

AFFILIATIVE MANAGEMENT STYLE IN SECONDARY SCHOOL IN VUCA AND BANI TIMES

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Purpose: Secondary school headteachers, tasked with overseeing performance and achieving goals, face the challenge of managing their institutions in a VUCA and BANI reality. Being acquainted with organisation management styles in problematic situations and in a state of flux may prove helpful when making decisions, leading a team or enforcing the fulfilment of duties.

The aim of the article is to present one of school management styles adopted in unpredictable situations which require specific decisions to be made and actions to be taken in order to ensure the correct functioning of an educational institution in a changeable environment.

Design/methodology/approach: This article references the literature on VUCA, BANI and management styles; it is also based on the knowledge and experience of the authors -academic and secondary school teachers (one of the authors has 20 years of experience of working in a school). In addition, analyses both Polish and international studies on the aforementioned phenomena and tracks trends in secondary education. The article also presents sample stages of handling a crisis situation.

Findings: The dynamics of VUCA and BANI have increasingly permeated secondary education. Educational reforms, the introduction of new subjects, the decline in birth rate or the war in Ukraine are only some of the issues the consequences of which need to be handled by school authorities or teaching staff. The headteacher's knowledge, experience, openness and communication skills determine whether a given educational institution copes with change, survives on the educational market and gains the confidence of students and their parents. In the context of change, affiliative leadership is a management style which may be implemented in a secondary school. It should be noted, however, that it brings the desired results if certain conditions are met both by the team led by the headteacher and the school-governing body.

Practical implications: There is no single universal management style which could be successfully used in every situation regardless of circumstances. VUCA and BANI exposed schools' flaws and proved that change management, mastering leadership styles, flexibility, openness and innovative approach to dealing with a difficult reality are fundamental abilities of the contemporary headteacher.

Originality/value: This study discusses the problem of an affiliative management style for secondary schools in VUCA and BANI times. Thanks to their expertise, experience and skills, headteachers can employ various leadership styles or management models. The present article

presents the affiliative management style, which, once certain conditions are met, may help deal with a challenging and changeable reality.

Keywords: VUCA, BANI, affiliative school management style.

Category of the paper: viewpoint, literature review.

1. Introduction

The VUCA and BANI reality, so frequently analysed from the perspective of for-profit enterprises, also affects secondary schools -institutions which prepare young people for work or secondary education exams.

The abolition of junior secondary schools, introduction of new subjects, modifications to the core curriculum, the Covid-19 pandemic, and successive reforms have all contributed to a lack of sense of security among teachers and students. Schools have to function in a changing reality, which requires flexible approach to management, fast and effective responses to unforeseeable events (e.g. the war in Ukraine and enrolment of students who were unable to communicate in Polish).

A school is managed by its headteacher, who makes decisions and is responsible for the fulfilment of the tasks of the educational institution, ensures the safety of students and teachers. The headteacher's knowledge, experience, personality and skills determine the school's survival and performance in trying times. Regardless of circumstances, the school must perform its goals, prepare students for school-leaving exams and the job market, instruct, educate, provide support in difficult life situations. A headteacher who knows his or her staff is able to manage the institution in reliance on a number of available leadership models or styles. One such model is the affiliative management style, which highlights interpersonal relations. The affiliative style has both positive and negative sides; it is not universal by any means and as such will not work in all possible situations, yet it may be helpful in emergencies or crises.

The aim of the article is to present one of school management styles employed in unpredictable situations which require specific decisions to be made and actions to be taken in order to ensure the correct functioning of an educational institution in a changeable environment.

The authors formulated the following research hypotheses:

1. A correctly functioning school means that solutions ensuring its continued operation must be designed and implemented quickly.
2. The affiliative style is one of several styles which can be applied in an unpredictable reality.
3. The affiliative management style promotes responsible and mature teamwork.

Like all institutions, secondary schools need to respond to changes which are not always planned, predictable or easy to implement. In the case of schools, adaptation to consecutive reforms requires a great deal of responsibility, experience, knowledge and skills on part of its headteacher and staff.

