

# **Teachers' work style development as means of preventing their high staff turnover rates**

Zenobia NICULIȚĂ\*

**Abstract:** *Defining teachers' work styles from an organizational rather than an educational point of view, the present study focuses on their abilities to manage their time and professional projects and on exploring a training strategy of developing those skills. The research has been carried out on a small sample of students in teacher training programs (undergraduate and graduate level) participating in a 11 weeks training project focused on exercising and self evaluating progress. The comparison between pretest and post test measures of time and project management abilities has demonstrated a significant improvement of these skills.*

**Keywords:** *work style, time and project management skills*

**JEL Classification:** *M53*

As employees of the schools, teachers' professional activity can be observed as a particular case of providing the clients / beneficiaries / communities with an essential set of services - educational ones. They are required to manage and/or supervise both their professional projects and those of their students (as part of mentoring and class management). That means that the impact of teachers' personality and individual results on the functioning of the school as an organization can be analyzed in the conceptual framework of work style.

Very often, work style is analyzed from an efficiency point of view, which implies a comparison of different work styles against organizational and economic values. From this perspective, some work styles are better or more efficient than

---

\* Lect. Dr., Romanian Adventist Theological Institute, e-mail: zenobia.niculita@gmail.com

others in a certain work frame. The present study uses a definition of work style that approaches the concept as a personality construct applied to work situations and environments. Thus, work style is a heterogeneous concept that combines motivational, emotional, cognitive, potential, attitudinal and psychosocial factors which determine the unique individual's way of working and using his/her resources to reach professional objectives (both individual and organizational). In this conceptual work frame, the efficiency of work style is turned to a matter of matching the individual's work style with the specific requirements of the job. Considering the qualitative nature of a teacher's work, and the different contents and activities he or she has to manage, it is only natural that a wide variety of work styles is necessary in order to provide to the students with the necessary skills and knowledge.

The main objective of this study has been to analyze the impact of training teachers work styles in order to improve their project and time management abilities as means of preventing turnover and improving work satisfaction.

## **1. Literature review**

### **1.1. Research focused on teachers' styles**

The problem of style related to teachers' professional activity has been approached mainly from a pedagogical point of view, directly connected to the students learning process. By far the most frequently explored variable in this field, learning style has been studied in connection to a wide variety of social and psychological variables. For the purposes of this article, it is relevant to mention the recurrent theme of the impact of teacher's personality and teaching strategies on students' learning styles (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Eyyam, Menevis, & Dogruer, 2011; Franzoni, Assar, Defude & Rojas, 2008; Trip, 2003). As proved by the numerous research articles and references, learning styles apply not only to students, but also to teachers. True to the specific nature of their work, teacher's continuous learning is not only a matter of formal education, but also an outcome of the daily interactions with their students (Brown, 2003; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Somprach, Prasertcharoensuk & Ngang, 2015)

Teaching style has been defined as an essential set of teacher's strategies, methods and attitudes with a significant impact on students' learning process and results (Barrett, Bower, and Donovan, 2007; Mohanna, Chambers, & Wall, 2007). Thus, most research studies have been focused the impact of teaching styles on learning results and students' attitudes (Giles, Ryan, Belliveau, De Freitas & Casey, 2006; Opdenakker & Van Damme, 2006; Coldren, & Hively, 2009, Bota &

Petre, 2015). Developing and perfecting teaching style is another important recurrent research problem with a wide interdisciplinary field of application (Mohanna, Chambers & Wall, 2007; Clark, & Latshaw, 2012; Vogt & Rogalla, 2009, Duta, Panisoara & Panisoara, 2015).

## **1.2. Factors that influence teachers' turnover**

Teachers' high turnover rates result in a vicious circle for schools at organizational level: Low performance schools correlate with high turnover rates among teachers, which, in its turn, makes the institutions less attractive for highly skilled teachers (Barnes, Crowe & Schaefer, 2007). When these schools are financed from public funds, the problem becomes one of at least local interest and, as a socio-economic phenomenon, is widespread at national level. As education represents a basic requirement for increased national competitiveness and resilience, as well as diminished vulnerability (Zaman & Vasile, 2014), it becomes essential to focus on sustainability not only at national level, but also at organizational level in schools or any other educational institution.

