

WHY DO WE STAY? CAREER RURAL TEACHERS' BURNOUT COMPARED TO  
PERSONAL MOTIVATIONAL SOURCES AND DEMOGRAPHICS

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# WHY DO WE STAY? CAREER RURAL TEACHERS' BURNOUT COMPARED TO PERSONAL MOTIVATIONAL SOURCES AND DEMOGRAPHICS

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This study investigated the effects of individual motivational sources, demographics, and levels of burnout within career rural school teachers in Nebraska. The dependent variable was the psychological syndrome burnout as measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory. Two independent variables were individual motivational sources (a personality trait measured by the Motivational Sources Inventory) and individual demographic information. The purpose of this study was to aid in recognizing burnout with goals of increasing job engagement (the antithesis of burnout), improving organizational culture, and retaining teaching staffs in school districts that have difficulty attracting certified staff. In the burnout trait depersonalization, significance was found in intrinsically motivated teachers, instrumentally motivated teachers, self-concept internally motivated teachers, and male teachers. The burnout trait reduced personal accomplishment was significant in instrumentally motivated teachers, self-concept externally motivated teachers, self-concept internally motivated teachers, and teachers with an education level beyond a Masters degree. Instrumentally motivated teachers were the only group to show significance with the burnout characteristic emotional exhaustion.

## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to two groups of people. First, my family who occasionally allowed me to pursue this dream of mine and still be their dad. And, also to the teachers this work studied. Teachers have always been my heroes for their selfless dedication in the face of numerous adversities. Public schools are the greatest social institution in the United States, and they are held up by the teachers who toil there.

PREVIEW

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Career public school teachers. When I needed a reason to continue, they were my inspiration.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

“A teacher is the candle that lights others in consuming itself.”

-Giovanni Ruffini

### **Problem Statement**

During my years of teaching experience, I have seen many teachers leaving not only our district, but also the profession itself. According to Hellmich (2001), thirteen percent of a teaching staff will leave each year compared to only eleven percent for other occupations. Seventeen to twenty percent of new teachers leave the field within their first four years (Hellmich, 2001). At its peak, my rural school district employed around forty teachers. The staff would turn over approximately every seven years (an annual rate of fourteen percent), thus losing experience, expertise, enthusiasm, and talent. This researcher hopes to understand the causes of such discontent and offer suggestions to create a more content, fulfilled, engaged staff and to improve retention.

Teacher shortages are looming. An estimated attrition rate of between two to 2.2 million teachers will occur over the next decade (Hellmich, 2001; Newsweek, 2000). The U. S. Department of Education predicts one million of the nation's 2.6 million teachers will be replaced by 2010 (Kantrowitz, Wingert, Won Tesoriero, Foote, and Downey, 2000). The number jumps to 2.8 million new teacher hires by 2015 (Wallis, 2008). The estimated average annual cost of teacher turnover is seven billion dollars. For rural districts, the situation seems dire. These districts have less to offer prospective teachers because of smaller staff sizes and budgets, and fewer accommodations within

their communities. If rural teachers did not leave the profession entirely, they typically migrate to larger districts for various reasons. To maintain the continuity of their school systems, these rural school districts will need to retain and engage as many teachers as possible.

The career ladder for teachers stops abruptly when compared to other professions and, because of resources, limits the types of career opportunities. Dan Lortie (1975) noted, “Teaching salaries display a low, fixed ceiling” and do not reach more than double the beginning salary. Also, the career is filled with status anomalies such as “professional, yet less earnings than jobs with less training; middle-class, yet it uses collective bargaining; and praised for ‘dedicated service’, yet lampooned as ‘easy work’.” Lortie called teaching “special but shadowed”.

