MANAGEMENT OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND BURNOUT

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Abstract
Today's modern, fast-paced, expanding organizations are characterized by higher risks of burnout emergence among their employees than ever before. Many managers worldwide struggle to identify more effective measures for empowering employees in their jobs and sustaining work engagement. Thus, new management and leadership practices have been proposed and tested. For this research, we selected transformational leadership. The main objectives of this research are: to measure the occurrence of transformational leadership and burnout and to find out the potential relationship between them. The main research methods used were: self-reported questionnaires, a Burnout Assessment Tool, and a Global Transformational Leadership scale. The research results were processed with Jeffrey's Amazing Statistics Program. According to the results, transformational leadership negatively correlates with burnout, meaning that lower levels of burnout are experienced by employees led by the transformational type of leaders (managers). The findings of this research are specifically useful for private and public managers and scholars as well as human resources specialists and consultants, providing valuable insights about leadership practices that can improve employees' performance and reduce their burnout in organizations.

Keywords: transformational leadership; burnout; management; organizations.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the first quarter of the 21st century, organizations are experiencing various challenges that impact their employees' working lives: pandemics, economic crises, shrinking markets, relocations, restructuring of activities, etc.

In this context, the subjective job demands perceived by individuals in organizations are at the highest levels. A widespread global phenomenon is now almost instantly associated with the working life: burnout. This unfortunate condition has drastic negative effects on work performance and the mental and physical health of individuals who are experiencing it (Rakauskienė & Petkevičiūtė-Stručko, 2022).

The consequences of burnout are felt both in the private and public sectors (Jansen & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2023; Ndzabela, & Lukman, 2023; Yurchyk et al., 2023). Education, health care, and public institutions (especially local public administration) face increasing workloads and lesser qualified staff available for the implementation of new technologies (Androniceanu, 2024).

In any organization, the relationship between managers and subordinates can help in the management and potential prevention of burnout, while fostering work engagement (Paulikas & Paulikienė, 2022). The well-being and development of an employee can be ehnanced or reduced by the manager's leadership style (Tsheola et al., 2023). Achieving the highest potential of a team member through empowerment is a characteristic specific to the transformational leadership style.

In this regard, the investigation of the process in which employees' burnout is influenced by the transformational leadership of their managers is an endeavor worth pursuing.

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2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The construct of "transformational leadership" was used for the first time by James MacGregor Burns in 1978, in his book entitled "Leadership". Transformational leadership is presented in antithesis to transactional leadership. While transformational leaders improve the morale, motivation, and moral values of those who follow them, transactional leaders only address the immediate personal interests of their subordinates (Davidov, 2023; Bass, 1999). Burns' book was based on historical studies of US presidents and 20th-century revolutionary movements and ideologies. According to the author, transformational leadership represents a creative form of interaction between leaders and subordinates in which both parties play a dynamic role, influencing the perceptions and actions of the other. Transformational leaders are truly responsive to the needs and desires of their followers, seeking to motivate them so that they become capable of moving forward, eventually becoming leaders and in turn leading their former mentors (Zikhali et al. 2023; Khanin, 2007).

Breevaart conducted a study in 2014 on a sample of 61 naval cadets from a Norwegian Military University during a trip. Transformational leadership was found to contribute to subordinates' daily work engagement (Breevaart, et al., 2014).

According to Ghasabeh and his research team, there is a correlation between transformational leadership and organizational innovation. Transformational leaders manifest distinct behaviors (eg. intellectual stimulation) that foster innovation among organization members (Ghasabeh et al., 2015).

Transformational leadership is a desired, potential state with positive effects on employees. However, managers who aspire to use such a leadership style in their organizations, are currently facing a different, actual state among their subordinates: the burnout syndrome.

The "burnout" construct has been used in scientific literature since the 1970s. The first research articles on the topic of burnout appeared in the United States of America and focused on studying the phenomenon among employees in the field of human services (social work, medicine, education, etc.) (Maslach et al., 2001). Burnout was originally used colloquially to describe the ill effects of chronic drug abuse. In 1974, the first scientific article on professional burnout appeared, the author being Herbert Freudenberger, a psychiatrist from a medical clinic in Manhattan, New York. To present certain symptoms (e.g. emotional exhaustion; loss of motivation; reduced commitment) experienced by the volunteers and himself in the clinic where he worked, the “burnout” term was used by Freudenberger (Pîrvu, 2020; Schaufeli et al., 2009).

