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The role of transformational leadership in increasing the job satisfaction of primary education teachers

Rola przywództwa transformacyjnego w zwiększaniu satysfakcji zawodowej nauczycieli edukacji podstawowej

Introduction

Transformational leadership is a central concept in the educational management literature, recognized for producing deep and lasting changes in academic institutions. This type of leadership has been developed and studied since the 1970s in the works of J.M. Burns (1978) and B. Bass (1985), who proposed a new approach to leadership focused on inspiration, motivation, and the personal and professional development of those involved. In the educational context, transformational leadership plays a crucial role in determining the professional satisfaction of teachers in primary education, where the relationship between school management and department teachers is often a determining factor of the organizational climate. This

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form of leadership is based on the leader's ability to motivate, inspire, and support the continuous development of teachers, giving them a sense of belonging, autonomy, and professional fulfilment. P. E. Spector highlights that "*professional satisfaction* represents a set of feelings that an individual has towards various aspects of the workplace, such as the work itself, colleagues, school managers and financial rewards (Spector, 1997, p. 38). The professional satisfaction of primary education teachers is essential for educational success, directly impacting the quality of teaching and the academic performance of young school-age students. Primary teachers often face unique challenges, such as responding to diverse student needs, managing bureaucratic pressure, and balancing curricular demands and children's emotional needs. At this juncture, transformational leadership becomes essential, as it allows teachers to develop their professional competencies in a supportive and collaborative environment, thereby increasing the sense of professional satisfaction.

Conceptual Framework

We note that several researchers have defined and conceptualized transformational leadership over the decades, each contributing to the understanding of this leadership style, especially in education. In teacher satisfaction, this type of leadership plays an essential role in influencing motivation, involvement, and professional development.

Thus, J. M. Burns is considered the pioneer of transformational leadership, defining transformational leadership as a process by which leaders and followers lift each other to higher levels of morality and motivation. According to Burns, this type of leadership involves a commitment to shared values and personal development, transcending personal interests for the collective good. J. M. Burns states: "Leaders can improve the group's collective efficacy by persuading members that they can accomplish a task well or by exhorting them to do so" (Burns, 2004, p. 415). In addition, researchers G. R. Goethals, G. J. Sorenson, and J. M. Burns state that "persuasion is at the heart of charismatic or transformational leadership, whereby a leader by force of personality and strength of vision convinces followers of the correctness of a particular course of action and, more importantly, raises their individual and collective senses of efficacy that they can achieve desired outcomes." (Goethals, Sorenson, Burns, 2004, p. 415). This model translates into leaders who inspire teachers to

push their boundaries and actively contribute to the educational community. From the perspective of professional satisfaction, according to this researcher, teachers feel more satisfied when encouraged to participate in a common goal, which gives them a sense of belonging and value.

Analysing the specialized literature, we notice that the researcher B. M. Bass extends the concept of transformational leadership proposed by Burns, adding new dimensions to his model. In 1985, the author defined this type of leadership as the leader's ability to influence change through motivation and challenging the status quo. Interestingly, the remark of the authors B. M. Bass and R. E. Riggio, in this vein, regarding the personality of the leader, points out, "Transformational leadership has much in common with charismatic leadership, but charisma is only part of transformational leadership" (Bass, Riggio, 2006, p. 5). B. M. Bass (1985) proposes four essential dimensions: idealized influence (leaders become role models for teachers), inspirational motivation (leaders communicate an attractive vision that motivates the team), intellectual stimulation (leaders encourage innovation and creative thinking), and individualized consideration (leaders provides personalized support to each team member). Concerning professional satisfaction, according to B. M. Bass (1985), teachers who feel that their leaders respect their individual needs and encourage creativity tend to have higher levels of job satisfaction.

In education, K. Leithwood (1995) was among the first to adapt the concept of transformational leadership to educational contexts. In his works, the author highlights six dimensions of transformational leadership: establishing a shared vision, developing shared goals, providing models for behaviour, intellectual stimulation, personalized support, and sustaining a climate of respect. Ch. Day and K. Leithwood mention: "To set a clear direction, a leader must be able to articulate a common vision, create high-performance expectations, and then communicate the vision and expectations effectively" (Day and Leithwood, 2007, p. 157). We note that this form of leadership supports teacher satisfaction by creating an environment where teachers feel valued and supported in their professional development efforts.

B. Avolio (1994) deepened the dimensions of transformational leadership, emphasizing that this type of leadership is not only about change but also about developing authentic leadership based on integrity and trusting relationships between leaders and subordinates. He introduced the concept of "authentic leadership," which is integrated into transformational leadership. Concerning

professional satisfaction, we attest that teachers tend to be more satisfied in environments where their leaders are authentic (sincere, dedicated) and cultivate trust, which reduces stress and increases commitment.