According to de Heus and Diekstra (1999), teachers may leave the profession because of other stressors, too. They may perceive that the job does not live up to their expectations, or peripheral activities (such as paperwork) take too much time. Chronic time pressures and classes that are too large are seen as unfavorable work conditions. Teachers may feel they are expending too much emotional energy with too little being returned, or their career options are limited. These stressors lead to burnout, a psychological condition marked by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. The fact that burnout builds over time within the individual, leads one to assume it has a tremendous effect on retention and engagement in the work.

As Maslach quoted Farber (1999), if five to twenty percent of all American teachers are burned out at any time and burnout affects productivity, then school efficacy is challenged. If Farber is correct, then as many as 4,000 teachers in Nebraska alone

suffer from burnout. Multiply this number by the others that the sufferers affect (students, co-workers, and families) and it becomes an epidemic.

Therefore, this study will investigate the individual motivational sources and demographics of career teachers in rural Nebraska school districts compared to their levels of burnout. Ultimately, this research hopes to determine or explain how teachers navigated their course through the profession to reach a career level of seniority. The researcher hopes this study's suggestions will help identify burnout and correlate factors associated with it. Conversely, limiting burnout will increase engagement and stability in these smaller, rural school districts.

Understanding the psychological and demographic constructs of retention and its related levels of burnout compared to personal motivational sources will help administrators and teachers prescribe career development options. Teacher retention is critical to rural Nebraska school districts, and yet it is a mystery as to why a teacher becomes a career teacher. Do career teachers have less burnout, or do they remain in teaching despite burnout? Is there a demographic factor or predominant trait for burned out and non-burned out teachers? In an effort to find a construct for teacher retention, this assumption presumes certain motivational sources are more prone to burnout, and therefore, attrition or dissatisfied, ineffective or unengaged teachers.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this survey study is to test the theory that compares demographics, motivational sources, and burnout in career rural public school teachers in the state of Nebraska. Demographics will be defined as gender, education level, grade assignment, years of total experience and years at current location and reasons for staying in the

profession. Motivational sources are taken from the Motivational Sources Inventory (Barbuto and Scholl, 1998). The traits are intrinsic, instrumental, self-concept internal, self-concept external, and goal internalization. The scales of burnout are characterized as depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and reduced personal accomplishment.

This research is not meant to blame administrators or teachers. It is not meant to screen teacher applicants or eliminate teachers with higher prospects for turnover. However, it is meant to benefit and maximize the talent within each school district. It is meant to encourage administrators and teachers to think about what else can be done for their career teachers to both make them more effective and less stressed, and thus, happier.

## **Background**

Kantrowitz, Wingert, Won Tesoriero, Foote, and Downey (2000) wrote about the desperate situation schools must go through to fill teaching vacancies. Houston, following the lead of industry, offered signing bonuses and stipends to teachers in fields such as math, science, and technology. New York and Chicago recruited overseas for teachers looking for an opportunity to teach in the United States. Some new layers of career development have been added as incentives. Seven states awarded pay hikes, days off, cash compensation, and waiving test fees for teachers earning certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Georgia, New York, and now Nebraska have begun short term training to prepare people without certification to teach in their fields of expertise.

Tracy (2002), using University of Nebraska—Lincoln Teachers College information, reported that in 2002, seventy-seven Nebraska school districts had 119

unfilled teaching positions. Of these, seventy percent were in districts with fewer than 500 students. Most of these unfilled positions were in music, science, and foreign language. The causes for these unfilled positions were teachers leaving the profession or migrating to school districts in larger communities. Along with the baby boomer generation (those people born between the years 1946 and 1963) approaching retirement age, these figures appear likely to increase.

### **Burnout**

According to Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001), engagement is the antithesis of burnout. It is energy, involvement, and efficacy. Whereas low levels of activation and pleasure characterize burnout, high levels of activation and pleasure characterize engagement. Schaufeli and his colleagues have defined engagement as a persistent, positive affective-motivational state of fulfillment in employees that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, 2001).

