

Effectiveness of School Principals' Transformational Leadership in Reducing Teachers' Burnout under Normally Demanding versus Extremely Demanding Work Conditions

Sarit Rashkovits*, Yael Livne

Max Stern Yezreel Valley College, Israel

*Corresponding author: saritr@yvc.ac.il

Abstract This study examines the effect of transformational leadership of school principals on teachers' level of burnout under two types of work conditions, i.e. extremely demanding versus normally demanding schools. Data were obtained from a sample of 263 teachers working in both types of schools, and the hypotheses were tested using hierarchical multiple regression analysis. Results supported all three research hypotheses, showing that (a) burnout level is higher in extremely demanding schools in comparison to normally demanding schools; (b) school principals' level of transformational leadership negatively affects the level of teachers' burnout; (c) this effect is moderated by school type (extremely- vs. normally demanding), such that transformational leadership is more effective in reducing burnout in less demanding schools rather than in high demanding schools. The finding shed light on contextual contingencies of the transformational leadership-burnout relationship.

Keywords: *transformational leadership, burnout relationship, work conditions*

Cite This Article: Sarit Rashkovits, and Yael Livne, "Effectiveness of School Principals' Transformational Leadership in Reducing Teachers' Burnout under Normally Demanding versus Extremely Demanding Work Conditions." *American Journal of Educational Research*, vol. 4, no. 14 (2016): 1015-1018. doi: 10.12691/education-4-14-5.

1. Introduction

Highly demanding work environments often lead to strain reactions in employees and impair work performance [1]. A well-recognized outcome of job demands is burnout, conceptualized as a psychological syndrome of exhaustion, depersonalization and perceptions of reduced personal accomplishment, resulting from exposure to chronic job stressors [2]. According to Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter [3] burnout is a response to the chronic experience of job demands, including role ambiguity, role conflict and overload. The relationship between high demands, stress and burnout is documented in the occupational stress literature. It has both theoretical foundations, e.g. in the Conservation of Resources theory [4] and the Job Demands-Resources theory [5], as well as empirical support, as many studies show that prolonged and intensive demands produce stress and lead to burnout [6,7,8,9].

A highly demanding work environment can be found in the education sector [10,11], primarily due to the demanding nature of pupil interaction. However, certain types of schools place greater demands on their staff than others. Specifically, efforts to prevent pupils from dropping out lead to the formation of separate schools for this population, which is characterized by high absenteeism, low achievement, feelings of alienation,

social maladjustment, behavioral problems, and violence [12,13]. Teachers who work in this type of schools are faced with an extremely demanding work environment, hence must invest a lot of effort in order to achieve the required level of performance.

According to the COR theory [4], the ongoing use of resources intended for coping with job demands leads to continuous resource loss and consequently to burnout. In addition, a recent qualitative study [14] points to the reciprocal influence of chronic failure and distress experienced by pupils in this type of schools on the continuous failure and distress experienced by their teachers. Therefore, based on COR theory and on prior research, we hypothesize that the extremely demanding working conditions in this type of schools put the educational staff in higher risk for burnout, compared to teachers working in regular (normally-demanding) schools. Accordingly, we present the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: The burnout level of teachers working in extremely demanding schools will be higher in comparison to that of teachers in normally-demanding schools.

Managers have a major impact on employees, and their leadership style is a key component in influencing work outcomes, including burnout [15,16,17]. Transformational leadership is defined as a style of leadership that transforms followers to rise above their self-interest by changing their values, beliefs, self-perceptions, and

motivating them to perform above and beyond expectations [18,19]. It consists of four components: *idealized influence* (serving as a role model and motivating followers to act beyond self-serving interests); *inspirational motivation* (expressing an attractive vision); *Intellectual stimulation* (encouraging followers to question the status quo); *individualized consideration* (enhancing and supporting the followers' needs for development and growth). Furthermore, a systematic review showed that transformational leadership was negatively related to burnout [20]. In line with the above reasoning we present the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: School principals' level of transformational leadership will negatively affect teachers' level of burnout.

However, the primary goal of the present study is to investigate whether the school type moderates the relationship between transformational leadership and burnout. Specifically, we were interested in testing whether transformational leadership is equally effective in reducing burnout under the different work conditions of extreme versus normal demands. Recently research shows that the beneficial consequences of transformational leadership are contingent upon environmental factors. For example, latest studies investigated the effect of transformational leadership on innovative and proactive work behavior as moderated by contextual variables such as empowerment [21], job autonomy [22] and job strain [23]. In the present study we focus on the effect of transformational leadership burnout and examine how this relationship is contingent upon contextual job demands. Drawing on COR theory we argue that school principals' transformational leadership is more effective in reducing burnout when the teachers' resources are not depleted due to an extremely high level of job demands.

