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SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' LEADERSHIP STYLE AND TEACHERS' SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING AT SCHOOL

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Abstract

There is a widely recognized concern over the poor reputation of the teaching profession and lack of attractiveness of the school as a workplace. The aim of this study is to ascertain to what extent the leadership style of the school principal is related to the set of variables describing different aspects of teachers' wellbeing at the school - teachers' burnout, job insecurity, teachers' emotional and cognitive identification with the school and turnover intentions.
305 teachers working in 12 public schools in Estonia were surveyed. Results indicate that the more transformational leadership style prevails over transactional leadership style, the stronger affective and cognitive identification with their school teachers perceive, while the level of teachers' job insecurity and burnout is lower and they consider the likelihood of leaving their school smaller. Thus, the school principals' leadership style can be considered as a factor shaping the teachers' wellbeing at school as well as their emotional attachment to the school as a workplace.
Key words: *burnout, job insecurity, organizational identification, transformational and transactional leadership, turnover intentions.*

Introduction

As in many European countries, there is a concern in Estonia over the poor reputation of the teaching profession and lack of attractiveness of the school as a workplace. Members of teaching staff are ageing and strongly feminized, competition for teacher training programs is low, young teachers are hard to find. According to the last OECD TALIS teacher survey, in the majority of European countries teachers older than 40 years of age predominate, about two thirds of all teachers in participating countries are female, in some of the countries the share of female teachers exceed even 80% - in Bulgaria 81%, Slovak Republic 82%, Estonia 84%, Latvia 89% (OECD, 2013, 34). About one third of teachers participating in TALIS were from schools whose principal reports that the shortage of qualified and/or well-performing teachers hinders the school's capacity to provide quality instruction in their school (OECD, 2013, 47).

The reputation of the teaching profession in society is also low, which is most acutely perceived by the teachers themselves. The public debate usually explains the situation with low salaries of teachers. Yet, also in the countries where teaching is a well-paid job, teachers do not regard their occupation as sufficiently acknowledged by the society. Table 1 gives the assessments of the reputation of the teaching profession in society by teachers from different countries accompanied by the figures of annual salaries of teachers and school principals in these countries. Practically in all of the countries (with the exception of Finland) the vast majority of teachers are of the opinion that teaching as a profession is not sufficiently valued in society. Even in Norway and Denmark where teachers' salaries are very high, the majority of the teachers perceives the poor reputation of the teaching profession.

Table 1. Teachers' assessments of the reputation of the teaching profession in society, annual salaries of teachers and school principals.

Country	Percentage of lower secondary education teachers who "agree" or "strongly agree" with the following statement: I think that the teaching profession is valued in society**	Annual gross salary of full-time fully qualified school heads in public schools. (Euros) *	Annual gross salary of full-time fully qualified teachers in public schools. (Euros) *
Finland	58	57 600	42 000
Romania	35	9 200	5 800
Norway	32	76 500	59 000
Bulgaria	19	7 300	4 400
Denmark	18	87 800	63 500
Poland	17	19 000	13 900
Italy	14	62 500	29 100
Estonia	14	14 300	9 800
Czech Rep	13	19 200	12 600
Portugal	11	38 100	27 400
Sweden	5	46 500	35 000
Slovakia	4	10 200	10 200

*Source: Teachers' and School Heads' Salaries and Allowances in Europe, 2012/13, Eurydice Facts & Figures, European Commission, 2013

**Source: OECD (2014), TALIS 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning, OECD Publishing. http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264196261-en

Remuneration definitely has an important role in establishing the reputation and attractiveness of the teaching profession, especially in poorer countries. However, research also indicates that there are other factors modifying the attractiveness of the teaching profession and school as a workplace. In particular, the specific features of the teaching profession are highlighted – high workload and increasingly more complex requirements, a need to keep up with continuous innovation and competitive pressures, stress and burnout caused by the intensity of work. Even in Finland, where teachers' reputation in the society is considerably higher than in the majority of other countries, teachers have highest burnout levels compared with workers in all other human services and white-collar jobs (Pyhältö, Pietarinen, Salmela-Aro, 2011).