After analysing the concepts offered by Burns, Bass, Riggio, Leithwood, and Avolio, it is evident that transformational leadership is a leadership style that:

- motivates teachers to exceed their expectations.
- creates an environment of support and development.
- improves collaboration and innovation.
- increases the level of professional satisfaction through personalized support and intellectual stimulation.

These factors are highly relevant for primary education teachers, as job satisfaction plays an essential role in teacher retention and the quality of the educational act. Therefore, studying how transformational leadership contributes to teacher satisfaction is necessary to research to identify improvement strategies in this regard.

To strengthen the correlation between transformational leadership and teaching staff job satisfaction, we synthesize the transformational leadership theories and their impact on teaching staff work satisfaction in Table 1.

Table 1. Transformational leadership and job satisfaction of teachers

Theory	Author	Main components	Impact on teachers' professional satisfaction
Transformational Leadership	B. M. Bass (1985)	- Idealized influence - Inspirational motivation - Intellectual stimulation - Individualized consideration	- Increasing satisfaction through individual recognition and support of teachers' needs - Teachers feel valued and supported in their professional development
Motivational leadership theory	B. Shamir, R. J. House, M. B. Arthur (1993)	- Creating a sense of self-efficacy - Alignment of personal and organizational objectives	- Satisfaction increases when teachers see their work aligned with organizational goals and feel they can make a meaningful contribution - Self-efficacy increases professional involvement and commitment

Applied transformational leadership in education	K. Leithwood (1995)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Professional development - Collaboration between teaching staff - Autonomy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improving satisfaction by providing autonomy and a sense of competence - Supporting collaboration and mentoring among teaching staff contributes to a more satisfying work environment
Theory of educational change	M. Fullan (2001)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promoting continuous change - Creating a continuous learning environment - Supporting innovation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Satisfaction increases when teachers are involved in the change process and feel part of a continuously developing organization - An innovative and positive environment reduces the risk of burnout
Transformational leadership and shared vision	J. M. Kouzes, B. Z. Posner (2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Behaviour modelling - Inspiring a shared vision - Supporting teachers' involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers become more motivated and satisfied when leaders inspire them with a clear vision and ethical behaviour - Communicating clear direction reduces stress and uncertainty

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Each theory in the table highlights different aspects of transformational leadership. However, all emphasize the essential role of leaders in cultivating a positive and motivating work environment for teachers.

To summarize, Bass (1985) introduced the notion of transformational leadership, which emphasizes influencing employees through intellectual stimulation, inspiration, and individualized consideration. In the educational context, the respective components contribute to the satisfaction of teaching staff by providing the necessary support for professional and personal development, thus increasing their sense of belonging, value, and commitment to the institution where they work. According to the theory of authors B. Shamir, R. J. House, and M. B. Arthur (1993), transformational leaders create a sense of self-efficacy and alignment between personal and organizational goals. At the

primary level of education, when teachers perceive that their work is valuable and aligned with the school's mission, their satisfaction increases. Also, the feeling of self-efficacy has a beneficial effect on motivation and professional commitment. In the same logic, Leithwood (1995) extended the concept of transformational leadership to introduce the particularities of the academic environment. Cooperation, autonomy, and professional development are essential factors that increase job satisfaction. Transformational leaders can create a more motivating educational environment by supporting teacher collaboration and providing autonomy in pedagogical decisions. Fullan (2001), for his part, emphasizes the importance of leaders in promoting continuous change in academic institutions. Teaching staff involved in innovation processes feel a higher level of professional satisfaction. They feel part of a dynamic organization and are motivated by the prospect of continuous learning and improving the academic climate. Kouzes and Posner (2002) are the researchers who emphasize the importance of a clear vision and the involvement of teachers. A transformational leader, who models positive behaviours and inspires through a shared vision, reduces uncertainty and increases teacher motivation, thereby increasing their job satisfaction and commitment to the common purpose of the educational institution.

Research Methodology

The study highlights that, in recent decades, transformational leadership has been recognized as an essential factor in promoting job satisfaction in the educational field. Primary school teachers face various challenges, and effective leadership can influence their performance and psychological and professional well-being. Applying research instruments in this context is essential for understanding not only the level of job satisfaction but also teachers' perceptions, experiences, and expectations.

Thus, **the research aims** to analyse the relationship between transformational leadership and the job satisfaction of primary school teachers in the Republic of Moldova. The study investigates how the characteristics of transformational leadership influence teachers' perceptions, experiences, and levels of professional satisfaction, providing valuable insights for developing educational strategies to support their well-being.