Burnout, then, is the erosion of engagement. It can be observed in the job performances of the employees. Burnout causes withdrawal in the form of absenteeism and turnover. Less job satisfaction, when job satisfaction is a source of need fulfillment and contentment, and reduced organizational commitment, when it is the employee's allegiance to the organization, causes lower production. In addition, burned out employees can have a negative impact on co-workers and their own home lives.

Burnout grows over time from the interaction of the individual with the work setting. It emerges from interpersonal interactions where the relationship between providers and recipients is central to the work (Maslach, 1999), and therefore is endemic to education, service, or treatment professionals. As a form of mental illness, it possesses

characteristics of anxiety, depression, and self-esteem problems. Burnout is viewed as job stress with links to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover (Maslach, Schnaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).

Although burnout is related to anxiety and depression, it is job related. Whereas depression is generalized, burnout is situation specific. And, since burnout is situational, it can be prevented. Job characteristics with high correlation to burnout are workload, time pressure, role conflict, and role ambiguity—all traits of teachers' jobs. Other sources of burnout include an absence of job resources, lack of social support (more so from co-workers than administrators), lack of feedback (information and control), and a lack of decision-making capabilities (Schwab, Jackson, & Schuler, 1986). Burnout is more mental and emotional than physical. It manifests itself in “normal” people who have no previous psychopathology, and it shows decreased effectiveness and work performance because of negative attitudes and behaviors (Pines, 1991). It manifests itself in three traits: 1. depersonalization, 2. emotional exhaustion, and 3. personal accomplishment or efficacy (Maslach, 1982).

### **Research and Theory**

Edgar Schein (1990), expanding on Donald Super's seminal work (1957), identifies ten major stages of any career. Stages one and two prepare the person for their field of work (stage 1: growth, fantasy, exploration; and stage 2: education and training). Stages nine and ten prepare the person to end his or her career (stage 9: disengagement; and stage 10: retirement). The remaining six units are the focus of this teacher retention theory. They are stage 3 (entry into the world of work), stage 4 (basic training, socialization), stage 5 (gaining of membership), stage 6 (gaining of tenure, permanent

membership), stage 7 (midcareer crisis, reassessment), and stage 8 (maintaining momentum, regaining it, or leveling off). According to statistics used earlier in this section (Hellmich, 2001), one in five new teachers never advance beyond stage five. Somehow, career teachers have navigated their way through all the stages of their careers and still remain in the teaching profession. Somewhere in each career teacher's work life was a job fit, a positive engagement (quantified as a lack of burnout) to keep him or her in the profession. As hypothesized in this study, some of this fit may be attributed to the demographics of individual teachers and their unique circumstances or organizations. Some may be related to each individual's personality traits, such as his or her primary source of motivation.

In addition, teaching over time exacerbates the problem, thus leading to burnout. The higher than average turnover rate of teachers (compared to other occupations) compounded by a predicted teacher shortage makes teacher retention critical in districts with fewer possible teacher candidates (rural). Understanding and limiting burnout in career teachers is an important step in retaining staff. This researcher wants to understand what the individual motivational sources for career teachers are and if the levels of burnout that they feel are significantly different. This study seeks knowledge of the balance between motivation and burnout in career teachers.

The motivational framework this study used the Barbuto and Scholl Taxonomy of Motivation (1998). This scale uses the Motivation Sources Inventory (MSI) to measure a person's motivational traits. The taxonomy is synthesized into five sources of motivation from the works of numerous psychological researchers and theorists. (They cite such researchers as Alderfer, Maslow, Herzberg, Bandura, Piaget, Kohlberg, Kegan, and

McClelland.) These five generalized traits are 1. intrinsic, 2. internal self-concept, 3. external self-concept, 4. goal internalization, and 5. instrumental.

The conceptual model for this research is shown in figure 1.1.