The contradiction between high expectations regarding the teaching profession and the teachers' unstable and insecure feelings at school is a problem that gave rise to the current study. In the present situation, it is reasonable to ask – what creates a bond between a teacher and the school, what determines the value and reputation of the school as a workplace, how to improve today's situation? These questions are asked in many countries, but are especially acute in the Eastern European context, where teachers' salaries are pointedly modest while their workload and responsibilities are not smaller than those of their Western colleagues. Could there be additional resources hidden in the school itself that would increase its attractiveness as a workplace, could organizational administration and leadership in school be the factors that would make working there more pleasant for teachers? Based on a study conducted in Estonia is spring 2014, this article will focus on school principals' leadership style, asking how it affects teachers' wellbeing at school, what effect it has on teachers' attitude towards the school as a workplace.

Theoretical Background

When dealing with school principals' leadership style, transformational (TF) and transactional (TA) leadership model is used, often considered to be the single most studied and debated idea in the field of leadership studies. The study is trying to ascertain to what extent the use of TF and TA style by school principals is related to the set of variables describing different aspects of teachers' wellbeing at the school - teachers' burnout, job insecurity, teachers' emotional and cognitive identification with the school and turnover intentions. All these variables have been elaborated and widely used in the context of business organizations, but quite seldom in the analysis of educational organizations. Still, there are some studies indicating that these measures can also be used to describe teachers' subjective well-being in the context of the school as an organization.

Leadership

Transformational leader, defined by Burns is one who raises the followers' level of consciousness about the importance and value of desired outcomes and the methods of reaching those outcomes (Burns, 1978). The transformational leader convinces his followers to transcend their self-interest for the sake of the organization, while elevating the followers' level of need on Maslow's hierarchy from lower-level concerns for safety and security to higher-level needs for achievement and self-actualization (Bass, 2008).
Transactional leadership refers more to the exchange relationship between leader and follower to meet their self-interests. According to Bass,

> *"it may take the form of contingent reward in which the leader clarifies for the follower through direction or participation what the follower needs to do to be rewarded for the effort, it may take the form of management-by-exception, in which the leader monitors the follower's performance and takes corrective action if the follower fails to meet standards, or it may take the form of passive leadership, in which the leader is waiting for problems to arise before taking corrective action or is laissez-faire and avoids taking any action" (Bass, 1999, 11).*

TF leader is a leader who directs and suggests common goals, who emphasizes the common targets and wider (organizational, national) interests. TA leader is a leader who relies more on the so-called market principles, who attempts to offer everyone recognition appropriate to their contribution and organize things so that both the subordinate and the leader are satisfied (McCleskey, 2014). Taking into consideration the increasingly higher marketization of schools and education, it is justified to differentiate between TF and TA leadership styles in school as an organization. On the one hand, a more idealistic leader who emphasizes wider interests, on the other hand, a pragmatic leader attaching importance to mutual giving and receiving.

In practice both TF and TA can be realized through different behavior and communication patterns. As Bass indicates,

> *"Transformational leaders can be directive or participative, authoritarian or democratic. Nelson Mandela is directive and transformational when he declares, "Forget the past". He can be participative and transformational when he actively supports and involves himself in open, multiracial consultations. He can be directive and transactional when he promises blacks better housing in exchange for their votes and is participative and transactional when he reaches mutual agreements about sharing power with the white minority. The same leaders display both transformational and transactional behavior as well as mix direction and participation" (Bass, 1999, 13).*

The most common measuring instrument of TF and TA is the *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire* (MLQ), which has been used to conduct hundreds of studies. According to one of the authors of the questionnaire, B. Bass, the behavior of an individual leader generally contains elements of both TF and TA. The full range of leadership, as measured by the MLQ, implies that every leader displays a frequency of both the transactional and transformational factors, but each leader's profile involves more of one and less of the other (Bass, 1999).

