



# Preventing teacher burnout and promoting job satisfaction and retention: work values in teachers of learners with dyslexia in relation to organisational initiatives.

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## ABSTRACT

Research suggests that Special Educational Needs (SEN) teachers are more significantly impacted by teacher burnout than other teachers, which inherently affects teacher retention and the quality of the service eventually rendered in SEN schools and organisations. This article presents the findings of an exploratory study that sought to understand the alignment between the work values of the teachers of a special educational needs organisation supporting learners with dyslexia, the organisational policies and incentives implemented and their impact on job satisfaction and teacher burnout. The basis of the study is the notion that the particular combination of work values and the work environment guided by organisational values, impacts the wellbeing and continued employment of SEN teachers and an alignment between teachers' work values and organisational Values encourages positive mental health through job satisfaction and therefore, a reduction in teacher burnout. To examine this, 111 Educational Therapists' work values are surveyed through the use of the ONET Work Importance Profiler and the findings are discussed in relation to the organisational incentives and policies to investigate the consonance of these sets of Values. The interpretation of the results is then presented together with recommendations to organisations aiming to improve retention, job satisfaction and prevent teacher burnout through an improved alignment of Values

**Keywords:** Values, Work Values, Teacher burnout, Theory of Work Adjustment, Job satisfaction, SEN teachers, SEN organisations

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## DEFINING VALUES

The concept of Values as a seemingly simple, everyday concept masks a complexity when attempting to unravel them. For instance, in defining Values, an exploration across various domains is warranted. According to Philosophy Today (Thagard, 2018), Values are an abstraction revealing an ideal end state. While some values are perceived to be universal, others are reliant on human motivations. However, cognitive science proposes that Values are a convergence of the cognitive and the emotional, such as beliefs tied to emotional views. In summary, Values are defined as important and lasting beliefs that guide and influence what a person does or does not do. Values have a major influence on a person's behaviour and attitudes and serve as broad principles in all situations. They provide individuals with a yardstick to measure if an action is right or wrong, good or bad and desirable or undesirable.

While Values differ from individual to individual, Values may also differ from one generational group to another, and this is largely shaped by the political, social and cultural norms of the period. For instance, it is reported by Cennamo and Gardner that those born between 1946 and 1960 grew up in an optimistic, post-war world and therefore, they value "status and extrinsic rewards as recognition for loyalty and commitment," (2008, p.892). In the same report, and in contrast, it is noted that Generation X grew up amidst rapid technological advancement and they value personal growth over organisational loyalty. Although defining the boundaries between generations has always been problematic, for the purposes of this study, we defined the generations by adopting Lyons classification: Baby Boomers (born 1946-1961), Generation X (born 1962-1979) and Generation Y (born 1980 - 1999). Furthermore, we included Generation Z, also commonly known as millennials (born after 2000).

More specifically and in the context of career and work, Values can be broadly classified into two types: general and work-related values. General work values are applied to circumstances and individuals one interacts with daily and in varying capacities. Largely societal, but yet, closely dependant on one's family environment, life experiences and social, moral and religious beliefs. work values are related to but different from personality and interests. They are most similar to personal values and they have a greater impact on influencing the career decisions of adolescents and adults (Porfeli, 2008). The Theory of Work Adjustment, a major career development theory, describes work values as aspects of a job that promote job satisfaction. Donald Super (1980, p130) defined work values as "an objective, either a psychological state, a relationship or material condition, that one seeks to attain."

Naturally, work values have a wide ranging influence at work. Research has shown that aside from predicting job satisfaction (Round, 1990), promoting job satisfaction and acting as positive reinforcers (Hansen and Leuty, 2011), work values would also be able to predict vocational interests (Berings, De Fruyt, & Bouwen, 2004), choice of careers

and work performance (Swenson & Hershe, 1994). As values may differ across generations, research has shown that more recent generations such as Generations X and Y have different work values than the Silent and Baby Boomer generations (Hansen and Leuty, 2011). Consequently, it can be assumed that in understanding the work values of their teachers and responding appropriately with appropriate incentives and policies, organisations may improve job satisfaction, and in turn prevent teacher burnout. This paper explores this assumption through a study of an organisation's incentives and policies in relation to the work values of their teachers, and by providing recommendations to prevent further teacher burnout.