During the same time frame, social psychologist Christina Maslach and her colleagues were conducting research studies on emotions in the workplace. Following a series of interviews, she conducted in the state of California among social workers, Maslach identified specific dimensions (e.g. emotional exhaustion, negative feelings; lack of professionalism) and grouped these as part of the burnout construct (Maslach et al., 1997).

Individual characteristics such as personality and personal resources have some correlation with burnout. Burnout appears to be more strongly correlated with health outcomes. Thus, high demands at work have been identified as the main cause of burnout, which leads to poor health and negative organizational outcomes (Bakker et al., 2014).

According to (Demerout et al., 2001), research in recent decades has highlighted the fact that high job demands often generate burnout. While workplace resources support the achievement of work goals and personal development of employees, chronic fatigue and detachment among subordinates are caused by high job demands. In addition, an important factor in the occurrence of burnout is represented by job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), but compared to job demands, there is a smaller, negative correlation between resources and burnout. Job resources reduce the relationship between job demands and burnout. Effective and healthy coping with job demands is favored due to this type of resource (Bakker & de Vries, 2021).

There is a statistically significant association between burnout and performance, according to (Bakker, 2015), the latest being one of the indicators of employee well-being. Research conducted in 2015, based on the theories of work engagement and self-determination, showed that employees' time spent on their main work tasks, administrative tasks, interactions with customers, or meetings had a negative association with task-level

need satisfaction for employees with high (vs. low) burnout. Thus, those with a high level of general burnout fail to meet their basic needs through work (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2015).

Previous research provides some insight into the positive correlations between some dimensions (intellectual stimulation) of transformational leadership and burnout. This effect could appear specifically in those professions (e.g. nurses, teachers) with high levels of stress involved (Seltzer et al., 1989).

A study carried out by Salem and Kattara in Egypt, at the level of 113 5-star hotels (327 respondents who completed questionnaires – a response rate of 65.4%), highlighted the fact that transformational leadership correlates significantly and negatively with workplace stress. This negative correlation is stronger for hotel employees who interact directly with hotel guests (Salem & Kattara, 2015).

Arnold and Connelly suggest that a high level of stress generates negative behavior (e.g.: reducing resources, focusing attention on a single problem, affecting the ability to make decisions), which are in antithesis with the precepts of transformational leadership (e.g.: attention paid to the initiatives and needs of employees - individualized consideration, the use of new information and approaches – intellectual stimulation). As a result, there could not be a positive association between stress and transformational leadership (Arnold & Connelly, 2013).

Teetzen claims that transformational leadership style influences the state of well-being (the opposite of burnout) and the relationship between these two variables is mediated by different job resources and job demands (Teetzen et. al, 2022).

3. RESEARCH GOAL, MAIN OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESIS

The main research goal of this study is to identify the existing relationship between transformational leadership and burnout and to analyse to what degree does transformational leadership influence burnout.

The main objectives of the research are as follows:

- To discover the potential relationship between transformational leadership and burnout;
- To examine the intensity of the relationship between transformational leadership and burnout.
- To determine the existence of a criterion-predictor relationship for transformational leadership.

The hypotheses of this research are the following:

H1: Transformational leadership is negatively correlates with burnout.

H2: The level of transformational leadership predicts the level of burnout.

4. RESEARCH METHODS & METHODOLOGY

The research procedure consisted of a cross-sectional study on a group of employees from Romania, based on two questionnaires with self-report scales: the Global Transformational Leadership (GTL) scale, used for examining transformational leadership levels of respondent's superiors, and the Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT) for measuring burnout. Data was collected electronically, and online through the Google Forms application. At the beginning of the form, participants had to answer a series of questions about meeting the eligibility criteria. All participants explicitly agreed to the processing of their data in accordance with the legal norms in force, by signing an informed consent before completing the actual questionnaire. All statistical analyses were carried out with the help of Jeffrey's Amazing Statistics Program (JASP), version 0.19 (2024).

A systemic research approach was implemented, beginning with the analysis of the existing research literature; establishing the research objectives; setting the time frame; selecting the appropriate research tools; and identifying the target group. followed by the design and dissemination of the questionnaires; then collecting the responses, synthesizing and processing the data.

