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Title:

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Date:

2023

Citation:

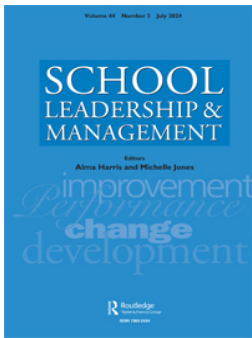
Moreno, B. (2023). Teachers' perceptions toward their new principal. *School Leadership and Management*, 44 (3), pp.207-227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2023.2277174>.

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To cite this article: Bernardita Moreno (2024) Teachers' perceptions toward their new principal, School Leadership & Management, 44:3, 207-227, DOI: [10.1080/13632434.2023.2277174](https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2023.2277174)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2023.2277174>



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Published online: 08 Nov 2023.



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# Teachers' perceptions toward their new principal

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## ABSTRACT

This study sought to explore teachers' perceptions of new principals (NPs) and how these perceptions influenced different aspects of their work environment. The research was conducted using case study methodology of three schools in Melbourne, Australia. Data collection tools included semi-structured interviews of teachers and principals, supported by non-participant observations and the study of school documents. The results showed that teachers' perceptions of their NP were a function of the incomer's personal and leadership qualities and practices, which, in turn, were informed by three contextual factors: school leadership history, the origin and background of the NP, and teacher expectations. These perceptions appeared to influence several domains within teachers' work environment, mainly teacher morale and, to a lesser extent, teacher professional development. A new conceptual model for understanding teachers' perceptions of an NP has been distilled from the data.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 30 April 2023  
Accepted 23 October 2023

## KEYWORDS

Principal succession;  
principal turnover; new  
principals; high principal  
turnover

## Introduction

A change of principal can have a lasting impact on individuals and schools alike, yet often, but not always, this can result in a challenging and unpredictable process (Berry and Townsend 2019). A change of principal 'changes the line of communication, realigns relationships of power, affects decision making and generally disturbs the equilibrium of normal activities' (Miskel and Cosgrove 1985, 88). At a much deeper level, this process also involves 'replacing a series of existing social relationships (those involving the "leaver") with a set of brand new social relationships (those that involve the replacement)' (Hanselman et al. 2016, 8). School leadership succession is about 'ensuring that the right person is in the right place at the right time for the right reason' (Fink 2011, 18). Using a multiple-perspective case study approach, this paper explores teacher perceptions of three new principals and their influence on teachers' work environment. A new conceptual model has been developed to better understand this influence.

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## Review of related literature

Most studies on principal succession focus on the causes for the change and very few examine the consequences and impact of this process (Snodgrass Rangel 2018). Nevertheless, recent studies suggest two areas with the potential to suffer from a change of principal: student achievement and school culture (Bartanen, Grissom, and Rogers 2019; Béteille, Kalogrides, and Loeb 2012; Burkhauser et al. 2012; Miller 2013). Whether dictated by policy or through other circumstances, high principal turnover can also impact considerably on staff and school culture (Meyer et al. 2011), having the potential to change school culture negatively affect teacher and school morale. Nonetheless, principal succession is not experienced equally by all school communities and, for some, a change of principal may be the best option (Thelin 2020).

Studies with a focus on novice (new to the role) and new (new to the school) principals are both fewer in number and relatively recent in comparison with those exploring the broader characteristics and practices of established principals (García-Garduño, Slater, and López-Gorosave 2011; Kılınc and Gümüş 2020). Most of the research in this area focuses on conceptual models of the different stages of this transition (e.g. Miskel and Cosgrove 1985; Oplatka 2012); NPs' sense-making of this socialisation process (e.g. Bengtson, Zepeda, and Parylo 2013; Spillane and Lee 2014); and the differences between internal and external appointments (e.g. Buckman, Johnson, and Alexander 2017; Moreno 2020; Myung, Loeb, and Horng 2011). Bengtson, Zepeda, and Parylo (2013), for example, concluded that socialisation is complex given the idiosyncratic characteristics of individuals and the contextual nature and culture of the school. Regarding internal vs external appointments, conclusions about one or the other remain inconclusive. Buckman, Johnson, and Alexander (2017, 43), for example, found that because internal applicants may be more aligned with the leadership expectations of the school, they have an 'organic advantage over external candidates'. However, when exploring the relationship between principal hiring type and student achievement, Buckman and Tran (2018) concluded there was no statistically significant factor between internal and external appointments.