VUCA and BANI are most often analysed from the perspective of for-profit enterprises. Although school is not a business entity in the strict sense, it has to be flexible, open and forward-thinking, like a business. School authorities should be acquainted with management styles and able to apply them practically in cooperation with school staff, being aware that their personality, communication skills, responsibility for actions taken may strengthen the team they work with. For a school, VUCA and BANI mean a new concept of work, management, teaching, contacts with teachers, students and other school staff, as well as the ability to make informed and rational decisions in trying and complex times,

2. Methods

This article references Polish and international publications on managing organisation in the VUCA and BANI reality; both terms were explained in the context of secondary school. The issue is global in nature rather than limited to a single country, as VUCA and BANI affect every school irrespective of stage of education or country of location.

There are publications which present the situation in schools and education in terms of the two phenomena. Nevertheless, VUCA is analysed more extensively (the Covid-19 pandemic revealed a host of problems related to the online management of an educational institution, its staff, students and other entities). BANI is usually discussed in the context of businesses, partnerships or companies. Like any other organisation, school must be managed through tough times of change, crises or hardship.

The authors (including a professionally active secondary school teacher with more than 20 years of experience) also presented an affiliative management style which may be an answer to the unpredictable reality of contemporary schools.

There is a scarcity of publications on the subject of managing a school in the context of BANI, the role of the headteacher responsible for the performance of school's goals and tasks in a changeable reality, building teams composed of teachers with different experience and seniority.

The following methods were applied in this article:

1. Analysis of texts and studies on VUCA, BANI and the affiliative leadership style published in Poland and other countries.
2. Tracking trends in secondary schools.
3. The article also presents sample stages of handling a crisis situation.

The choice of methods was determined by the research problem analysed in this article.

3. The VUCA and BANI world

A headteacher managing a contemporary school must adopt an interdisciplinary approach to a number of phenomena such as consecutive reforms of the education system, introduction of new technologies, staff insufficiency or depopulation, which causes classes, and ultimately schools, to be closed. In such an unpredictable, ambiguous and often difficult reality, it is necessary to adapt to change quickly, efficiently and effectively.

VUCA is an acronym for:

- Volatility.
- Uncertainty.
- Complexity.
- Ambiguity (Taskan, Junça-Silva, Caetano, 2022; Ziarko, 2024).

In the school context, VUCA made itself felt during the closure of lower secondary schools, the COVID-19 pandemic, the outbreak of war in Ukraine and the integration of Ukrainian youth into Polish schools without prior knowledge of the Polish language or familiarity with the realities of the Polish educational system. This broader issue also encompasses the adaptation of educational pathways to the demands of the labour market and future professions, which involves a shift in perspectives regarding education, competencies and skills of young individuals entering adulthood -a forward-looking approach to the learning process.

The response to VUCA was encapsulated in a concept proposed by Bob Johansen from the Institute for the Future, who emphasized key skills necessary to cope with the challenges of this reality (see Fig. 1). This concept is known as VUCA PRIME. According to Johansen, leaders require a strategic approach to effectively manage volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (Arnott, 2024).

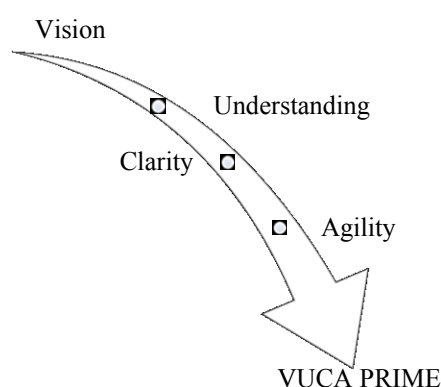


Figure 1. VUCA PRIME components.

Source: Illustration by the authors, based on: Skarbek R. (2023). Świat VUCA i BANI: zarządzanie zmianą i celami. Niepewność i złożoność, <https://www.empowerment-coaching.com/post/swiat-vuca-i-wyznaczanie-celow>, 12/09/2025; Arnott R. (2024). Adapting to Change: The Evolution from VUCA to VUCA Prime and the Executive Assistant's Role, <https://executivesupportmagazine.com/vuca-prime>, 12/09/2025.

In the educational sector, the VUCA reality especially came to the fore during the pandemic. The closure of schools and the transition to remote learning exposed the vulnerabilities of the system, such as unpreparedness of teachers, students and parents for online work, as well as a lack of necessary digital skills and equipment across all entities involved.