## THE ORGANISATION

The Dyslexia Association of Singapore (DAS) is a non-profit organisation that is part funded by the Ministry of Education and the National Council of Social Service. It has 14 learning centres across Singapore from which it supports over 4000 students through its programmes and the 155 Educational Therapists it hires.



Figure 1: Professional Development for DAS Educational Therapists

DAS is a firm believer in Continuing Professional Development and invests heavily to ensure that its staff are all properly skilled. In 2014, the Manpower Research & Statistics Department released the "Employer Supported Training 2014" report (Ministry of Manpower Singapore, 2018). The report stated that 8 of 10 employers now provide structured training. The national average training expenditure was \$726 per trainee (or \$410 per employee). However, at DAS, the training expenditure was 7 times that amount at to \$3,726 per trainee (and \$3,487 per employee). The professional development support comes in a variety of forms. Aside from the structured initial training that all staff will receive, staff will also get opportunities to be go on attachments, to be involved in action research and receive scholarships to further their education.

## TEACHER BURNOUT

The quality of the educational programmes delivered and their impact on the lives of many students with dyslexia is directly dependent on the performance of therapists in the classroom. In turn, the actions of the therapists are largely influenced by how satisfied the Educational Therapists are in the work that they do. Consequently, it becomes important for any organisation to study and look deeper into their work values and through this effort, better understand what motivates them to stay with the work that they do and the organisation that they work for thus, improving job satisfaction and preventing teacher burnout.

Special Educational Needs (SEN) teachers like DAS Educational Therapists are at a higher risk of burnout when compared with other professionals. Sahlberg (2010) notes that teaching is a profession which is typically driven by values, ethical motives or intrinsic motivation. Periods of stress may arise when teachers feel that they do not belong, that is, they feel a sense of dissonance with the values that the organisation or school upholds or stands for. It is therefore important that organisations evaluate and implement policies and incentives with an awareness of these values, in order to successfully satisfy and retain effective teachers.

Notably, DAS was able to maintain a consistent 12-14% attrition rate over the past years amongst the Educational Therapist. In 2017, this percentage went as low as 11.6%. This naturally points to the conclusion that the organisation had better measures than most organisations and responded effectively to the work values of the majority of therapists. Arguably, amongst other reasons one can suggest that this means the DAS achieved an organisational and individual match in values. Notwithstanding the drop in attrition, 11% of therapists did leave the organisation and the most common reasons cited were working hours and teacher burnout. The question then remains, can the organisation better understand if there is a continued mismatch in values and should the organisation respond to the reasons for this continued burnout experienced by a percentage of their Educational Therapists?

## THEORY OF WORK ADJUSTMENT

The Theory of Work Adjustment questionnaire has been widely used in a range of studies over the years, for example initially in 1992 with a study of job satisfaction in bank employment (Hesketh et al., 1992). A Second edition has been adapted and validated and this is the version used in our research. Of greater interest than the wider studies, from our point of view, are the studies with teachers across a range of backgrounds. These include studies on the reasons for beginning teachers pursuing success, (Johnson and Birkeland, 2003). This also includes studies on teachers in different cultural environments across the world for example the impact of organisational support in Thailand (Na-Nan et al.) and Iran (Mir safian, 2016), and studies of teachers' satisfaction in secondary schools (Louis, 1998).

To our knowledge, however, none of these studies have addressed the impact of teaching on teachers working with children with either special-needs or dyslexia. Inevitably the demands on these teachers are greater and the responsibility higher, especially in situations such as DAS in Singapore where teaching must be undertaken after school hours and at weekends.

