



AMS Henkilöstöpalvelut Oy

Position Paper

**Well-Being of Managers in leading the Green and Digital
Transitions**





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” Principals of schools often feel lonely, faced with daily challenges as Managers in top positions.”

Professor Joachim James Calleja

Introduction

Vocational Education and Training (VET) school managers are leaders who provide a purpose and a direction to their staff and to the institutions they manage. They are responsible for daily organisational and administrative issues that often mean additional pressure and stress.

The pandemic exposed many of the already existing inequalities that cut across our education system, and new doors for change and a renewed emphasis of tackling inequality and repositioning well-being as a core principle in how education is practiced and provided have been opened.

Within the European Union (EU), around 60% of VET schools’ students report feeling tense whilst studying for tests¹. The effects of assessment practices that are detrimental to well-being can be carried through into adulthood, reducing individuals’ willingness to engage in learning later in life.

When searching for information about well-being, there are many sources of information providing data about the role of managers in improving well-being at the workplace and on their staff, and on it Well-Being of Managers in leading the Green & Digital Transitions impact on employees’ mental health. There are also a number of strategies and tools that are recommended by the European Commission (EC) to be implemented by managers in schools, but there are not many resources focused specifically on managers’ well-being, which must also be promoted given its relevance to the quality of the work environment, for preventing stress and for successfully overcoming daily challenges.

The European Education Area addresses the topic of well-being in schools with two initiatives that support EU countries to develop the “whole-system, whole-school approach”: *Pathways to School Success Council Recommendation* (November 2022),² and *Well-being at school*³. This approach aims at creating a positive learning environment for all students and teachers, focusing on universal strategies addressing children and students at risk of (or that already are) experiencing mental health issues, and on the mental health and well-being of teachers and staff.

Furthermore, the European Education Area also provides a series of factsheets⁴ addressing relevant topics connected to well-being (including one on well-being on the digital era, and another one focused on promoting teachers’ well-being), but no factsheet specifically dedicated to managers.

Aware of the importance of this topic for its Members, the European Forum of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (EFVET) addressed it during dedicated activities carried out during its last two International Conferences (in 2022 and 2023), which results are the baseline for this Position Paper.

¹ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/campaign-free-to-speak-safe-to-learn/improving-well-being-at-school#1>

² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022H1209%2801%29&qid=1671106078506>

³ <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/school-education/well-being-at-school>

⁴ <https://education.ec.europa.eu/news/supporting-well-being-and-mental-health-through-education-factsheets-for-schools>

Well-Being of Managers: A relevant topic for EfVET and for its Members

EfVET organized this year its 32nd Annual Conference, between October 25th and 27th, in Rhodes (EL). Carried out under the theme “Future Skills for Green Transitions – an agenda for VET”, this Conference had many parallel activities focused on relevant issues connected to this theme, which allowed EfVET Members to discuss and actively participate with their own perspectives.

One of such activities was a breakout session titled *Wellbeing of Managers in leading the Green Transition*, co-conducted by EfVET President, Professor Joachim James Calleja, and EfVET Vice-President for Policy, Arja Flinkman, supported by Annemaija Summanen, from AMS Henkilöstöpalvelut Oy (FI).

This breakout session was the follow-up of another initiative (the *Management Corner*) carried out during the previous EfVET Annual Conference 2022, held in Kuopio (FI). Also conducted by EfVET President and Vice-President for Policy, the *Management Corner* aimed at starting discussions to understand the dimensions of well-being and self-management based on the inputs provided by the participating managers themselves. The main findings of this initiative included:

- Managers’ perceived lack of self-empathy when comparing to their empathy towards others;
- The lock-down during the global pandemic caused an uneasy situation for managers, with VET schools closing and students not being at school;
- Challenging situations leading to tension are rewarded with enthusiasm when solutions are found but, on the other hand, managers tend to deny their feelings and don’t realise when they have achieved a peak;
- Mixed feelings towards staff, i.e., managers want to show they are strong but on the other hand they want to be “easy-going”.

The purpose of the breakout session held during EfVET 32nd Annual Conference 2023 was to look at the issue of well-being at work in a more multidimensional way.

The EfVET President opened the breakout session by addressing the impact of stress on well-being in general, and on well-being of managers in leading the green and digital transitions in particular, considering that it requires them to develop new strategic competences that have repercussions on:

- Organisational functions, processes and events;
- Operations and financial planning;
- Staff and students, and stakeholder collaboration;
- The level of complexity of daily activities, which rely more and more in technology (e.g., use of Artificial Intelligence, remote work, etc.).

Next in the session, the model of the dimensions of well-being developed by Peter Warr (1999), and supplemented by Jari Hakanen (2005) from work exhaustion to work absorption was addressed. Job absorption consists of three separate dimensions: vigor, dedication and immersion in work. Summanen (2019) added to the model the accounts of members of Finnish management teams about the burnout phenomenon, which includes the criteria *Deny*, *Persist*, *Survive* and *Defend*.