Research Questions:

1. How does transformational leadership influence the job satisfaction of primary school teachers, and what specific characteristics of this leadership style are most appreciated by teachers in educational institutions?
2. What aspects of educational leadership are perceived by primary school teachers as necessary for improvement, and to what extent can optimizing these aspects contribute to increased job satisfaction?
3. How can the recommendations of primary school teachers for improving job satisfaction be correlated with the application of transformational leadership, and what impact do they have on their professional satisfaction?

Research Methodology: The research adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing a correlational design to examine the relationship between transformational leadership and the job satisfaction of primary school teachers. Research methods include literature review, questioning, data analysis, and interpretation.

The primary data collection method was a questionnaire. This method was chosen because it allows respondents to express their opinions and feelings more freely, contributing to a better understanding of how transformational leadership influences teachers' professional satisfaction. The questionnaire was distributed online, with voluntary participation and anonymous responses.

Purpose of the questionnaire: To investigate transformational leadership's effects on primary school teachers' job satisfaction.

The study's sample included 165 primary school teachers from the Republic of Moldova.

Research period: Data collection took place from October to November 2024, with the questionnaire applied to participants (teachers) from professional development courses held at "Academia Educație fără Frontiere" in the Republic of Moldova.

Analysis of the Study Results

The analysis of the data obtained through the questionnaire, correlated with the research questions, leads to the formulation of the following syntheses:

1. How does transformational leadership influence the job satisfaction of primary school teachers, and what are the specific characteristics of this leadership style that teachers in educational institutions most appreciate?

The answers given in the questionnaire offer a varied picture of the appreciated characteristics, indicating factors that support job satisfaction, primarily through the lens of transformational leadership.

Main aspects identified:

- **Effective and open communication.** Many responses highlight open and transparent communication as one of the most valued aspects of leadership. Responses such as *“open and transparent communication”* or *“clear and effective communication”* highlight that educational leaders who promote a culture of dialogue and active, assertive listening are perceived positively by teachers. Transformational leadership emphasizes communication, as it facilitates the transmission of organizational vision and goals.
- **Empathy and mutual support.** Empathy and the ability to support teachers in primary education are often scored: *“respect, understanding, empathy, smile, help”* and *“free opinion, mutual support, trust”* denote that educational leaders who care for employees and encourage mutual support create a positive climate. Transformational leadership is based on relationships of trust and mutual respect, which contributes to the increase of positive socio-affective state and teacher satisfaction.
- **Collaboration and team spirit.** *“Harmonious collaboration among colleagues”* and *“team spirit”* reflect the appreciation of collaboration and a cohesive educational environment. In transformational leadership, collaboration is paramount for achieving common goals and the team’s professional development. The collaborative atmosphere supports commitment and involvement, increasing job satisfaction.
- **Clear and inspirational vision.** *“Clear vision, empathy, effective communication”* and *“the ability to create a clear vision”* evoke the value of leaders with a well-defined vision and share it inspirationally. Transformational leadership involves developing a shared vision that motivates the team to achieve their goals and be satisfied at work.

- **Motivation and recognition.** Responses such as “*recognition and motivation*” and “*encouragement, support*” suggest that teachers value leaders who motivate their team and recognize individual efforts. In transformational leadership, encouragement and recognition increase job satisfaction because they provide a sense of appreciation and progress.
- **Ethics and integrity.** Terms such as “*ethics and integrity*” and “*fairness, respect for employees*” indicate the importance of ethical behaviour by educational leaders. Transformational leadership is characterized by exemplary moral behaviour that inspires loyalty and trust.
- **Autonomy and involvement.** “*Freedom to make decisions*” and “*involvement in national, international projects*” show that autonomy and involvement in essential initiatives are relevant motivational factors. A transformational leader encourages innovation and inquiry and provides personal and professional development opportunities.

By defining and communicating an inspirational vision, developing relationships based on trust and support, and constantly motivating the team, transformational leadership increases teachers’ job satisfaction. The answers to this item confirm the essential elements of this leadership style. Teachers appreciate not only leaders’ managerial and strategic skills but also their ability to build strong human relationships, stimulate collaboration, and promote an organizational climate based on integrity, respect, and mutual support. The characteristics of transformational leadership, highlighted in the answers, show that this style positively impacts the working environment in primary education, contributing directly to the satisfaction and motivation of teachers. The appreciation of transformative leadership is essential in consolidating a harmonious and high-performing educational framework.

2. What aspects of educational leadership are perceived as needing improvement by primary school teachers, and to what extent can their optimization contribute to increased job satisfaction?

