. Je stimuleert een reflectieve, onderzoekende houding op alle niveaus binnen de organisatie en je vervult daarbij zelf een voorbeeldrol. Om de betrokkenheid en leerbereidheid van medewerkers te bevorderen ga je het gesprek aan over opvattingen en drijven. Hiermee wordt samen betekenis gegeven aan het werk en aan gestelde (leer)doelen.

Innovator in het leiding geven aan schoolontwikkeling
Als schoolleider geef je samen met medewerkers vorm aan de ontwikkeling van de school als professionele organisatie. Je bevordert een professionele cultuur en leidt of ondersteunt verbeterings- en innovatieprocessen. Je bevordert gespreid leiderschap waar mogelijk en kiest een bij de ontwikkeling van de school passende veranderstrategie.

Onderzoeker in het leiding geven aan onderwijskwaliteit
Als schoolleider houd je zicht op de onderwijskundige en pedagogische processen in de school. Je draagt zorg voor een samenhangend curriculum, voor de personele en organisatorische inrichting en voor ondersteuning van het primaire proces. Op basis van systematische en cyclische informatieverzameling organiseer je ondersteuning en feedback aan leraren.

Netwerker in het leiding geven aan verbinding met de omgeving
Als schoolleider anticipeer je op ontwikkelingen en je zet dit om in strategisch en maatschappelijk ondernemend handelen. Je geeft doelbewust vorm aan verbinding en samenwerking met de omgeving, om onderlinge relaties, onderwijsprocessen en leerresultaten te optimaliseren en om vanuit maatschappelijke verantwoordelijkheid ook bij te dragen aan de omgeving. Je creëert en benut netwerken, met het oog op kennisdeeling en versterking van het onderwijs en de school als organisatie.

(Leithwood, 2019; SRVO, 2021)
METHOD & RESULTS
Conducting the research

- September to December 2021 in VO-academy (VO-raad) leadership courses
- 36 Participants
  - 13 experienced school leaders
  - 5 experienced team leaders
  - 18 beginning team leaders
Questionnaire preceding the identity workshop

1. professional standards that were confirmed or challenged in specific situations;
2. leadership roles that school leaders identified themselves with;
3. background information from participants
1) Which guiding standards do school leaders mention related to different professional roles?
## Standards per Professional Role

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<td>Being able to listen. Lending an ear</td>
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<td>3. Linking pin</td>
<td>Restoring relationships by dealing with resistance and emotions. Being a linking pin in difficult situations. Working and co-creating on the basis of equality, independence and autonomy. Being able to (re)connect the team. Valuing vulnerability and honesty within the team. Providing for shared leadership on the basis of freedom, accountability and reciprocity.</td>
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<td>4. Encouragement</td>
<td>Getting others to take responsibility. Inviting others to take action and ownership of problems. Coaching others to come to solutions. Being constructive in working together on a vision.</td>
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<td>6. Authenticity</td>
<td>Being honest and open, Taking strong emotions seriously and deal while being yourself. Expressing your moral compass.</td>
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Standards mentioned as characterizing school leaders in different professional roles

- Standards were mentioned for **all professional roles**
- Respondents mentioned the largest number of standards for the professional role of **People manager**.
- The lowest number of standards were mentioned for the professional roles of **Researcher and Networker**.
- Some respondents mentioned the same standards for the roles of **Innovator and Inspirer**.
- Within the topics identified per professional role, certain topics showed a **wider variety of standards** than others. Certain topics were described in a **more richly varied manner**

  - For **listening or innovativeness**, the standards were described in a basic vocabulary, for example, "being able to listen or wanting to innovate".
  - For the topic **linking pin** under the same professional role, there was a rich description of standards: "restoring relationships by dealing with resistance and emotions", "valuing vulnerability and honesty within the team", "ensuring shared leadership based on freedom, accountability and reciprocity".
2) What professional roles do school leaders identify with?
Indicate for each of these roles in percentages to what extent this role is characteristic for you as a school leader.

Vind je dat er een beroepsrol mist, voeg die rol dan toe en ken er een percentage aan toe. Herken je je zich niet in een rol, dan is het mogelijk 0% toe te kennen aan een rol. Het totaal mag niet meer dan 100% zijn.

Voer uw antwoord in.
Broad identification with all professional roles

There's always pressure, it's like playing chess on 13 boards (starter)
People are what really makes the job worthwhile. Therefore, it is necessary to search for each person's own talents and to connect these talents to achieve the best process/product together.

I am in frequent contact with elementary schools, our PO-VO network and the VO school in the region, to coordinate all matters concerning orientation and enrollment. This takes up much of my time.
I think I really need it at work to have a clear vision that I can relate everything to. (...) This all starts with an analysis of where the "problem" is situated.

I "invent" many developments of significance within the school and I initiate various projects that 'spark' the other roles.
Other: Identification with a "Hands on" role

I consider myself an administrator / a ‘conferencing-tiger’ (vergadertijger).

At least one-fifth of my time is spent in meetings on all sorts of peripheral, organizational matters and administration in the form of personnel files, contracts, schedules, etc.
Many standards were mentioned for the social role and for ‘interacting with others’

Also, a strong identification was found with the role of People Manager
- Recognize the impact of this (social) role as a basis for school leadership.
- Emphasize this role in training for school leaders as a basic requirement for doing the job well.

It is not yet clear what the preferences for role identification are based on: environment or interactions with others and what behavior and emotions play a role.

Also still unclear what the difference is between beginning and experienced school leaders - in this sample many beginning school leaders
Implications and conclusion

- The two identification patterns can help school leaders identify their leadership preference as more analytical or social.
- The method from this study (radar charts) provides pictures of identifications with professional roles. By adding descriptions explaining the preferences, the dialogue about who they are as school leaders, is made possible. The method thus serves as a reflection tool and as a basis for formulating one's own identity standards and role preference.

As with teachers, understanding professional identity can help school leaders to develop effective ways of doing their work that fit who they are and help them to be resilient in dealing with demanding and changing professional contexts.
What is learned from this study about school leaders’ professional identity?
Especially with regards to the topic of People Management
Want to learn more about my PHD?

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Thank you for your attention!