The beneficial influence of transformational leadership in elevating followers' level of performance is accomplished by setting high expectations, challenging employees to make extra efforts as well as demonstrating proactive initiatives for achieving common goals and fulfilling the shared vision. This efforts and initiatives require investment of employees' resources. According to Schmitt, Den Hartog, and Belschak, [23], when resources are depleted, individuals prevent further resource loss to ensure basic functioning. Hence, under extremely demanding work conditions transformational leadership is less likely to succeed in initiating proactive behaviors. Therefore, we suggest that the inspiring and motivating nature of transformational leadership should better inhibit

burnout when teachers have more available resources to take advantage of their principals' leadership style, that is, when the working environment is not extremely demanding. Thus, we formulate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: School type will moderate the relationship between school principals' level of transformational leadership and teachers' level of burnout, such that in extremely-demanding schools the negative effect of transformational leadership on burnout will be weaker than in normally-demanding schools.

2. Method

2.1. Sample and Procedure

263 teachers participated in the study (81% females), 72 worked (27%) in extremely-demanding schools and 191 teachers worked in normally-demanding schools in northern Israel. Participation in the study was voluntary and data was obtained using anonymous questionnaires.

2.2. Measures

Burnout was assessed with the Teacher's Burnout questionnaire [24] based on the Maslach Burnout Inventory [25]. It included emotional exhaustion (5 items), depersonalization (4 items) and reduced personal accomplishment (5 items). All items were scored on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 ("never") to 6 ("always"). Reliability analysis yielded Cronbach's alpha = .95.

Transformational leadership was measured by teachers' ratings of their school managers' leadership behaviors using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire [26]. The scale consisted of 18 items rated on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (frequently, if not always). Reliability analysis yielded Cronbach's alpha = .97.

School type (extremely/normally demanding) was determined according to their classification in the education system.

Control Variables: The teacher's gender and tenure were considered as control variables.

3. Results

Table 1 displays means, standard deviations and correlations among the study variables.

Table 1. means, standard deviations, and correlations between study variables

variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. burnout	3.21	1.22	1.00					
2. TL	3.64	.97	-.28*	1.00				
3. School type	1.27	.45	.45**	-.25**	1.00			
4. Gender	1.86	.97	-.01	-.12	.06	1.00		
5. Tenure (in years)	15.79	8.41	-.13*	-.01	-.09	-.06	1.00	

Note: SD=standard deviation; TL=transformational leadership; School type: 1=normally-demanding, 2=extremely-demanding; Gender: 1=male, 2=female; *p<0.05; **p<0.01.

The hypotheses were examined using hierarchical multiple regression analysis as presented in Table 2.

In support of hypothesis 1, a significant effect was found for school type on teachers' burnout ($\beta=0.454$, $P<0.0001$), such that burnout level was higher in extremely demanding schools. This result supports

hypothesis 1. Likewise, in support of hypothesis 2, a significant effect was found for transformational leadership on teachers' burnout ($\beta=-0.449$, $P<0.0001$), such that as the manager's level of transformational leadership was higher the burnout level of the teachers was lower. Finally, a significant interaction was found

between transformational leadership and school type in predicting teacher's burnout ($\beta=0.465$, $p<0.05$), such that the negative effect of transformational leadership on teachers' burnout was significantly stronger in normally

demanding schools in comparison to extremely demanding schools, as presented in Figure 1. Thus, hypothesis 3 was supported as well.

Table 2. Results of hierarchical multiple regression analysis for transformational leadership and school type predicting teachers' burnout

predictor	Burnout			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta
Gender	-.014	-.057	-.096	-.068
Tenure	-.153*	-.109	-.125	-.123
School type		.454***	.324***	-.105
TL			-.449***	-.768
School type*TL				.465*
R	.152	.475	.639	.647
R ²	.023	.226	.408	.419
Adjusted R ²	.015	.216	.398	.406
R ² change	.023	.202***	.183***	.010*

Note: TL=transformational leadership; School type: 1=normally-demanding, 2=extremely-demanding; Gender: 1=male, 2=female; * $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$; *** $p<0.001$.

