Protective Leadership: The Relationship Between Leadership Readiness and Burnout

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Introduction

Leadership has gained significant attention in recent years, becoming a key focus of research on psychosocial risk prevention and organizational factors that affect workers' well-being and performance [1,2]. Based on the Leadership Efficacy Model (LEM)[3], *this study examined the relationship between leadership readiness and burnout among employees in a business context, categorizing workers into three groups based on their perceptions of their supervisors' leadership readiness*.

According to the LEM, three leadership factors can explain leadership efficacy: leadership cycles, leadership styles, and antecedent factors of leadership (Figure 1). The combination of these dimensions yields a single "score" indicating managers' readiness to exercise leadership.

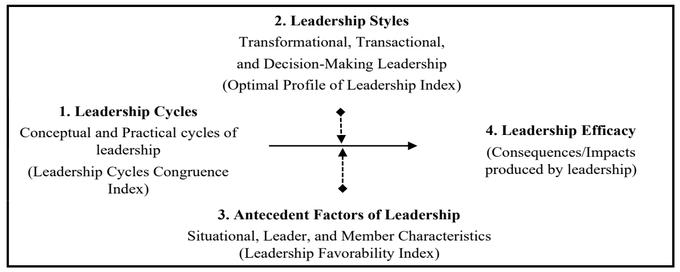


Figure. 1 - Leadership Efficacy Model

Methodology

Participants: The study included 236 participants from two secondary-sector companies in northern Portugal, aged 21-65 years (M = 40.38, SD = 10.70). Most participants were women (51.3%), 76.7% had secondary education or less; 67.4% worked in the production department, 20.8% in production support, and 11.8% in the administrative area. The average professional experience was 7.36 years (SD = 7.34; range = 1-40).

Measures: 1) Leadership: *a) Leadership Cycles Questionnaire (LCQ; Gomes et al., 2022); b) Multidimensional Scale of Leadership (MSL; Gomes et al., 2021); c) Leadership Antecedent Factors Questionnaire (LAFQ; Gomes et al., 2022); 2) Burnout: Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT; Schaufeli et al., 2019)*

Procedure: After obtaining organizational consent, participants were informed about the study's objectives and confidentiality measures. Data were collected via Qualtrics over email invitation.

Data Analysis: IBM SPSS and AMOS (version 29.0) were used as statistical tools.

Hypotheses: H1 - Employees who perceive greater readiness for leadership show lower levels of work-related burnout than those who perceive less readiness for leadership; H2 - The difference in employees' perceived leadership in managers is not explained by sociodemographic variables.

Results and discussion

Leadership Cycles

Table 1. Leadership Cycles: Assessment of Leadership Philosophy, Practice, and Criteria

Leadership cycles	Increase *n* (%)	Decrease *n* (%)	Maintain *n* (%)
LCQ-Leadership philosophy	102 (43%)	2 (1%)	132 (56%)
LCQ-Leadership practice	113 (48%)	3 (1%)	120 (51%)
LCQ-Leadership criteria	109 (46%)	4 (2%)	123 (52%)

Correlation between Variables

Table 2. Correlations between the Variables under Study

Leadership cycles	1	2	3	4
1. LCQ-LCCI – Leadership cycles	--	--	--	--
2. MSL-OPLI: Optimal profile of leadership	-.611**	--	--	--
3. LAFQ-LFI – Leadership favorability	-.499**	.797**	--	--
4. BAT – Burnout Assessment Tool	.278**	-.415**	.398**	--

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

Constitution of Leadership Profiles

Table 3. Frequency of participants and average for each instrument

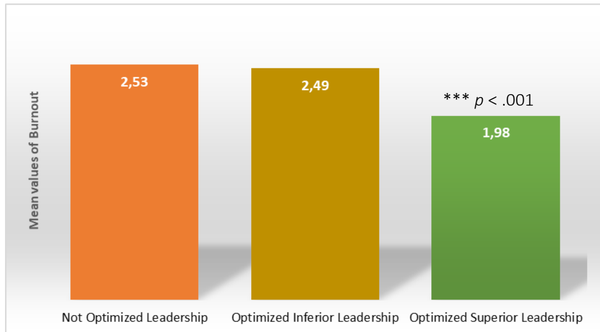
Leadership Readiness Profile	*n*	LCCI *M* (*SD*)	OPLI *M* (*SD*)	LFI *M* (*SD*)
Not Optimized Leadership	39	2.47 (0.68)	2.28 (0.53)	3.10 (0.63)
Optimized Inferior Leadership	97	0.84 (0.47)	2.99 (0.46)	3.55 (0.56)
Optimized Superior Leadership	100	0.36 (0.46)	4.20 (0.41)	4.46 (0.37)

Note. To test the hypotheses of this study, leadership profiles were defined through cluster analysis using the K-means method to group participants based on their perceptions of their managers' leadership.

Differences in Leadership Profiles Based on Sociodemographic Variables

The Chi-Square tests showed that the groups did not differ significantly with respect to gender ($\chi^2(2)$ = 0.63, p = .731) or academic degree ($\chi^2(2)$ = 2.61, p = .271). ANOVA indicated no differences in age ($F(2, 233)$ = 0.41, p = .663) and professional experience ($F(2, 199)$ = 1.18, p = .310). Thus, the differences in burnout levels between leadership profiles found in the previous stage of this study cannot be attributed to variations in the sociodemographic characteristics of the groups.

Differences in Burnout Based on Leadership Profiles



A one-way ANOVA: $F(2, 232)$ = 19.86, p < .001, partial η^2 = .146. The identified leadership profiles explained 15% of the variance in burnout scores. Differences between the optimized superior profile and both the optimized inferior profile and the non-optimized profile were statistically significant (p < .001). No significant differences were identified between the optimized inferior and the non-optimized profiles (p = 1.00).

Conclusions

In summary, the results of this study allow us to affirm that leadership readiness is a relevant dimension in the organizational context, playing a significant role that, depending on circumstances and its development, can either increase or decrease employees' burnout levels. This predisposition to exercise leadership functions can act as a protective factor, promoting greater emotional balance, or, conversely, become an additional source of stress and exhaustion when the necessary support and adequate organizational conditions are absent.

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