This study takes a different approach to exploring principal succession by focusing on teachers, therefore, placing the attention on those individuals who experience the arrival of an NP, rather than those that provide it (principals). Studies on teachers' perceptions of NPs are surprisingly few (Snodgrass Rangel 2018). Oplatka and Ben Or (2019) conducted semi-structured interviews with 14 Israeli teachers who had experienced the arrival of an NP in the previous three years. They concluded that the perceived image of the former principal, as well as the reasons for the principal's departure, played a significant role in how teachers formulate a perception of their new leader. A few yet significant studies have suggested that teachers navigate through a number of stages as they

adjust to new leadership (e.g. Daresh and Playko 1994; Ogawa 1991), explaining the relationship between pre-succession and post-succession. In a study on the demands made on first-year principals, Weindling and Earley (1987) found that most teachers did not resist change; in fact, most of them welcomed it. However, the way in which change was introduced by the NP could sway their support. Similarly, Johnson and Licata (1995) found that while teachers accepted that change was inevitable during succession, NPs who were perceived by teachers as strong and visionary did not seem affected by teachers' feelings of vulnerability towards change.

Learning from this teacher-focused perspective is important, as it can have significant repercussions for successful leadership preparation and retention.

Two research questions guided this study:

- (1) How do teachers perceive their new principal?
- (2) How does this perception influence teachers' work environment?

## Methods

This study employed a qualitative methodology through a multi-perspective case-study approach. By using the arrival of an NP to a school as a situation, the approach was to observe, describe and interpret the nature of this experience through an understanding of how teachers perceived their NP, responded to the NP's practices and reflected on how these perceptions affected their work environment.

### *Data collection and analysis*

Data for this study were collected in three schools in Melbourne, Australia (Table 1). Each school had had a change in principal within the last two years, a delimitation of what constitutes an NP informed by prior research (Weindling 1999). The data collection tools employed for this study included (1) semi-structured individual interviews of teachers and principals, (2) non-participant observations, and (3) the examination of relevant school documents. Three principals and 36 teachers were interviewed, 12 from each school. Ten non-participant observations were conducted where the principal interacted with staff and/or students. These observations included formal and informal events, such as staff meetings, leadership team meetings, professional development sessions, school tours, and more. The school documents examined were public records, school archival material, school websites and newsletters, minutes and agendas of meetings, and so on.

Data analysis was conducted in two stages: within-case analysis followed by cross-case analysis. The stage one analysis included codification, classification and categorisation of emergent themes from each case, and in stage two,



**Table 1.** Case studies.

School and principal (pseudonyms)	School system	School sites	Student population	Teaching staff	Type of appointment	Principal trajectory	Participants Per school
Kingston College (KC) Peter	Independent (ELC-Yr12)	Two campuses	1913	230	Internal	Novice	Principal 12 teachers
Summerhill College (SC) Lisa	Independent (ELC-Yr12)	Two campuses	764	118	External	Novice	Principal 12 teachers
St Frances College (SFC) Jane	Catholic (Yr7-Yr12)	One campus	1043	95	External	New (2nd principalship)	Principal 12 teachers

these were later compared to each other in search of commonalities and differences. NVivo 12 software assisted with analyses and with managing and displaying the data.

### *Sample*

The sample was enhanced by the diverse characteristics of these case studies, such as type of school, principal career trajectory, the nature of the appointment, etc. (Table 1). In the two multi-campus schools (KC and SC), six teachers from each campus were chosen to have an equal distribution of participants. Teachers were chosen through purposeful selection, with the only condition being that they had been employed at the school during the transition. Participants represented a diverse range of attributes such as gender, age, years in the profession, years employed in the school, and whether they held a leadership role, all of which included middle leaders and members of the leadership team.

Pseudonyms are employed to protect the privacy of participants.

### *Case studies*

*Case Study One.* Kingston College (KC) is an independent co-educational and multi-campus school in the Melbourne metropolitan area catering for students from Early Learning Centre (ELC) to Year 12 and serving an educationally advantaged community. Peter is a novice principal. He was internally promoted from head of campus and deputy principal to principal. His office is located on the older Campus A, although he spends one day a week at Campus B.