Apart from the obvious socio-economic factors related to poor funding and faulty national policies, there is a number of organizational and psychological factors that increase teacher's turnover. A consistent number of studies have focused on identifying and exploring the extent of some of those factors, such as:

- Teachers' perception on their influence over school policies (Jackson, 2012)
- Teachers' emotional connections to the work environment (Lachman and Diamant, 2007)
- Having a mentor in the same institution (Rockoff, 2008)
- High stress level caused by students' misbehaviour (Liu & Onwuegbuzie, A., 2012)
- The level of organizational support (Gardner, 2010)
- The low level of satisfaction with one's work and workplace (Stuit & Smith, 2009)
- Lack of learning resources (Loeb, Darling-Hammond & Luczak, 2005)
- The quality of relationships in the workplace and workload overcharge (Torres, 2014)
- The school's leadership (Boyd *et al.*, 2005)

The high rates of turnover among teachers have a negative impact not only on education costs and performance, but also on all pedagogical, psychological and organizational components of the educational process. In schools where turnover rates are particularly high it is more difficult to build an academic community and to develop mentoring relationships. (Milanowski & Odden, 2007).

While implementing organizational strategies and national policies that promote stability regarding personnel fluctuation in schools can prove to be a difficult and complex endeavor, training teachers to develop their time and project management skills as part of their work styles might prove to be an effective way of providing them with the personal skills necessary to improve their work environments and to contribute to creating a positive organizational climate in the schools instead of just searching for a new workplace that might prove to be just as disappointing as the previous one. Considering that creative employees need a higher level of opportunities to express that creativity which in its own turn, correlates with lower turnover intentions (Valentine, Godkin, Fleischman & Kidwell, 2011) it might prove beneficial to provide the creative, adaptive, flexible teachers with means to develop their time and project management skills. This way, they will be better equipped to get involved into shaping their work environments to their satisfaction, thus further reducing their intentions for turnover.

## **2. Methodology**

The main hypothesis of the research study has focused precisely on measured improvements in both time and project management abilities as work style factors. It was stated as following: There are significant differences between pre-test and post test measures of time and project management abilities factor of participants' work style.

The operationalized objectives for the training project have included the following:

1. The participants will present an improvement of the abilities to manage their time and professional projects as revealed by the pre training and post training measures of the following indicators and skills:
  - the ability to establish specific objectives for personal and professional projects;
  - the ability to plan for short, medium and long term activities;
  - the ability to explore and analyze available and potential resources;

- developing personal strategies for efficient time management;
  - establishing self-evaluation strategies;
  - cooperating with colleagues in order to better organize team projects.
2. The participants will register a significant decrease of the time-related stress and anxiety caused by poor time-management skills, procrastination and high workload before deadlines.

### **2.1. Research design and training intervention**

The project's target population has been composed of students enrolled in teachers' training Bachelor and graduate programs of study. Following the advertisement 24 participants have applied for the project. After the initial session of work style testing, 15 of those have been selected to participate in the training program based on their low scores for the project and time management abilities factor. 10 of the 15 participants have been present at all training sessions and at the final evaluation meeting and provided answers for both testing sessions (pretest and post test). Of the 10 sets of scores, 9 have been complete and valid.

The training project, carried out between January, 20 and March, 16, 2015, has been designed for 11 weekly sessions focused on different abilities and skills as well as typical problems related to time and projects' management such as: establishing short and long term objectives, developing a balanced time perspective, finding and evaluating resources, planning and project design, creating personalized plans, procrastination prevention, project evaluation techniques, feedback and learning. The methods used during the sessions included: planning and time management workshops, debate, role-playing exercises, SWOT analysis, Phillips 6-6, brainstorming and other creative idea generating techniques, self assessment exercises etc.

### **2.2. Instrument for work style assessment**

Both pre-test and post test work style evaluation sessions have used the SM II questionnaire, developed by the author.

