

The Effect of Despotic Leadership on Work Alienation with the Mediating of Work Boredom

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of despotic leadership on work alienation with the mediating of work boredom. This study was a correlation research method based on structural equation modeling. 253 teachers of Konarak (Iran) were studied by stratified random sampling method. To collect information, three questionnaires were used: despotic leadership, work alienation and work boredom. For data analysis the Pearson correlation coefficient and structural equation modeling were used by SPSS and Lisrel software. Based on results the direct effect of despotic leadership on work alienation, despotic leadership on work boredom and direct effect of work boredom on work alienation was positive and significant. The indirect effect of despotic leadership on work alienation was also significant with the mediator role of work boredom. Thus, school principals who use a despotic leadership style lead to the spread of organizational anomie in the school, and this organizational anomie in turn increase the deviant behaviors of teachers.

Keywords: despotic leadership, work alienation, work boredom

1. Introduction

Marx, a German philosopher, mentioned alienation for the first time. He defined work alienation as the result of the contradiction between the nature of the work role and human nature. Marx believed that all sources of alienation emanate from economic factors such as wages and division of labor. Accordingly, Marx stated that in today's industrial society, workers are alienated because they do not own either the product of their work or the act of production. Nowadays, special attention is paid to the concept of work alienation by scholars of various disciplines, such as labor and organizational psychology and labor sociology. However, there is a major difference between these views, that is, Marx mentioned objective work alienation (i.e., workers are alienated because they do not own the product of their work), but contemporary scholars have focused on mental work alienation, meaning that workers feel alienated from their work (Mehdad, Mehdizadegan, & Soosanabadi, 2015). Work alienation is a feeling on which a person's job is considered an external factor, and s/he does not feel internal independence in her/his work (Polatcan, 2020). Psychologically, the concept of work alienation roots in psychological states in which one feels suffering from psychological dissociation from his/her duties and responsibilities. Hence, they are not willing to establish or maintain their social relations (Farahbod, Azadehdel, Goudarzvand Chegini, & Ashraf, 2012). In 1959, Seeman introduced five main features of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement. Then, between 1967 and 1991, he modified and adjusted the above features, and finally, by eliminating two features of normlessness and isolation, he considered three features for work alienation, which are accepted by most management experts (Bazmi, Haghghatian, Ansari, & Vahida, 2014). Self-alienated employees are a risk to organizations, and one-fifth of employees suffer from work alienation (Sharafi, Mehdad, & Fazel, 2017). Self-alienated employees think that they have simple, repetitive, and trivial works with no authority. In other words, they do not have job characteristics such as skill diversity, the identity of duty, importance of duty, independence, and feedback. Also, they are trying to take advantage of their works and avoid independence, accountability, and career promotion. In addition, they are not committed to any of their job areas (Amin Farahbakhsh, Salajeghe, & Ziaaddini, 2020). Studies showed that

work alienation causes low productivity (Al Hosain, Jabeen, Paul, & Stachowicz-Stanusch, 2020), organizational injustice (Rasti & Salajeghe, 2019), higher burnout, less organizational commitment (Akar, 2018), less job involvement (Kartel, 2018), mistrust, organizational pessimism (Li & Chen, 2018), feelings of futility, job dissatisfaction (Yumuk, 2017), absenteeism and leave of work (Gozukar, Mercanlı, Çapuk, & Yıldırım, 2017), feelings of powerlessness, isolation, loss of identity (Yılmaz & Sarpkaya, 2009), lower work morality (Kralik & Jakobsen Tinley, 2017), lack of organizational citizenship behaviors (Dagli & Averbek, 2017), loneliness, and lower organizational health (Özer, Uğurluoğlu, Saygılı, & onğur, 2019). Also literature review showed that lack of independence, diversity and feedback, job enrichment, leadership style, organizational culture and structure, social support and work-family conflicts, job stress, satisfaction from the quality of life, consistency of individual-organization values, high workload, organizational structure, centralized decision-making, and rigid rules, policies, and procedures contribute to work alienation (Golparvar, Vaseghi, & Ashja, 2014, Taslimi, Bazargan, Musakhani, & Alvedari, 2011). In this study, two effective factors in work alienation, which have been less investigated by researchers, namely despotic leadership and work boredom are investigated.