The qualitative interpretation of the responses highlights diverse opinions and perspectives among primary school teachers. These responses can be grouped into several main themes:

Communication and collaboration. Many respondents emphasize the importance of *open communication* and *effective collaboration*. Improving leaders’ *communication skills*, both with staff and parents, is perceived as a key

factor in increasing job satisfaction. Aspects such as creating a *collaborative environment* between teachers at different levels of education and the more active *involvement of teachers in decision-making* were also mentioned.

Organizational and leadership aspects. Some respondents suggest that leaders' organizational skills could be improved, especially in *managing* primary education employees' free time and avoiding *discrimination* within the organization. The need for leaders to be more involved in *supporting staff* and promoting *leadership by example* was also mentioned.

Motivation and recognition. A frequently encountered aspect concerns the *recognition* and *appreciation of teachers' efforts*. Many respondents emphasized the need for leaders to be more proactive in *motivating* employees through *financial rewards* or fair *performance appraisal*, especially for teachers who work with students with low intellectual performance (with special educational needs).

Working conditions and resources. Another common theme is improving *working conditions* and providing *adequate resources*. This includes access to *modern equipment* (e.g., interactive whiteboards, computers), quality internet, and appropriate classroom equipment. The need to reduce the administrative and bureaucratic workload is also mentioned to allow primary education teachers to focus on the teaching activity.

Personal and relational aspects. The responses also indicate that leaders should develop *empathy* and *emotional intelligence*, encouraging a *positive work environment*. Respect, equity, and integrity are essential values for interpersonal relations within the organization, whose mission is to maintain and increase the degree of satisfaction of the teaching staff.

Openness to change. Although some respondents stated that they were satisfied with the current situation and that there were no significant areas for improvement, many pointed out that *there is always room for improvement*. *Leaders' openness* to change and adaptation to new strategies or technologies is seen as an essential point for progress and for increasing the degree of satisfaction of teachers in primary education.

We note that most responses reflect a positive view of current leadership but highlight areas for improvement. A transformational approach to leadership, which emphasizes communication, collaboration, recognition, and professional development, would significantly contribute to increasing the job *satisfaction* of primary education teachers.

3. How can primary school teachers' recommendations for improving job satisfaction be correlated with applying transformational leadership, and what impact do these have on their professional satisfaction?

- **Salary and compensation**

Financial satisfaction. Many respondents emphasize the crucial factor of a decent salary in job satisfaction. Adequate remuneration contributes directly to the motivation and well-being of teaching staff.

- **The work environment**

– *Positive atmosphere.* A strong focus is on creating a friendly and inclusive working environment where teachers feel supported and respected by colleagues and management.

Relaxation spaces. Some respondents propose setting up spaces for teachers to relax, which could improve their well-being and professional satisfaction.

- **Communication and Collaboration**

– *Open dialogue.* The teachers emphasize the need for effective communication between the institution, families, and colleagues. This can increase cohesion and facilitate problem-solving.

– *Team-building activities.* Involvement in group activities can strengthen professional relationships and a sense of belonging and satisfaction.

- **Innovation and flexibility**

Innovations in education. Recommendations regarding implementing new teaching methods and appropriate resources can increase teachers' and students' commitment.

– *Flexibility.* Teachers want more freedom in their pedagogical approaches and working time management.

- **Recognition and appreciation**

– *Valorisation of efforts.* Many teachers seek recognition for their efforts through appreciation events or constructive feedback from the educational community, or from the leader.

- **Professional development**

– *Continuous training.* Expressing the desire to participate in training and continuous professional development courses highlights the importance of constant learning in teaching and increasing professional satisfaction.

Comparing these aspects, we observe that the majority of teachers in primary education focus on fundamental elements of job satisfaction, such as *salaries*

and the *working environment*, but also on more subtle, personal dimensions, such as *communication* and *recognition*. Transformational leadership is essential in integrating these aspects because an effective leader can influence the institution's policies and organizational culture, promoting values such as collaboration, integrity, respect, and innovation. The suggestions provided in the questionnaire represent a solid basis for formulating strategies to improve primary education teachers' job satisfaction. These strategies could include but are not limited to, raising salaries, creating friendlier work environments, and promoting open, empathetic, and constructive communication.