*Case Study Two.* Summerhill College (SC) is also an independent co-educational and multi-campus school located in an outer Melbourne metropolitan area catering for students from Early Learning Centre (ELC) to Year 12 and serving an educationally advantaged community. Lisa is a novice principal and new to the school. The school has had five principals in the last eight years as a result of planned and unplanned principal succession.

*Case Study Three.* St Frances College (SFC) is a Catholic girls' secondary school located in the Melbourne metropolitan area catering for students in years 7–12 and serving an educationally advantaged community. The school belongs to a religious order. SFC has had four principals in the last 10 years, and can also be regarded as a school with a high principal turnover. Jane was externally appointed, and this is her second principalship.

## **Results**

### ***RQ1: How do teachers perceive their new principal?***

In the process of formulating their perception of the NP, teachers drew on the principals' personal and leadership qualities. This is reflected in Table 2, which



presents the number of times teachers identified certain personal and leadership qualities in their new principal. These qualities, in turn, appeared to be informed by several factors, such as comparisons to previous principals, whether the appointment was internal or external, as well as established expectations associated with the arrival of a new leader.

In all three schools, the arrival of the NP did not go unnoticed, and across all case studies, similarities as well as differences were noted in the salient characteristics used to describe the new principal. Some of the most commented qualities were visibility, authenticity and being a people person. All principals were perceived as being seen consistently around campuses, engaging with staff and students, as well as with other members of the school community. For Peter (KC) and Lisa (SC), this was particularly significant, considering their respective schools have more than one campus.

The kids would never see the previous principal. They would only see him at assemblies and things. So, if he was to come through the school, the kids wouldn't have a clue who he was. (KC-Campus B Teacher)

Lisa certainly has spent more time here than any other principal has ... she's here a full day a week and then bits and pieces and so that's more than anyone's ever done. (SC-Campus B Teacher)

I think coming from a principal who we hardly saw, this new person was immersing herself amongst the people and definitely those kinds of actions speak volumes about what kind of person you're dealing with. (SFC-Teacher)

Being authentic was also a frequently reported characteristic of these principals. This was particularly important for KC, whose principal (Peter) had been internally appointed. Authenticity for these teachers was measured with a particular lens in mind; a before-and-after assessment where teachers could evaluate whether Peter the head of campus could still be recognisable in Peter the new principal.

I thought, I wonder if we'll still see him around and within two or three days of being appointed, he was up at morning tea. He's still out and about ... he's still a visible presence around the campus. He was at morning tea today, for example. (KC-Campus A Teacher)

From when he was the deputy principal of the school to the principal now, obviously the title has changed, but the way that he addresses the staff, is involved with the staff is exactly how he was as that deputy principal ... What you see is what you get with Peter. (KC-Campus B Teacher)

On the other hand, authenticity meant something quite different for a number of teachers at SC. Given SC's turbulent leadership history in the last 10 years, an authentic leader was perceived as a twinkle of longed-for stability.

I like the way she was very clear with her own philosophies and values and I think that's really important for us to have seen ... I don't think there's been any shocks or changes or she said this and now ... No. (SC-Campus B Teacher)

As soon as you met Lisa, you knew her personality, you knew her beliefs, her values and you knew where she was going to take this school or her leadership style, you knew straight away. Whereas, with the other appointment you knew straight away that it was not good. (SC-Campus A Teacher)

For both schools that had experienced high principal turnover (SC and SKC), having an externally appointed principal was seen as a non-negotiable condition and one that appear to influence strongly on how teachers perceived them. An external appointment, in the eyes of these teachers, symbolised their desire for a new leader who could lift school morale, improve school culture and set the school on a new path, away from its tumultuous leadership past.

I think when you appoint somebody from an external source, they bring in those fresh ideas, those new ideas ... so, I think it's good to have somebody from the outside who can then come in and put a different stamp on the school. (SC-Campus A Teacher)

[Having an external appointment] excited me and probably the feel at the grassroots level here was that the organisation was stuck in a bit of a rut and we needed to have fresh eyes, fresh ears to move us into the 21st-century education. (SFC-Teacher)

Visionary and consultative were also leadership attributes evident in the way most teachers spoke about their NP, attributes that were spoken about in direct association with teachers' expectations of impending change. While change was regarded as a given during a change of principal, teachers' preoccupation focused on the pace of change as much as the nature of change.

