IRISH PRIMARY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP DURING COVID-19

Principals' Study Report 2020

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About This Report

Foreword

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused major disruption over the past few months, forcing organisations globally to quickly adapt to the unprecedented shift in changing workplace demands. As a result, 3,240 primary schools in Ireland with 37,839 staff and 559,365 students have been facing immense, unforeseen challenges unlike anything previously experienced by this generation.

In order to help Irish primary schools to overcome these challenges, this national study focuses on principals as managers and leaders of school communities and the provision of digital education at Irish primary level during the lockdown. Principals are leaders who directly lead and influence staff, students, and parents during the crisis. Principals are crucial figures for establishing and fostering an environment which promotes successful practices, making them gatekeepers, to prioritise what is educationally and culturally of merit. Principals, as school leaders, play an important role in ensuring the school is running and that the school meets the educational, social and emotional needs of its students.

This crisis has forced educational systems across the globe to move online and is likely to transform what teaching and learning looks like in the coming years. This timely research project focusing on the principals in Irish primary schools plays a significant role in navigating education through the COVID-19 pandemic. It truly shows that research matters for educators and the youth of our nation.

The research team extend their gratitude to the Dean of Research at Trinity College Dublin and the Director of Research at the School of Education, Trinity College Dublin for promoting this report.

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Dr. Na Fu (FCIPD, FTCD) is an Associate Professor, Director for MSc HRM at Trinity Business School and the Co-Director at the Trinity Centre for Digital Business. Her primary research interest is focused on strategic human resource management issues relevant to organisational growth and development. She has led a number of research projects in both the private and public sectors around people management relevant to organisational growth and innovation.

Ms. Tam Nguyen completed an MSc in Human Resource Management 2019/2020 at Trinity Business School, Trinity College Dublin. Tam is passionate about helping people to develop and reach their full potential in addition to assisting organisations to achieve business goals through talents.
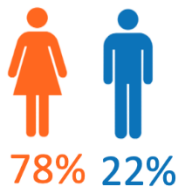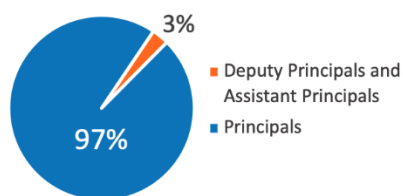
Acknowledgements

Key Findings in Numbers

PARTICIPANTS' PROFILE

Female **Male**

78% 22%

Role

- 97% Principals
- 3% Deputy Principals and Assistant Principals

Tenure

- 18% 20+years
- 37% 10-19 years
- 45% <10 years

Age

- 30-39 years old: 17%
- 40-49 years old: 30%
- 50-59 years old: 45%
- 60+ years old: 7%

School size

- Up to 100 students: 36.1%
- 100-499 students: 57.9 %
- 500+ students: 6%
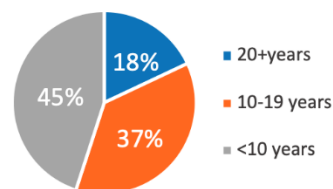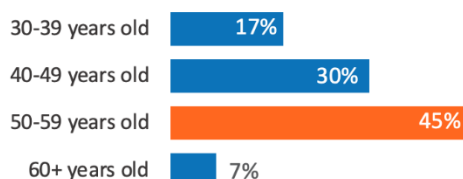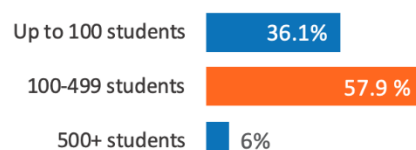
PRINCIPAL WELLBEING
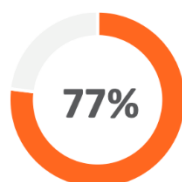
77% overwhelmed by the crisis
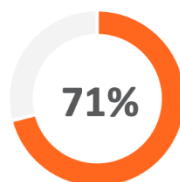
71% emotionally exhausted

59% isolated and disconnected

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

96% agreed that their schools carried out and completed core tasks well

95% – 97% agreed that their schools adapted well to changes during the crisis

93% agreed that they made changes to the way their core tasks are completed

79% agreed that they initiated better ways of doing core tasks
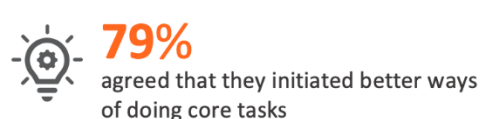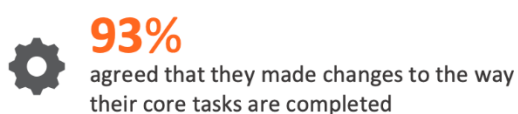
SUPPORT FROM STAFF MEMBERS

High human capital — **90%+** — reported that their staff were highly skilled, creative and experts at their particular jobs, developed new ideas and knowledge and shared insights/expertise with one another.

High level of staff trust — **90%+** — agreed that their staff members trusted them in a position of leadership and trusted each other.

High adaptivity — **90%+** — agreed that their staff changed quickly to adapt to new conditions, sought new ways to solve problems and quickly responded to change.

COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION WITH THE DES (DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS)

	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
I am clear about decision-making processes.	54%	19%	28%
I am kept up-to-date about important issues.	53%	14%	33%
I hear enough from the DES about how everything is running.	62%	12%	25%
Suggestions that I make to the DES are taken on board.	52%	39%	9%
If changes occur, I am given the reason why.	67%	15%	18%
I am consulted by the DES before decisions are taken that affect my work.	86%	8%	6%

PRINCIPALS' LEADERSHIP

85%
Respect and encourage

80%
Delegate and promote participation

55%
Provide advice and direction

EFFECTIVE CONNECTIONS WITH MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDERS

- Staff members: 70%
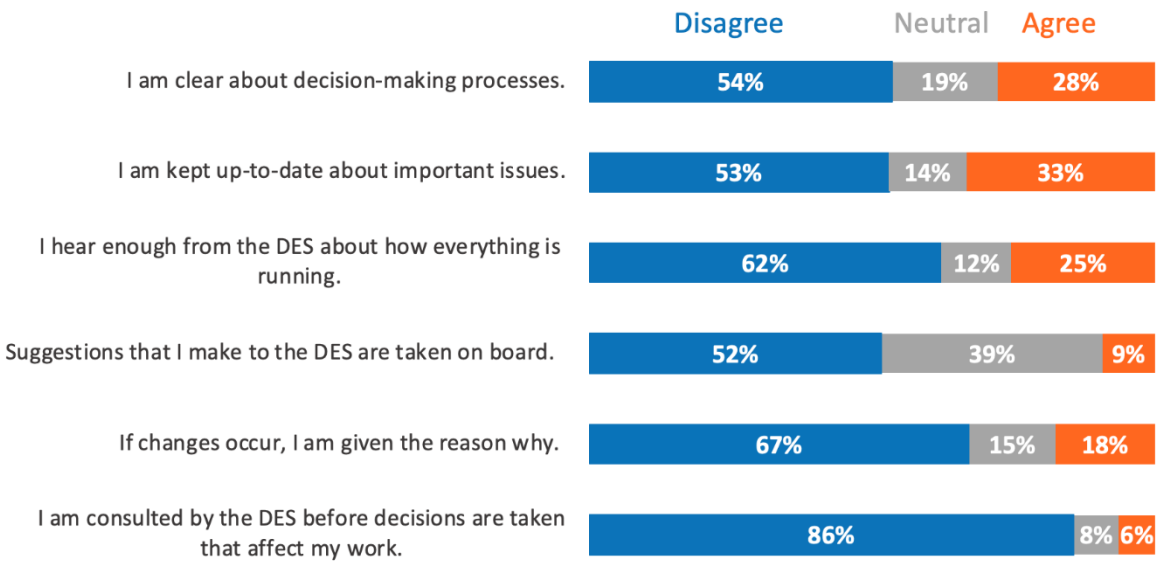- All parents: 57%
- Board of Management: 52%
- Parents' Association: 41%

ATTITUDE TOWARDS ONLINE LEARNING DURING THE LOCKDOWN

I like the idea of using online learning
- 70% Agree/Neutral
- 30% Disagree

Online learning is an effective method of learning
- 68% Agree/Neutral
- 32% Disagree

Interaction with online platforms is easy and flexible
- 68% Agree/Neutral
- 32% Disagree

Online learning platforms have most of the functions that staff need to teach effectively
- 57% Agree/Neutral
- 43% Disagree

Online learning can assist student learning efficiency
- 67% Agree/Neutral
- 33% Disagree

Online learning can assist student learning performance
- 66% Agree/Neutral
- 34% Disagree

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Executive Summary

This report was based on a major national study - 'School Leadership in Response to the COVID-19 Crisis'. The study is being led and conducted by a team of researchers at Trinity College Dublin and was formed in response to concerns from teaching management professionals.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, school closures were implemented by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET). Accordingly, given the changing demands and shift in the new way of working (including teaching remotely, communicating with staff via online platforms & planning for a safe return to school), many school principals have experienced a significant level of stress. This report identifies ways that principals navigated the initial stage of the pandemic and how leading during the pandemic has affected their personal wellbeing.

The purpose of this study was to explore leadership experiences in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It seeks to provide information which will inform supports that school management teams may benefit from. This report outlines a set of key themes that principals have expressed as being of importance regarding their role and demands, in addition to resources which principals feel might be of benefit to management teams going forward.

Based on an extensive literature review, a series of theoretically important factors were identified for building individual wellbeing and organisational performance during crisis. A questionnaire was designed including questions from published articles to ensure the reliability and validity of the results.

The survey examined several influential factors that potentially affect a range of principal and school outcomes including:

- Principal wellbeing
- Staff adaptivity
- School performance
- Online teaching adoption

The main drivers of these outcomes that were explored included:

- Communication and consultation from the Department of Education and Skills (DES)
- Support from staff members
- Principals' Leadership
- Effective connection with multiple stakeholders

The researchers carried out a detailed analysis of the data which involved statistical modelling to identify the drivers that have the greatest impact on these outcomes.

This executive summary provides a broad overview of the main findings from the survey. The main report provides a more in-depth overview of the findings based on the quantitative responses and comments shared by survey participants.

Summary of Key Findings

Overall, the findings are highlighted below:

- There has been a significant increase in job demands placed on school principals since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has proved challenging for many with regards to maintaining a work-life balance.
- The majority of principals have learned new skills under pressure to help them to adapt to and navigate school closures.

- The majority of principals are confident that their staff trust them and are confident in the management of the school.
- Principals highlighted their job satisfaction for working with students and staff members, expressing that their teams had been creative and bright and had coped well to complete core tasks during the crisis.
- The most adopted leadership style by principals was transformative leadership, followed by participative and directive leadership.
- Principals expressed dedication to engaging with parents and students to ensure that online learning was carried out to the best of their ability during school closures.
- Principals expected that receiving advanced notice before public directives are issued would be beneficial in helping them to navigate inquiries from parents etc.
- Teaching Principals experienced a significant increase in job demands during school closures with regards to managerial duties in addition to setting up and monitoring the online learning of their students.
- Principals of special schools and students with additional needs encountered difficulty with regards to accessing supports to provide individual students with appropriate online learning opportunities.
- Principals feel that advice and guidance for reopening/staying open with regards to safety, hygiene and staff/student illness procedures would be of great benefit to them.
- Inadequate broadband, lack of digital knowledge, no access to devices/learning materials; lack of relevant/targeted professional development and unavailability of funding were expressed as challenges for engaging with digital learning.
- Anxiety over the incredibly high workload, impossible balancing act, demands in supporting school children, managing own children and family, uncertainty about returning to work, and uncertainty about their future role and availability were commented on by principals in relation to their wellbeing and concerns.

Conclusion and Key Recommendations

Overall, the findings highlight that principals are confident in their abilities and their staff to perform a wide range of skills in their work roles, and that they have the propensity to deal with changes that arise.

Following the analysis of the data, the research highlighted three areas in which interventions might be made to enhance a successful transition to living with COVID-19.

- **Improved communications and greater involvement of principals**

  Possible interventions here include: revitalising the DES communication and consultation system and making more use of expertise from principals to enhance the effectiveness of this process. Involvement with networks is strongly encouraged to provide a platform for principals to share and exchange knowledge and information, as well as for staff members in schools. More explicit use of knowledge sharing and knowledge dissemination such as online conferences, seminars and workshops as a central activity need to be in place. The communities of practice are a necessity in order to enhance collective ability to adapt to changes; for example, through regular principal and staff surveys and focus groups.

- **Providing professional development opportunities**

  It is recommended that leadership crisis management training is to be provided for principals and their management teams in order to enhance their ability to cope during this pandemic and future potential crises. Increased attention placed on shared/distributed leadership, particularly during times of crisis would help to alleviate the increase in workload placed on

the principal. Optional team-building training should also be accessible to school management teams.