TF and TA studies have mainly been conducted in business organizations. The results indicate that from the subordinate's point of view, TF style is generally preferred to TA style, and TF leaders are also more effective (Walumbwa, Avolio, Weichun, 2008). There are some studies, however, that have been carried out in school environment and outline teachers' attitudes to TF and TA styles practiced by school principals. The results received by Canadian researchers reveal that teachers who worked in schools with highly transformational principals praised the positive organizational culture at their school. In contrast, teachers who worked with principals evidencing low levels of transformational qualities were frustrated with the behaviors of their respective principals and the attendant negative implications for the school's culture (Hauserman, Stick, 2013).

Similar conclusions were also drawn by Pakistani researchers, who concluded that schoolteachers working under transformational leaders are found to elicit higher level of citizenship behaviors as compared to transactional styles (Ali, Waqar, 2013). Also, in the study of Smith and Bell (2011), head teachers in England used both transactional and transformational leadership, but it was the transformational leadership that brought about the greatest school improvements.

The above allows assuming that school principals' leadership style is related to teachers' sense of wellbeing at school and their bond with the school as a working place. To assess teachers' wellbeing and subjective bond, we relied on the variables used in the field of organizational behavior - teacher's emotional and cognitive identification with the school, teacher's burnout, job insecurity and turnover intentions.

Burnout

Burnout is a construct that describes an employee's sense of well-being in the context of an organization. Burnout is a state of prolonged physical and psychological exhaustion, which is a consequence of prolonged and extensive work-related stress. Usually three distinctive symptoms – emotional exhaustion, cynicism and professional inadequacy – are considered as elements of burnout (Maslach, Jackson, 1981).

Burnout has also become topical in the school environment, teacher burnout has been found to have significant implications not only for teachers' motivation, health and job satisfaction, but also for student behavior (Montgomery, Rupp, 2005). It has also been indicated that burnout is related to the behavior of the school principal. Research on teacher's burnout has shown that various environmental as well as individual factors contribute to burnout, including also lack of administrative support (Pyhältö, Pietarinen, Salmela-Aro, 2011).

Job insecurity

Job insecurity is defined as an overall concern about the continued existence of the job in the future (De Witte, 1999). This is an aspect of job-related sense of wellbeing, which describes security-insecurity about the continued existence of the job and its duration. It is usually assessed by means of statements expressing job-related doubts or fears, e.g. "I worry about", "I fear I will", or "I feel uneasy about" (Sverke, Hellgren, Näswall, 2006), which indicates, that job insecurity is predominantly negative and undesired, it is a stressor, which is considered unpleasant for the individual.

Job insecurity is usually divided into a quantitative (threats to the job as such), and qualitative (threats to valued job features) aspects. Quantitative job insecurity refers to concerns about the future existence of the present job. Qualitative job insecurity pertains to perceived threats of impaired quality in the employment relationship, such as deterioration in working conditions, lack of career opportunities, and decreasing salary development (Hellgren, Sverke, 1999).

Empirical evidence indicates that job insecurity has detrimental consequences for employee attitudes and well being, greater insecurity means stress, health risks, lower commitment, but also higher turnover intention (Sverke, Hellgren, Näswall, 2006). A study conducted among Israeli teachers revealed that job insecurity tended to lead to negative attitudes towards one's job and workplace and that the strongest effect of work insecurity was with the intention to quit (Rosenblatt, Ruvio, 1996).

Organizational identification

Organizational identification describes a person's subjective bond with an organization, i.e. to what extent the person identifies with the organization. This approach relies on the theory of social identity widely used in psychology. According to Johnson, Morgeson and Hekman:

"Social identification is defined as a sense of oneness with some group, a relationship where group members feel attached to certain groups and define themselves as members of those groups. As empirical studies indicate, when employees identify with organizational groups (teams, workgroups, whole organizations), they are less likely to leave, perform more organizational citizenship behaviors, are more involved in the job, are more satisfied with their jobs" (Johnson, Morgeson, Hekman, 2012).

Usually two dimensions of organizational identification are outlined – emotional and cognitive identification. Emotional identification refers to the person-organization affective bonds (I am happy and proud to work here); cognitive identification reflects more rational considerations that connect employees with the organization. Empirical studies reveal that organizational identification is closely related to other measures of person-organization bonds – person-organization fit, organizational commitment.