In 2020, American anthropologist and futurist Jamais Cascio put forward the idea of BANI, a new model reflecting this reality, a concept which far from optimistic (Rosalska, 2022).

BANI is an acronym which stands for:

- brittle,
- anxious,
- non-linear,
- incomprehensible (Sidor-Rządkowska, 2022; Kruse, 2025).

In secondary education, these four adjectives describe the reality that school management and pedagogical staff must confront (see Table 1).

Table 1.
Analysis of BANI in the context of Polish secondary schools

BANI reality	Analysis
Brittle	The COVID-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine, staff shortages and other phenomena have demonstrated that planning-one of the fundamental management elements-is not always feasible.
Anxious	Educational reforms, demographic decline, plans to close schools, unpredictability related to class sizes and the low prestige of the teaching profession create instability in employment. All of these factors are not conducive to stability at work.
Non-linear	The educational process is driven by change: introducing new subjects requires hiring specialists, revising curricula and modifying final exams, impacting not only the headteacher, teachers and students but also school counsellors, psychologists, career advisers and other personnel.
Incomprehensible	The nature of some phenomena is beyond comprehension, and it is unclear in which direction they will develop. It may take several years to observe the outcomes of certain decisions, such as the establishment of junior secondary schools. It remains unknown what decisions will be made with regard to future changes in secondary school final exams or the new health education subject.

Source: authors' own work.

The BANI environment has become a daily reality in schools in Poland and worldwide, and beyond the secondary level (Baskoro, 2023; Kondrashkina, Novichkova, 2024; Tantasit, 2025). Many events and phenomena are unpredictable, yet schools, as organizations, must fulfil their strategic objectives and tasks. Developing a certain style of organizational management that at least partly mitigates the effects of VUCA and BANI is essential. Research by Z. Tshetshe indicates that recognizing the uniqueness of individuals at the workplace helps alleviate the challenges posed by the BANI era. Consequently, it is necessary to develop methods, strategies or concepts that emphasize employees' well-being and ensure sustained engagement (Tshetshe, 2025). An affiliative management style offers such possibility within the school context.

4. Affiliative management style in the school environment

Effective and efficient school management requires selecting appropriate methods, styles and tools tailored to the specific team which one manages and works with. School management is the responsibility of the headteacher, who is increasingly seen as a manager tasked with overseeing the educational institution, managing staff, collaborating with students' parents, the external environment of the school and other entities. In this context, the headteacher must methodically and continuously expand his or her knowledge of management and communication. Each manager should possess appropriate skills to ensure the success of the organisation which they lead. Figure 2 presents three types of skills.

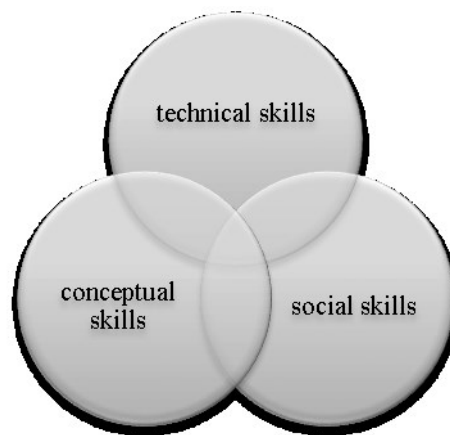


Figure 2. Three skill types according to D. Katz.

Source: Illustration by the author, based on: Korzeniowski, 2019, p. 35.

- For a headteacher, technical skills include primarily specialist knowledge of management, economics, finance, logistics and other areas.
- The headteacher's social skills are defined as the ability to cooperate with the faculty, students and their parents, as well as external entities. This also encompasses understanding and empathising with the people with whom the headteacher works on a daily basis.
- The headteacher's conceptual skills involve treating their school as an organisation which undergoes changes and needs to meet the requirements of the educational market. Consequently, the headteacher must be intuitive, plan the school's expenses wisely, analyse the job market and adjust the educational pathways to the needs of the local, domestic and European job market.

All three skill sets must overlap, since every headteacher in possession of this expertise will be able to cope in a volatile, challenging and unpredictable reality. An organisation is frequently capable of overcoming hardship thanks to its leader, who not only makes strategic decisions but also supports employees (Olkowicz, Kozłowski, Jarosik-Michalak, 2024, p. 504).

