

**Professional Identity and Career Aspirations as
Mediators between Perception of the Principal
as an Authentic Leader and Teachers' Behaviors
and Intent to Leave in Israel's Educational
System**

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Abstract

The aim of the present study is development of an integrative multi-dimensional model to predict teachers' positive (citizenship behavior) and negatively perceived behaviors (Counterproductive Work Behavior- CWB), withdrawal behaviors such as lateness, absence and intent to leave, through the teacher's perception of the school principal as an Authentic Leader, as tested by attitude mediation relative to the workplace, of the professional identity type and career aspirations.

605 teachers and 41 principals participated in the study, nested in 41 elementary, junior high and high schools, through use of cluster sampling (districts: South, Central, Tel Aviv, Education Administration, Jerusalem, North, Haifa and Rural education) combined with layered sampling (different sectors – Jewish: state, state religious, Torah and Ultra-Orthodox; Arab: Bedouin and Druze), for a proper representative sample of Israeli schools, teachers and principals. Data collection was executed through questionnaires provided to teachers and principals, in addition to personnel reports regarding teacher absences.

Data analysis was based on Multi-level structural equations (SEM). Throughout the entire model, teachers' individual perceptions, attitudes and behavior were compared simultaneously with their collective perceptions, attitudes and behavior, using two corresponding analytic levels: teachers' level and schools' level.

The findings indicate differential mediation of professional identity and career aspirations, of the connection between perception of Authentic Leadership and teachers' behaviors, vs. teachers' behaviors in Israeli schools, two mediating connections were found on the school level. The more the school was characterized by perception of the principal's leadership as more authentic compared to other schools, the greater the teachers' aspiration for professionalization; better integration of teachers' professional identity was found to be negatively associated with counterproductive behavior toward school colleagues. Additionally, the more the school was characterized by perception of the principal's behavior as more authentic as compared to other schools, teachers' aspiration for professionalization was greater; greater aspiration for professionalization was found associated with less counterproductive behavior toward the organization.

Furthermore, at the school level, the more a school was characterized by its teachers' higher professional identity by comparison with other schools, there was less

counterproductive behavior, and teachers tended less to leave the school. At the school teacher's level, the higher the teachers' professional identification, the lower their tendency to resign. Similarly, at the school level, the more the school was characterized by higher aspiration to professionalization among its teachers, the less counterproductive behavior at school in the organizational context, and the less teachers' tended to leave. Perception of authentic leadership was not mediated by workplace attitudes of professional identity and career aspirations types vs. lateness, perception of absence and actual absences.

An interesting finding is the importance of teachers' collective perception of their schools' principals and its relationship with their attitude and behavior, which is above and beyond their personal perception. An interesting study finding is the direct connection between collective perceptions of the principals' authentic leadership by his/her teachers with their citizenship behavior, whereas this connection does not exist in mediation of the teacher's workplace attitudes, of the professional identification and career aspirations type.

The present study makes several contributions. *Theoretically*, there is a combined influence of workers' perception of their leader on the one hand, and workers' attitudes toward their career world on the other hand, on teachers' positively and negatively perceived behaviors. Moreover, teachers' aspiration for a career after having chosen the teaching profession has yet to be researched. Furthermore, the teachers' perceptions, attitudes and individual and collective behaviors were examined and compared simultaneously throughout the model, a comparison that has yet to be tested. Also, this study joins a few other studies that describe citizenship behavior as behavior likely to be perceived as a negative experience by the teacher, as interpreted by the self-regulated theory.

Practically, the change suggested for reducing counterproductive behaviors, is emphasizing and investing in the school's leadership, the school's principal and assistant, training them to be more authentic. In addition, the findings are likely to help shape the definition of the school principal, placing emphasis on authentic aspects such as ethicality, self-awareness and transparency, and on his treatment of the teacher's workplace attitudes, on advancement of the school staff, retention of good teachers in the school system and on school efficiency. Aside from that, there is also a need to examine how to increase teachers' inner motivation in order to have citizenship behavior without harming the organization by having concomitant

counterproductive behavior. Also, the damage of the New Horizon and Oz Letmura (Strength for Change) reform programs needs to be examined in the spirit of teachers' volunteering and the relationship of trust between them and the system.