Mentoring has proved to be particularly useful for beginner teachers in order to ensure that they develop feelings of competence and autonomy (Hobson et al., 2009, Hebert and Worthy, 2001), with evidence in support from a large scale meta-analysis of the literature (Ingersoll and Strong, 2011). The framework developed later by Scott and Kowalski in 2011 is also particularly salient here, focusing on socialisation, work adjustment, mutual adaptation and thriving at work as an ongoing process. A number of these elements have proved key in staff retention and provide motivation for the research reported here.

## AIM

Therefore, the purpose of this study is threefold. One, to better understand the work values of the Educational Therapists, two, to understand the match or mismatch of the current organisational incentives to the work values revealed and three, to review recommendations on improving the alignment between the organisational values and Educational Therapists work values to improve job satisfaction and prevent burnout. As such, the study was formed around these two research questions:

1. What do Educational Therapists value?
2. Does the DAS have the appropriate incentives to retain Educational Therapists?

## METHODS

### Participants

A total of 111 participants, working as Educational Therapists from DAS participated in the study. They range from staff who had just joined the organisation to those who have been around for more than 10 years (Table 2). The different generational age groups are also represented in Table 1. The teachers performance in their most recent annual quality assurance audit, an educational performance review, was also noted (Table 3). Trainee teachers who have yet to go through a performance review have been noted as NA. The participants are largely female (Table 4), representative of the actual gender demographics for teachers within the organisation.

Table 1: Age Group

AGE	SS
Baby Boomers (1946 to 1961)	10
Generation X (1962 to 1979)	20
Generation Y (1980–1999)	80
Generation Z (2000 +)	1

Table 2: Years of Experience

EXPERIENCE	SS
0 to 4	66
5 to 9	34
>10	11

Table 3: Educational Performance Review

<b>QA SCORES</b>	<b>SS</b>
Needs improvement	0
Below Ave	0
Met	20
Exceeding	62
Far Exceeding	16
NA	13

Table 4: Gender of Therapists

<b>GENDER</b>	<b>SS</b>
Female	98
Male	13

## DESIGN

Participants in the study were asked to take the ONET Work Importance Profiler (WIP), a self-assessment career exploration tool that allows them to pinpoint what is important to them in a job. The WIP helps people identify occupations that they may find satisfying based on the similarity between their work values and the characteristics of the occupations. These tests were administered online and data collected simultaneously. The various work values and their corresponding definitions are provided in Table 5. Each work value may also have sub values that further elaborates what is important.

Furthermore, an analysis of the current organisational incentives implemented to support, encourage and motivate Educational Therapists was conducted. This enabled a review of the present alignment between work values and organisational incentives. The results are shown in the next section.

Table 5: Definitions of work values (Onetcenter.org, 2018)

S/N	WORK VALUE	DEFINITION	SUB VALUE
1	<b>ACHIEVEMENT</b>	Involves the need to use one's individual abilities and the need to obtain a feeling of accomplishment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <b>Ability utilisation</b>—Need to use one's individual abilities.</li> <li>◆ <b>Achievement</b>—Need to obtain a feeling of accomplishment</li> </ul>
2	<b>INDEPENDENCE</b>	The Independence work value refers to the need to perform tasks on one's own and the need to use creativity in the workplace. It also involves the need to obtain a job where one can make his/her own decisions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <b>Creativity</b>—Need to try out one's own ideas.</li> <li>◆ <b>Responsibility</b>—Refers to the need to make one's own decisions.</li> <li>◆ <b>Autonomy</b>—Need to work with little supervision</li> </ul>
3	<b>RECOGNITION</b>	The Recognition work value involves the need to have the opportunity for advancement, the need to obtain some prestige, and the need to have the potential for leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <b>Advancement</b>—Need to have opportunities for advancement.</li> <li>◆ <b>Authority</b>—Need to give directions and instructions to others.</li> <li>◆ <b>Recognition</b>—Need to receive recognition for the work one does.</li> <li>◆ <b>Social status</b>—Need to be looked up to by others in the company and community.</li> </ul>
4	<b>RELATIONSHIP</b>	The Relationships work value encompasses the need for friendly co-workers, the need to be of service to others, and the need to not be forced to go against one's sense of right and wrong.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <b>Co-workers</b>—Need to have co-workers who are easy to get along with.</li> <li>◆ <b>Ethics</b>—Need to do things that agree with one's sense of right and wrong.</li> <li>◆ <b>Social service</b>—Need to do things for other people.</li> </ul>
5	<b>SUPPORT</b>	The Support work value involves the need for a supportive company, the need to be comfortable with management's style of supervision, and the need for competent, considerate, and fair management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <b>Company policies</b> and practices</li> <li>◆ Need to be treated fairly by the company.</li> <li>◆ <b>Supervision - human relations</b>—Need for supervisors who back up their workers with management.</li> <li>◆ <b>Supervision - technical</b>—Need for supervisors who train their workers well</li> </ul>
6	<b>WORKING CONDITIONS</b>	The Working Conditions work value refers to the need to have one's pay compare well to that of others and the needs for job security and good working conditions. This work value also includes the need to be busy all the time and the need to have many different types of tasks on the job	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <b>Activity</b>—Need to constantly be busy.</li> <li>◆ <b>Compensation</b>—Need to be well-paid in comparison to other workers.</li> <li>◆ <b>Independence</b>—Need to work alone.</li> <li>◆ <b>Security</b>—Need to have steady employment.</li> <li>◆ <b>Variety</b>—Need to have something different to do every workday.</li> <li>◆ <b>Working conditions</b>—Need to have good physical working conditions.</li> </ul>