Secondary school is a unique type of organisation, bringing together adults and minors; those who are emotionally and professionally mature and those whose personality is not fully developed and who are yet to make their career choices. Therefore, such an organisation should be based on mutual trust between teachers, students and student's parents (Bilgic, Iker Gumuseli, 2012; Akdogan, 2021; Holzer, Daumiller, 2025). This trust defines the school's first functional tier; however, the organisation needs to be managed skilfully.

American psychologist David Goleman identified six leadership styles based on emotional intelligence (Figure 3).

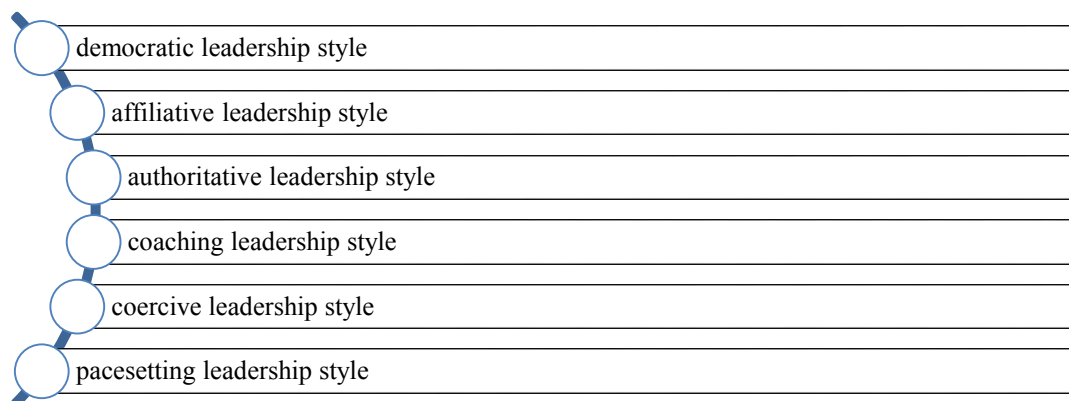


Figure 3. Management styles according to D. Goleman.

Source: Illustration by the authors, based on: Szymczyk, 2022; Goleman, 2000; Layton, Pearson-Shaver, 2021.

An affiliative management style means forming bonds in the workplace and prioritising interpersonal relations. It also involves creating a positive work environment by fostering cooperation between employees. Managers who use this leadership style are empathetic, have regard for the well-being of employees and promote teamwork. Of key importance to this style is creating a positive atmosphere in the team, which encourages employee loyalty. Leaders have communicative competences, are oriented on active listening, boost their employees' morale, help to form strong intra-team relations, have high emotional intelligence, create supportive work environment, wherein employees feel safe to voice their opinions, ideas and concerns. In this style, leaders offer constructive feedback and motivate their people to work. This helps foster a positive work culture based on continuous learning. It also involves building trust and mutual respect. The affiliative style emphasises supporting employees' growth, which involves training, upgrading skills, qualifications and competences (Style zarządzania zespołem..., 2023; Affiliative Leadership; Imer, 2024). Affiliative leadership is characterised by specific qualities, which have their positive and negative aspects, as seen from the perspective of Polish secondary schools (Table 2).