Our biggest concern was, I wonder how the school is going to change now that we have a new principal ... so, lots of change within the school and schools can change dramatically depending on what kind of leader you have. (KC-Campus B Teacher)

There hasn't been this sort of, "I'm going to change everything, and you're all living in the last century". No, none of that, but the momentum of changes remained and it hasn't been "We can't do that, and we have to do this and let's just get it done". It's never that sense. We're moving forward and we're all going to be moving forward. (SC-Campus A Teacher)

I'm surprised that she hasn't made more changes in the time, although she's had a lot to deal with ... I think this is her wisdom in that everything happens in its time, [but] I underneath feel that change is afoot and I'll wait and see what happens. (SFC-Teacher)

I think she's mindful of doing things in a way that brings the tide along with her rather than trying to do the impossible and then being autocratic. (SFC-Teacher)

At SFC, Jane prioritised showing her staff that she was interested in who they were, not just what they did. Therefore, she organised to meet with each member of staff individually. The rationale for this initiative was twofold. As well as meeting them, she also wanted to provide each teacher the opportunity to share their ideas about what needed to be kept, improved or changed. For

some teachers this came as a surprise, given they had not experienced this type of consultative leadership before. Indeed, all 12 teachers commented on the positive impact this aspect of Jane's personality had on themselves and students alike.

... a totally new approach to doing things, very much of a people person that is transparent in what's happening in the school that shows that they value the staff and the students and the whole community ... a lot of the time she touches base with you without her needing to, just knowing about your family or your kids or whatever and she doesn't need to do that. (SFC-Teacher)

It's very different to what I've been used to because she has that approach that we work as a team, that everyone is important in the decision-making. (SFC-Teacher)

### **RQ2: How does this perception influence teachers' work environment?**

During interviews, teachers reflected on how the NP had influenced different aspects of their working environment, which were later coded and categorised into domains and sub-domains. Table 3 displays a numerical visualisation of this positive or negative influence across the three schools. This result is based on how many of the 36 teachers (12 from each school) reported either a positive influence (PI) or a negative influence (NI) in each sub-domain. Some teachers also oscillated between negative, positive and no influence at all. This is reflected in the split cells (/).

Teacher well-being proved to be one of the domains in which the influence of an NP was mostly felt and, within that, teacher morale is where it was mostly evident.

At KC, for example, most of the negative influence was reported from Campus A, while most of the positive influence originated from Campus

**Table 3.** New Principal influence on teachers' work environment – no. of comments.

	Kingston College								Summerhill College								St Frances College			
	Campus A Interviews (6)				Campus B Interviews (6)				Campus A Interviews (6)				Campus B Interviews (6)				Main campus Interviews (12)			
Teacher well-being	NI	0	PI	NI/PI	NI	0	PI		NI	0	PI	NI/PI	NI	0	PI	NI/PI	NI	0	PI	
Teacher morale	4			2	1		5		1	1	2	2	1	2	2	1		1	11	
Teacher sense of belonging	2	3	1			4	2			3	3			4	2			5	7	
Teaching capacity	Campus A Interviews				Campus B Interviews				Campus A Interviews				Campus B Interviews				Main campus Interviews			
	NI	0	PI	NI/PI	NI	0	PI		NI	0	PI	0/PI	NI	0	PI		NI	0	PI	0/PI
Teacher Professional development		2	3	1			6				6				6			3	6	3
Teaching practice		4	2			6				3	3			5	1			8	4	
Professional relationships	Campus A Interviews				Campus B Interviews				Campus A Interviews				Campus B Interviews				Main campus Interviews			
	NI	0	PI	NI/PI	NI	0	PI		NI	0	PI		NI	0	PI	0/PI	NI	0	PI	
Teacher - teacher relationships		6				6				6				5		1		9	3	
Teacher - Student relationships		5	1			6				6				6				11	1	

NI = negative influence PI = positive influence 0 = no influence / = a combination of influences.

B. This difference can be attributed to Peter's insider status. While teachers at Campus A are pleased with Peter's appointment as their NP, they paradoxically experienced a sense of loss and low morale. They missed him as their head of campus, and learning to work with his replacement has been challenging.

Before Peter was principal, I felt like I had a really good head of campus and now that Peter is principal, it's been a difficult transition ... With our current head, he's a very different personality to Peter, so it's not as easy to go and just discuss things with the [new] head of campus. So yes, I definitely miss when he was just the head of campus. (KC-Campus A Teacher)

For Campus B, however, having a principal who showed an interest in them had a positive influence on these teachers, thereby increasing their sense of community and of being valued.