## RESULTS

Table 6 Overall Results

TYPE		NO.	TOP VALUE	%	2ND VALUE	%
<b>WHOLE SAMPLE</b>		111	Achievement	65.77	Support	18.92
<b>GENDER</b>	Females	98	Achievement	65.31	Support	20.41
	Males	13	Achievement	69.23	Relationship	15.38
<b>AGE</b>	Baby Boomers (1946–1961)	10	Achievement	70.00	I-S-R	30.00
	Generation X (1962–1979)	20	Achievement	75.00	Relationship	15.00
	Generation Y (1980–1999)	80	Achievement	62.50	Support	23.75
<b>YEARS OF EXPERIENCE</b>	0-4 yrs	66	Achievement	74.24	Support	16.67
	5-9 yrs	34	Achievement	52.94	Support	17.65
	>10 yrs	11	Achievement	54.55	Support	36.36
<b>EFFECTIVE (QUALITY)</b>	Exceeding	62	Achievement	69.35	Support	17.74
	Far Exceeding	16	Achievement	62.50	Support	31.25

Table 7: Alignment of Organisational Incentives to Work Values

VALUE	ORGANISATIONAL INCENTIVES
<b>RECOGNITION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ CEO Commendation Award</li> <li>◆ Quantitative Performance Appraisal</li> <li>◆ Performance Bonus</li> <li>◆ Appraisal System</li> </ul>
<b>*ACHIEVEMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Clarity of Mission and Vision</li> </ul>
<b>WORKING CONDITIONS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 13th month Bonus</li> <li>◆ Comprehensive Medical Benefits</li> <li>◆ Appraisal System</li> </ul>
<b>RELATIONSHIPS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Staff Event</li> </ul>
<b>*SUPPORT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Appraisal System</li> <li>◆ Professional Development Pathway</li> <li>◆ Comprehensive Initial Teacher Training</li> <li>◆ Mentoring</li> </ul>
<b>INDEPENDENCE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Professional Development Pathway</li> </ul>

Finally, an analysis was undertaken to compare the importance of achievement and support as values, firstly, in relation to experience levels, and secondly in the context of the number of years of service at DAS.