Leadership style is one of the effective factors in job alienation, so that studies show that positive leadership styles, including transformational leadership, play a role in reducing job alienation (Damghanian & Hajkazemi, 2014). Despite the positive aspects and effectiveness of leadership, it should not be overlooked that, in reality, not all leaders are effective and of worthy qualities. This is where the dark side of leadership such as inefficient and harmful leadership occurs (Barani & Nastiezaie, 2020). Scholars mentioned various types of leadership's dark side, including despotic leadership, which is defined as the verbal and nonverbal hostilities of a supervisor against subordinates (Breevaart & De Vries, 2017). Despotic leadership is employees' understanding of the verbal and non-verbal hostility of their supervisor (Avey, Wu, & Holley, 2015). This kind of leadership roots in self-interest, along with dominance and despotic behaviors with others. Despotic leaders are hegemonic, intend to control the others, and vengeful; in contrast to moral leadership, this kind of leadership paves the way for the gradual weakening of employees in the psychological and organizational aspects (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008). Key aspects of despotic leadership include the mental quality of employees concerning despotic behaviors, the persistence of hostility imposed by the leader, and the self-sustaining and purposive nature of mistreatment (Javed, Fatima, Yasin, Jahanzeb, & Rawwas, 2019). The despotic leaders, in particular, mistreat their subordinates because they have less power to stand against them. In addition, despotic and destructive leaders try to direct employees to achieve their goals without paying attention to the welfare of their subordinates (Aryee, Chen, Sun, & Debrah, 2007). Studies show that despotic supervision with job dissatisfaction, perceptions of injustice, mental and physical illness, job frustration, deviant behaviors and reduction of organizational citizenship behaviors (Tepper, Duffy, Henle, & Lambert, 2006), emotional exhaustion and decreased knowledge sharing behaviors (Lee, Kim, & Yun, 2018), immoral behaviors, organizational anomie, job alienation and normative conflict (Golparvar, Javadian, Salimian, Ismaili Ardestani, & Ahmadi, 2012), less efficiency, less productivity and less optimism of personnel (De Hoogh & Den Hartog employees, 2008) is related.

One of the possible consequences of despotic leadership is work boredom, which has attracted the attention of industrial and organizational psychologists, behavioral scientists, and social scientists in recent years. Work boredom is defined as a state of boredom or incompatibility with any kind of repetitive experience. It usually happens in situations where a repetitive measure must be performed. It is associated with symptoms such as feelings of boredom and fatigue, meaninglessness, emptiness, lack of interest, lack of communication, or lack of interaction with the work environment. Work boredom usually occurs in three stages: (a) stress arousal, which is due to irrational demands of clients; (b) formation and expansion of pessimistic attitudes toward clients and other people in the workplace; and (c) exhaustion. Emotional and physical arousal can also be added to these stages, which is one of the first symptoms (Cleary, Sayers, Lopez, & Hungerford, 2016). Work boredom is a characteristic of people who are engaged in dull and repetitive jobs and are submitted to the fact that their workplace has no space for improvement and progress (Cunha & Rego, 2009). This syndrome has been observed among a variety of relief Jobs, including counselors, social workers, doctors, police, and nurses. Almost all people have experienced work boredom at different times, regardless of the nature of their work, and this phenomenon is observed at all levels of various organizations in different countries (Sohail & Hussain, 2012). Most employees who are prone to fatigue and boredom often experience uniform patterns in their working lives, and often experience a sense of relentless despair, loneliness, low energy levels, and lack of peace, and have lower levels of enthusiasm and interest than their colleagues. They also have little ability to plan or execute their duties properly, are less committed to their work and profession, which in turn causes gradual burnout, less creativity, and lower risk-taking and ultimately become indifferent to their jobs and organizations (Gibbs, 2011). Bored and indifferent people are not worried about the future because whatever they are concerned about, for them, there is no difference between the present, the future, and the past. They have a low level of