### *Theory Model*

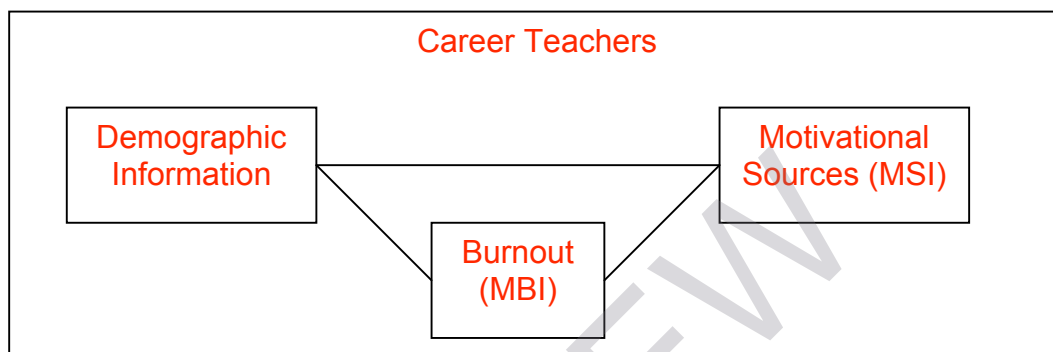


Figure 1.1

### **Research Questions**

Question 1: What relationship is there between the personal motivational source and the levels of burnout in career rural public school teachers?

What keeps career K-12 teachers in the profession? Are there significant differences between the motivational dispositions of career teachers and their level of burnout/commitment? How much burnout are career teachers willing to tolerate and does their individual personality type influence their tolerance?

Question 2: What relationship is there between demographic factors and levels of burnout of career rural public school teachers?

Question 3: What is the relationship between the demographic factors and motivational sources of career rural public school teachers?



Do demographics play a role in burnout and are they demonstrated through career teachers' motivational sources? This information provides a link between the individual and the school community and completes the cycle shown in the conceptual model.

### **Methodology**

A person with an intrinsic motivational source does the work for the sake of the work. The work alone itself acts as the incentive. Internal self-concept types work for achievement. They seek higher levels of competence and challenges and are inner directed. External self-concept requires recognition. They want acceptance, status, and affiliation. Their ideal self is adopted from role expectations of reference groups; they are other directed. When individuals adopt attitudes and behaviors because of their personal value system, they are goal internally motivated. They share the same personal values as the leader or the group and work toward the goal of the collective. Historically, they have been called self-actualizing. Instrumental rewards motivate individuals when they perceive their behavior will lead to certain extrinsic tangible rewards such as pay, promotions, and bonuses. For some instrumentalists, power is also a significant extrinsic reward.

The job satisfaction/engagement/burnout instrument was the Maslach Burnout Inventory, Second Edition (MBI). This test measures three subscales which Maslach and Jackson believe are components of burnout: Emotional Exhaustion, Personal Accomplishment, and Depersonalization. The form ED version of the test is for teachers instead of other human service professionals. The concept, though possessing only negative measures, is "sufficiently distinct to be a different construct".

The demographic factors were gender, education level, grade level assignment, total years of teaching experience, and years at current location. In addition, respondents will be asked to rate the following reasons for staying in teaching: staff camaraderie, family concerns, like the community, community involvement, administration, tenure, extra curricular school activities, curriculum assignment, location compared to spouse's career, other educational opportunities, other employment opportunities, and other interest opportunities. Also, a short answer question, "What was your primary reason for remaining as a career teacher in a rural school district?" sought personal perspectives of teachers that might not have been accounted for in the survey and also showed the highest priority of the individual teacher.

A sample of rural Nebraska career teachers will be given the MSI questions (1998) to determine motivational traits and the Maslach Burnout Inventory, Second Edition (form ED) (1990) to determine the career teachers job satisfaction. The results will be compiled and analyzed using various statistical methods matched to the data. Whenever possible, all hypotheses will be tested using a level of significance (alpha level) of .05.