The sample was composed of 238 subjects from Romania, employed in different organizations and industries (human resources; IT&C; consulting; banking; medical services; education; and public administration). Out of the total eligible participants (N=238), 67.65% were women (n = 161) and 32.35% were men (n=77). The age of the participants varied between 18 and 62 years, with an average of 32.28 years (SD=12.02) and the length of service varied between 1 and 38 years, with an average of 11.12 years (SD=10.86).

In regards to the format of the professional activities performed, most employees, 44.5% (n=106), declared working from the workplace, 29% (n=69) worked in a hybrid format and 26.5% (n=63) worked from home. Regarding the activity sector, over a quarter of respondents (27.3%) worked in human resources (n=65); 25.6% (n=61) worked in commercial services (e.g., information and communication technology, consultancy, etc.); 10.9% (n=26) in banking, real estate and financial services; 8.8% (n=21) in medical, social and law enforcement service; 4.2% (n=10) in public administration and governance; 4.2% (n=10) worked in retail, whole sail and repairs; 3.8% (n=9) in IT; 3.4% (n=8) in education; 2.5% (n=6) in constructions; 2.1% (n=5) in hospitality (e.g., hotel, restaurant); 1.7% (n=4) in finances; 1.2% (n=3) in advertising, market research, marketing; 1.2% (n=3) in engineering (processing, automotive); 0.8% (n=2) in agriculture, silviculture and fishing; 0.8% (n=2) in NGOs and 1 respondent worked in sales.

A series of standardized instruments were used to measure the constructs investigated in the present study.

The Romanian version of the Global Transformational Leadership (GLT) scale (Carless et al., 2000), was used in order to measure transformational leadership. The questionnaire presents 7 dimensions of transformational leadership, each dimension corresponding to one item. The 7 dimensions are as follows: (1) vision – the leaders' capacity to explicitly share a bright outcome; (2) staff development – support and encouragement provided to each employee; (3) supportive leadership –efforts and results are recognized by the leader; (4) empowerment – team members are encouraged to work together and interact; (5) innovative thinking – the leader challenges the subordinates to develop lateral thinking; (6) leadership by example: consistency between the words and actions of the leader; (7) charisma: self-efficacy and competence of the leaders is inspiring for the followers. Responses to this questionnaire were collected on a five-point Likert scale, with participants responding between 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree). The measurement of internal consistency was performed through the values analysis of the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the entire scale. In this study, the internal consistency coefficient was α = .95 (M = 3.62; SD = 1.05).

The Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT) version adapted for the Romanian language (Oprea, Iliescu & De Witte, 2021) was used for measuring burnout levels. The scale has the form of a self-report questionnaire composed of 12 items that evaluate four dimensions (basic symptoms) of burnout with three items in each dimension. These dimensions are: (1) exhaustion – at the mental level, during work; (2) mental distancing – experiencing strong job dissatisfaction; (3) impairment of cognitive control – the locus of control problems during work; (4) impairment of emotional control – depersonalization and cognitive dissonance. Responses to this questionnaire were collected on a five-point Likert scale, with participants responding between 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree). The internal consistency coefficient was α = .88 (M = 1.99; SD = 0.66).

5. RESEARCH RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Jeffrey's Amazing Statistics Program (JASP) 0.19 was used to organize, synthesize, and describe the data. Referring to the descriptive statistical procedures, essential for the foundation of the inferential procedures, the following descriptive indicators were identified: the minimum value, the maximum value, the average, and the standard deviation. This information can be found in Table 1.

3.62 and 1.99 were the average scores for transformational leadership and burnout, respectively. This indicates that certain behaviors of transformational leadership were displayed by the respondent's superiors, while a mostly low level of burnout was recorded among employees.

The minimum levels of transformational leadership and burnout (1) were declared by some subjects, while there was no single subject with the highest level of burnout on the scale deployed (5), as the maximum measured score was 4.

TABLE 1 - DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Variables	N	*M*	*SD*	Min	Max
Burnout	238	1.99	0.66	1	4
Transformational leadership	238	3.62	1	1	5

High internal consistencies: (r=.88) and (r=.95), respectively, appeared for both transformational leadership and burnout. A statistically significant negative correlation was identified between burnout and transformational leadership (r=-.20). These results are summarized in Table 2.