Table 2.
Benefits and drawbacks of affiliative leadership in secondary school

Benefits and drawbacks of affiliative leadership*	Benefits	Drawbacks
Focus on problem-solving	In the school context, this entails mitigating conflicts (which frequently arise in large and diverse teams).	Conflicts are inevitable, yet the school principal cannot focus solely on this aspect. The team should acquire the ability to cope with crises and challenging situations without the direct involvement of school leadership.
Recognition of staff	Acknowledging and appreciating staff members has a motivating effect on their work, engagement and performance.	However, excessive or unjustified praise may lead to a decline in effectiveness, as employees might display behaviour unacceptable in the school environment, such as neglecting to conduct lessons, arriving late, or failing to complete documentation. Praise must therefore be well-founded and stem from concrete achievements.
Interpreting emotions	Empathy and the proper interpretation of an employee's behaviour support an understanding of their actions and decisions. This contributes to team integration and fosters positive relationships among staff members.	Nevertheless, the headteacher may not always be able to accurately interpret employees' emotions, which can in turn deteriorate the overall atmosphere within the team.
Flexibility	Flexibility facilitates adaptation to change and prepares the school and its stakeholders for new realities. It also demonstrates the trust of school authorities in the innovations introduced by teachers.	However, excessive flexibility can result in chaos, a lack of task completion and disregard for established rules. Flexibility must therefore be clearly defined and bounded.
Creativity and innovation	This primarily concerns the introduction of new elements into the curriculum, engaging students more actively in the educational process, unlocking their potential and developing their skills. From the perspective of the headteacher, it also involves implementing new models, styles, or methods of school management.	Nonetheless, creativity and innovation may lead to unjustified changes that cause significant disruption in both teaching and administration. They may also generate considerable costs.
Resilience	Like all other institutions, schools are subject to reforms (whether positively or negatively assessed by stakeholders) that require substantial organizational, financial and structural resources. The composure and calmness of the leadership help all members of the school community navigate such periods of change.	Not every headteacher is able to manage reforms, especially those that must be implemented within a short timeframe. This demands strong organizational skills, psychological resilience, the ability to work under pressure and effective stress management. It also entails maintaining control over school documentation and procedures.
Empathetic communication	This involves understanding the emotions and problems of staff and students, as well as dedicating time and attention to listening to others. It also requires the ability to overcome communication barriers in interactions with staff, students, or parents.	However, excessive empathetic engagement must not lead to burnout on the part of the headteacher. The headteacher should be familiar with manipulative techniques as well as different types of communication barriers. Here too, clear boundaries of compassion and emotional involvement must be established.

* What is Affiliative Leadership? The "People First" Approach, <https://status.net/articles/affiliative-leadership/>, 12/09/2025.

Source: Benefits and drawbacks: Authors' own work.

It is the headteacher's experience and expertise that determines the effectiveness of the style of leadership in the institution that he or she manages. "Effective management is a multi-faceted process, with setting goals, organisation, employee orientation, problem solving, motivation and inspiration as its integral components" (Łyszkowska, 2024, p. 43). This style prioritises the role of the team. A motivated and competent team who are aware of their tasks and know how to complete them will be able to cope in a crisis. Open, sincere communication which builds trust among workers is of primary importance. "Open communication is essentially the 'bloodstream' of every organisation; in a way it means sharing part of yourself" (Królik, 2015, p. 72). The affiliative style will not work without this crucial component. However, within this style, the headteacher should also, when justified, admonish, discipline and remind staff of the school's functions as well as the duties of teachers and other employees. Equally important is the headteacher's ability to make decisions promptly, decisively and responsibly. For this reason, the school authority should define the limits of applying the affiliative leadership style and, when necessary, introduce additional management techniques. Employees must be held accountable for their work; in this style, pedagogical supervision remains applicable, along with the timely completion of school documentation, participation in faculty meetings and meetings with parents (including online meetings), continuous professional development, participation in training and related activities. The affiliative style must not introduce disorder -since this would only exacerbate a school's crisis situation - nor relieve employees of their responsibility for task completion and the achievement of institutional goals.

5. Sample stages of handling a crisis situation

In connection with the influx of Ukrainian youth into Polish secondary schools, headteachers, teachers, psychologists and counsellors faced the problem of the admission and education of the new intake. In Poland, education is compulsory up to the age of 18 years. Ukrainian teenagers who arrived in Polish schools did not know the Polish language or system of education; they had no Polish coursebooks. Moreover, the new students' levels of knowledge and skills varied, which stemmed from the characteristics of the Ukrainian education system. In addition, some students declared that they would like to take the Polish "matura" exam. For school authorities, this meant the necessity to execute hitherto inapplicable strategies. This also called for a change in the method of managing an educational institution, communication with students and parents, as well as hiring teachers who spoke Ukrainian or a related language. Figure 4 shows a flowchart for coping with a crisis situation, with the enrolment of Ukrainian students used as an example.