- **Offering additional support**

    It is recommended that adequate IT infrastructure and support needs to be put in place for principals to enable them to meet directives. This includes: ensuring that adequate WIFI is available; equipping principals with devices and providing IT professional development in the areas of digital learning and communication. It is also recommended that supplemental individualised support (e.g. SNA and/or learning support teacher) is provided for students with additional needs (economic and special educational needs), to further allow the principal to focus their efforts on managerial duties. Also recommended is an online learning platform designed specifically for students with special educational needs (SEN).

Recommendations for Immediate Action

| Suggested Actions	Recommendations for Immediate Specific Actions	Relevant Stakeholders
Isolating children	Clarity is required regarding quarantining/isolation.	TÚSLA
Contact tracing	Fast response to contact tracing needed (less than 24 hours after a positive case is confirmed in the school community).	Health Service Executive (HSE)
Regional helplines	To ensure that prompt advice can be accessed by principals when required.	
Sanitising equipment	Direct provision of sanitising materials to avoid delays and inconsistencies with private companies.	
Substitution	Supply panel needs to increase in size to cover high levels of staff absence.	Department of Education and Skills (DES)
Administrative duties	Additional administrative staff to assist with increase in volume of phone calls (to parents, HSE etc.)	
Postponement of new initiatives and inspections	To allow principals to focus their full attention on keeping their schools functioning during this crisis.	
Principal wellbeing	Where possible, release important information/circulars during the school working day to ensure that principals have sufficient time in the evenings to maintain a work-life balance. Avoid releasing important information/circulars both at weekends and during the October school closure period to ensure that principals have opportunity to rest and recuperate.	
Working digitally	Selection/recommendation and financing of appropriate online learning platforms to use in cases of class/school closures. Enhanced training is required to prepare for effective hybrid/remote learning.	
Professional development, collaborative learning & sharing communities	Continuation of provision of webinars. Organisation of online conferences on Leadership & Working Digitally run by experts in the areas of IT and Human Resources. Focus groups/surveys to report, evaluate and enhance the effectiveness of supports.	Independent researchers, PDST, Unions, Education Centres, NCSE & other relevant stakeholders

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The context in which this survey was conducted could not be more challenging. Firstly, due to COVID-19 and the rise in uncertainty associated with it, there has been an unprecedented increase in job demands for principals. Following guidelines from the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET), Irish schools closed on 12th March 2020 in an attempt to reduce the spread of COVID-19. This initial (3-week) closure was extended through to the end of the academic year.

Principals, who would usually have time off during normal school closure periods (e.g. Easter and summer), were instead faced with an increased volume of challenging work demands as a result of the unforeseen COVID-19 crisis. From the time of school closure on 12th March, 2020 (Department of Education and Skills, 2020a), to the reopening of schools in late August, principals faced a period of six months with increased job demands. As the pandemic is still ongoing, these demands are ongoing.

Based on an extensive literature review, several theoretically important factors were identified for building principals' wellbeing, staff adaptivity, school performance and online teaching adoption. They included communication and consultation with the DES, support from staff members, principals' leadership and effective connections with multiple stakeholders. A summary of the major factors and outcomes explored in the research are presented in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1 Drivers and Outcomes Explored in the Survey

Drivers	Outcomes
• **Communication & consultation with the DES** • **Support from staff members** • **Principals' leadership** • **Effective connections**	• **Principals' wellbeing** • **Staff adaptivity** • **School performance** • **Online teaching adoption**
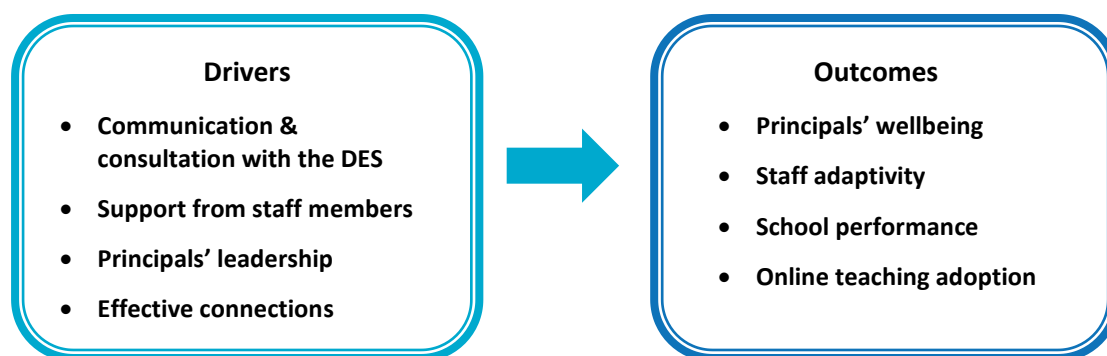
Comprehending the effects of these issues on principals is critical. Therefore, the information provided by the principals in this survey is of vital importance. The responses from principals of 634 schools were analysed and interpreted.

At this time of change, the evidence provided in this survey is invaluable in devising appropriate responses to the needs of staff and developing a culture of transformation through employee engagement and empowerment. The findings will also assist in developing suitable changes to management programmes and designing appropriate HR approaches to help improve schools' ability to function effectively within the new normal.

1.2 Structure of the report

The report contains seven main sections. Section 2 provides the methods used in this project. Section 3 is an overview of the respondents who participated in the survey. Section 4 provides an overview of the survey's findings for the overall sample and for key categories of respondents. This incorporates principals' perspectives on the main issues that they encountered while navigating managing their schools during a pandemic. Section 5 details findings from the 'key drivers analysis' undertaken with respect to the main outcomes investigated. Section 6 provides the themes of comments from respondents. Section 7 concludes the report and includes key recommendations.

2 Methodology

This project involves four stages, i.e. literature review, instrument development, data collection, and analyses, as reported below.

2.1 Literature Review

In order to identify the key drivers for effective management of crisis and to develop the instrument, the research team conducted an extensive review of literature on leadership, crisis management, wellbeing and education effectiveness etc. Leaders and their relationships with people and organisations have been given great attention by academia and practitioners (Marks and Printy, 2003; Hulpia *et al.*, 2012; Castelli, 2016; Anderson, 2017; Gerards, de Grip and Baudewijns, 2018; Shahid and Muchiri, 2019; Thien, 2019). Given the challenges that arise in times of crisis such as COVID-19, leaders experience a significant increase in demand as the breadth and depth of their responsibilities intensify and the pressure of executing decisions under extreme time pressure mounts at a rapidly increasing rate (Ash and Smallman, 2018). Research on leadership during crisis reveals that it is essential that leaders exhibit a specific set of skills and competencies that will aid in navigating the crisis (Boin and Hart, 2005; Wooten and James, 2008; Kapucu and Ustun, 2018; Duffy, 2019; Liu, Iles and Herovic, 2020). Drawing upon the literature review, this study systematically examines principals' experiences, attitudes and behaviours in navigating the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.2 Instrument Development

Based on the extensive literature review, a survey instrument was development to capture principals' experiences and expectations during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond. It included the key constructs such as leadership, support, communication, participation, wellbeing, and performance.

2.3 Data Collection

The research was carried out between May and July 2020. The primary method of completing the survey was on-line, with the option of obtaining a paper-based version directly from the researchers. An invitation letter was issued by the research team to relevant stakeholders to advise them about the survey and encourage their support (e.g. IPPN, INTO, NCSE, PDST, TC, National Education Centres etc.). The survey was sent to all Irish primary school principals. This was followed up with two reminders from the research team and the featuring of the survey on an Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) newsletter.

2.4 Data Analyses

Analyses of the questionnaire included descriptive, predictive and prescriptive. The descriptive statistics were used to explore the participants' views on different aspects of their work and schools during the COVID-19 crisis. Predictive analysis was then adopted to predict critical factors influencing principals' wellbeing, staff adaptivity and school performance. The results from descriptive and predictive analyses were finally integrated to provide some recommendations on the intervention strategies that could help principals to manage school performance effectively during the crisis as well as to ensure their well-being. Thematic analysis was carried out on the reflective, open-comment section of the survey as this permits for precise qualitative analysis of the meaning of the data in a context.

3 Survey Participation

3.1 Response Rate

There are 3,240 primary schools in Ireland, employing 37,839 staff and educating 559,365 students (Department of Education and Skills, 2020b). An online survey was sent out to 3,240 principals in all Irish primary schools listed on the national website www.education.ie. After several reminders, 708 responses were received (26%). After deleting incomplete responses, the final sample size was 634 (20%).

3.2 Breakdown of the Sample

Figures 3.1 to 3.4 provide an overview of the respondents' backgrounds.

Here is the breakdown of the sample.

- Gender: 78% were female, and 22% were male.
- Role: 97% were Principals; 3% were Deputy Principals and Assistant Principals.
- Age: 45% were aged 50-59, 30% were aged 40-49; 17% were aged by 30-39; and 7% were above 60 years old.
- Tenure: 45% of the respondents had tenure less then 10 years; 37% between 10-19 years, and 18% with 20+ years' tenure.
- School size: 36.1% of the respondents from schools of less than 100 students, 57.9% from the schools of 100-499 students, and only 6% were from the schools of over 500 students.
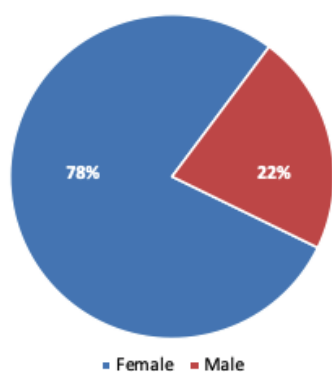

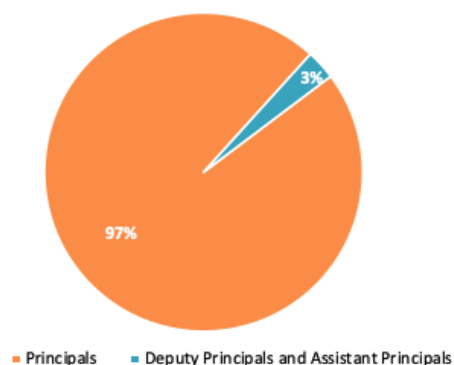**Figure 3.1 Respondents by Gender**

Figure 3.2 Respondents by Roles
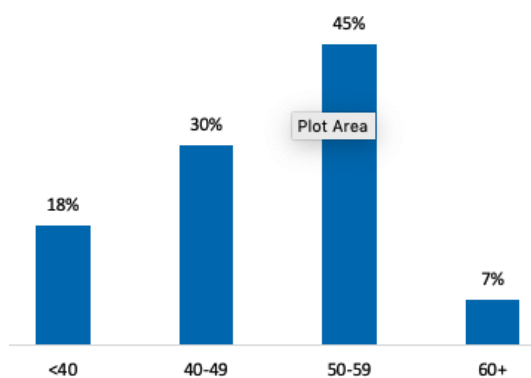

Figure 3.3 Respondents by Age

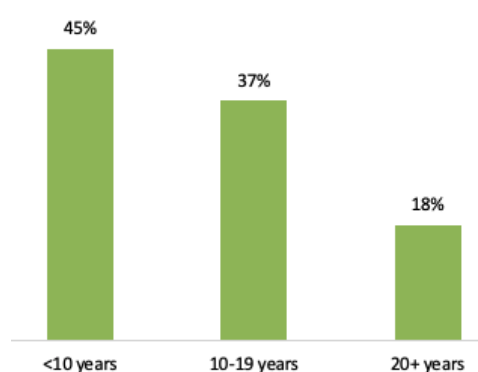**Figure 3.4 Respondents by Tenure**

Figure 3.5 Respondents by School Size
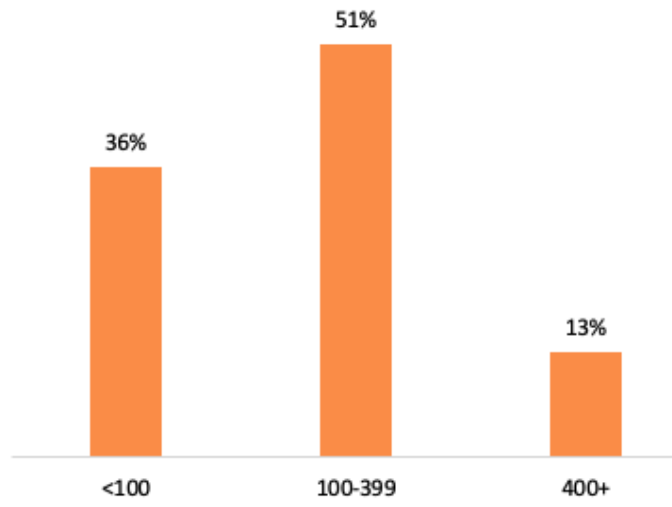
4 Survey Findings

This section provides an overview of the main findings from the survey. These findings are based on principals' experiences of their work and schools during the COVID-19 crisis. The report of the findings will present the outcomes and influential factors as follows: principals' wellbeing, staff adaptivity, school performance, online teaching adoption, communication and consultation with the DES, support from staff members, leadership, and effective connection with multiple stakeholders. In each section, an overview of the findings for the entire sample is provided.