The influence on teacher well-being was also high at SC and distributed quite evenly between both campuses, teachers reporting a strong sense of being valued and some increase in school connectedness, particularly in Campus A. Campus B teachers also reported an increase in teachers' voice and sense of purpose and motivation.

Before [Lisa] was here I didn't feel my voice was heard as much as it is now, I certainly feel I have a voice and I'm excited about how the school is changing ... she's taught me to believe in myself more by just providing those opportunities. She believes in me ... she does motivate me. (SC-Campus B Teacher)

At SFC the results were similar with a very high proportion of teachers reporting some influence on their work environment. These teachers experienced a very tangible positive influence, which included low levels of anxiety, high teacher morale and an increased sense of pride in the school and its future. Notwithstanding, teachers also acknowledged that while they were learning to trust the principal, this was a slow and complex process. One contextual factor to explain this is the frequency with which they had experienced a change of principal.

We're still recovering and [Jane] is aware of that, but it is slowly building up ... there are still some people that have been burnt, they'll take a while to come back. ... It's really hard to rebuild once you lose it and we existed on a lot of goodwill. (SFC-Teacher)

Teacher professional development and teaching practice were two sub-domains that received high levels of influence, although not necessary of the same kind. Most teachers across schools spoke about a positive influence on their professional development with a small number of teachers recording no influence at all. Emergent themes from these data reveal teachers' appreciation of enjoying more time and resources for collaborative and individual professional development activities, together with more middle leadership opportunities. This positive influence was more pronounced at SC where teachers

were more explicit in describing their principal as instructional with a strong interest in improving student outcomes.

The staff days are more meaningful, I think about them more. It's about real stuff. I don't mind going to them ... I always used to go to them, but I used to think I'll take other work to do ... (SC-Teacher)

When it came to teaching practice, however, this positive impact was not necessarily sustained. Moreover, more than 70% of teachers across schools identified no impact on their classroom practice since the arrival of the NP. Interestingly, this was even more evident at Campus B of both KC and SC where more than 90% of teachers from these locations identified no impact on their classroom practice. The dominating themes around this result attest to teachers' sense of self-efficacy and a unique sense of individual responsibility towards improving pedagogy.

That comes from my own self rather than by a principal and even with having a new person in charge of professional learning and ideas that are coming through, but it's nothing that I hadn't already done before. (SC-Teacher)

If professional development is to be understood as a vehicle through which to improve pedagogy, then it is worth exploring why professional development perceived as positive is not seen as having the same teacher-perceived influence on classroom practice and what might be impeding this link.

Across all three schools, teachers reported minimal or no changes in their relationships with their colleagues or students due to the presence of an NP. Only 3 out of 12 teachers from SFC reported a positive influence on their relationship with their colleagues and, even then, their comments were affirmed by acknowledging that the school was now a happier and warmer work environment as a result of improved teacher morale. In the case of teacher–student relationships, only 2 out of 36 teachers identified an NP as having a positive influence on their relationships with students. The remaining participants recorded no influence at all in this sub-domain; moreover, many emphasised that this was the sole responsibility of teachers and students.

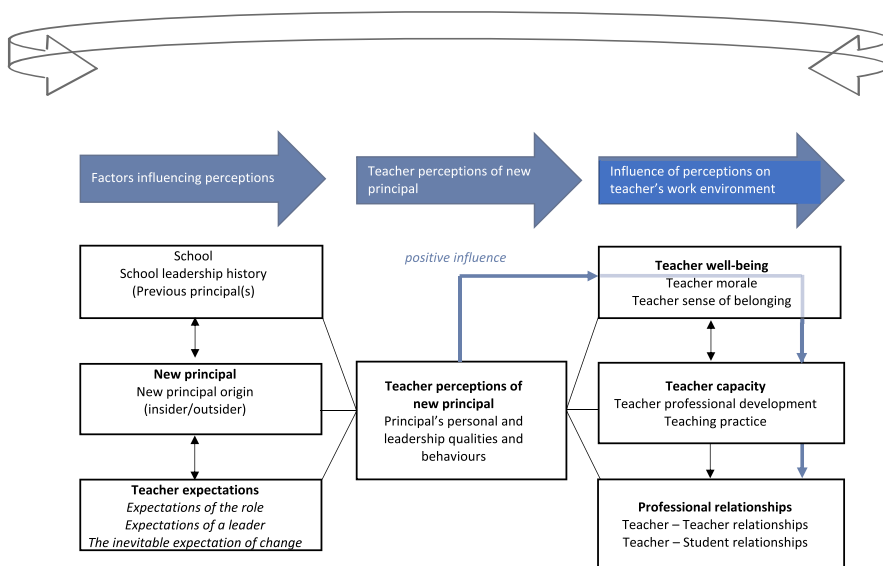
During interviews, teachers across the three schools highlighted several leadership practices that they believed should be undertaken by the NP in order to ease the transition experience for teachers. These included building relationships early, engaging in frequent communication and refraining from making immediate changes.