The SM II Questionnaire has been tested on a 200 participants sample and validated by a committee of experts. The reliability of the questionnaire is estimated at alpha Cronbach=0.866 for the total factor and values between 0.800 to 0.873 for the 7 sub-factors.

The assessment of employees work styles using the SM II Questionnaire is based on a model that includes the existence of a composite work style factor,

consisting of cognitive motivational attitudinal and psycho-social sub-factors. Each individual tested within the model's frame is attributed a score placed on a bipolar scale between dynamic and structured work style. The dynamic work style is fluent, innovative, intuitive, highly involved in working activities, competitive and creative. A person that scores high on the work styles scale is usually flexible, rather impulsive, makes decisions based on intuition, discarding the quality in favor of speeding the process. He or she integrates easily in the work rhythm imposed by the organization, adapts on the go to the changes in work plans and methods, appreciate originality and change. Such a person is highly interested in the chosen professional field, capable of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014), striving for performance. Highly motivated and dedicated to reaching the organizational goals, he or she avoids routine in professional activities and uses his / her strengths in order to achieve professional targets. The weakness of such a work style is represented by the reduced capacity for time and project management. This is not because of reduced planning abilities but rather a natural effect of the person's high flexibility. A dynamic work style employee is usually impatient when it comes to implementing original ideas. This is one of the reasons for his / her constant preference for work teams, which allows him / her to avoid unpleasant tasks while having the opportunity to compete and perform.

Situated at the opposite pole of the continuum, the structured work style is characterized by a highly organized way of working and developing professional relationships in the workplace. Such a person characterized by a structured work style carefully analyses every detail of the problem before making a decision and chooses the logic solution against the one subjectively preferred. One of the main traits of this style and an important weakness is the low level of flexibility in every aspect in the professional activity, paired with a disregard for the new ideas, considered disruptive and counter-productive. Such a person appreciates order and feels unbalanced major changes. His / her greatest strength is the high-level of time and project management, including efficiency, perseverance, prioritizing, detailed planning of each activity and good evaluation skills. Although such a person is less creative, he / she keeps a constant work rhythm, which may prove to be a valuable asset when it comes to reaching organizational objectives and standards. Because of his / her focused, structured work style, a person who scores low on the work style scale feels disturbed by the seemingly hectic work habits of his / her colleagues and, although he/she might enjoy the exchanges, the preference will most often incline towards individual work as opposed to teamwork.

### 3. Research results

The data analysis has focused on comparing participants' work style pre-test and post test measures in order to assess the impact of the training program on the relevant work style factors. Another measure of the training's effect on the participants' skills has been their self-evaluations regarding their ability to manage time and professional individual projects.

There is a significant difference between self evaluation pre test and post test measures of self-organizing abilities ( $t(8)=2,40$   $p<0,05$ ). The participants evaluate their skills as being improved following the training program.

**Table 1 – Paired-Sample T-test for organizing abilities pre training and post training measures**

Nr. crt.	Variabile	t	df	p	pre-test mean	post test mean
1	Organizing abilities (SM Questionnaire scores)	7.63	8	<0.01	3.93	3.15
2	Time management	5.62	8	<0.01	3.86	3.16
3	Project management	8.00	8	<0.01	4.00	3.14

Detailed analyses have been carried for participants' scores on all items of the SM Questionnaire regarding time and project management. As expected, there were significant differences between pre training and post training scores on items regarding specific behaviors and skills (i. e. "I plan no more than 5 or 6 daily activities." ( $t(8)=3.46$   $p<0.01$ )). Items regarding generic opinions on the ability to organize one's time and projects (i. e. "At work, it is essential to know what you are going to do next."), as well as items focused on life style showed no significant differences between pre training and post training measures.

### 4. Conclusions

Training teachers in order to develop their work styles in general and their organizing abilities in particular can prove to be a fruitful endeavor, especially if the intervention strategies are adapted to the specific of their work tasks. Considering the eclectic nature of teachers' daily tasks, the need for diverse, creative ways of planning the learning activities, the focus on learning outcomes as well as processes and relationships, it is obvious that they need to develop a

set of skills relevant for time and project management. These skills can be approached as a factor of teachers' work styles.