4.1 Principals' Wellbeing

Wellbeing is very important to individuals and organisations. It is a multi-dimensional construct, where emotional (e.g. morale and distress) and cognitive (e.g. job satisfaction) factors come together to impact wellbeing at work (Hart and Cooper, 2002). Wellbeing is an indicator of a healthy workforce and is important to organisations' long-term sustainability and growth. In addition, wellbeing is associated with many outcomes of managerial interest such as job performance, retention, absenteeism, productivity, and organisational performance (Wright and Huang, 2012).

As a result of the crisis, many principals are disconcerted and distressed with feelings of uncertainty and anxiety. This survey captures principal wellbeing with this in mind, i.e. illbeing such as being overwhelmed by the crisis, emotional exhaustion and isolation. This section provides a summary of respondents' views in relation to these aspects. Figure 4.1 presents the results of principals' feelings and experience of their wellbeing during the crisis.

Figure 4.1 Principal Wellbeing
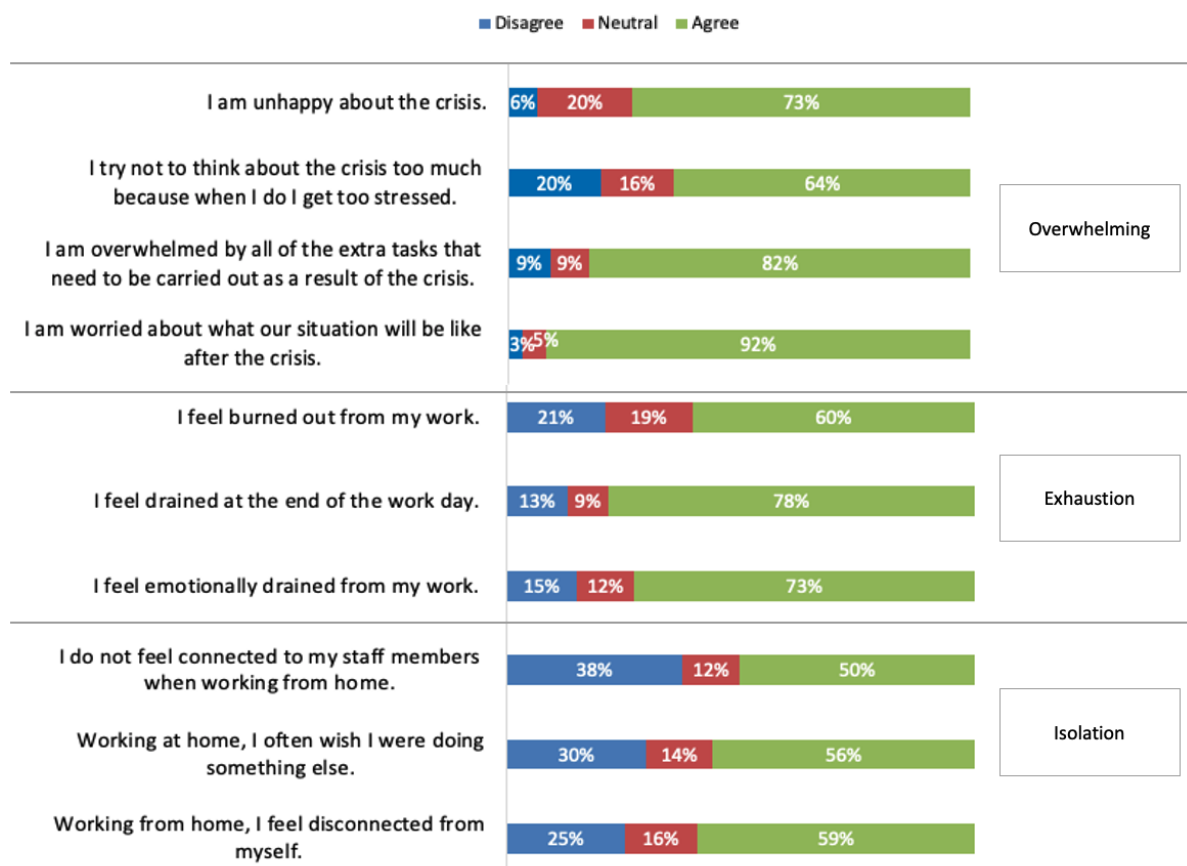
The results highlight that the majority of the school leaders experienced a low level of wellbeing evidenced by negative feelings relating to the crisis, a high level of exhaustion and less connection.

- 73% were unhappy with the crisis;
- 64% tried not to think about the crisis because they would get too stressed;
- 82% were overwhelmed by the extra tasks as a result of the crisis;
- 92% of the respondents felt worried about their situation after the crisis.
- 60% felt burnout from their work;
- 78% of the participants felt drained at the end of the workday;
- 73% felt emotionally drained from their work.
- 56% reported that they often wished to do other things when working at home;
- 56% reported that they often wished to do other things when working at home;
- 59% felt disconnected with themselves.

4.2 Staff Adaptivity

Staff adaptivity is an important indicator for talented workforce within schools. The staff adaptivity examined in this survey refers to the extent to which staff have openness to change and are able to adapt to these changes within the working environment (Patterson *et al.*, 2005; de Poel, Stoker and van der Zee, 2012). When staff are adaptive, schools are more likely to cope well with the changes that occur as a result of the crisis. Principals were asked to what extent they agree with the statements in relation to school performance: "*During the crisis, my staff members in school …*". Figure 4.2 presents findings regarding staff adaptivity during the lockdown.

Figure 4.2 Staff Adaptivity
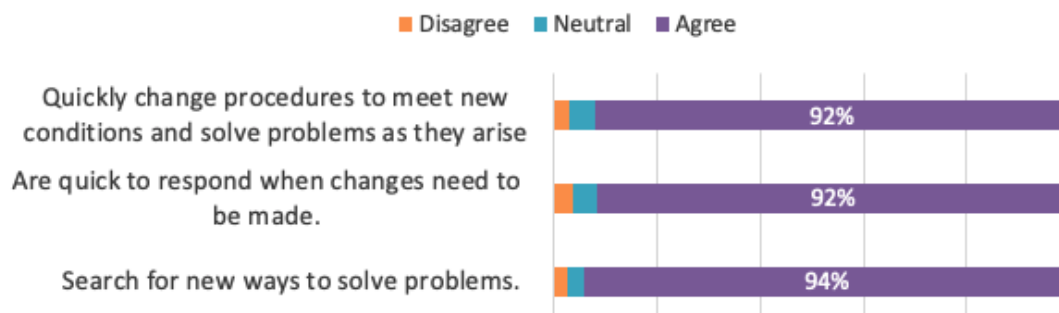
Overall, principals provided a very high evaluation on their staff's adaptivity.

- 92% of the sample agreed that their staff members changed quickly to adapt new conditions, solved problems as they arise and quickly responded to change.
- 94% agreed that their staff members sought for new ways to solve problems.

4.3 School Performance

Performance is broadly understood as how an individual or an organisation carries out tasks (Griffin, Neal and Parker, 2007). It has become an increasingly complex concept due to the changing nature of work and organisations.

Considering the context of lockdown, in addition to focusing on the functionality of schools (proficiency), two other performance measures were introduced as the proactivity and adaptivity to school performance. Principals were asked to what extent they agree with the statements in relation to school performance: "*As a school during the Covid-19 closure, we have …*". Figure 4.3 presents findings regarding school performance during the lockdown.

Figure 4.3 School Performance
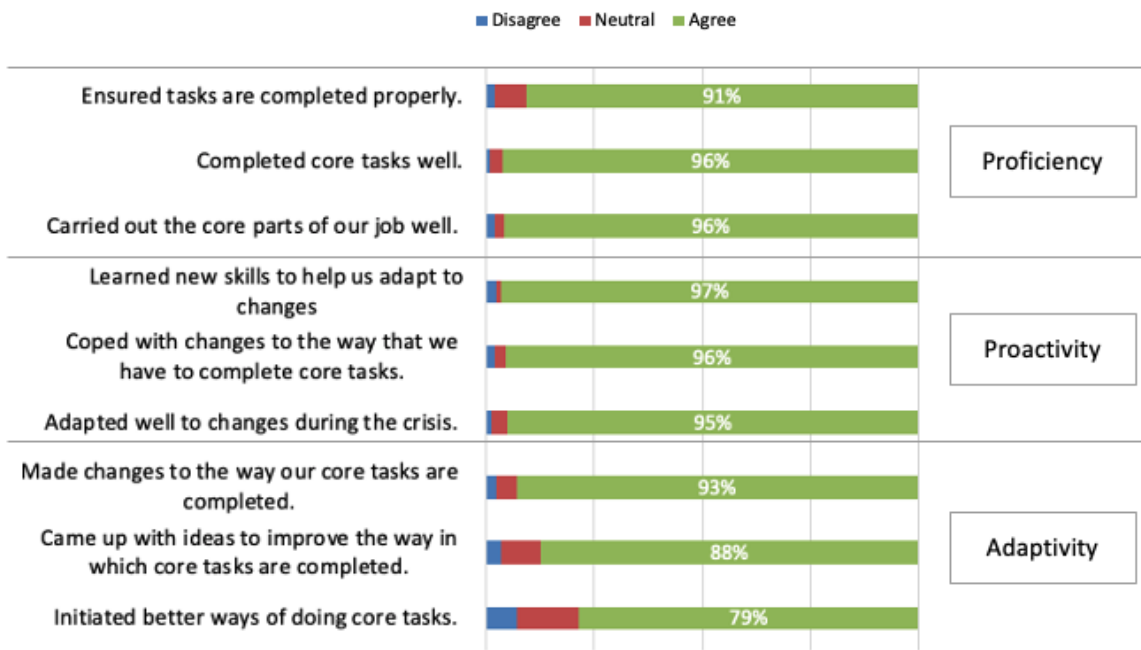
The majority of the participants provided a positive view on performance of their schools during the crisis, particularly with regards to proficiency, adaptivity and proactivity.

- 96% of the respondents agreed that their schools carried out and completed core tasks well.
- 95% - 97% agreed that their schools were highly adaptable to changes.
- 93% reported that they made changes to the way their core tasks are completed.
- 88% indicated that they came up with ideas to improve the way in which core tasks are completed.
- 79% confirmed that they initiated better ways of doing core tasks.

4.4 Online Teaching Adoption

Principals were asked to report their perspectives on the adoption of online learning during the school closures due to the pandemic. The data highlights mixed responses from the respondents as shown in Figure 4.4.

- Almost one-third of the participants had positive attitudes towards online learning and another one-third had negative attitudes towards online teaching.
- In terms of the usability of online learning platforms, 32% of the respondents felt easy and flexible when interacting with online learning platforms and another 32% disagreed with this.
- 39% reported that online learning forms contained most of the necessary functions to help the staff teach effectively while 43% disagreed with this.
- 37% confirmed that learning to use online learning platforms were easy to most of their staff while 21% disagreed with this.
- For online learning effectiveness, around a quarter (26-27%) agreed that online learning can assist student learning performance and efficiency while a third (33-34%) disagreed with that.

Figure 4.4 Online Teaching Adoption

Legend: Disagree, Neutral, Agree

Statement	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Category
I like the idea of using online learning.	33%	37%	30%	Positive attitude towards online learning
Online learning is an effective method of learning.	32%	39%	29%	
Online learning is a good idea.	25%	49%	27%	
Interaction with online learning platforms is easy and flexible.	32%	36%	32%	Easy to use
Online learning platforms have most of the functions that staff need in order to teach effectively.	43%	18%	39%	
Learning how to use online learning platforms (e.g. Seesaw, Zoom etc.) was easy for most of our staff.	21%	42%	37%	
Online learning platforms can assist student learning performance.	34%	39%	26%	Online learning effectiveness
Online learning platforms can assist student learning efficiency.	33%	41%	27%	

4.5 Communication and Consultation with the DES

The survey examined the principals' experiences of communication and consultation with the DES during the initial school closures. Figure 4.5 presents findings concerning communication and consultation with the DES during the crisis.