## Discussion

As a result of the findings, a conceptual framework for understanding how teachers' perceptions of an NP influence teachers' work environment has been developed (Figure 1). This model begins (from left to right) with three

contextual factors that influence how teachers perceive the personal and leadership qualities and behaviours of the NP. This perception has the potential to influence negatively or positively in three distinct domains within teachers' work environment. Of these three domains, teacher well-being appeared to be the one where the influence was most strongly felt. In addition, when well-being had been influenced positively, it had the potential to act as a mediator between teachers' perception of the NP and teacher professional development, and, to a much lesser degree, towards teaching practice and professional relationships. The double-headed arrow links teacher perceptions to teacher capacity and professional relationships via teacher well-being. The double-headed arrows in the model represent the existence of a reciprocal influence. The one-headed arrow between teacher capacity and professional relationships, however, represents the influence, albeit weak, that teacher capacity can have on professional relationships, which did not appear to be reciprocal.

Finally, the cyclical nature of this model, represented by the double-headed elliptical arrow, explains how once the influence of NP perceptions is cemented in these three domains, this overall influence has the capacity to evolve into new contextual factors of future principal transitions. While this framework does not imply a cause–effect relationship, it does, however, offer a new conceptual visualisation of how teachers live and experience the arrival of an NP even before the NP has begun in the role.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework for understanding teachers' perceptions of NPs and their influence on teachers' work environment.

### *Factors influencing teacher perceptions of NPs*

The analysis shows that teachers arrived at these perceptions based on three contextual and converging factors: the school, the new principal and teacher expectations, highlighting concordances with earlier research where these contextual factors were identified within pre-arrival or pre-succession stage-based conceptual frameworks (Hart 1993; Miskel and Cosgrove 1985; Ogawa 1991).

#### *School leadership history*

Comparisons between the former principal and NP were consistent and present in every teacher interview, congruent with previous research where teachers were confronted with images of the former principal (Draper and McMichael 2000; Oplatka and Ben Or 2019; Weindling and Dimmock 2006). However, in the two schools identified as having experienced high principal turnover (SC and SFC), not only perceptions of the former principal prevailed, but rather the entire gamut of leaders who had occupied the principal office in a relatively short time. This experience was exacerbated when teachers perceived those past principals negatively, especially where teachers reported being scarred emotionally, and sometimes physiologically, by the behaviours and actions of these leaders (SKC). This concurs with Blasé and Blasé (2003), who noted that the mistreatment of teachers at the hands of principals can have a lasting detrimental effect on teachers' personal and professional lives. In the case of KC, however, links to previous principals other than the immediate past principal, were incidental. This difference in the frequency of principal turnover accentuates the lasting and accumulative impact that frequent principal succession can have on teachers' work environment. Oplatka and Ben Or (2019) also found that when the perception of the former principal was positive, teachers tended to place high expectations on the NP; however, when the perception of the former principal was perceived as negative, teachers experienced first suspicion and then happiness towards the NP.

#### *New principal origin*

Gordon and Rosen (1981) posit the importance of NP origin given that it is teachers' perceptions, collectively, that really determine if the newcomer is considered an outsider or an insider. At KC's Campus A, Peter knew the people, understood the organisational structure and culture (Normore 2004). Peter was part of that world and an insider in the eyes of these teachers, possessing that 'organic advantage' (Buckman, Johnson, and Alexander 2017, 43). More than anything, teachers compared Peter the principal, with Peter the head of campus, rather than with his predecessor. The focus on the origin of the principal played a pivotal role in teachers' perception. This assertion resonates with Rivera-McCutchen's (2014) study, concluding that teachers' point of departure for formulating their perceptions depended significantly on their memory of

NPs in their previous role. For Campus B teachers, however, Peter was an outsider who at times demonstrated insider characteristics. For SC and SFC, however, the external feature was non-negotiable in order to move away from an unstable leadership past.