Turnover intentions

Intention to leave or turnover intention is usually defined as one's desire or willingness to leave the employing organization. Verbally expressed intent to leave one's position has been reported to be a good indicator of actual turnover. Employee turnover has for a long time been a focus of interest for researchers because of its negative influences on organizational performance - losing experienced employees is directly related to the loss of organizational competencies and important knowledge. Also, teacher turnover has been a focus of interest because of its negative influence on school performance and educational quality (Song, Martens, McCharen, Ausburn, 2011). Some studies indicate that teacher turnover intention is related to their job satisfaction and work stress (Liu, Onwuegbuzie, 2012).

TF and TA leadership styles as well as variables describing teachers' wellbeing – teacher's burnout and job insecurity, and constructs describing teachers' bond with the school as a workplace – teacher's emotional and cognitive identification with the school, have all been analyzed to some extent in earlier studies focusing on school as an organization. However, their mutual relations specifically in the Eastern European economic and political context have not yet been addressed. Therefore, an empirical study was carried out aiming to answer the

following research question - to what extent the use of TF and TA leadership style by school principals is related to the variables describing different aspects of teachers' wellbeing at the school - focusing specifically on teachers' burnout, job insecurity, teachers' emotional and cognitive identification with the school and turnover intentions.

Methodology of Research

Background of Research

To answer the research question, a survey among Estonian teachers was carried out during February and March 2014. Survey questionnaire consisted of several blocks and included scales of leadership style, burnout, job insecurity, organizational identification and turnover intention. Data were gathered using an online survey software SurveyMonkey.

Sample

The sample consisted of 305 teachers working in 12 public schools of Estonia. The sample included teachers working with at least half-time. Non-probability non-proportional quota sampling principles were used to ensure that schools of different types and sizes would be represented. Still, the sample is not representative of whole Estonia, mainly urban schools were represented with the total number of students varying from two hundred to two thousand. Therefore, although research results allow us to describe the relations between variables, they cannot be generalized to the entire teachers' population in Estonia.

89.5% of the respondents were female and 10.5% male. The age distribution of the respondents was as follows: below 30 years of age 15.4%, 30-39 years of age 22.3%, 40-49 years of age 27.5%, 50-59 years of age 24.3% and 60 years of age or older 10.5%.

The majority of the respondents - 97% had higher education. 20.5% of the respondents were teaching at primary school, 25.5% at basic school, 21.2% at upper-secondary school, and 32.5% at several different school levels.

Instruments

Leadership style. To describe school principals' leadership style a version of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ version 5x) developed by Avolio, Bass and Dung (1996) was used, which had been adapted for investigating school principals by Nir and Kranot (2006). There were 13 statements describing transformational leadership style and 6 statements describing transactional leadership style. The statements were rated on a (1- "strongly disagree" to 6- "strongly agree").

Burnout. To measure teachers' burnout the work-related burnout subscale of the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI) was implemented, which consists of seven questions describing the extent of burnout specifically developed for measuring work-related burnout (Kristensen, Borritz, Villadsen & Christensen, 2005). The questions were answered on a 5-point Likert type scale (1- never to 5- always or 1-a small extent to 5- a great extent)

Job insecurity. To measure quantitative job insecurity two statements of the job insecurity scale by De Witte (2000) and De Cyuper and De Witte (2006) were employed and to measure qualitative job insecurity two statements of the scale developed by Hellgren, Sverke and Isaksson (1999) were applied. The statements were rated on a 5-point scale (1- strongly disagree to 5- strongly agree).

Organizational identification. To measure organizational identification, 3 statements describing cognitive identification and 3 statements describing emotional identification of the

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scale developed by Johnson, Morgeson and Hekman (2012) were used. The statements were adapted to describe working at school. All statements were rated on a 5-point Likert type scale from "disagree" (1) to "agree" (5).