Figure 4.5: Communication and Consultation with the DES

Legend: Disagree, Neutral, Agree

Statement	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Category
I am clear about decision-making processes.	54%	19%	28%	Communication
I am kept up-to-date about important issues.	53%	14%	33%	
I hear enough from the DES about how everything is running.	62%	12%	25%	
Suggestions that I make to the DES are taken on board.	52%	39%	9%	Consultation
If changes occur, I am given the reason why.	67%	15%	18%	
I am consulted by the DES before decisions are taken that affect my work.	86%	8%	6%	

It should be noted that this study was carried out during school closures, prior to the release of government guidelines and timelines regarding the reopening of schools.

- 46% of the respondents reported that they were neutral or clear about decision-making processes.
- 47% report being neutral or positive about being kept up-to-date about important issues.
- 37% reported being neutral or positive about hearing enough about how everything is running.
- 47% reported being neutral or positive that suggestions they make are taken on board.
- 33% report being neutral or positive about being given the reason why when changes occur.
- 14% reported being neutral or positive about being consulted before decisions were taken that affect their work.

4.6 Support from Staff Members

The survey examined principals' experiences with support received from staff members. In particular, the skills and trust from staff were investigated. Skilled staff consider the knowledge, skills and abilities of staff members that schools can utilise (Subramaniam and Youndt, 2005). Trust from staff refers to principals' perceptions of trustworthiness that team members have about them as leaders (Langfred, 2004). Figure 4.6 shows the findings in relation to these aspects.

Figure 4.6 Support from Staff Members
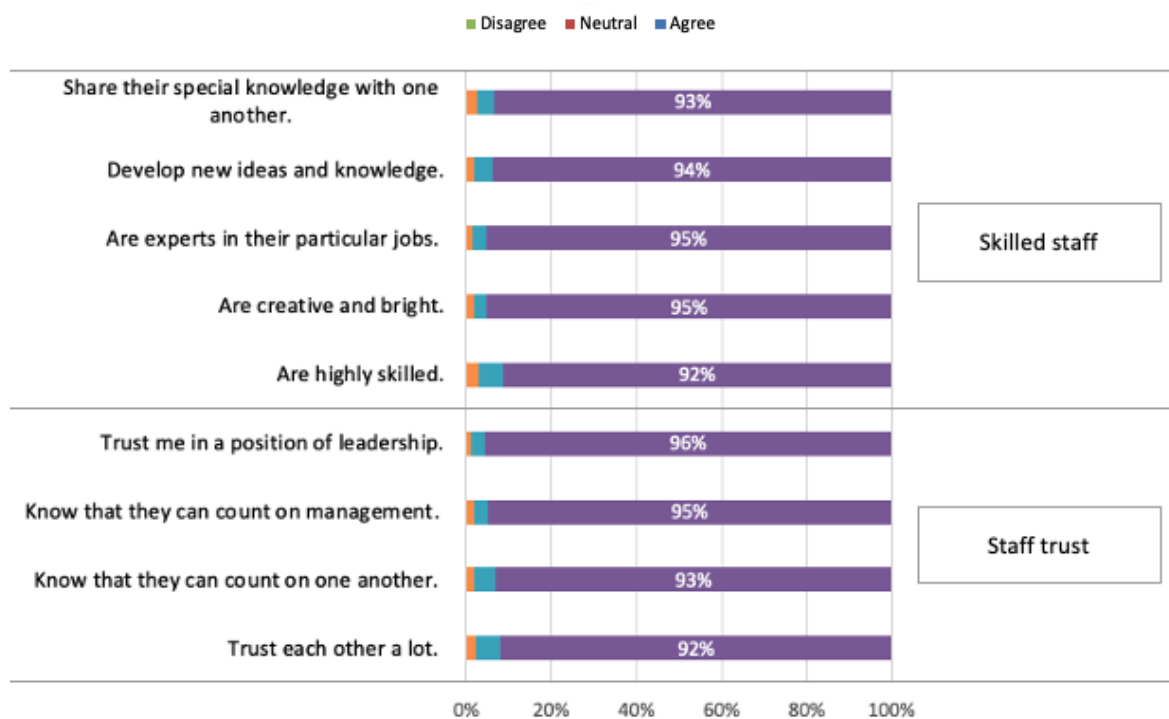
Overall, principals perceived a very high level of support from their staff members.

- 93% of the respondents reported that their staff members shared special knowledge with one another.
- 94% reported that their members developed new ideas and knowledge.
- 95% confirmed that their members were creative and experts at their particular jobs.
- 92% agreed that their members were highly skilled.
- 96% of the respondents agreed that their staff members trusted them in a position of leadership.
- 95% agreed that their members knew that they could count on management.
- 93 % agreed that their members knew that they could count on other colleagues.
- 92% agreed that their members trusted each other a lot.
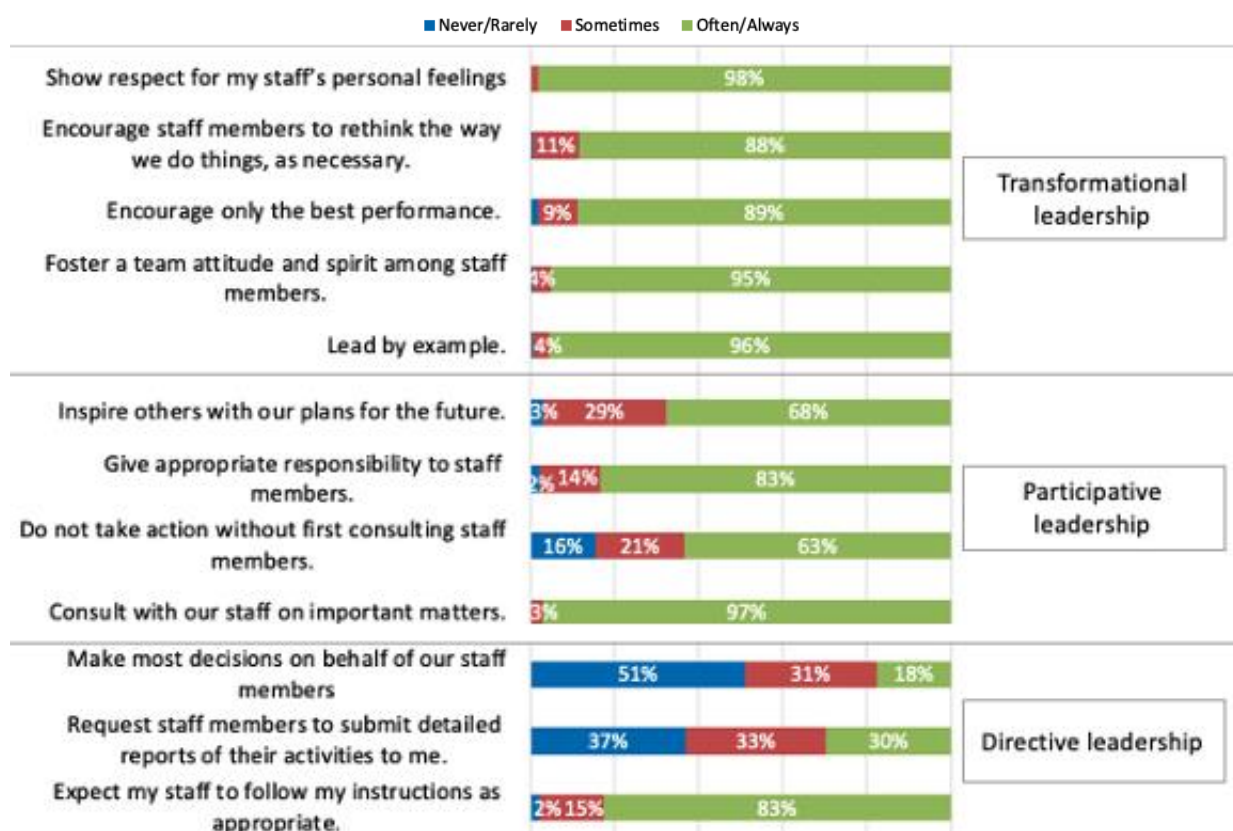
4.7 Principals' Leadership

The survey explored principals' leadership during the crisis. Three types of leadership were examined: participative, transformational and directive leadership. Participative leadership involves joint decision making and/or shared input in decision making by a manager and their staff (Somech, 2005). This leadership style can enhance decision-making quality (Scully, Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1995), improve the standard of the work lives of teachers, their motivation and overall job satisfaction (Armenakis, Harris and Mossholder, 1993; Smylie, Lazarus and Brownlee-Conyers, 1996; Somech, 2002, 2005).

Transformational leadership is a leadership style that encourages and inspires employees to change and innovate during organisational transformations (Bass, 1985; Bass and Avolio, 1993; Bass and Riggio, 2006), and has been regarded as an effective leadership style to manage work, people, and organisations during change and crisis (Nissinen, 2001; Anderson, 2017). Research has demonstrated that transformational leaders positively influence organisation performance (Maley, 2019; Malinen *et al.*, 2019; Montani *et al.*, 2019), staff outcomes including staff performance (Adamu, Mohamad and Rahman, 2016) and staff resilience (Kennedy, Landon and Maynard, 2016; Lester, Lester and Saboe, 2018; Hartmann *et al.*, 2019; Hartwig *et al.*, 2020).

Directive leadership can be defined as *"providing staff with a framework for making decisions and following through with them as per the principal's vision"* (Fiedler, 1989, 1995).

All three of the above leadership styles are associated with high organisational outcomes (Sagie *et al.*, 2002; Maley, 2019). Therefore, it is positive that principals displayed characteristics of each while navigating the school closure. Figure 4.7 shows the findings in relation to these leadership behaviours that reflect three leadership styles.

Figure 4.7 Leadership

Overall, principals showed high levels of transformational and participative leadership and relatively low levels of directive leadership.

- 90% of respondents indicated that they often or always respect for staff's personal feelings (98%); encourage staff to rethink the way we do things (88%), encourage best performance (89%), foster a team spirit (85%) and lead by example (96%).
- 97% consulted with their staff on important matters.
- 83% gave appropriate responsibility to staff members.
- 68% inspired other with their plans for the future.
- 63% did not take action without first consulting staff members.
- 83% expected staff to follow instructions as appropriate.
- 30% requested staff members to submit detailed reports.
- 18% of respondents made decisions on behalf of their staff.

4.8 Effective Connections with Multiple Stakeholders

Effective connections with multiple stakeholders were very important for schools to function well during the crisis. Relational coordination was used to measure the high-quality communication between the school leaders and other important stakeholders including the Board of Management, staff members, Parents' Association and entire parent body. Relational coordination was developed by Gittell and her colleagues (Gittell, 2000, 2002b, 2002a; Gittell *et al.*, 2010). Relational coordination is defined as "*a mutually reinforcing process of interaction between communication and relationships carried out for the purpose of task integration*" (Gittell, 2002a, p. 301).

Relational coordination is operationalised via seven elements including the timely, accurate, frequent and problem-solving based communication, shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect amongst varied parties. Relational coordination is important when work is ambiguous, and time is tight whereby high-quality communication is needed (Gittell, 2002b).

During the crisis, the high quality of communication and professional relationships with these important stakeholders was critical to ensure that core tasks were completed effectively and that schools were functioning, particularly during the lockdown. Figure 4.8 presents an overview of these connections and Figure 4.9 presents the detailed results in relation to relational coordination with multiple stakeholders.