QUALITY	ACHIEVEMENT	SUPPORT	GAP
<b>MET REQUIREMENTS</b>	70.00	10.00	60
<b>EXCEEDING</b>	69.35	17.74	51.61
<b>FAR EXCEEDING</b>	62.50	31.25	31.25

### Points scored

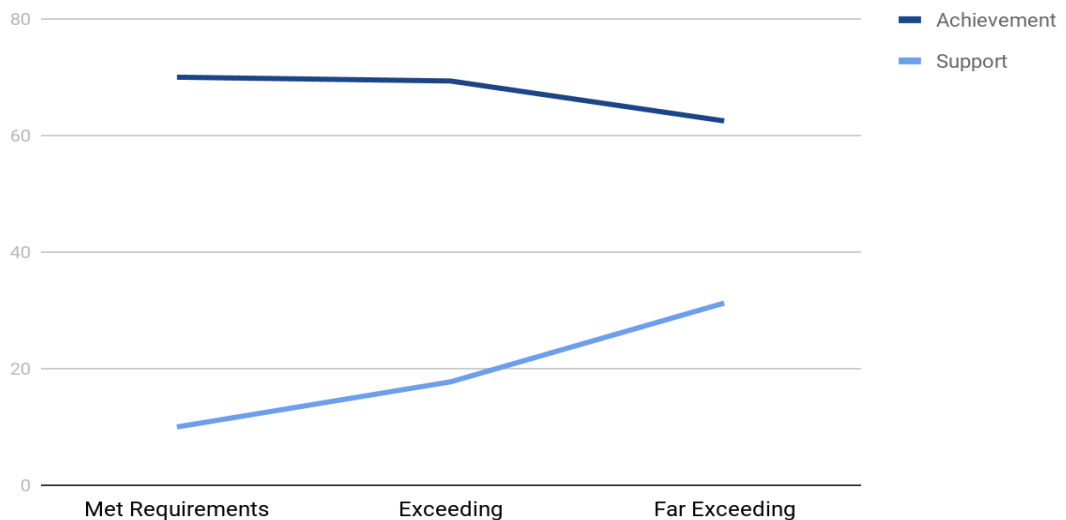


Figure 1: Comparison between Achievement and Support as Values over experience levels

YRS OF SERVICE	ACHIEVEMENT	SUPPORT	GAP
0-1	63.16	31.58	31.58
2-4	75.51	10.20	65.31
5-9	52.94	17.65	35.29
>10	54.55	36.36	18.19

Points scored

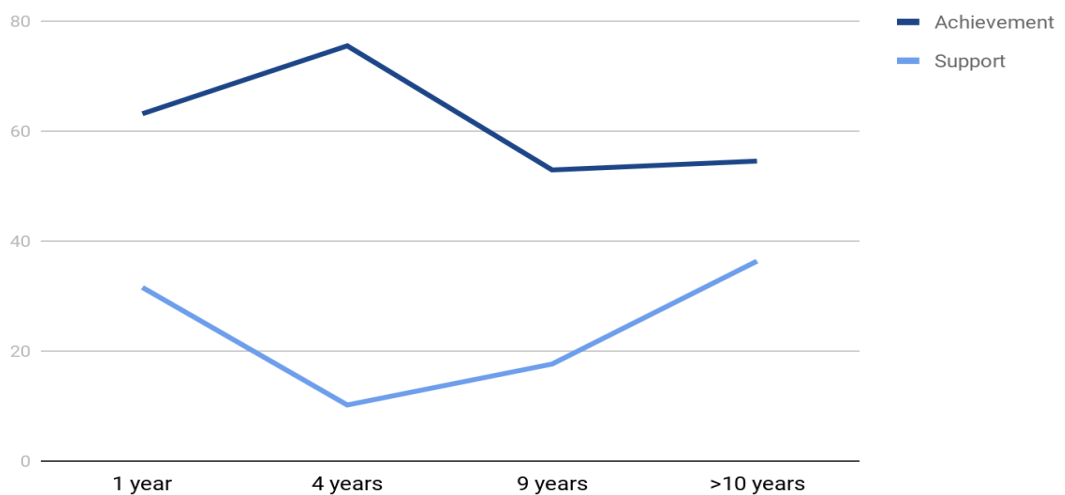


Figure 2: Importance of Support as a Value over years of service

**DISCUSSION**

A number of interesting issues emerged from the results of this study, and these will be discussed in detail before the implications for the organisation are considered further. The overall results from Table 6 reveal that Achievement - Support represent the top 2 work values amongst the Educational Therapists at DAS. It is interesting to note that this differs from the top 2 work values of the SEN teachers in the US who prioritise Relationships and Achievement instead (Pacareerzone.org, 2018). One can argue that the difference lies in the way educational therapists are recruited and DAS positively views individuals who have strong inclinations towards developing themselves further in the field of special education, which resonates with the organisation's support of such professional and personal development through work opportunities and further studies .