### *Teacher expectations of new principal*

Three types of expectations dominated teachers' comments: expectation of the role, expectation of the leader and the inevitable expectation of change. This is consistent with research (Grissom, Egalite, and Lindsay 2021) highlighting how principals continue to be perceived as the most important source of leadership in schools. Teachers saw their principal as the face of the school and, as such, expected the NP to be articulate and knowledgeable.

As to the expectations of a leader, the overwhelming majority of teachers expected their NP to be visionary, visible and approachable, all qualities associated with successful school principals (Gurr 2015). Similarly, Oplatka and Ben Or (2019, 501) discovered teachers expecting their NPs 'to express positive emotions towards them from the first moment they meet and particularly to listen to them empathically.' This was especially resonant at SFC, where teachers longed for a leader who showed empathy and who would bring much needed structural and cultural change.

The last expectation was an inevitable expectation of change. Ogawa (1991, 57) suggested that teachers expect principals to make changes 'by virtue of their position' and this study also confirms this. Teachers from KC hoped for structural change to improve staff development; SC teachers expected changes around lifting teachers' voice; while SFC teachers expected a caring and empathetic leader who would raise morale and create a path for regaining trust in the principalship. Concerns were particularly about the nature, pace and communication of change. Paramount from this study is that principal turnover is unequivocally associated with change, hence, its depiction as inevitable.

### *Teacher perceptions of new principal*

The factors discussed above were instrumental in shaping teachers' perceptions of their NP. Overall, all three principals were perceived as visible, approachable and authentic and committed to building relationships and valuing teachers. Visibility that was perceived as intentional and purposeful was consistently perceived as the most important leadership quality. The importance of early visibility is also supported by a large report by Burkhauser et al. (2012), which concluded that principal classroom visibility was a behaviour that achieved high levels of teacher buy-in. Although the above strategy referred to principals' visibility in the classroom, this study suggests that principal visibility should extend beyond the classroom to include a variety of places and times within the school day. Teachers from all three schools highly valued a principal who showed an interest not only in what they did but, more importantly, in who

they were. Individual encounters between principals and teachers are important, given their impact on how teachers respond initially to the arrival of an NP (Burkhauser et al. 2012; Oplatka and Ben Or 2019).

### *Influence of perceptions on teachers' work environment*

Teachers follow very closely the NP's actions and behaviours from their very first day in the role, and begin to assess the implications of this change (Oplatka and Ben Or 2019). Teacher perceptions of the NP appear to have had major influence on teachers' well-being and professional development, and, to a lesser extent, on teaching practice and professional relationships.

*Teacher well-being.* While the literature lacks consensus in terms of its definition, teacher well-being encompasses personal, relational and contextual factors impacting on aspects of teachers' professional lives, such as satisfaction, happiness, self-efficacy, connectedness and sense of belonging (Acton and Glasgow 2015). Teacher well-being is of utmost importance given its significant mediating role between school leadership and student achievement (Leithwood, Sun, and Schumacker 2019). Similarly, enough evidence suggests that principals' behaviours associated with internal relations are linked to high levels of teacher well-being (Liebowitz and Porter 2019). Within this domain, teacher morale emerged as crucial in uncovering an undeniable relationship between the arrival of a new principal and its ripple effect on staff's emotional state.

*Teacher morale.* Meyer, Macmillan, and Northfield (2009, 173) define teacher morale as a 'construct that describes the relative mental/emotional valence of positive or negative energy of an individual or of a group of individuals (as in a school staff), it is the result of the perceptions and interpretations of contextually influenced experiences'. This definition is especially relevant to this study given two of its foci: the use of positive and negative valences to demonstrate influence and the emphasis on perceptions. All three schools experienced, to some degree, a variation in teacher morale. At KC, the way teacher morale was impacted was significantly distinct between campuses. Teachers from Campus A experienced a dichotomy of emotions comprising a simultaneous sense of happiness and sense of loss. They displayed joy in having Peter as their NP, yet sorrow in losing their head of campus. In this regard, the findings of this study resemble those found in earlier research, where teacher responses, while aimed at the newcomer, were not personal, but rather reactions towards the succession process itself (Daresh and Playko 1995).