Figure 4.8 An Overview of Effective Connections with Multiple Stakeholders
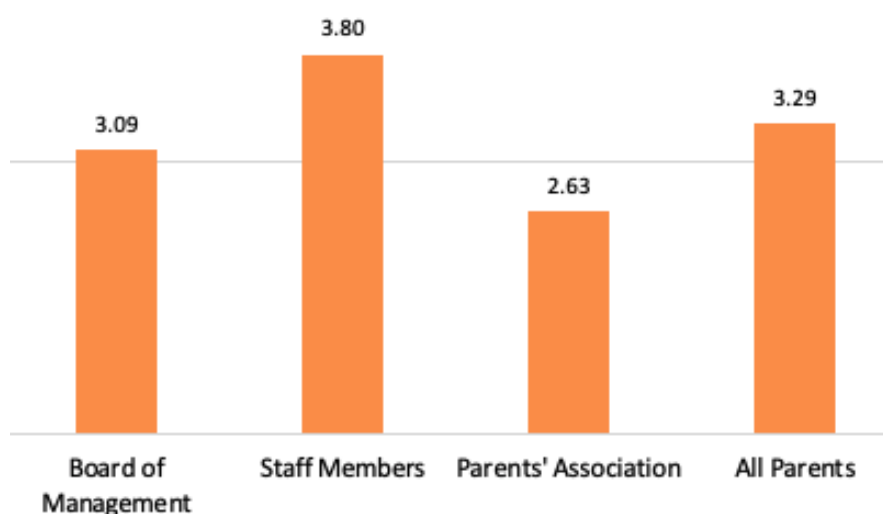
Figure 4.9 Effective Connections with Multiple Stakeholders
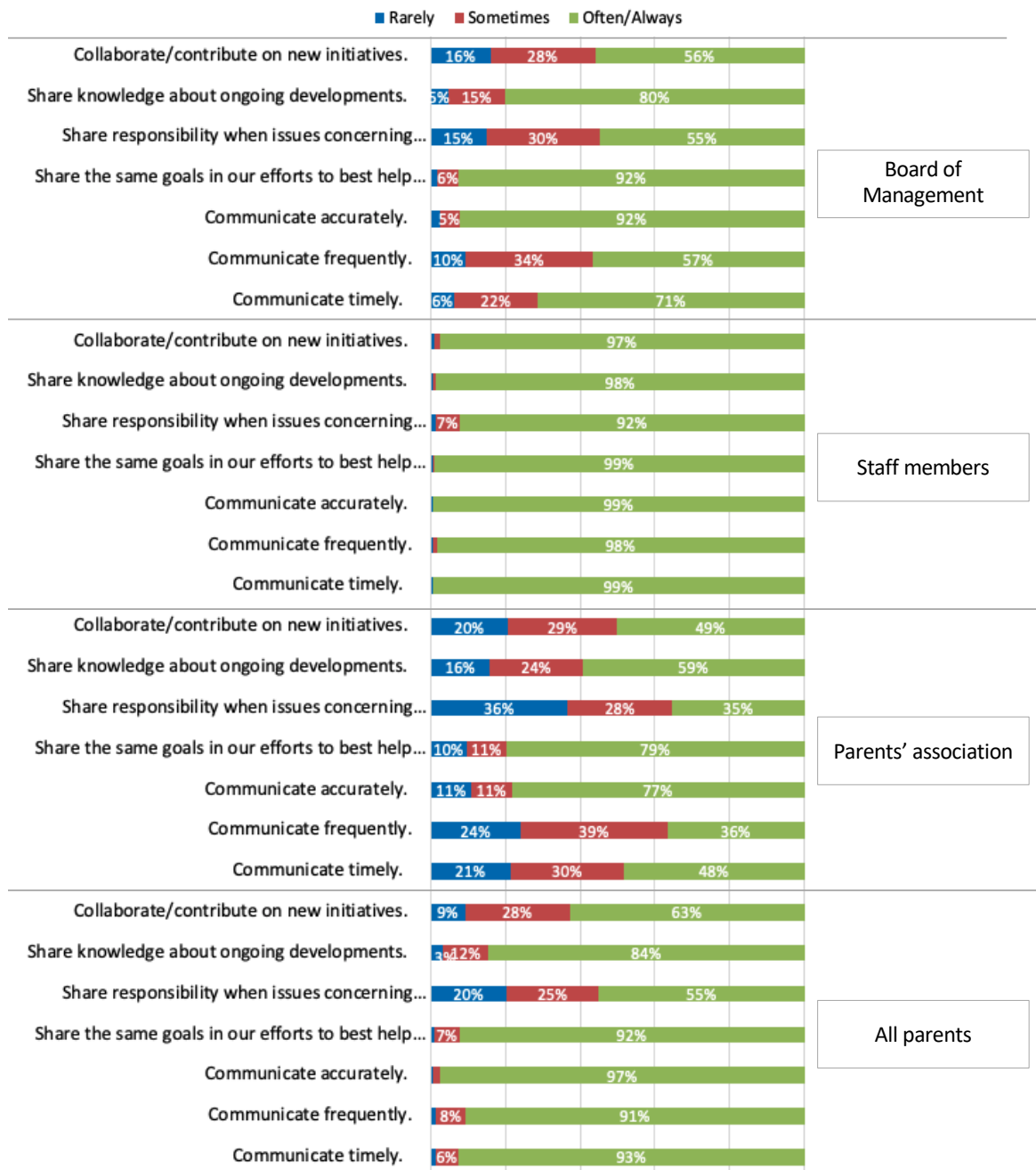
The connections with all stakeholders during the lockdown were strong. Differences existed across these groups whereby:

- Connections with staff members were the strongest (3.80).
- Connections with the Parents' Association were the weakest (2.63).
- Connections with Board of Management (3.09) and all parents (3.29) were strong.

The reason for the lowest score with the Parents' Association could be due to the timeliness of communication. Each family needed to be reached on an individual basis during these uncertain times. In addition to this, some principals reported that their schools do not have a Parents' Association.

4.9 Comparison Analysis

Comparison analysis was conducted based on the mean score for the key constructs in order to identify the different experiences for key characteristics of principals and schools including gender, tenure, and school size. This type of analysis examines whether differences in the mean scores between various groups are statistically significant. In the area of statistics, the term significant does not mean important or meaningful, as is implied in the everyday use of the term. A result is deemed statistically significant if it is unlikely to have occurred by chance, and therefore provides enough evidence to signal that group means are different.

Where differences are detected, a further test is used to determine which group is significantly different from which others. A symbol of "*" was used to indicate the significance in the figures. Figures 4.10 – 4.12 presents the comparison between gender, across tenure and school sizes.

Some differences were found.

- Female principals experienced lower level of wellbeing than male principals.
- Principals with longer tenure experienced higher levels of wellbeing and support from staff members.
- Principals in larger schools perceived a higher level of school performance than those in the smaller schools.

Figure 4.10 Comparison between Gender
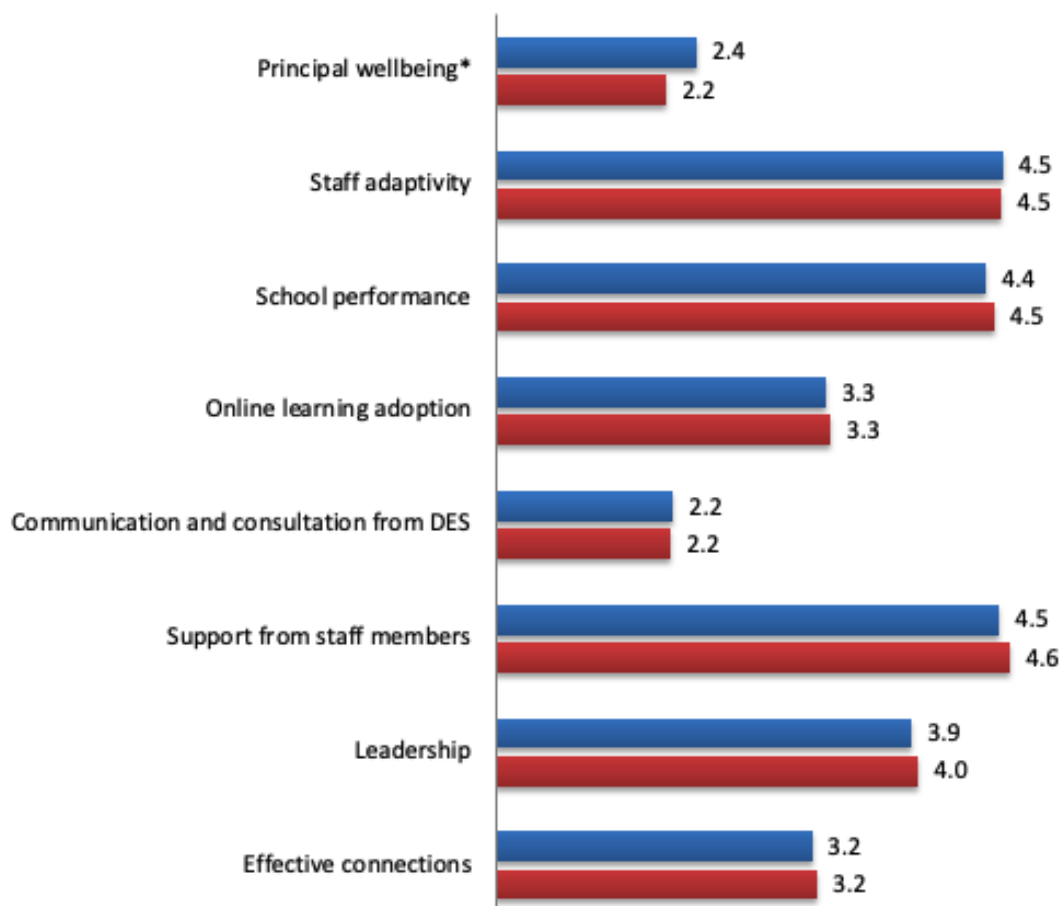
Key: * indicates the difference was statistically significant.

Figure 4.11 Comparison across Tenure

Legend: ■ < 10 yrs ■ 10-19 yrs ■ 20+yrs

Category	< 10 yrs	10-19 yrs	20+yrs
Principal wellbeing*	2.1	2.3	2.4
Staff adaptivity	4.5	4.6	4.6
School performance	4.5	4.4	4.6
Online learning adoption	3.4	3.3	3.4
Communication and consultation from DES*	2.1	2.3	2.5
Support from staff members*	4.5	4.6	4.7
Leadership	4.0	3.9	4.0
Effective connections	3.2	3.2	3.3
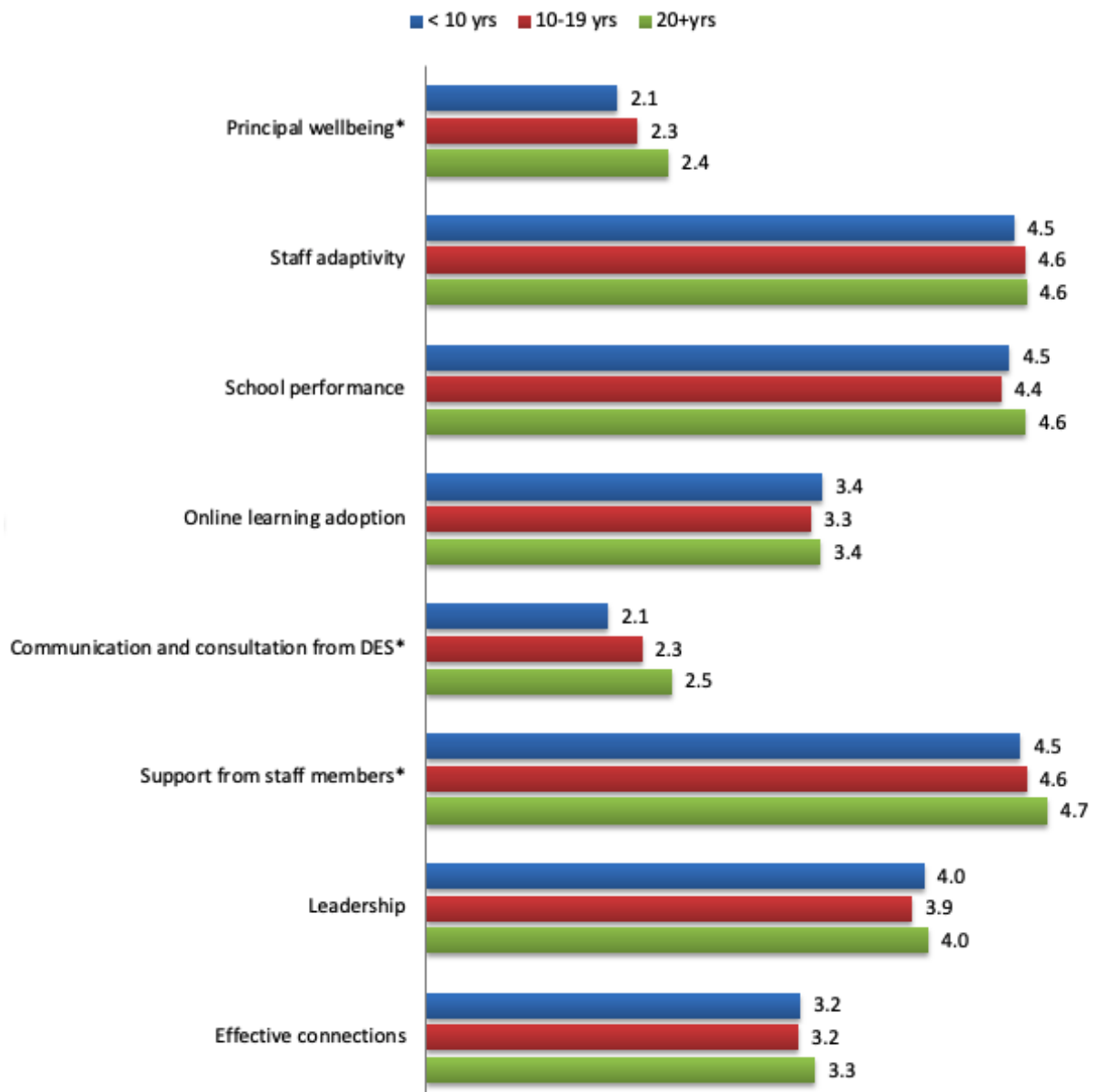
Key: * indicates the difference was statistically significant.