However, considering the success DAS has had with low attrition, it is evident that there is transparency and clarity among educational therapists on the vision and mission of the organisation. Besides the mission and vision, DAS encourages growth within the organisation, which is largely dependant on the personal motivations of educational therapists. Through the development of new initiatives and programmes for the learners and their supporting adults, educational therapists are empowered to explore their individual strengths and 'give back' to the population they are working with and in turn, feel their personal contribution and abilities effectively utilised to benefit their learners. Table 7 shows that while there is an alignment between the Support Value and organisational incentives, there seems to be limited alignment between the Achievement Value, which is the primary work value of DAS educational therapists and the organisational incentives. Table 7 also confirms that through significant organisational efforts to provide incentives that align with the work value of support, the more effective teachers are retained.

It is also observed that the more effective the teacher is, the more support appears to become an important value (see Figure 1). A number of further issues emerge from Figure 2, which addresses the importance of support as a value in relation to years of service. It is clear that the gap between Achievement and Support widens the longer the EdT stays with the organisation. However, this gap reduces when they stay on beyond 5 years. Moreover, Support as a value increases in importance the longer an EdT stays with the organisation. One can determine that the importance of the Support Value for educational therapists mirrors the significance and complexity of the task and effective teachers recognise this complexity. On further investigation, the increasing importance of the Support Value also reflects the changing job role of the educational therapists and increasing demands on their abilities to meet those needs as they receive more complex students and are expected to perform a range of duties such as supporting newer teachers and contributing to the enhancement of curricula.

In summary, these results highlight that the success DAS has achieved in retention can be related to the clarity in and consistency of it's mission and vision, the opportunities for individual exploration of strength utilisation and the level of support for professional development within the organisation. However, as with all good research, the findings illustrate that more could be achieved with further modifications to the system. These recommendations are discussed below.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the success DAS encountered in improving job satisfaction and therefore retention, and given the comparison of the findings from both the Educational Therapist survey on work values and the analysis of the alignment of Organisational incentives to such values, it is apparent that organisations determined to retain educational therapists must consistently ensure consonance between the two.

Additionally, the need to offer diverse solutions is evident as staff will have differing Values at different stages in their career, especially since in addition to work environments, personal, social and cultural environments also significantly influence work values and consequently, job satisfaction. This is evident as we look at the positively changing importance of the Value of Support for Educational Therapists who stay longer in the organisation. Hence, the nature and options for support must evolve and be flexible to accommodate the changing needs of the educational therapist who continues within the organisation.

While solutions may be available, organisations must evaluate and implement policies and incentives with an awareness of these work values to retain educational therapists and promote job satisfaction. Consequently, periodically running work values surveys will keep an organisation prepared to adequately match the Values of the employees.

Further effort to create a sense of belonging through the use of a workplace counsellor will provide for more individualised solutions and a non-judgemental platform for expressions of concern. A deliberate policy that promotes consultative and collaborative organisational goals instead of one that is directive or centrally managed when initiatives are implemented maintains and further fosters that sense of belonging. School leadership keen on implementing changes should study successful organisations and their policies towards staff retention.

Finally, the above mentioned recommendations may improve retention of educational therapists and SEN teachers and should be carefully considered by all organisations aiming to promote positive mental health of their employees. However, as a cautionary word, in the midst of all the organisational solutions, one cannot undermine the importance of the individual in seeking solutions against stress and burnout. While conducting this study to seek an understanding of personal work values and their effect on stress and burnout, it was suggested that one could interpret this as an attempt to blame the 'victim' as the cause for the burnout and dissatisfaction. However, while organisations work at improving the work environment, individuals too must be aware of their own possible contributions to both the causes and solutions for a more satisfying work experience.

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