The obtained results, which show significant positive correlations between the dimensions of transformational leadership and job satisfaction, have several implications:

- a) *Leadership development*. Educational institutions should invest in transformational leadership development programs for their principals and managers, as this type of leadership can be associated with higher levels of job satisfaction among primary school teachers.
- b) *Performance evaluation*. In teaching staff evaluations, it would be beneficial to include criteria measuring behaviours associated with transformational leadership, such as clear vision, openness to innovation, and employee empathy.
- c) *Organizational culture*. Fostering an organizational culture that encourages collaboration, respect, and recognition of individual contributions can amplify the positive effects of transformational leadership on job satisfaction.
- d) *Staff retention*. Since job satisfaction is closely related to employee retention, institutions that cultivate transformational leadership can benefit from more excellent staff stability and reduced recruitment and training costs.

Although our study provides valuable information, there are also limitations:

- *Correlative design*. As the study is correlational, other variables may influence transformational leadership and job satisfaction.
- *The sample*. A larger sample could provide more relevant results. For future research, we recommend a longitudinal study (following the same participants over time).

Conclusion

Transformational leadership is central to teacher motivation and involvement in primary education. From Burns's moral approach to Bass's sophisticated dimensions of leadership and Leithwood and Jantzi's adaptation to education, the listed models emphasize that transformational leaders increase job satisfaction through personalized support, encouraging innovation, and creating a positive work environment. These theories and models reveal the importance of a transformational leadership style in education, contributing directly to increasing professional satisfaction and fulfilment among primary education teachers.

Most of the surveyed teachers perceived the school's leadership as transformational, associated with clear vision, individualized support, and the promotion of innovative thinking. The analysis of the answers revealed the correlation between the perception of transformational leadership and the degree of satisfaction at work.

Transformational leadership has a central role in increasing the professional satisfaction of primary education teachers through individual support (teachers feel that their opinions are listened to and that they have development opportunities), promoting autonomy and collaboration (teachers have control over their own professional decisions and can collaborate in an environment of mutual support); inspiration and motivation (a clear vision and leadership based on positive values help create an educational climate where teachers feel valued and professionally satisfied).

Transformational leadership significantly impacts the satisfaction of primary school teachers, creating a favourable work environment where employees are motivated to perform and innovate. Capitalizing on this leadership style can lead to greater professional satisfaction, thus reducing stress and professional burnout and increasing the quality of the primary education process.

Abstract: The present study explores the impact of transformational leadership on the job satisfaction of primary education teachers. The research is part of an academic context in which transformational leadership has become central to studying organizational effectiveness and employee well-being. Through a literature review, the research nuances the various theories of transformational leadership and how they correlate with teacher job satisfaction. A questionnaire was created and applied to a group of primary education teachers from the Republic of Moldova to investigate the relationship between these two concepts. Analysing the collected information allowed the identification of the leadership aspects most appreciated by the teaching staff and those that could be improved to increase job satisfaction. Also, the study offers concrete recommendations from the teachers surveyed for improving leadership practices in educational institutions. The research conclusions emphasize the role of transformational leadership in creating a positive and stimulating work environment for teachers, thus contributing to increasing job satisfaction and, implicitly, improving the quality of the educational process.

Keywords: transformational leadership, teacher professional satisfaction, professional motivation, collective self-efficacy, innovation, organizational culture, educational management.

Abstrakt: Niniejsze badanie analizuje wpływ przywództwa transformacyjnego na satysfakcję zawodową nauczycieli edukacji podstawowej. Badanie wpisuje się w akademicki kontekst, w którym przywództwo transformacyjne stało się kluczowym zagadnieniem w analizie efektywności organizacyjnej i dobrostanu pracowników. Na podstawie przeglądu literatury badanie uwzględnia różne teorie przywództwa transformacyjnego oraz ich korelację z satysfakcją zawodową nauczycieli. W celu zbadania relacji między tymi dwoma conceptami opracowano i zastosowano kwestionariusz wśród grupy nauczycieli edukacji podstawowej z Republiki Mołdawii. Analiza zgromadzonych danych pozwoliła zidentyfikować aspekty przywództwa najbardziej cenione przez kadrę nauczycielską oraz te, które wymagają udoskonalenia w celu zwiększenia satysfakcji zawodowej. Ponadto badanie zawiera konkretne rekomendacje sformułowane przez ankietowanych nauczycieli dotyczące poprawy praktyk przywódczych w instytucjach edukacyjnych. Wnioski z badań podkreślają znaczącą rolę przywództwa transformacyjnego w tworzeniu pozytywnego i stymulującego **środowiska** pracy dla nauczycieli, co przyczynia się do wzrostu ich satysfakcji zawodowej, a tym samym do poprawy jakości procesu edukacyjnego.

Słowa kluczowe: przywództwo transformacyjne, satysfakcja zawodowa nauczycieli, motywacja zawodowa, zbiorowa samoefektywność, innowacyjność, kultura organizacyjna, zarządzanie edukacyjne.

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