Figure 4.12 Comparison across School Size

Legend: ■ < 100 ■ 100-399 ■ 400+

Category	< 100	100-399	400+
Principal wellbeing	2.1	2.3	2.3
Staff adaptivity	4.5	4.5	4.6
School performance*	4.4	4.5	4.6
Online learning adoption	3.3	3.3	3.3
Communication and consultation from DES	2.3	2.2	2.1
Support from staff members	4.6	4.5	4.7
Leadership	3.9	3.9	4.0
Effective connections	3.2	3.2	3.3
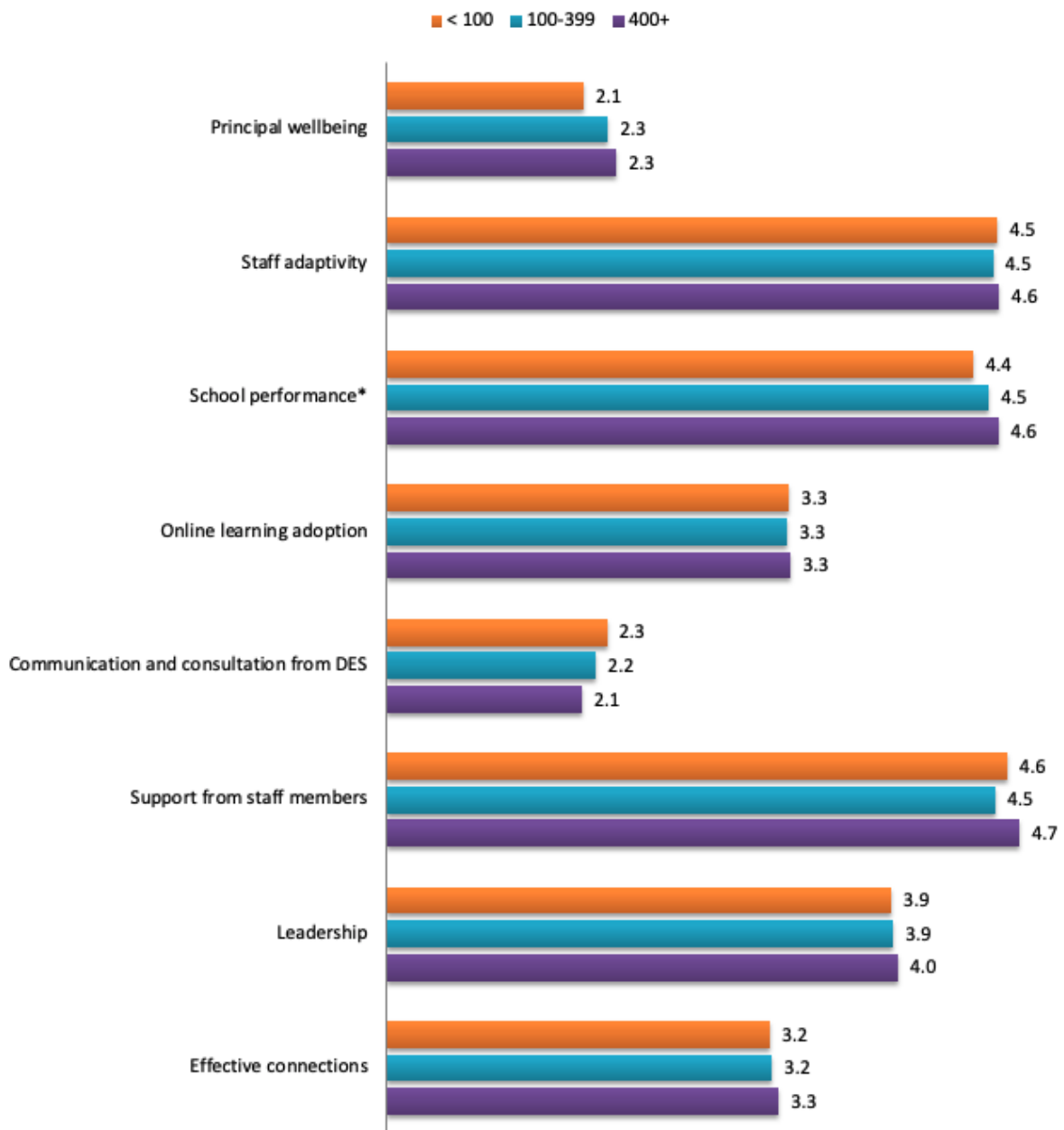
Key: * indicates the difference was statistically significant.

5 Drivers Analysis

The survey examined a wide range of issues. Therefore, in order to isolate those that are most important for principal wellbeing, staff adaptivity, school performance, and online teaching adoption, a key driver analysis was undertaken. This analysis uses a number of statistical techniques to help in the interpretation of results so as to identify actionable criteria. Following each analysis, we plotted the drivers with the largest impact on each outcome against its presence across the three organisations (i.e. its mean score). This helps to identify those work features that need to be developed, monitored and improved.

5.1 Drivers of Principal Wellbeing

Figure 5.1 plots the main drivers of principal wellbeing.

Figure 5.1 Drivers of Principal Wellbeing
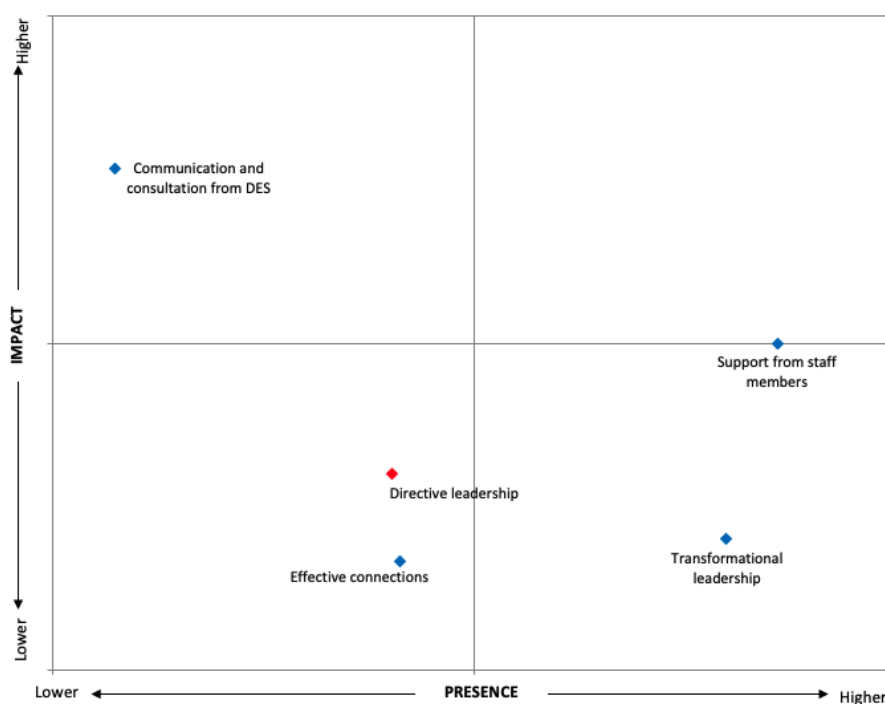
Figure 5.1 shows that the most important drivers of principal wellbeing are: (1) communication and consultation with the DES, (2) support from staff members and (3) transformational leadership. Directive leadership reduces principal wellbeing.

Given the relative high presence of support from staff members and transformational leadership, these factors need to be monitored and maintained. The areas in most need of attention are communication and consultation with the DES and effective connections with multiple stakeholders.

5.2 Drivers of Staff Adaptivity

Figure 5.2 shows that the most important drivers of staff adaptivity are: (1) participative leadership, (2) transformational leadership, and (3) effective connections.

Participative and transformational leadership were already at a high level (presence), and they need to be monitored and maintained. The areas in most need of attention are effective communication and consultation with the DES, which were with low presence but high impact to improve staff adaptivity.

Figure 5.2 Drivers of Staff Adaptivity
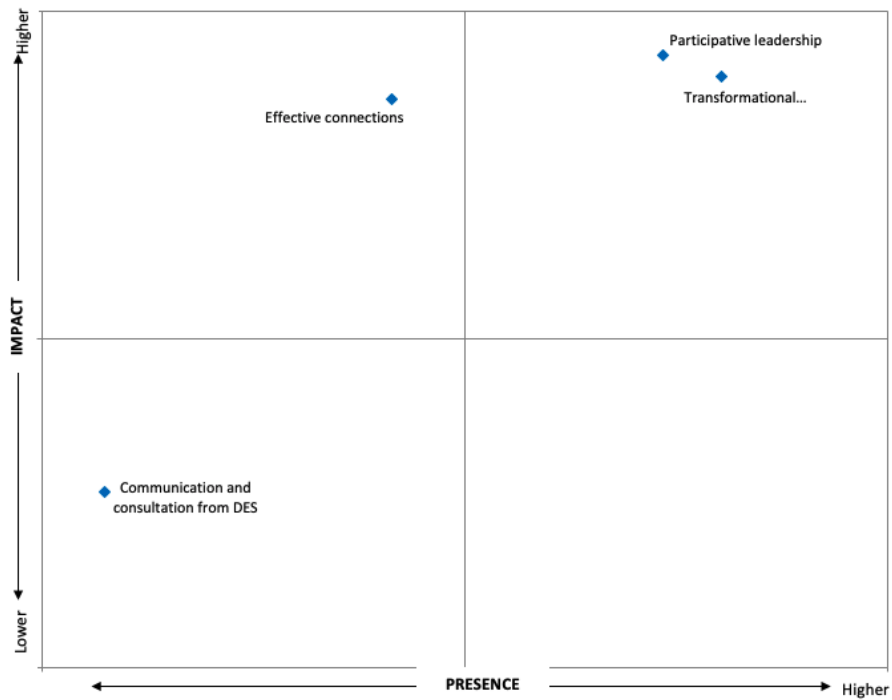
Figure 5.3 Drivers of School Performance
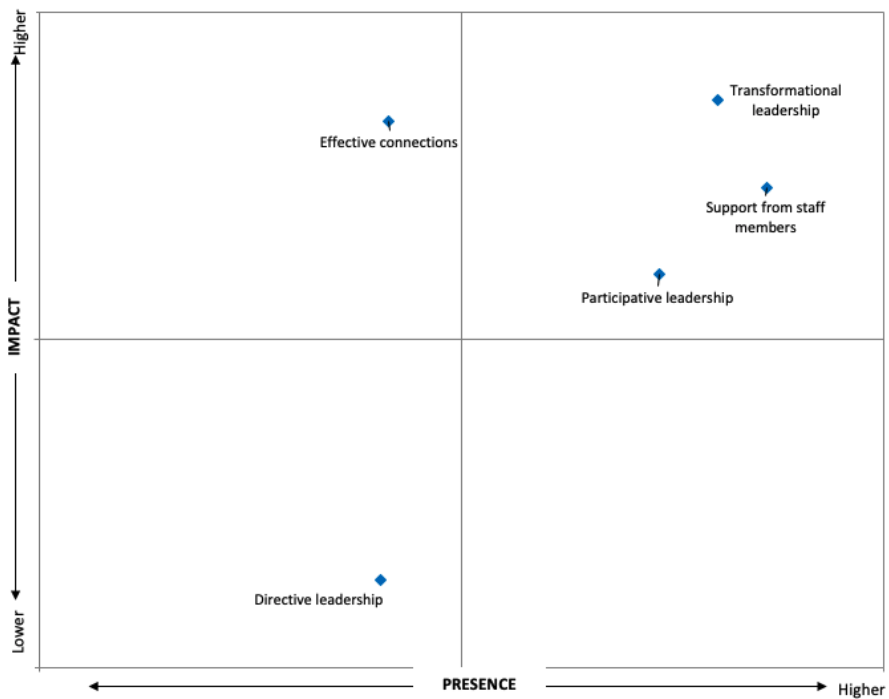
5.3 Drivers of School Performance

Figure 5.3 shows that the most important drivers of school performance are: (1) transformational leadership, (2) effective connections and (3) support from staff members.

Transformational leadership and support from staff members were already at a high level (presence), they need to be monitored and maintained. The areas in most need of attention are effective connections and directive leadership, which had low presence but high impact to improve school performance.

5.4 Drivers of Online Learning Effectiveness

Figure 5.4 shows that the most important drivers for online learning effectiveness are: (1) easy to use, and (2) positive attitudes towards online learning, both need attention and support to enable online learning to be effective.