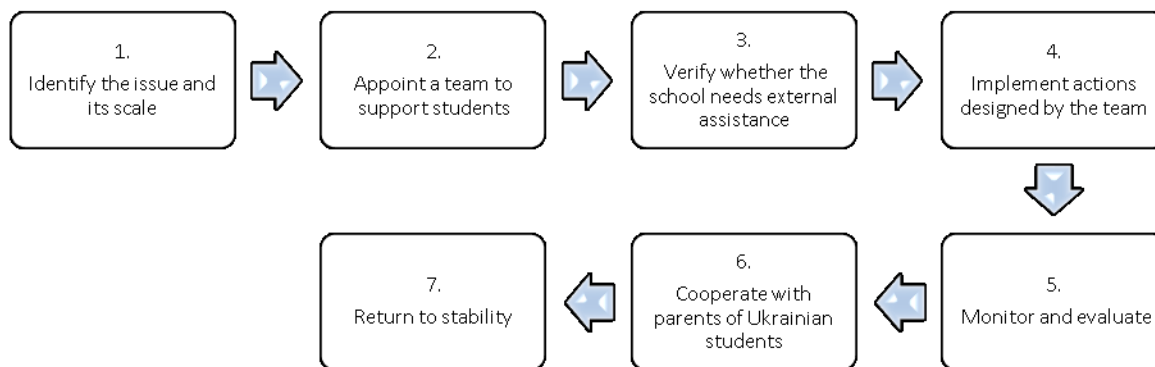


Figure 4. Sample stages of handling a crisis situation.

Source: Author's own work.

1. Identifying the issue and its scale: in Polish school realities, this involves determining the number of students from Ukraine, their command of the Polish language and their knowledge of the Polish secondary education system.
2. During the second stage, the headteacher consents for a student support team to be appointed. The team comprises form tutors, school counsellor, school psychologist and, optionally, support teachers. The scope of the team's responsibilities must also be defined.
3. It needs to be determined whether the school needs external support, e.g. from the regional board of education, local government, local psychological and pedagogical counselling centre, etc.
4. Implementation of actions designed by the team in order to:
 - verify the Ukrainian students' integration with the Polish students and the faculty,
 - evaluate academic progress (especially with regard to the Polish language) and the extent to which the new students have mastered the material in individual subjects,
 - at this stage it is important to provide a sense of security and stability for those who were forced to leave their country.
5. Monitoring and evaluation: the assessment of the effectiveness of actions taken and making corrections.
6. Cooperation with parents of the Ukrainian students and communicating key information relevant to the student's development.
7. School's return to stability.

Depending on the complexity of the issue, the headteacher may use other methods, e.g. training for all school staff, summoning an extraordinary faculty meeting.

6. Results

VUCA and BANI made it necessary for headteachers to adopt a new outlook on managing their secondary schools in challenging or crisis situations. The headteacher is increasingly perceived as a manager who needs to possess specific management, communication, planning and decision making skills in difficult situations or in a crisis. Consequently, school authorities must keep relevant areas of their expertise up to date.

The affiliative style means, first and foremost, building a friendly atmosphere based on honesty and trust. In education it constitutes one of the foundations of effective teamwork. It favours engagement, reinforces employee loyalty, accentuates interpersonal relations, supports integration, harmony and conflict resolution. Still, not every headteacher is able to adopt this leadership style. Since a lot depends on the team one works with, every headteacher needs to know his or her employees well. It proves particularly problematic in schools with large staff, with part of teachers working for other educational institutions or coming to work for a few hours only (as is the case e.g. with retired teachers).

Moreover, affiliative leadership highlights the significance of the school manager's personality. The leader must possess relevant qualities such as empathy, communicative skills and openness in interpersonal interactions. The headteacher must not avoid confrontation with reality, teachers or students; he or she will have to demonstrate decisiveness, ability to delegate tasks and supervise their completion, and adherence to practices and procedures. Although decisions may be consulted with the staff, only the headteacher can be held accountable for managing the school.

The affiliative style should not cause chaos: employees must be aware of their duties and the way in which they are to achieve the set goals. This requires considerable responsibility, discipline, well-developed competences and skills. For this reason, the affiliative style, which puts a human being in the centre, must have clearly defined limits.