Turnover intention was described by the question: "How likely do you think it is that you will leave your current job next year?" The question was answered on a 5-point Likert scale (1-it is very unlikely, 5-it is very likely). It was also asked if the teacher would prefer to continue working in the school system after leaving the current job (a different job in the same school or the same job in a different school) or would prefer leaving school system and doing a different job.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using statistical package Statistica.10, the main statistical procedures used for data analysis were descriptive statistics, Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient after testing the normal distribution using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, and ANOVA. The descriptive statistics of the variables in the study and their reliabilities, measured by Cronbach alpha, are presented in Table 2. The higher score of the mean indicates higher level or intensity of the construct studied (higher burnout, more insecurity, etc).

Table 2. **The descriptive statistics and reliabilities of study variables.**

Variable	Reliability (Cronbach alpha)	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Std. Dev.
Transactional leadership style	0.93	2.70	1.00	6.00	0.89
Transformational leadership style	0.84	4.54	1.00	5.38	0.79
Qualitative job insecurity	0.77	3.55	1.00	5.00	0.94
Quantitative job insecurity	0.70	3.94	1.00	5.00	0.85
Burnout	0.85	2.71	1.14	4.71	0.71
Affective organizational identification	0.85	4.15	1.33	5.00	0.79
Cognitive organizational identification	0.83	3.74	1.00	5.00	0.91

Results of Research

School principals' leadership style. In all schools, the principals apply elements of both transformational and transactional leadership styles. According to the assessments of the participating teachers, the behavior of school principals is more characterized by transformational leadership style (M=4.54; SD=0.79) than transactional leadership style (M=2.70, SD=0.89). The comparison of the difference in the application of the two leadership styles showed that TF style is more frequently applied (t(274)=20.8; p<0.001). The domination of TF style occurred in all the 12 schools involved, while the degree of TF domination varied considerably in different schools.

As all school principals apply elements of both transformational and transactional leadership styles, we calculated a measure that describes to what extent transformational style predominates over transactional style in each individual school principal. For that, from each TF score a relevant TA score was subtracted and the resulting measure shows the level of predomination of transformational style over transactional style. The mean of the measure of predominance of transformational style was M=1.82 (SD=1.45, min = -2.99, max =5.00).

Leadership style and teachers' wellbeing at school. Table 3 presents correlations between the investigated variables. It appears that school principals' leadership style is related to teachers' sense of well-being. The more transformational is the principal's perceived leadership style, the lower the level of teachers' burnout and job insecurity, especially qualitative insecurity used to be. The opposite is true as well: a higher level of TA in the leadership style is related to a higher level of burnout and insecurity.

The differing relationship of teachers' quantitative and qualitative job insecurity with the explored leadership styles deserves attention. The more transformational teachers perceive school principals' leadership styles, the lower is their qualitative job insecurity, the fewer risks to their employment relationship – deterioration in working conditions, reduction in career opportunities, a decrease in their pay, etc. they anticipate. And the other way round: the more TA the leadership is perceived, the higher risk to the quality of the employment relationship is anticipated. Quantitative job insecurity appeared to be somewhat more weakly related to leadership style. This may result from the overall labor market situation in Estonia where due to low competition the probability of teachers losing their job is relatively low and the demand for teachers is greater than the supply in many regions.

The study shows that the school principals' TF and TA leadership styles were also related to teachers' bond with their school: turnover intention and teachers' cognitive and affective identification with school. The more transformational style and the less transactional style teachers perceive in their school principal's behavior, the greater their subjective bond with their school and the higher their affective and cognitive identification with the school happened to be, and they also consider leaving the school more unlikely.

Table 3. Correlations between school principal's leadership styles and the variables describing teachers' sense of well-being and bond with their school (*Spearman* Rank Order Correlations).