Figure 5.4 Drivers of Online Learning Effectiveness
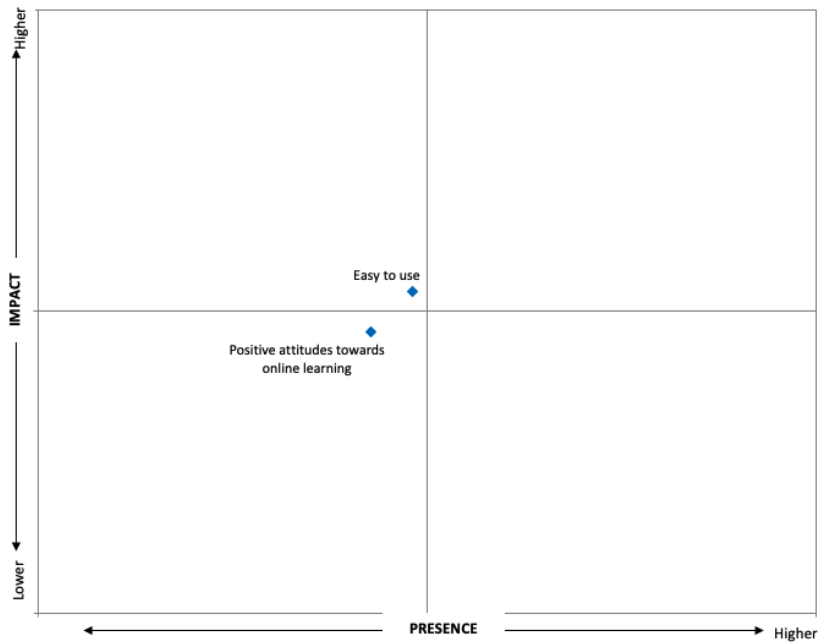
6 Principal Comments

There were 254 comments received from principals through the reflective and open-comment section at the end of the survey. To further understand the perspective of principals within the context of COVID-19, thematic analysis was carried out on the 254 comments. This process involved reading, understanding and coding the data, enabling the research team to generate higher order constructs and themes. Three independent coders analysed the comments. Two coders used NVivo whereas the third carried out analysis on paper. The coding process was repeated until a clear and shared understanding and interpretation was reached among the researchers.

6.1 Principals' Experiences

The thematic analysis of the principals' responses yielded 1,230 references and 325 codes. Five main themes emerged from the comments related to the principals' experiences. They were: (1) guidance, support and communication, (2) working digitally, (3) work-life balance, (4) students and families with additional needs and (5) teaching principals. Table 6.1 below details some of the perceived experiences of principals within the above established themes.

- Guidance and support was the most significant theme that emerged. Four subcategories present and the references within the theme are broken down as follows: guidance & support outlets; timeliness of received communication; lack of guidance and communication within school.
- The second most referenced theme was that of digital learning. Four subcategories present and the references within the theme are broken down as follows: inadequate broadband & lack of devices; online learning cannot replace face-to face learning; lack of digital knowledge and positive responses to online learning.
- Work-life balance is the third most referenced theme. It is broken down into three subcategories: increased job demands; supporting pupils in addition to managing personal life and reduced personal wellbeing.
- Students & families with additional needs is the fourth most significant theme that emerged. Two subcategories present: economic disadvantage and special educational needs.
- Teaching principals was the fifth most referenced theme, with one main category: balancing teaching with administrative duties.

6.2 Principals' Recommendations

Principal recommendations were also grouped under the themes discussed above. Table 6.2 below provides a sample of the type of recommendations that principals made.

Table 6.1 Principal Experiences: Illustrative Quotes

Main theme	Sub-theme	Illustrative Quotes
Guidance, support & communication	Guidance & support outlets	"Schools have risen to the challenge over the past few weeks through collaboration with our colleagues in **neighbouring schools** and **IPPN**."
		"**IPPN** provided great leadership, during this crisis, to principals."
		"We have discussed and taken on board advice, relating to procedures policy and practice, from webinars with **IPPN**, **Mason Curran and Hayes** and others."
		"Webinars provided by the **Teachers' Centres** have been invaluable."
		"There are some optional webinars available from the **Department of Education**."
		"I feel that online webinars were a perfect solution for teachers, students and parents, during this COVID pandemic."
		"**Education Centres and the PDST** were a shining light in providing support and information during the crisis."
		"I am working on ways to improve my own wellbeing and since March 12th have offered various websites, links to wellbeing blogs e.g. **PDST** and reminded staff of their entitlement to access Inspire Wellbeing."
		"We have up-skilled using available opportunities presented by **Education Centres** throughout the country and **PDST**."
		"My **mentor** has been great and is just on the end of the phone."
		"**YouTube** provided the most timely tutorials for staff in getting up to speed in the use of online platforms quickly and efficiently."
	Timeliness of received communication	"The Department's communication may be slow but they're on the learning curve too."
		"Information that is given is not released to us principals before it is known nationally."
		"Directives are being issued too late and they aren't always helpful or understanding of our situation."
	Lack of guidance	"There was an absolute dearth of any guiding framework."
		"Lack of directives."
	Communication within school	"Very stressful trying to manage the communication of all parties."
		"It takes much longer to do things, to connect with staff etc."
Working digitally	Inadequate broadband & lack of devices	"We do not have a reliable broadband service. It is a very uneven playing field while these discrepancies exist."
		"Poor Broadband a real issue for staff and students."
		"Poor internet connections and lack of devices has also been very challenging."

		"Broadband and access to ICT devices a big issue for online learning."
		"Online learning presumes that all staff and students have devices that they can work on and internet access at home."
	Online learning cannot replace face-to face learning	"While having to engage with children in a virtual world is necessary, it is not ideal and there is a lot of learning that cannot happen remotely."
		"Teaching remotely is extremely difficult as teaching by its very nature is a hands-on activity."
		"The outstanding issue is trying to keep pupils engaged with their learning from a distance. Nothing can replace the dynamism of the classroom. Pupils learn so much from each other and the interaction that a vibrant classroom brings."
	Lack of digital knowledge	"The delay in the provision of any workshops/CPD in online platforms meant that by the time these tutorials were made available, schools had already committed to one or other platform and had to make that decision in isolation and purely from the advice offered on the PDST technology website."
	Positive responses to online learning	"It has given us an opportunity to develop our IT skills. Teachers, parents and pupils have all been on a steep learning curve but thankfully all our families have engaged with distance learning."
		"We taught using an interactive app. but it is far from ideal and we made the best of an awful situation."
		"To put a positive slant on this the Crisis has possibly modernised at an enormous rate our approach to how we can do things in schools. All staff have upskilled in the area of IT a rate that we would not have thought possible. New communication methods with parents have now been firmly established."
		"Colleagues responded with enthusiasm. They shared expertise. They were open to new skills and ideas. We had to adapt very quickly, reach decisions about remote learning and which platforms to use."
		"We are planning on using it to enhance learning and help with homework tasks in the future."
		"My general sentiment is that overall, we haven't done too bad, it hasn't been perfect but I can happily stand over the fact that as a staff we did our best, especially given our own personal circumstances. We have remained engaged daily and have been positive and supportive in these engagements."
		"Teachers need lots of IT upskilling - we sometimes assume that people know more about IT than they do just because they are social media savvy."
		"Many parents have really bought in to online learning and see its value."
Work-life balance	Increased job demands	"Schools/principals were left in a very vulnerable position, left to run the school without any additional resources at home, any preparation or training and indeed any warning."
		"On-going stress levels for people in management positions continue to be the most common problem when you talk to other principals, this message seems to be overlooked/ignored."
		"I find I am working weekends and late into the evening answering emails and texts."

		"Working days have tripled in length. I still feel terribly isolated and burdened with trying to keep up with all the webinars, advice and demands as well as planning."
		"Our workload has drastically increased and there are very little supports available."
	Supporting pupils in addition to managing personal life	"Difficult to keep home and school going smoothly the whole time!"
		"Sharing internet access at home with three school going kids and trying to work from home is not ideal."
		"Working from home, home-schooling children and balancing all of these needs in a time of immense emotional trauma, has been horrendous."
		"Everyone forgets that teachers have their own young children at home who also have a right to be safeguarded."
		"Most of the staff including myself have young families and childcare demands. Some, including myself are caring for elderly parents and many are sharing these duties with spouses and partners who are also working from home. There are also members of staff who are in lockdown alone and are struggling with social isolation, but this has not dented their resolve to provide learning opportunities for our pupils."
		"I have found it hard to get across to various people that I was at home with my child therefore was not able to drop food/laptops to children, get signatures from my chairperson, go to the bank etc. There are demands from so many people on me professionally as well as navigating my own home situation."
	Reduced personal wellbeing	"As a principal I have always supported and empathised with all staff members, however now more than ever the support required to work with stressed employees is definitely taking its toll on me personally."
		"I cannot air my frustration to staff because I need to reassure them not heighten their stress levels - they cannot work at their best if they don't feel valued and part of a team and they are feeling pushed aside by the Government and being made to feel like scapegoats."
		"I manage everyone's wellbeing as well as my own and I struggled to maintain an empathetic approach with the NQTs after 2-3 months."
		"I love my job and am by nature a very positive and motivated person, but find the challenges and uncertainties around re-opening schools to be utterly overwhelming."
Students & families with additional needs	Economic disadvantage	"We have a high level of disadvantage with 70% of our parent body in low skilled jobs. We are not DEIS. We don't have a home/school liaison teacher so engaging with some of our children has been extremely difficult."
		"There are vulnerable children who cannot be support by their parent(s) at home as the parent does not have the academic ability to support them, these children are of great concern to us. Also school is a safe place for some children, they know they will be fed and cared for when they walk through our gates."
		"I think the perspective of DEIS schools has to differ quite a bit from non DEIS. During the crisis the disparity has become particularly evident. Online learning cannot be done effectively using a single smartphone in a family set up. Parents can feel helpless knowing their child is missing out and not having the means or capacity to address this. Schools are supporting these families day in, day out."

		"Difficulties with access and the digital divide exacerbate the problems for vulnerable children, leading to increased educational disadvantage."
		"Working in a DEIS school brings the added difficulty of the very uneven playing field."
	Special educational needs	"SEN need one to one tuition and teachers need time with students observing our students throughout the course of the day to know what's going on with the individual children to know how to best guide their learning."
		"SNAs (while awaiting redeployment) & ancillary have taken on the tasks of supporting learning & maintaining administration, building security and maintenance with enthusiasm, while observing HSE/Government guidelines."
		"Our students have SEN it is very challenging for them to engage effectively via online methods and a huge parental commitment has had to happen in order for online learning to take place."
Teaching principals	Balancing Administration with Teaching	"Teaching Principals cannot implement changes from a classroom."
		"The workload for me, as a teaching principal, had been extreme under normal circumstances but this has been ridiculous. It is fine for many professionals to tell us that we need to mind ourselves and look after our on wellbeing which is all well and good. However the other side of the coin (and the reality) is that we have things being thrown at us from all angles."
		"There are not enough promoted positions and all this extra workload has fallen to me...All teachers do extra voluntary work. The BOM all are all volunteers, all have their own commitments so I am left to lead on everything."
		"An exhausted teaching principal!"