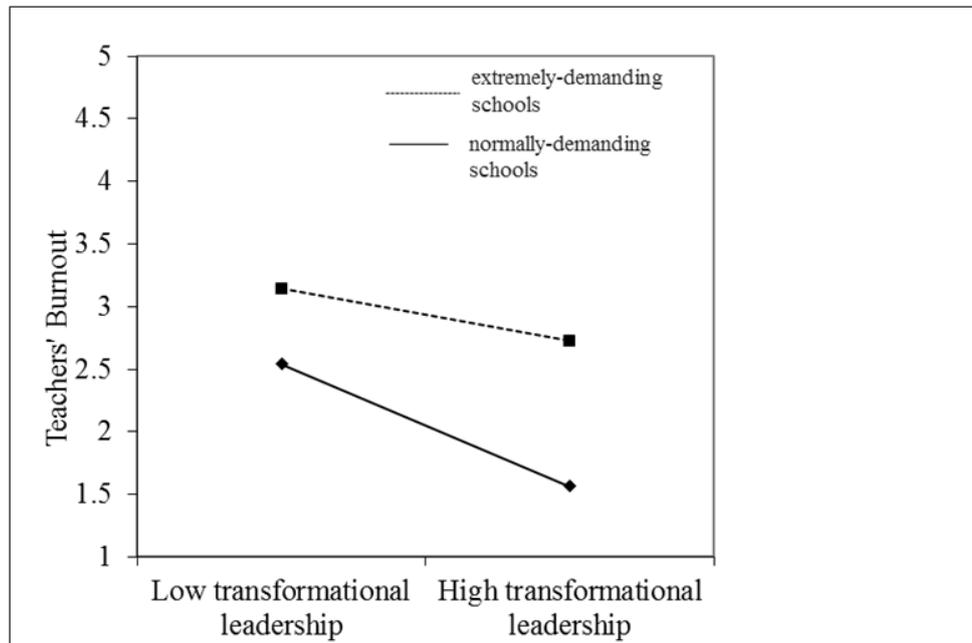


Figure 1. The effect of transformational leadership on teacher's burnout in normally-demanding schools and in extremely-demanding schools

4. Discussion

This study aimed to shed more light on contingencies of the transformational leadership-burnout link by investigating this relationship in extremely demanding vs. normally demanding work conditions.

The results fully supported the hypotheses, indicating that the level of teachers' burnout was positively affected by extremely demanding schools and negatively affected by the school manager's level of transformational leadership. These findings are consistent with occupational stress theories as well as with past research [7,20].

Furthermore, school type moderated the effect of transformational leadership on burnout, demonstrating that the ability of transformational leadership to reduce burnout was significantly stronger in normally demanding

schools in comparison to extremely demanding ones. This finding expands our understanding of contingencies of the transformational leadership-burnout relationship, showing that transformational leadership is less effective in extremely demanding work settings, where employees resources are depleted therefore not allowing them to use the benefits of transformational leadership for burnout reduction.

The results indicate that extremely demanding schools, in which the pupils are especially in need of high quality educators, are characterized with highly burned-out teachers. Furthermore, the potential of the manager's transformational leadership to reduce teachers' burnout is lower in extremely demanding schools, pointing to the need for other burnout reduction mechanisms in this type of schools.

The present study also has limitations; its cross-sectional design does not allow conclusions regarding

causality between transformational leadership and burnout (hypothesis 2). However, type of school was objectively defined and measured, constituting a methodological advantage over studies that examine the moderating effect of work strain on the relationship between transformational leadership and employees' outcomes using subjective strain measures [23].

