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SPECIFICS OF ASSESSING SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY CHANGES

The task of assessing the professional performance of teachers, particularly directors of general secondary education institutions, has recently become increasingly relevant in various countries, including Ukraine, due to the changing powers and functions of the head of an educational institution. School directors are no longer simply managers whose responsibilities are limited to administrative and operational tasks. Today's school directors determine the overall development policy of the institution and initiate changes that inspire team growth.

Why is there a need to revise existing models and technologies for assessing the professional performance of school directors? We believe the answer lies in several key factors. The emergence of numerous new responsibilities for school principals is closely linked to the growing number of challenges. These challenges stem not only from innovations in education – such as inclusive education, distance learning, and institutional autonomy-but also from broader *socio-economic* (e.g., population migration, demographic shifts, financial instability), *man-made* (e.g., industrial accidents due to infrastructure deterioration, environmental pollution), and *emergency phenomena* (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic [6], epidemiological outbreaks, military conflicts, terrorist threats, and natural or man-made disasters), etc.

For instance, the need to ensure access to education – both physical and intellectual [7; 9] – for diverse student groups, and to safeguard the educational environment during wartime in Ukraine, has required school directors to adopt alternative models for organizing school space. They must create conditions for the safe presence of students and teachers on school premises, especially in areas near combat zones, and integrate digital technologies into both educational and administrative processes. Successfully addressing these new tasks demands not only equipping school principals with new skills and professional competencies, but also rethinking the fundamental purpose and objectives of their professional activity.

In developed countries, the professional role of a school director is viewed through the lens of leadership [3] – both managerial and pedagogical – aimed at creating conditions for the continuous growth of learners within a safe, comfortable, and inclusive educational environment [2]. Accordingly, the assessment of their professional performance should motivate school leaders to pursue ongoing professional development [8], focused on acquiring new skills and methods to enhance student learning outcomes [1; 4] and support teacher development.

In our view, significant changes have occurred in the understanding of the primary goal of Ukrainian secondary school principals. As is well known, performance assessment is based on analyzing the extent to which the stated goal has been achieved. Although the professional standard for school principals in Ukraine defines their goal as the direct management of the

institution – encompassing administrative, economic, and other functions – many current principals believe their true mission is to create a safe, comfortable, and inclusive educational environment where every student has the opportunity for continuous development [5]. This interpretation aligns fully with the concept of leadership and reflects the evolving role of modern educational leaders.

Unfortunately, the current model for assessing principals of general secondary education institutions in Ukraine has several conceptual and procedural shortcomings that require revision and improvement. Key weaknesses include: the formalistic nature of evaluation procedures and the declarative conclusions made without in-depth analysis of the principal's actual management actions and their impact on educational quality; the lack of clear indicators for evaluating principal effectiveness; limited involvement of educational stakeholders in the assessment process; a weak connection between evaluation results and the identification of areas for individual professional growth; and insufficient objectivity and, at times, evaluator competence. These issues highlight the urgent need to establish strict criteria for selecting experts for certification commissions [10].

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