TABLE 2 - MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS, ZERO-ORDER CORRELATIONS AND INTERNAL CONSISTENCY OF DATA (N = 238 SUBJECTS)

Variables	*M*	*SD*	Min	Max
Burnout	1.99	0.66	(.88)	
Transformational leadership	3.62	1.05	-.20**	(.95)

Note: *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

TABLE 3 - LINEAR REGRESSION

Model Summary - Burnout score

Model	R	R^2	Adjsuted R^2	RMSE
M0	0.000	0.000	0.000	8.023
M1	0.383	0.146	0.143	7.429

Note. M_1 includes Transformational leadership score (TLS)

TABLE 4 - ANOVA TEST FOR THE LINEAR REGRESSION

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
M_1	Regression	2232.180	1	2232.180	40.450	< .001
	Residual	13023.287	236	55.183		
	Total	15255.466	237			

Note. M_1 includes Transformational leadership score (TLS)

Note. The intercept model is omitted, as no meaningful information can be shown.

TABLE 5 - COEFFICIENTS OF THE LINEAR REGRESSION

Model		Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized	t	p
M0	(Intercept)	23.878	0.520		45.915	< .001
M1	(Intercept)	34.252	1.701		20.140	< .001
	TLS	-0.410	0.064	-0.383	-6.360	< .001

A linear regression was conducted to examine how well transformational leadership could predict burnout. A scatterplot showed that the relationship between transformational leadership and burnout was negative and linear and did not reveal any bivariate outliers. An analysis of standard residuals showed the data contained no outliers (Std. Residual Min.=-2.64, Std. Residual Max.=3.06). Independence of residual errors was confirmed with a Durbin-Watson test (d=1.782). Residual plots showed homoscedasticity and normality of the residuals.

Transformational leadership did not statistically significantly predicted Burnout, F (1, 236) = 40.45, p < .001, accounting for 14.3 % of the variability in burnout with adjusted R2= .14. The regression equation for predicting the burnout from transformational leadership was y=34.252.-0.41x (transformational leadership). The confidence interval for the slope to predict burnout from transformational leadership was 95% CI [-0.283, -0.537] with a B=-0.41; thus, for each one unit increase of transformational leadership, burnout decreases by about 0.3 to 0.5 points.

Transformational leadership negatively correlating with burnout was the first hypothesis of this study. This hypothesis was validated through the research results, with the discovery of a statistically significant and negative association between the two variables. Transformational leadership predicting burnout, the second

hypothesis, was invalidated through the research results. The R2 coefficient did not reveal a statistically significant association for the predictor-criterion relationship.

The present study contributes to the research literature by enriching it with significant results regarding the negative correlation between transformational leadership and burnout, supporting other studies conducted to date. Also, the study showed that even though associations between transformational leadership and burnout exist, the transformational leadership variable does not predict the burnout variable.

6. LIMITS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Limits of this research include the fact that the sample size was reduced and not statistically significant for the population: only 238 subjects. In addition, a lot of personal factors, which could play a role in the levels of perceived burnout, were not taken into account (ex.: personality traits; the existence of a social support system; cognitive abilities matching the occupied job's requirements, etc.).

The sample of subjects used in the present study was obtained non-randomly, based on the availability of participants, being a sample of convenience. Consequently, it is important that future studies also test this relationship in a randomized, large sample size to conclude with a greater degree of generalizability.

Regarding the research methodology, the evaluation method used was self-evaluation (self-report). This method does not ensure the objectivity of the evaluation made by the participant in the context of completing the questionnaire, as it is impossible to check, for example, different biases of a participant. In this sense, it would be recommended that other research methods be included in future research.

Exploration of the correlations between the different dimensions of both transformational leadership and burnout could be the focus of future research on this subject.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Investigating the relationship between transformational leadership and burnout was the main goal of this research. Due to the discovery of a negative correlation, with statistical significance (r=-.20) between the two variables and the analysis performed to test if transformational leadership predicts burnout (R2= .14), the three research objectives were accomplished.

The study supports the idea that a low level of burnout corresponds to the practice of a transformational leadership style by the respective employee's superior. However, it appears that the burnout levels of human resources are not predicted by the transformational leadership styles of their managers. Based on the research, factors for managing burnout could include: investing in training for managers, deploying workshops, developing an organizational culture centered around transformational leadership, and support provided from top to bottom management levels (Ibrahim et al., 2023).

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