References

- [1] S. Sonnentag, and M. Frese, "Stress in Organizations". In Weiner, I.B., Schmitt, N.W. and Highhouse, S. (Eds.), *Comprehensive Handbook of Psychology*, John Wiley, New York, NY, 2012, 2, pp. 560-592.
- [2] M.P. Leiter, and C. Maslach, "Areas of Worklife: A Structured Approach to Organizational Predictors of Job Burnout", In Perrewe, P.L. and Ganster, D.C. (Eds.), *Research in Occupational Stress and Well-Being*, Elsevier, Oxford, 2004, 3, pp. 91-134.
- [3] C.Maslach, W.B. Schaufeli, and M.P. Leiter, "Job Burnout", *Annual Review of Psychology*, 2001, 52, pp. 397-422.
- [4] S.E. Hobfoll, (1989), "Conservation of Resources: A New Attempt at Conceptualizing Stress", *American Psychologist*, 1989, 44, pp. 513-524.
- [5] A.B. Bakker, and E. Demerouti, "The Job Demands-Resources Model: State of the Art", *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 2007, 22, pp. 309-328.
- [6] J.D. Nahrgang, F.P. Morgeson, and D.A. Hofmann, (2011). "Safety at Work: A Meta-Analytic Investigation of the Link Between Job Demands, Job Resources, Burnout, Engagement, and Safety Outcomes", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 2011, 96(1), pp. 71-95.
- [7] W.B. Schaufeli, and A.B. Bakker, "Job Demands, Job Resources, and Their Relationship with Burnout and Engagement: A Multi-Sample Study", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 2004, 25(3), pp. 293-315.
- [8] L.L. Ten Brummelhuis, C.L. Ter Hoeven, A.B. Bakker, and B. Peper, "Breaking Through the Loss Cycle of Burnout: The Role of Motivation", *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 2011, 84(2), pp. 268-287.
- [9] A. Van den Broeck, M. Vansteenkiste, H. De Witte, and W. Lens, "Explaining the Relationships between Job Characteristics, Burnout, and Engagement: The Role of Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction", *Work & Stress*, 2008, 22(3), pp. 277-294.
- [10] R.P. Chaplain, "Stress and Psychological Distress among Trainee Secondary Teachers in England", *Educational Psychology*, 2008, 28, pp. 195-209.
- [11] J.J. Hakonen, A.B. Bakker, and W.B. Schaufeli, "Burnout and Work Engagement among Teachers", *Journal of School Psychology*, 2006, 43(6), pp. 495-513.
- [12] M. Cohen-Navot, S. Frankovitch, and T. Reinfeld, *Open and Hidden Dropping Out Among Youth*. Jerusalem: Joint Distribution Committee-Brookdale Institute, 2000, (in Hebrew).
- [13] G. McCluskey, "Exclusion from School: What Can 'Included' Pupils Tell Us?" *British Educational Research Journal*, 2008, 34(4), pp. 447-66.
- [14] M. Razer, V.J. Friedman, and B. Warshofsky, "Schools as Agents of Social Exclusion and Inclusion", *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 2013, 17(11), pp. 1152-1170.
- [15] H. Hetland, G.M. Sandal, and T.B. Johnsen, "Burnout in the Information Technology Sector: Does Leadership Matter?", *European journal of work and organizational psychology*, 2007, 16(1), pp. 58-75.
- [16] S. Kovjanic, S.C. Schuh, and K. Jonas, "Transformational Leadership and Performance: An Experimental Investigation of the Mediating Effects of Basic Needs Satisfaction and Work Engagement", *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 2013, 86, pp. 543-555.
- [17] W.B. Schaufeli, "Engaging Leadership in the Job Demands-Resources Model", *Career Development International*, 2016, 20(5), pp. 446-463.
- [18] B.M. Bass, *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations*, The Free Press, New York, 1985.
- [19] G. Yukl, "An Evaluation of Conceptual Weaknesses in Transformational and Charismatic Leadership Theories", *The Leadership Quarterly*, 1999, 10, pp. 285-305.
- [20] J. Skakon, K. Nielsen, V. Borg, and J. Guzman, "Are Leader's Well-Being, Behaviors and Style Associated with The Affective Well-Being of Their Employees? A Systematic Review of Three Decades of Research", *Work & Stress*, 2010, 24 (2), pp. 107-139.
- [21] A.N. Pieterse, D. Van Knippenberg, M. Schippers, and D. Stam, "Transformational and Transactional Leadership and Innovative Behavior: The Moderating Role of Psychological Empowerment", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 2010, 31(4), pp. 609-623.
- [22] D.N. Den Hartog, and F.D. Belschak, "When Does Transformational Leadership Enhance Employee Proactive Behavior? The Role of Autonomy and Role Breadth Self-Efficacy", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 2012, 97(1), pp. 194-202.
- [23] A. Schmitt, D.N. Den Hartog, and F.D. Belschak, "Transformational Leadership and Proactive Work Behaviour: A Moderated Mediation Model Including Work Engagement and Job Strain". *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 2016.
- [24] I.A. Friedman, "Turning Our Schools into A Healthier Workplace: Bridging Between Professional Self-Efficacy and Professional Demands", *Understanding and Preventing Teacher Burnout: A Sourcebook of International Research and Practice*, 1999, pp. 166-175.
- [25] C. Maslach, and S.E. Jackson, "The Measurement of Experienced Burnout", *Journal of organizational behavior*, 1981, 2(2), pp. 99-113.
- [26] B.M. Bass, and B.J. Avolio, *Transformational Leadership Development: Manual for the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire*, Consulting Psychologists Press, Palo Alto, CA, 1990.