7. Discussion

The affiliative style is one of many approaches which may be used when coping with change in secondary school. Pursuant to Article 7 of the Teacher's Charter Act, the headteacher manages the school, represents it outside, acts as the official supervisor of all school employees and presides over the teacher's council. (...) is responsible for caring for children and young people attending the school (the Teacher's Charter Act). There is substantial responsibility for running the school in a lawful and effective manner. "Hence, in Poland the position of a headteacher is multi-dimensional, since it encompasses organisational, legal, social,

pedagogical and economic matters” (Sudoł, 2024, p. 360). The manifold tasks must be completed in difficult and unpredictable circumstances. In secondary school, VUCA and BANI affects school authorities, teachers, students and their parents. Nevertheless, regardless of the situation, students must follow compulsory education and the school needs to perform its functions. The affiliative style puts the teacher, the student and the parent in focus. By building a friendly atmosphere based on kindness, understanding and support, the organisation cultivates a sense of security. However, a number of matters should be addressed before the headteacher decides to put the affiliative style into practice. First, they need to assess the team they work with. If the team is composed of loyal, competent staff who know their capabilities and limitations, and who are open to change, the affiliative style will be helpful in managing a crisis. Second, the headteacher must not be afraid of making changes, even if they do not match the expectations of all employees. Third, the affiliative style should support team-building as long as the team are aware of the purpose of individual undertakings. This necessitates open communication and transparency. This skill has not been mastered by every headteacher. An employee has the right to express their opinions, views and concerns. The role of the headteacher is to listen to their team and clarify any issues. This is the foundation of trust and honesty between the school authority and the entities which interact with it. The affiliative style has its benefits and drawbacks; it does not necessarily work in every school and every crisis. It is the headteacher who is obliged to ensure the operational continuity of the educational institution; however, he or she will fail without up-to-date knowledge of management techniques. Each crisis necessitates a different approach, course of action, implementing the appropriate procedures (which became clear during the Covid-19 pandemic). Managing a school has two main dimensions: the first one is strictly defined by law, whereas the other one comes from experience, intuition and the headteacher’s personality traits.

8. Conclusions

In a school, the affiliative management style should be seen as a possibility rather than a universal solution. There is simply no one-size-fits-all model for all situations. How successful an organisation is in dealing with changes, unpredictability or rearrangement of plans depends on the expertise, experience and commitment of the headteacher and the staff. The affiliative management style puts the employee and interpersonal relations based on kind and friendly atmosphere first. It involves teamwork to build trust between the headteacher and the faculty. School managers also prioritise training and upgrading employee qualifications, as it facilitates coping in a crisis. Open communication provides a sense of security, supports employee involvement and loyalty. Still, the affiliative style cannot be effectively used with every team and in every organisation. A headteacher who wishes to adopt this model must be

aware of several issues. Firstly, the goals and tasks of the school must always be kept in mind. Each educational institution is held accountable for the fulfilment of this obligation. Secondly, the headteacher manages the school and makes key decisions with regard to the functioning of the school (at times, decisions can be difficult and meet with criticism on part of the employees). For this reason, the team must be integrated well enough to comprehend the motives behind the headteacher's actions. Thirdly, the manager must know other leaderships styles which will prove more successful and effective in a given situation. The headteacher, as well as any other employee, should update their knowledge on management as well as the so-called soft skills. On the one hand, the VUCA and BANI reality forced take a new look at education and the role of the school in the process from a different angle, exposed its shortcomings and indicated areas for improvement. On the other hand, it showed us that change is inevitable and affects all organisations, including schools, which need competent staff open to learning and upgrading their skills. Development cannot be stopped; it is impossible to predict many phenomena which may soon become an integral part of schooling, education or work.

Several aspects deserve consideration in this context. The first one is the way in which the candidates for the position of headteacher are prepared for managing an educational institution. This entails verifying their knowledge and experience in the face of new challenges, adaptation skills with regard to changes which are unplanned but demand decisiveness and action. The second aspect is the need to keep the headteacher's knowledge of management, communication or conflict resolution up to date. Like any other teacher, the school authority must expand their expertise in these areas.

Last but not least, teacher training programmes must prepare students for working in schools in terms of coping with challenges posed by VUCA and BANI. This may be seen as an attempt to answer the question of how well such students would cope with a reality of changing, uncertain and unpredictable phenomena. This approach would make it necessary to review university programmes, introduce new subjects to address relevant demands and adapt teaching methods to today's reality.

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