self-confidence and consider simplicity and confusion as defensive strategies (Danaeefard, Hassanzadeh, & Salarieh, 2010). Factors such as the mismatch between employees and work, doing repetitive and uniform tasks, feeling job insecurity, lack or insufficient excitement, the mismatch between the education level of employees and job descriptions, not receiving support from supervisors, friends, colleagues, family, and spouse, and poor management and weakness of feedbacks contribute to work boredom (Rimaz et al., 2020). In order to prevent work burnout, the job should be enriched in six ways: (1) Accountability; (2) Performance-based success; (3) providing feedback; (4) Freedom to perform tasks; (5) Performance control; and (6) Employee Growth and Improvement (Zeyaaddiny & Ramezani, 2013). Bakker and Demerouti (2008) found colleagues' and supervisors' support, performance feedback, diversity of duties, independence and learning opportunities and optimism, and self-confidence and self-esteem are among the resources that can reduce work boredom and increase employees' job engagement. Also Hackman and Oldham (1995) showed that variety of skills, duty identity, the importance of duty, independence, and feedback are the factors that reduce work boredom.

School management is one of the few important positions in the educational system, so that an incompetent principal reduces the effectiveness of the school programs. Today's schools require principals with very high characteristics, abilities, and skills to guide their organization according to the current situation, and the sole role of doing executive affairs is no longer acceptable. However, currently, many schools are poorly managed (Barani & Nastiezaie, 2020). In many schools, there are signs of destructive and despotic leadership, such as lack of clear goals for teachers and the principal, hostile relationships between the principal, teachers, students, and parents, strong emphasis on organizational rules and mission, mistrust and dishonesty in conversations, emphasis on working independently (instead of teamwork and participation), greater use of punishment, feelings of insecurity and lack of support, controlling interactions and conversations between colleagues, and being risk aversion (Epitropoulos, 2019). Such school principals cause work alienation and work boredom of teachers. The results of studies in Iran show that approximately 52.31% of teachers feel alienated from their jobs (Rastegar Khaled, Kaveh, & Mohammadi, 2014), 98% of school counselors suffer from job boredom syndrome (Rohani & Firouzi, 2010), mean job satisfaction of teachers is 59.8 of 95 (Ilanloo, Delavar, Shariatmadar, & Ahmadi, 2020), the mean boredom of teachers is 73.25 of 132 (Kazemi, Hossein Khanzadeh, Rasoulzadeh, & Mohammadi, 2020), the mean application of despotic leadership in schools is 33.73 of 70 and the mean tendency of teachers to leave their jobs is 8.22 of 15 (Barani & Nastiezaie, 2020). Despite the high prevalence of work alienation and work boredom in organizations, these issues have been less studied in educational organizations. Therefore, it is important to recognize work alienation and boredom and to investigate factors that contribute to these problems in order to find solutions. Considering the complex and multidimensional variables of despotic leadership and work alienation, it seems that the relationship between these two variables is not linear, and there are confounders that affect both of them. In the present study, by emphasizing what was mentioned before, we investigated the role of work alienation. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the effect of despotic leadership on work alienation through the mediation of work boredom. This study addressed several research hypotheses:

- 1) Despotic leadership has a positive and significant effect on work alienation.
- 2) Despotic leadership has a positive and significant effect on work boredom.
- 3) Work boredom has a positive and significant effect on work alienation.
- 4) Despotic leadership has a positive and significant effect on work alienation with the mediating of work boredom.

The relationships between despotic leadership, work alienation and work boredom behaviors can be illustrated as follows:

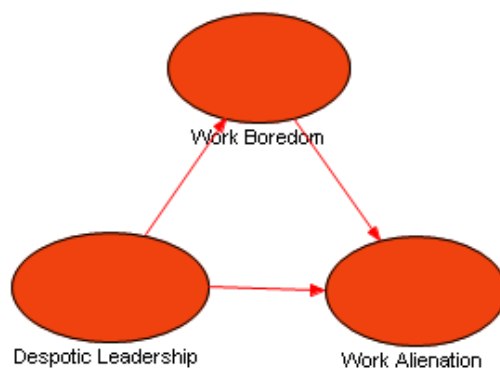


Figure 1. model of the research

2. Methods

The study is a cross-sectional survey based on structural equation model. The statistical population of the study was all teachers Konarak city in Iran in the academic year of 2020-2021 (N=850). 264 teachers were randomly selected by Cochran's sampling formula and were studied through questionnaires, of which 11 questionnaires were excluded due to lack of information and finally 253 questionnaires were analyzed.