As part of a larger study investigating psychosocial factors that influence teachers' turnover rates, the present article has focused on teachers' work styles and the way they can be developed through training programs. Since teachers' work styles represent unique ways of approaching work tasks, contents and environments, it is only logical that they should play a role in the intention of schools employees to leave their workplace in the foreseeable future. From all work styles factors, the abilities to manage time and projects are most compatible with structured interventions such as training programs and continuous education modules.

The study has provided an insight into the dynamics of developing teachers' work styles, more precisely, a specific set of skills regarding time and project management. A small group of students enrolled in graduate and postgraduate teachers' training programs of study has been the focus of the research presented in this article. The 11 weeks training program targeted different time and project management - related abilities as well as typical problems connected to the above mentioned skills, such as: establishing short and long term objectives, developing a balanced time perspective, finding and evaluating resources, planning and project design, creating personalized plans, procrastination prevention, project evaluation techniques, feedback and learning.

The research results revealed significant differences between pre training and post training measures of time and project management abilities as a factor of work style. The subjects' scores on this factor were the only ones that suffered a significant change, while the scores to all other work style factors remained the same (with no significant differences). Both time management and project management abilities were increased as a result of the training program. Participants' scores on SM Questionnaire items regarding specific behaviors and skills were the most sensitive to training influences, while generic items proved more stable.

Although the sample has been very small and the results may not be generalized, the significant improvement in the abilities measured pre training and post training provide an argument for expanding the project and including a larger group of participants, as well as developing a long-term educational program that focuses on broader skills.

### **Acknowledgement**

This paper has been financially supported within the project entitled „SOCERT. Knowledge society, dynamism through research”, contract number POSDRU/



159/1.5/S/132406. This project is co-financed by European Social Fund through Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013. Investing in people!" These and the Reference headings are in bold but have no numbers. Text below continues as normal.

## References

- Barnes, G., Crowe, E. & Schaefer, B. (2007). The Cost of Teacher Turnover in Five School Districts: A Pilot Study. *National Commission on Teaching and America's Future*.
- Barrett, K.; Bower, B. & Donovan, N. (2007). Teaching Styles of Community College Instructors. *American Journal of Distance Education*, 21 (1), 37-49, doi:10.1080/08923640701298738
- Bota, O. A. & Petre, C. (2015). Educational Style Impact on Student Academical Achievements. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 177 (2015). 127 – 131. doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.02.360.
- Boyd, D., Lankfort, H., Loeb, S. & Wyckoff, J. (2005). Explaining the Short Careers of High-Achieving Teachers in Schools with Low-Performing Students. *The American Economic Review*. 95(2). 166-171.
- Brown, B.L. (2003). Teaching style vs learning style. *Myths and Realities*, 26, 54-55.
- Cochran-Smith, M. & Lytle, S. (1999). Relationships of Knowledge and Practice: Teacher Learning in Communities. *Review of Research in Education*. 24. 249-305.
- Clark, S. D. & Latshaw, C.A. (2012). Effects of Learning Styles/ Teaching Styles and Effort on Performance in Accounting and Marketing Courses. *World Journal of Management*. 4(1). 67 - 81.
- Coldren, J., & Hively, J. (2009). Interpersonal teaching style and student impression formation. *College Teaching*, 57(2), 93-98.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2014). Applications of Flow in Human Development and Education. Springer Netherlands. doi: 10.1007/978-94-017-9094-9\_7.
- Duta, N., Panisoara, G. & Panisoara I. O. (2015). The Effective Communication in Teaching. Diagnostic study regarding the academic learning motivation to students. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 186 (2015.) 1007 – 1012. doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.04.064.
- Edmunds, J., Ntoumanis, N. and Duda, J. L. (2008), Testing a self-determination theory-based teaching style intervention in the exercise domain. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 38: 375–388. doi: 10.1002/ejsp.463.
- Eyyam, R., Menevis, I. & Dogruer, N. (2011), An Investigation of the Learning Styles of Prospective Educators. *The Online Journal of New Horizons in Education (TOJNED)*, 1 (3), 8-13.
- Franzoni, A.L.; Assar, S.; Defude, B. & Rojas, J. (2008). Student Learning Styles Adaptation Method Based on Teaching Strategies and Electronic Media. *Proceedings of Advanced Learning Technologies, 2008. ICALT '08. Eighth IEEE International Conference*. 778-782.
- Gardner, R. (2010). Should I Stay or Should I Go? Factors that Influence the Retention, Turnover, and Attrition of K–12 Music Teachers in the United States. *Arts Education Policy Review*. 111(3). 112-121.
- Giles, J., Ryan, D.A. J., Belliveau, G., De Freitas, E. & Casey, R. (2006). Teaching style and learning in a quantitative classroom. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 7, 213-225.
- Jackson, K. (2012). Influence Matters: The Link between Principal and Teacher Influence over School Policy and Teacher Turnover. *Journal of School Leadership*. 22. 975-901.