### **Delimitations/Limitations**

1. This research is not descriptive for all public classroom teachers because it only inquires about career public classroom teachers in rural Nebraska school districts. It may help explain Nebraska teachers but it is not generalizable for the large body of educators. It also does not include teachers who have left the profession before reaching career teacher status.

2. The time of year may influence the participant's responses. A teacher may have his or her judgment affected by an incident that happened during the school year.

Instructions will carry a caveat to reflect upon his or her entire career, not merely the immediate school year. The data relies on the ability of teachers to accurately reflect on their careers without being influenced by any recent events.

3. The entire population was given the opportunity to participate in the survey.

Therefore, the sample size will be only those who chose to participate.

4. Limitations include the fallibility of the MSI and MBI. This could be a measure of the number in the norming groups. The MBI has been performed many times, but the MSI was normed after two groups of 156 participants each. Also, both tests are self-reports, which could be influenced by many time sensitive factors (such as a bad day or other recent changes).
5. Last of all, the MBI may not properly measure the level of job commitment or engagement. It measures burnout, which is the antithesis of engagement.

### **Definition of Terms**

Burnout is measured on three scales: depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and efficacy. Each is measured by the corresponding ratings on the Maslach Burnout Inventory.

Career teachers are public school teachers with twenty or more years of teaching. This criterion establishes their career commitment and assumes some measure of job satisfaction. The longevity of these teachers will demonstrate some movement toward disengagement through Schein's Career Stages, which were defined in the theory section. It also shows enough competencies from each teacher to receive a continuing

teaching contract, implying some measure of job satisfaction and teaching aptitude or expertise. The sample career teachers will have spent the majority of their working life in the teaching profession, choosing to remain in education rather than make a conscious choice to leave it.

Engagement is the persistent, positive affective-motivational state of fulfillment in employees that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, 2001, p. 417).

Job satisfaction is a source of need fulfillment and contentment.

Rural school is a school district outside the boundaries of communities with a population of 5,000.

Teacher is a certified instructional staff employed by a public school district.

### **Assumptions**

1. This study assumes that all subjects answer truthfully as to the questions used during testing and information gathering.
2. It is assumed that the MBI and MSI are reliable and valid instruments for measuring burnout and motivational sources.
3. It is assumed, and all precautions were taken, to insure that the subjects in this study will be representative of the rural career teachers within the state of Nebraska.
4. It is assumed that a link exists between motivational sources, burnout, and the demographic factors chosen for this study.
5. It is assumed that the three variables (demographics, burnout, and motivational source) affect teacher retention in rural Nebraska public schools.

6. It is assumed that the three variables (demographics, burnout, and motivational source) affect teacher engagement in rural Nebraska public schools.

### **Significance**

Rural Nebraska districts already struggle to find certified staff. What, then, will be their situation when the baby boomer generation reaches retirement age and normal attrition takes its share of teaching personnel? If half of all teachers will need to be replaced within the next ten years, then rural districts and their students will suffer for certified, qualified teachers. Continuing expertise will be essential to the education process. Also, as Maslach quoted Farber (1999), if five to twenty percent of all American teachers really are burned out at any time and burnout affects productivity, then the foundation of education, its efficacy, is challenged. This study hopes to find a component of each staff member's personality and/or demographics to insure his/her own satisfaction, and so, more likely to remain productive (engaged) in his/her position. This information enhances both the school and the personal happiness of the teacher. This study expects to offer suggestions in the final chapter about finding each teacher's individual source of motivation so proper career development can occur for the teacher. Ideal career development matches the needs of the organization with the needs of the individual. Limiting burnout will help create fulfilled individuals to meet organizational goals. It will also contribute to the body of research and theory by increasing the knowledge of burnout along personality traits, as suggested by Maslach (1984).