2.1 Instrument

Three questionnaires were employed for collecting the data:

- 1) Despotism Leadership Questionnaire (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008): The questionnaire consisted of 6 items. It was organized on the 5-point Likert scale from "quite disagree" to "quite agree", being represented by mean 1 and 5, respectively. The minimum and maximum means of the questionnaire were 1 and 5, respectively. The closer to 5 mean it is a sign of more use of despotism leadership style in the school. The reliability of the questionnaire based on Cronbach's alpha in the study of De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008) was 0.82 and in this study was 0.76.
- 2) Work Alienation Questionnaire (Korman, Wittig Berman, & Lang, 1981): The questionnaire consisted of 8 items. It was organized on the 5-point Likert scale from "quite disagree" to "quite agree", being represented by mean 1 and 5, respectively. The minimum and maximum means of the questionnaire were 1 and 5, respectively. The closer to 5 mean it is a sign of more work alienation. The reliability of the questionnaire based on Cronbach's alpha in the study of Korman et al. (1981) was 0.87 and in this study was 0.83.
- 3) Work Boredom Questionnaire (Reijseger, Schaufeli, Peeters, Taris, Van Beek, & Ouweneel, 2013): The questionnaire consisted of 8 items. It was organized on the 5-point Likert scale from "quite disagree" to "quite agree", being represented by scores 1 and 5, respectively. The minimum and maximum mean were 1 and 5, respectively. The closer to 5 mean it is a sign of more work boredom. The reliability of the questionnaire based on Cronbach's alpha in the study of Rimaz et al. (2020) was 0.87 and in this study was 0.81.

2.2 Data Analysis Technique

Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis, as well as inferential statistics, including Pearson correlation coefficient and structural equation modeling (SEM), used to analyze the data in SPSS 21 and LISREL.

3. Findings

Table 1 represents mean, standard deviation, Pearson correlation coefficient of variables.

Table 1. Mean and correlation coefficient of variables

Variable	Mean	SD	r		
			despotic leadership	work alienation	work boredom
despotic leadership	1.425	0.541	1		
work alienation	1.414	0.527	0.772**	1	
work boredom	1.396	0.499	0.716**	0.811**	1

**($p_value < 0.001$)

As shown in Table 1, a significant relationship observed between despotic leadership work alienation and work boredom ($r=0.772$ and 0.716 , respectively), while work boredom was positively related to work alienation ($r=0.811$).

Moreover, a structural equation model used to test the relationship between the variables of the study.

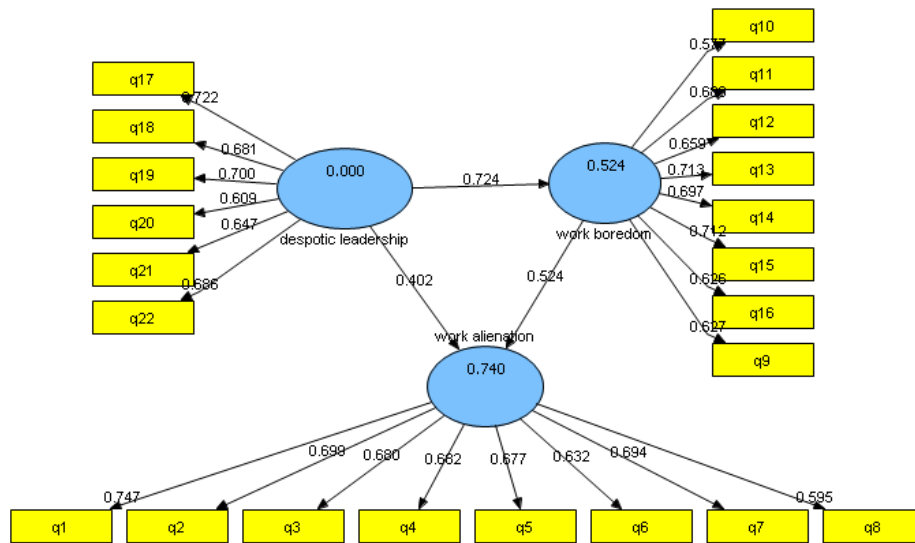


Figure 2. Fitted research model (Standard Coefficients)

