



# Interview - Heike Richter

## WP 2

### Activity 1 (Leaders Interview)

Developed by Wisamar | July, 2025

PROJECT NUMBER: 2024-1-FR01-KA220-VET-000244092



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## Interview Metadata

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Date of Interview:	26.07.2025
Interviewer Name:	Franziska Bommas
Consent for data collection	Yes
Additional remarks on the interview	The interview was conducted in writing.

## Meet the leader

Name:	Heike Richter
Age:	59
Gender:	female
Current role and position:	Head of Department
Years of Work Experience:	34
Years in Leadership Roles:	34
Organization:	Volkshochschule Leipzig - vhs (Adult Education Center)
Sector of Activity:	(Public) Adult Education
Country / City:	Germany, Leipzig
Organization Size:	<input type="checkbox"/> Micro <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> xSmall <input type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> Large



## Main Interview Content

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Interview Section	Summary of Answers	Selected Quotes
<p>The Path to Leadership Key moments, challenges, values</p>	<p>Heike Richter has been working in a leadership position in adult education for over three decades. Her professional path has been shaped by a strong commitment to co-creating meaningful change and a deep well of subject-matter expertise. Rather than actively seeking leadership roles, they developed organically — emerging from her consistent engagement, her trust in the capabilities of her teams, and her willingness to take on responsibility when it was needed.</p> <p>A formative moment in her career was the period of societal transformation during the <i>Wendezeit</i> (time of German unification) in Germany. This experience left a lasting impression, showing her how change can be successfully shaped when people are given the space to contribute and participate actively. She takes particular pride in having helped build new structures that upheld the educational mission with social justice in mind — even during challenging times — while enabling employees to develop freely and bring their full potential into their work. Asked how she creates spaces in her leadership role that allow both employees and the organization to grow in the long term, Richter emphasizes the importance of participation, trust, and professional development. She believes in fostering a culture of openness, where feedback and even mistakes are seen as opportunities for learning. One example she gives is the collaborative development and implementation of a new organizational structure. Rather than designing it top-down, the process was guided by joint reflection and shared responsibility .</p>	<p>“The <i>Wendezeit</i> (time of German unification) period was formative: it showed me how change can be shaped when people are allowed to get involved.”</p>
<p>Your Approach to Leading Inclusion, decision-making, vision</p>	<p>Heike Richter places great importance on creating an environment in which people feel seen, respected, and included. In her leadership practice, she relies on transparent communication, active listening, and meaningful participation. Beyond the completion of tasks, Richter seeks to bring a strong value orientation into her team and organization. Her work is guided by a commitment to the common good, a willingness to embrace change, and a desire to create spaces where creativity and individual agency can flourish. Sustainability also plays a major role – not only in ecological terms, but also in relation to educational equity</p>	<p>“We see ourselves as a learning institution, not only in the sense of a robust democracy.”</p>



	<p>and the long-term health of her team. Sustainability is also anchored as a dedicated topic within the organization’s quality management process. Richter sees her institution as a learning organization that takes its role within society seriously. This perspective shapes both strategic planning and everyday practices. The organization contributes to democratic resilience by developing educational programs that strengthen judgment, critical thinking, and reflection. Through these offerings, it actively supports social transformation processes, not just by observing them, but by engaging with them as a dynamic educational force.</p>	
<p>Driving Change Strategies for sustainable and positive outcomes</p>	<p>When faced with difficult decisions, Heike Richter is guided by core values such as participation, responsibility, and respect. She promotes collaboration and shared responsibility through transparent task distribution, participatory processes, and by creating spaces that enable others to contribute meaningfully. She observes that inclusion and sustainability have a real impact when employees take on responsibility and when diversity is reflected in decision-making processes. Richter takes responsibility for both people and the environment by embedding sustainability into decision-making at all levels – from procurement to the development and planning of educational programs.</p>	<p>“Through transparent division of tasks, participatory processes, and the creation of enabling spaces”</p>
<p>Bias &amp; Belonging Tools, practices, awareness</p>	<p>In the <i>vhs</i> concrete tools and practices have been implemented to raise awareness of bias, reduce prejudice, and promote diversity. These include workshops, training sessions, and spaces for reflection. Diversity is treated as a cross-cutting priority within the educational work of the institution. Through her experience, she has learned that creating space for different voices and perspectives requires the courage to let go of control. This openness is what enables true innovation. She has witnessed prejudice and injustice in her work — particularly toward people with a migration background or an East German biography. In facing such situations, she has found that a clear and consistent stance, combined with open dialogue, is essential for challenging and overcoming bias.</p>	<p>“It takes courage to let go of control.”</p>
<p>Sharing What Works Inspiration, examples, transferable tools</p>	<p>To promote inclusion and diversity in her work environment, Heike Richter relies on regular consultations and open discussion formats, some of which focus specifically on diversity-related topics. She finds inspiration, information, and training to strengthen her ability to recognize bias and create inclusive environments through professional and social networks, the German Adult Education Association</p>	<p>“Regular consultations, open discussion rounds, including those focusing on diversity”</p>



	( <i>Volkshochschulverband</i> ), international collaborations, and ongoing professional development opportunities.	
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