## Chapter 2

### Review of Literature

#### Search Process

The literature review for this study focused on research studies and publications in human resources development, education, and social psychology. A search of the ERIC system, PsycINFO, Dissertation Abstracts, and the University of Nebraska Library system was made using keywords such as “teacher retention”, “burnout”, “burnout in organizational settings”, “occupational stress”, “career development”, “career factors”, “teacher careers”, “public schools”, “engagement”, “job engagement”, “work/life balance”, “teacher personality traits”, “teacher turnover”, “teacher attrition”, “personal commitment”, “teacher commitment”, “teacher satisfaction”, “job satisfaction”, “teacher motivation”, “work motivation”, and “personal satisfaction”. Textbooks from past graduate level classes were referenced. Certain media were also used to corroborate information and provide a practical link between the research and reality.

#### Careers

##### *Definition.*

According to Hall (2002, p. 12), “The career is the individually perceived sequence of attitudes and behaviors associated with work-related experiences and activities over the span of the person’s life.” His definition has four central ideas. Career does not imply success or failure; only the individual assesses his or her personal success or failure. It is composed of behaviors and attitudes that are both subjective and objective. The subjective elements are values, attitudes, and motivation while the

objective characteristics include observable choices and activities. The last component is the process or the work-related experiences.

The career then represents work over the person's entire life, of which the most important choices are the area of work in which to engage and which organization for whom to work. This decision is the primary factor in determining overall quality of life. Individuals have a career anchor (Schein, 1996), which is the element of a person's self-concept that he or she will not give up, even in the face of difficult choices. It has paramount importance to the individual. These anchors are: technological / functional competence, managerial competence, autonomy independence, security / stability, entrepreneurial creativity, service / dedication to a cause, pure challenge, and lifestyle.

Strate (2004) quoted McLagan's (1989) definition of career development. Career development's primary emphasis is on the person as an individual who performs and shapes his / her various work roles. Its major intervention is influenced by self-knowledge and processes that affect individual and organizational abilities to create optimal matches of people and work. Or, as Super (1957) noted, the person-job fit is made up of self-concept, life span, and life space.

### ***Organizational Careers.***

The organizational career is the worker's career within the organization. Since it is not the person's entire career, it has a shorter cycle. Hall (2002) suggests that instead of one set of career stages spanning a life time (like Super's model), a series of shorter learning cycles occur over the course of a person's work life. This exploration, trial, mastery, and exit cycle repeats the cycle every time the worker changes jobs or roles. Individuals do not have to leave an organization to begin a new cycle. Movements inside

a system are *radial* and characterize someone with long retention within an organization. This person changes within the organization instead of leaving it. The individual becomes more central within the organization, part of the *inner circle*.

### ***Individual Careers.***

An individual moves through his or her career in stages. The Maslow, McClelland, Super, Hall and Mirvis (1996), and Dolton, Thompson, and Price models (Torraco, 2001) share many of the same components. Maslow's stages are physiological (meeting the needs to survive), safety (gaining acceptance into the profession), social (forming affiliations and becoming part of a group), ego (gaining power), and self-actualization (developing a sense of self worth). McClelland's general stages are achievement (gaining admittance into the profession), affiliation (gaining recognition in the profession), and power (real and implied). Super's stages are growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement. Hall and Mirvis's model (1996) moves from exploration to establishment to maintenance to disengagement. Dolton, Thompson, and Price (2001) list their stages as apprentice, colleague, mentor, and sponsor.

Schein (1990) presents a more specific ten-stage career model, which also incorporates the previously mentioned researchers' dimensions. They are: stage 1, growth, fantasy, and exploration; stage 2, education and training; stage 3, entry into the world of work; stage 4, basic training and socialization; stage 5, gaining membership; stage 6, gaining tenure, permanent membership; stage 7, mid-career crisis, reassessment; stage 8, maintaining momentum, regaining momentum, or leveling off; stage 9, disengagement; and stage 10, retirement. These stages are based on the worker's personal development instead of a vertical career ladder. Career stages are important