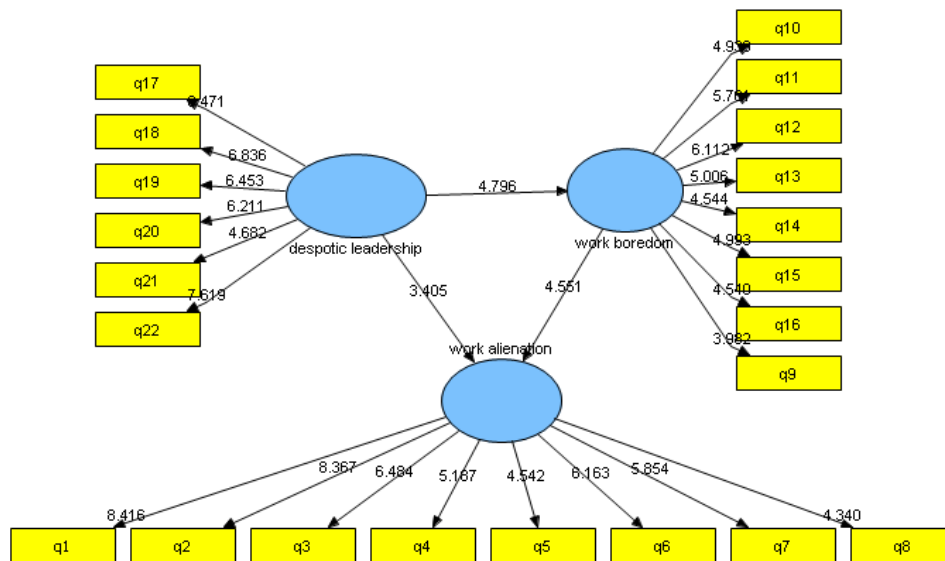


Figure 3. Fitted research model (T Coefficients)

According to the model (Figures 2 and 3), the research hypotheses can be analyzed as follows:

Table 2. Path coefficients for the study of research hypotheses

Hypotheses	Path coefficients	t	Conclusion
Despotic Leadership → Work Alienation	0.402	3.40	Accept
Despotic Leadership → Work Boredom	0.724	4.79	Accept
Work Boredom → Work Alienation	0.524	4.55	Accept
Despotic Leadership → Work Boredom → Work Alienation	0.379	3.29	Accept

According to the model and Table 2, the direct effect of despotic leadership on work alienation ($\beta=0.402$, $t=3.40$), the direct effect of despotic leadership on work boredom ($\beta=0.724$, $t=4.79$), and the direct effect of work boredom on work alienation ($\beta=0.524$, $t=4.55$) was positive and significant. Also, to investigate the indirect effect of despotic leadership on work alienation mediated by work boredom the Sobel test used. The Sobel t-test value was 3.29 ($p\text{-value} = 0.001$). Therefore, the indirect effect of of despotic leadership on work alienation mediated by work boredom ($\beta=0.379$, $t=3.29$) was also positive and significant.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the effect of despotic leadership on work alienation with the mediating of work boredom. The first finding showed that despotic leadership has a positive and significant effect on work alienation. Since in despotic leadership, the leader's behavior is inappropriate and contains indecent and inappropriate features such as character assassination, destruction, hypocrisy, exploitation and abuse, and other abusive behaviors, negative consequences such as harassment of employees, bullying, deceptive behavior, and all kinds of fraud and fraud are common in their workplace. Imposing additional and unfair workloads, hypocrisy, and the spirit of militancy among employees, reporting false statistics and figures, fabricating facts, and promoting aggressive and hegemonic behaviors are among prominent examples of this type of leadership (Nauman, Fatima, & Haq, 2018), which in turn cause the feeling of powerless, absurd, and alienation in the workplace among teachers Eidi Pour, Yosefy, Zardoshtian, & Eydi, (2020) argues that such a leadership approach causes organizational pessimism and works alienation of employees, at least. When managers use imperious leadership, they separate themselves from the employees and emphasize their power, so that they dictate their working methods to employees and make unilateral decisions. Therefore, such decisions can create conditions that limit employee's participation and increase their work alienation.