	Transformational leadership style	Transactional leadership style	Domination of transformational leadership style
Job insecurity, qualitative	-0.44***	0.22***	-0.36***
Job insecurity, quantitative	-0.11	0.15**	-0.17**
Burnout	-0.20***	0.17**	-0.22***
Affective organizational Identification	0.59***	-0.25***	0.46***
Cognitive organizational Identification	0.46***	-0.17**	0.32***
Likelihood of leaving the current job next year	-0.22***	0.08	-0.17**

**p<0.01; ***p<0.001

To gain a better understanding of the relationship between the school principals' leadership style and teachers' turnover intentions, we compared three groups of teachers: those who would prefer to stay in the same school should they want to change jobs (taking on a different job); those who would do the same job in a different school and those who would like to leave school system (work for another organization). The conducted ANOVA revealed that the teachers who would prefer to continue working in school system assessed their school principal more as the

follower of TF style than those who would rather leave school system and work in a different organization F(2, 244)=11,6; p<0.001) (see Table 4).

Table 4. The comparison of the means of transformational leadership style with the willingness to stay in school system or leave school system (ANO-VA; Tukey HSD-test) F (2, 244)=11.6; p<0.001).

	Would continue working in the same school	Would leave to work in another school	Would leave the school system
Transformational leadership style	M=4.92 SD=0.83	M=6.60 SD=0.71	M=4.31 SD=0.79
Would continue working in the same school (n=50)	1		
Would leave to work in another school (n=67)	0.073	1	
Would leave the school system (n=130)	0.000***	0.036*	1

*p<0.05; ***p<0.001

This ANOVA also indicates that the more transformational is the perceived leadership style of the principal, the higher are the indicators of teachers' well-being at school and the lower are their intention to leave the current workplace.

Discussion

The study conducted among Estonian teachers reveals that the more transformational leadership style prevails over transactional leadership style in the behavior of their school principal, the stronger affective and cognitive identification with their school teachers perceive, while the level of their job insecurity and burnout is lower and they consider the likelihood of leaving their school less likely. Therefore, the leadership style of school principals is important for teachers' sense of well-being and the bond with their school. The TF leaders probably help to reduce the teachers' stress and create stronger emotional bonds with the school by trying to inspire their teachers, cooperate with them and involve them in the achievement of common goals.

Some earlier studies have also found that there is a relationship between leadership styles, burnout and job insecurity (Haamer, 2010). When analyzing supervisory support (characteristic of TF style), Skaalvik and Skaalvik indicated that it is related to teachers' job satisfaction, whereas this effect is mediated with several other variables characteristic of school context (time pressure, autonomy, depersonalization etc.) (Skaalvik, Skaalvik, 2009). In our study, we also measured teachers' average workload (how many hours a day the teachers spend at school, how many hours they spend on work-related activities at home) and it appeared that teachers' work-related burnout *was not* related to their actual workload, whereas the correlation between burnout and the school principal's leadership style was significant. This gives additional grounds to speculate about the importance of the leadership style and teachers' subjective well-being.

As the study focuses only on a certain sector of schooling (teachers of larger urban schools in Estonia) and our results do not describe the impacts but relations between variables,

the causal interpretations should be avoided. However, the fact that there proved to be such a significant correlation between teachers' perception of TF and TA leadership styles and the variables describing teachers' wellbeing and their subjective bonds with their schools allows us speculate that school principals' leadership style, in combination with other factors, can be regarded as a force that shapes school's attractiveness and through that also the reputation of the school as a workplace. The leader and his leadership style create an overall working climate at the school, which can be either an attraction or a repulsive force for the teachers.

Conclusions

Teachers' well-being at school and the reputation of the teaching profession in general, certainly result from the interplay of various aspects in school life. In the political debate the salary issues have been presented as the most crucial aspect explaining the current controversies and tensions. This is certainly right, but not the whole story. There are reasons to believe, and the present study supports it, that the atmosphere created by the institution's leader as well as the working climate prevailing in the school also play a role in how the teachers feel at school and to what extent they identify themselves with the school. Not only financial rewards, but also quality of relationships and management are important for the teacher as well as for all employees to feel good in an organization.

The TF style leadership – suggesting common goals and involving teachers in achieving them, optimistic mood and acceptance of different views and approaches – seems to be the one that creates a stronger bond between teachers and the school rather than the TA style encouraging competition, close monitoring of the compliance with the rules or just letting go. The prevailing atmosphere at schools following the TF principles can be viewed as an additional resource that gives an essentially wider meaning to teachers' activities besides merely delivering their classes.

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