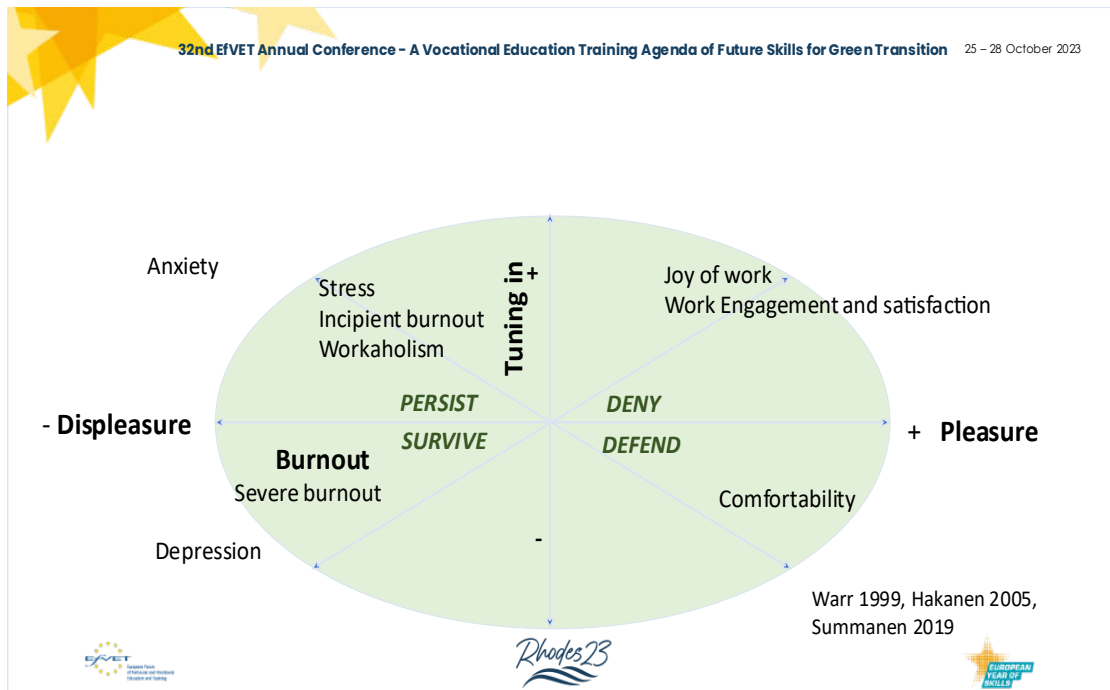


Figure 1 Dimensions of the Well-Being model developed by Warr, P. (1999), supplemented by Hakanen, J. (2005) and Summanen (2019)

Factor analysis showed that the complete version of the Work Engagement and Satisfaction Scale consists of three separate dimensions: vigour, dedication, and absorption. Work engagement was positively related to self-assessed health, work ability, and job satisfaction, and negatively to intentions of quitting one's job (Hakanen, 2005). Burnout and work engagement are the core constructs of subjective work-related well-being, which are related both to staying well at work and to staying at work.

The narrative research presented during the session increased participants' understanding and knowledge about the burnout phenomenon and how Finnish members of the municipal management team experience see and give meaning to it (Summanen, 2019).

EFVET Members' feedback

To foster discussion and to help EfVET collecting first-hand inputs from the participants of the breakout session about this relevant topic, four questions were made as baseline for a group work which goal was to find out, from their own experience, the support of participants' own organizational culture for well-being at work, to increase understanding of the presented dimensions of the Warr's well-being model, work burnout – absorption in work-, and get information about what managers want to emphasize in their well-being:

- How does the management culture/organisational culture support your well-being?
- How to take care of your recovery?
- Do you rely on your own resources, or do you think you also need external mental and physical coaching?
- What aspects would you like to highlight regarding the well-being of a leader?

The manager acts as a change leader in organizations also during the green and digital transitions. The goal for his/her well-being at work is also common in the international context.

Main results of the discussions:

Based on the replies provided by the participants of the breakout session to the questions asked, it was possible to understand that:

1. There can be different types of well-being, depending on the person and his/her needs;
2. It is important to prioritise tasks and to delegate them;
3. The focus should be given to burnout prevention (including a life and work balance and anticipating problems) and to managers' empowerment (including support among colleagues, respecting own boundaries and celebrating achievements);
4. There must be a "disconnecting policy" in organisations, i.e., the right to disconnect;
5. The organisation is based on trust and it is written in values of each organisation. Good organisation and people management support the recovery of managers. Trust should exist between managers and employees. Emotions and the ability to recognize and show them is important at work and interaction skills matter;
6. The first step for well-being is sleeping enough, having enough pauses. Taking care of recovery, nutrition and have a healthy lifestyle;
7. Network of managers. Mental and physical coaching and mentoring helps. The whole organisation may need help if there are a lot of burnouts;
8. Recognising and monitoring well-being in education and training of mental emotional and physical aspects takes into account the interdependence, complexity and integrity of living systems on well-being;
9. The manager must ensure his/her own well-being at work, take responsibility for his/her own coping. Self-management is important, as well as understanding that repeated experiences of stress can be connected to work burnout and low work absorption. If managers experience work burnout, they can choose what kind of support they want for themselves. *Don't pretend it's okay if it's not.*

Recommendations and conclusion

Managers do not have all the required tools and strategic competences to have a clear vision on where to take their colleagues and staff. They need to be flexible and to recognise an opportunity to build confidence on themselves and on others when they see it. Only this way can managers be able to have and transmit confidence and motivation, passion, and drive.

The over 50 EfVET members who participated in the breakout session demonstrated in an open discussion the importance of the managers' well-being at work and in the management of the organisations they lead during the green and digital transitions.

There should be preventive investment in the well-being of managers, and suitable approaches should be considered, as suggested by the participants during the discussions held. Different countries across the EU have different supporting mechanisms (e.g., in Finland, health services allow people to have access to psychological support). It would be relevant if such best practices could be implemented in countries that lack this kind of support. Learning from one another can help reshape our education and training systems, particularly when we shift towards conceptualising education as lifelong learning— the wealth of experiences



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by all the different sectors and levels of education at European level but also at global level can support the adoption of new and better practices.

The well-being of managers has become a top priority for remote work and for coping with the blurring of boundaries between professional and personal life.

EfVET Members are investing in mental health resources, implementing wellness programs and promoting work-life balance. The importance of the managers' ability to work well should be put on the management agenda.

EfVET will establish a new Thematic Team on this issue, urging its Members to join.

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