The second finding showed that despotic leadership has a positive and significant effect on work boredom. Despotic leaders use their power to control, influence, and persuade employees to perform tasks for their self-interest. These leaders are less willing to follow methods or observe ethical standards in order to achieve their personal goals. Besides, they constantly try to expand their dominance and control over employees, which in turn causes teachers' work boredom (Rasool, Naseer, Syed, & Ahmed, 2018). Despotic and destructive leaders not only do not care about the welfare of employees but also abuse and insult them. They also tend towards bullying behaviors, impose additional workload on employees and humiliate them. They do not tolerate constructive criticism, and by threatening others do not accept any questions or judgments about their actions and suppress any critical thinking (Golparvar et al., 2012), such cases can have a positive effect on teachers' work boredom. Despotic leaders, at an extensive scale, deliberately and hypocritically, use organizational power for their interests. They define and implement a certain type of relationship in the organization that destroys constructive working relationships and negatively affects the efficiency and functionalism in the organization, which in turn decreases teachers' work enthusiasm and causes work boredom (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2018).

Third finding showed that work boredom has a positive and significant effect on work alienation. When people feel that they are engaged in a dull and repetitive job and feel little hope for improvement and progress at their workplace, they feel boredom, meaninglessness, lack of interest, and lack of communication with the work environment, which in turn cause lower adaptation to the job. Eventually, these factors cause work boredom and present lower passion and commitment, which gradually results in resign. Most employees who are prone to fatigue and boredom experience more monotonous patterns in their work lives, and these people often experience feelings of restlessness, hopelessness, loneliness, low energy levels, and restlessness, and these people are less enthusiastic about activity. They benefit from their colleagues, who reduces the possibility of planning or performing the tasks assigned to the person correctly (Cunha et al., 2009) and increases the person's feeling of alienation from his work.

Fourth finding showed that despotic leadership anomie has a positive and significant effect on work alienation with the mediating of work boredom. Golparvar et al. (2012) conclude that by violating human values and moral principles, despotic leaders pave the way for overt and hidden humiliation of the employees, which causes an internal feeling of being a worthless, chaotic, and organizational anomie. De Lara, Tacoronte and Ting Ding (2009) conclude that the sense of being ignored and injustice, which can be interfered with from the behavior of non-moral leaders, can seriously cause a sense of normative disorder and normative conflict. Despotic and destructive leaders by showing inappropriate behavior and being disrespectful to employees, aggression, and threats, disrespect for clients, conflicting behaviors, dishonesty, misreporting, ignoring their promises, excessive control even concerning minor matters, lack of trust in employees, undesirable political behavior, despotic and destructive leaders follow their personal promotion. Creating a system that encourages flattering, narcissism, pride, and claim, inattentiveness, insisting on their positions, not respecting others opinions, lack of expertise and poor communication skills, weak decision-making, misuse of organizational resources, personal use of organizational resources, lack of justice, waste of organizational resources, and pressure on employees (Khorasani Toroghi, Rahimnia, Malekzade, & Mortazavi, 2018) Provides job dissatisfaction and job boredom for teachers. Those who interact with a despotic and destructive leader are more likely to have a negative judgment concerning their relationship with the organization, which in turn undermines their value about their jobs or causes declined royalty (Gallus, Walsh, Van Driel, Gouge, & Antolic, 2013) and as a result, they will have more work alienation. Heppell (2011) States that despotic and destructive leaders do not have the necessary competence; indeed, they are incompetent and are not self-confident, feel fear and insecurity, have a low level of conscience and a high level of dependence, are inflexible, and do not have a sense of philanthropy. In addition, they have gained their authority and power by force and are inclined to decisive control over individuals and the workplace, which causes them not paying attention to novel ideas. They are impatient, grumpy, spiteful, incompetent, and law-breaking. Besides, they have unwise emotions and have a psychological potential for deviant behaviors. Thus despotic and destructive leaders cause work boredom and work alienation.

Overall, the findings showed that despotic leadership has a direct and indirect effect, with the mediation of work boredom, on teachers' work alienation. Therefore, it is recommended to the top managers of the education organization by carefully selecting committed and ethical people as the school principal (leader), work boredom and work alienation of teachers can be prevented. It is also suggested to school principals that adherence to school rules, ethics, and norms, not pursuing personal interests, lack of humiliation, not threatening teachers, supporting teachers, and establishing desirable human relationships can play a role in reducing work boredom and work alienation of teachers. Since this study was conducted on teachers working in the City of Konarak, Iran, caution should be taken when generalizing the findings. Also, the authors recommend performing mixed studies (qualitative and quantitative) in the future.

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