- Kolb, A. Y. & Kolb D. A. (2005). Learning Styles and Learning Spaces: Enhancing Experiential Learning in Higher Education. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*. 4 (2). 193- 212.
- Lachman, R. & Diamant, E. (1987), Withdrawal and restraining factors in teachers' turn- over intentions. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*. 8, 219–232. doi: 10.1002/job.4030080304.
- Liu, S. & Onwuegbuzie, A., (2012). Chinese teachers' work stress and their turnover intention. *International Journal of Educational Research*. 53. 160–170.
- Loeb, S., Darling-Hammond, L. & Luczak, J. (2005). How Teaching Conditions Predict Teacher Turnover in California Schools. *Peabody Journal of Education*. 80(3). 44-70.
- Mohanna, K., Chambers, R., & Wall, D. (2007). Developing your teaching style: increasing effectiveness in healthcare teaching. *Postgraduate Medical Journal*, 83(977), 145–147. doi:10.1136/pgmj.2006.054106.
- Opendakker, M. C. & Van Damme, J. (2006). Teacher characteristics and teaching styles as effectiveness enhancing factors of classroom practice. *Teaching and Teacher Education*. 22. 1-21.
- Reeve, J. M. (2009). Why teachers adopt a controlling motivating style towards students and how they can become more autonomy supportive. *Educational Psychologist*, 44(3), 159-175.
- Rockoff, J. (2008). Does Mentoring Reduce Turnover and Improve Skills of New Employees? Evidence from Teachers in New York City, National Bureau of Economic Research, Inc. NBER Working Papers. no. 13868, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w13868.pdf>
- Stuit, D. & Smith, T. (2009). Teacher Turnover in Charter Schools. Nashville, TN: National Center on School Choice, Vanderbilt University. [http://www.vanderbilt.edu/schoolchoice/documents/briefs/brief\\_stuit\\_smith\\_ncspe.pdf](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/schoolchoice/documents/briefs/brief_stuit_smith_ncspe.pdf)
- Somprach, K., Prasertcharoensuk, T. & Ngang, T. K. (2015). The Impact of Organizational Culture on Teacher Learning. *The Proceedings of 5th World Conference on Learning, Teaching and Educational Leadership*. 186. 1038–1044.
- Torres, C. (2014). Is This Work Sustainable? Teacher Turnover and Perceptions of Workload in Charter Management Organizations. *Urban Education*. 1-24. doi: 10.1177/0042085914549367.
- Trip, S. (2003). Stiluri de învățare in Maxim, S. T & Popoveniuc, B. (coord.). *Analele Universității "Ștefan cel Mare" Suceava*. 107-111.
- Vogt, F. & Rogalla, M. (2009). Developing Adaptive Teaching Competency through coaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education*. 25(8). 1051–1060. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2009.04.002.
- Valentine, S., Godkin, L., Fleischman, G. M. & Kidwell, R. (2011). Corporate Ethical Values, Group Creativity, Job Satisfaction and Turnover Intention: The Impact of Work Context on Work Response. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 98(3). 353-372. doi:10.1007/s10551-010-0554-6.
- Zaman, G. & Vasile, V. (2014). Conceptual framework of economic resilience and vulnerability at national and regional levels. *Romanian Journal of Economics*. 2(48). 5-18