Table 6.2 Principals' Recommendations: Illustrative Quotes

Main theme	Sub-theme	Illustrative Comments
Guidance, support & communication	Dissemination of important information	"It would be helpful if the DES issued guidance in a timely manner."
		"I would like to receive timely advice from the DES and we should not be getting new information on Friday evenings. Monday morning is an appropriate time to be sending information to schools, as we practise in our own schools. Also, the information should be emailed to each school at the moment. Searching the site and finding out second hand is not a good use of my time."
		"If we could find things out before we hear it in media."
		"Less Friday evening emails from department etc that would relieve some of the stress."
	Guidance	"I would like clear, timely and structured instruction."
		"There is a need for local area management from the department based in the local area."
		"I realise that the DES has been incredibly stressed too and I believe Minister McHugh is doing the best he can.......but many of us feel, that like the Nursing Homes, schools and children and staff will be very vulnerable with no clear directions or equipment helping to support us, it's very important that the DES affirms the great work of the teachers and issue clear directives to teachers AND parents........school management can't be expected to come with all the answers and numerous Policies required when parents come asking questions and perhaps, alas, not following HSE guidelines etc."
	Increased support required for management	"I would like to see increased support/guidance for school leaders when school returns, as well as the option to step down from principalship without loss of seniority after a certain number of years."
		"I would like that the management posts that were lost due to retirements during the last economic downturn were reinstated. Our school lost 4 posts and only 1 was reinstated."
		"Please provide substitute cover for ALL Teacher absences...self-certified illness, EPV Days, force majeure, CPD, etc. Schools cannot split up classes."
	Positive acknowledgement	"We need an acknowledgement of the immense work drive put in by School Leaders since the 12th of March."
		"We had two hours to prepare our school communities; pupils, parents and teachers. I've seen the most wonderful things happen in our school communities in the past 10 weeks. It would be nice if the government gave credit and thanks for that."
		"Acknowledgement that many teachers are also working from home parents as well is needed."
		"It is not helpful for the media to undermine our teachers and leaders and this demotivates our teams when they are trying everything they can to ensure connection and continuity of learning with our very vulnerable pupils and their families."
		"Public acknowledgement by the Department of Education of the excellent efforts being made by schools to support

		"pupils and school communities is needed this to lift the spirits at this difficult and challenging time, for the wellbeing of the whole school community."
		"Schools are working. We never get good press releases to the public, good support to boost morale to emphasis this to the public."
Working digitally	ICT infrastructure	"Online learning would be very effective if infrastructure was put in place (but not in the way the school must use its time resources in order to source, implement and facilitate."
		"Provision of ICT and a planned upgrade to allow for obsolescence."
		"Nationwide schools' licence for products such as Zoom Aladdin, See Saw etc."
		"Centralised advice service for ICT's with Common Policy Documents for GDPR AUP etc."
		"Huge potential for use of on-line learning platforms to support learning: 1. in households where English is additional language; 2. for teaching principals when on principal release days- lessons saved on on-line platform for use by sub-pupils hear their own teacher teaching, sub can clarify and supervise subsequent work."
		"I feel we will be able to enhance our whole learning structure through this in the future. Blended or not our school in the future we have benefited and risen to the challenge and will include many of these new opportunities to engage as part of our toolbox in the future."
	Professional development of digital knowledge	"One overall learning app e.g. Seesaw: free, available, and highly recommended."
		"While online learning has now become part of day to day life it is an area where we all need to learn more."
		"Online training on a specific, safe DES recommended platform should be offered to all teachers in the future."
		"Better training and resources for online schooling would be necessary for any future similar closure periods."
		"Staff would need training in using the platforms. All children would need supervised access to a laptop or other device in order for it to work efficiently. All parents would need to co-operate."
		"I feel that the Department need to provide effective training for school staff in the areas of Digital learning."
		"Time and money spent by the DES on supplying courses run during our working day to upskill us in online learning platforms would be beneficial."
Students & families with additional needs	Special educational needs	"SEN need one to one tuition and teachers need time with students observing our students throughout the course of the day to know what's going on with the individual children to know how to best guide their learning."
		"Children with SEN struggle much more. They need face to face learning with concrete materials."
	Economic disadvantage	"We are a DEIS school and we are very aware of how this crisis has affected our pupils more than others and will continue to do so in the future. An IT grant will not bridge these inequalities. A lower pupil teacher ratio would help."
Teaching principals	Increased relief	"Supports needed for teaching principals- a minimum of one day a week to read and process documents and time to THINK and to carry out administrative duties, and a restoration of middle management posts lost in the recession."

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

This research was carried out to explore the impact that the COVID-19 crisis has had on principals as leaders of their school communities. The research investigated a broad range of issues including: wellbeing, staff adaptivity, school performance and online teaching adoption. A number of drivers included communication and consultation with the DES, support from staff, leadership, effective connection with multiple stakeholders.

This report presents a set of key findings and themes that principals have expressed as being of importance regarding their role and demands, in addition to resources which principals feel might be of benefit to management teams going forward.

Overall, the findings highlight that principals are confident in their abilities and their staff to perform a wide range of skills in their work roles, and that they have the propensity to deal with changes occurring in their work roles and in general.

The research findings suggest three intertwined priorities to help principals and their school communities to live with and thrive during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond.

- **Improved communications and greater involvement of principals**

  Throughout the course of the pandemic to date, the government has worked to provide principals with managerial directives to navigate the crisis. Principals have expressed a need for clear instructions on how to execute directives, specifically with regards to selection of online learning platforms and communicating with parents. In particular, teaching principals need to be accommodated with direct relief/substitution (where indicated necessary) from their teaching duties during crises situations to be in a position to navigate managerial directives effectively.

  Possible interventions here include: revitalising the DES communication and consultation system and making more use of expertise from principals to enhance the effectiveness of this process. Involvement with networks is strongly encouraged to provide a platform for principals to share and exchange knowledge and information, as well as for staff members in schools. More explicit use of knowledge sharing and knowledge dissemination such as online conferences, seminars and workshops as a central activity need to be in place. The communities of practice are a necessity in order to enhance collective ability to adapt to changes; for example, through regular principal and staff surveys and focus groups.

- **Provision of professional development opportunities**

  It is recommended that leadership crisis management training is to be provided for principals and their management teams in order to enhance their ability to cope during this pandemic and future potential crises. Increased attention placed on shared/distributed leadership, particularly during times of crisis would help to alleviate the increase in workload placed on the principal. Optional team-building training should also be accessible to school management teams.

- **Building additional support**

  It is recommended that adequate IT infrastructure and support needs to be put in place for principals to enable them to meet directives. This includes: ensuring that adequate WIFI is available; equipping principals with devices and providing IT professional development in the areas of digital learning and communication. It is also recommended that supplemental individualised support (e.g. SNA and/or learning support teacher) is provided for students with additional needs (economic and special educational needs), to further allow the principal to

focus their efforts on managerial duties. Also recommended is an online learning platform designed specifically for students with special educational needs (SEN).

Whilst long-term recommendations are discussed above, table 7.1 below identifies recommendations for immediate action.

Table 7.1 Recommendations for Immediate Action

Suggested Actions	Recommendations for Immediate Specific Actions	Relevant Stakeholders
Isolating children	Clarity is required regarding quarantining/isolation.	TÚSLA
Contact tracing	Fast response to contact tracing needed (less than 24 hours after a positive case is confirmed in the school community).	Health Service Executive (HSE)
Regional helplines	To ensure that prompt advice can be accessed by principals when required.	
Sanitising equipment	Direct provision of sanitising materials to avoid delays and inconsistencies with private companies.	
Substitution	Supply panel needs to increase in size to cover high levels of staff absence.	Department of Education and Skills (DES)
Administrative duties	Additional administrative staff to assist with increase in volume of phone calls (to parents, HSE etc.)	
Postponement of new initiatives and inspections	To allow principals to focus their full attention on keeping their schools functioning during this crisis.	
Principal wellbeing	Where possible, release important information/circulars during the school working day to ensure that principals have sufficient time in the evenings to maintain a work-life balance. Avoid releasing important information/circulars both at weekends and during the October school closure period to ensure that principals have opportunity to rest and recuperate.	
Working digitally	Selection/recommendation and financing of appropriate online learning platforms to use in cases of class/school closures. Enhanced training is required to prepare for effective hybrid/remote learning.	
Professional development, collaborative learning & sharing communities	Continuation of provision of webinars. Organisation of online conferences on Leadership & Working Digitally run by experts in the areas of IT and Human Resources. Focus groups/surveys to report, evaluate and enhance the effectiveness of supports.	Independent researchers, PDST, Unions, Education Centres, NCSE & other relevant stakeholders

Appendix A: Notes on the Context of this Study

This study targeted the principals in primary schools based in Ireland. Principals are leaders who directly lead and influence staff, students and parents during a crisis. The principal is responsible for the day-to-day management of the school, including providing guidance and direction to the teachers and other staff of the school and is accountable for that management. Principals are crucial figures for establishing and fostering an environment which promotes successful practices, making them gatekeepers, to prioritise what is educationally and culturally of merit (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Hargreaves, 2005). Teachers as employees implement changes in schools through the leadership of principals (Fackler and Malmberg, 2016). Principals control assignment of duties to members of the teaching and non-teaching staff (Hargreaves, Halasz, 2007) and faced with an increasing number of regulations and circulars (Cuddihy, 2012), principals must prioritise areas for improvement. During the COVID-19 crisis, governments in different countries provided guidelines to move schooling online. This was also the case in Ireland.

The first document issued to principals on 2nd April, 2020 suggested that principals use their *'professional expertise to decide upon appropriate online resources that match the intended learning'* (Department of Education and Skills Ireland, 2020b, p. 5). This initial document also suggested that school leaders would: face challenges; continue to monitor teachers' work in an effort to provide education to every student throughout the timeframe of the school closure; have regular meetings with teaching staff and maintain staff, student and parent relations; and strive to promote wellbeing within the school community (Department of Education and Skills Ireland, 2020b, p. 5).

The follow-up 18-page document (Department of Education and Skills Ireland, 2020c), released on 28th May echoed the concepts as explored above, this time in a more detailed nature, with the additional duty of coordinating a return for staff to work in the school building.

Whilst the above reports were targeted at all school types, specific guidelines were established for navigating the crisis for students with special educational needs (Department of Education and Skills Ireland, 2020a).

The initial set of guidelines for schools to reopen were published on 27th July, with a follow-up amendment on 12th August (DES, 2020).

Appendix B: Notes on Methodology

This section provides further details about the survey methodology. It provides additional information about a number of aspects of the study relating to survey administration, survey testing, survey content, and analysis of the data. It also details the ethical guidelines that were adhered to by the research team.

B.1 Survey Administration

The research was carried out between May and July 2020. The primary method of completing the survey was on-line, with the option of obtaining a paper-based version directly from the researchers. An invitation letter was issued by the research team to all relevant stakeholders to advise them about the survey and encourage their support (e.g. IPPN, INTO, NCSE, PDST, TC National Education Centres etc.). The survey was sent to all Irish primary school principals. This was followed up with two reminders from the research team and the featuring of the survey on an IPPN newsletter.

B.2 Review Group

The instrument was reviewed by principals, education centres and other relevant stakeholders. Their comments were incorporated to improve the face validity of the questions.

B.3 Survey Scales: Validity and Reliability

The scales used in the survey were derived from well-established and validated measures from the academic literature. Following the administration of the survey, tests of validity and reliability were carried out to check for the robustness of each scale among the sample. These tests re-established the validity and reliability of each scale used.

B.4 Statistical Treatment of the Data

The data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 19). The raw data was presented using descriptive statistics (frequencies and means). The tests for significant differences across groups were carried out using t-tests and analyses of variance (ANOVAs). This type of analysis examines whether differences in the mean scores between various groups are statistically significant (e.g. according to gender, tenure, age etc.). Where differences are detected, a further post-hoc test is used to determine which group is significantly different from which others. The relative importance of drivers for each outcome examined was tested using hierarchical multiple regression analysis, controlling for relevant background/ demographic variables. The plots presented in Section 5 represent the mean score for each variable (to establish presence) against the Standardised Beta co-efficient as derived from the hierarchical regressions (ranging from lowest to highest).

Thematic analysis was carried out on the reflective, open-comment section of the survey as is permits for precise qualitative analysis of the meaning of the data in a context (Joffe and Yardley, 2004). NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software package was used. Respondents comments data was loaded into NVivo platform to establish cases for analysis. To yield a clear understanding of the overall perceptions of the principals, each document was read in detail. Keywords and statements were identified and subsequent codes were generated from the text data. When all codes had been established, each code was grouped and classified into six clearly defined themes. Thematic analysis was conducted in line with the process outlined by (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This method was selected as it permits for identification and classification of themes and patterns through the use of a systematic coding process (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun and Clarke, 2006; Alhojailan, 2012). Additionally, thematic analysis can yield a high level of detail and assist with the interpretation of many aspects of the research topic and associated questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). To ensure the reliability, accuracy and consistency of the coding method applied (Bernard, 1995; Ryan, 1999), three researchers independently coded each

survey response. Two different approaches to content analysis were adopted: digital using NVivo and non-digital, systematic reading and thematic analysis. Intercoder reliability (ICR) was measured in line with (Carey, Morgan and Oxtoby, 1996; Hashimov, 2015) Within this process, the reliability of every code is a function of the number of coding agreements among coders against the number of coding agreements and disagreements (Bernard, 1995; Ryan, 1999; Kurasaki, 2000; Hashimov, 2015; O'Connor and Joffe, 2020). This process yielded an ICR of 85%, indicating an appropriate reliability rating had been achieved (Carey, Morgan and Oxtoby, 1996; O'Connor and Joffe, 2020).

B.5 Ethical Issues

The survey was strictly confidential, and participation was entirely voluntary. Participants were advised that a full report of the study's finding would be provided to them by email. Participants will also be invited to the launch of the report.

Participants were assured that this is a strictly confidential survey and under no circumstances would individual responses be made available to anyone outside the research team. Access to the data was limited to the research team and the data was stored electronically and protected by secure passwords known only to the research team.

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