This finding warrants special attention. When the principal position is filled by an internal candidate, another position becomes vacant: the one left behind by the NP. This finding suggests that teachers who experience the arrival of an internally appointed principal, in reality, experience two transitions, and go through two processes of adaptation, which have the potential to intensify and even aggravate the adaptation process, resulting in changes to teacher

morale. In contrast to earlier findings (Ganz and Hoy 1977), which found no significant differences between insider and outsider principal appointments in terms of teachers' job satisfaction and morale, the findings from this study strongly suggest that an internally appointed principal can influence teacher morale negatively, even in a school that had not experienced high principal turnover. So far, the literature on internally appointed principals is significantly focused on the new position being filled and not on the position being left vacant. Teacher morale on Campus B, however, emerged in almost complete contrast to that of its counterpart. This dichotomy from one campus to another, posits an interesting situation and an avenue for further research, given that two contextual characteristics – the origin of the NP (insider/outsider) and the multi-campus school – intersect to produce very different outcomes and while the perception of the NP from both campuses was consistently positive, the way in which this perception influenced teacher morale was not.

For schools thinking about appointing principals internally, careful attention should be placed on how teachers will respond to this internal shift in responsibilities and, in addition, particular care should be taken when deciding who will replace the now newly appointed principal as this change has the potential to destabilise teacher morale.

The research on principal succession posits that high principal turnover can have a very negative impact on teachers (e.g. Meyer, Macmillan, and Northfield 2009). SC and SFC fit this profile and add to this knowledge base, affirming the significant repercussions this turnover had on teacher morale. Given the positive reception of these two principals, the noticeable improvement in morale was palpable during teacher interviews. Despite this initial acceptance, the reoccurring nature of trusting yet another principal proved to be a slow and reflective process for teachers in these contexts.

*Teacher capacity.* The second domain that surfaced was teacher capacity and, within that, teacher professional development and teaching practice.

The three NPs in this study placed an importance in leading a learning community and especially in developing their staff in ways that responded to the needs of their school. More than 75 percent of all teachers identified teacher professional development as having been influenced positively because of the NP's arrival. By the time Peter began his principalship, KC had already well-established organisational structures, procedures and practices, which supported and advanced teacher professional development. This organisational context created a certain level of stability, which has had a mitigating impact on the disruption that is a change of principal (Hargreaves and Fink 2006). In addition, rather than communicating a sense of urgency (Kotter 1995), Peter instilled a sense of importance and began communicating very early on the changes that would come and how these would result in improving teacher expertise and student outcomes.

A similar experience occurred at SC where the entirety of participants acknowledged a positive influence in this domain as a result of Lisa's arrival. One of the most important leadership practices that had a positive influence on teachers was seeing the principal actively participating in professional learning, a significant practice identified earlier by Robinson, Hohepa, and Lloyd (2009).

In the case of SFC, the reported influence on professional development was less one-sided, where around half of teachers acknowledged a positive influence and the remaining half either no influence or a combination of both. Considering Jane's priorities coming into the role comprised lifting morale and rekindling a sense of unity, this is not surprising. This strategy resonates very closely with the findings exposed by Burkhauser et al. (2012), who found that NPs who begin to work quickly on attaining school cohesion are likely to achieve their goals.

As to teaching practice, the data analysis revealed minimal influence in this area. Most teachers commented on how this aspect of their work environment depended on their own individual sense of efficacy and intrinsic motivation, and saw no link (direct or indirect) between an NP and their teaching practice. These findings mirror previous results, which, despite methodological differences, found that teaching quality and practice appeared to be shielded from principal turnover (Mascall and Leithwood 2010; Pietsch, Tulowitzki, and Hartig 2019). Notable is a small number of teachers displaying a territorial-like attitude resembling that of teachers in Hallett's (2010) case study, where the NP generated a dramatic shift in practice instigated by an increase in accountability. Those teachers who did notice a positive influence on their teaching, however, attributed this to the overall improvement in teacher morale, suggesting a mediated influence of the latter. It is surprising, if not alarming, that teachers for whom professional development had had a positive impact, did not see this favourable outcome also reflected on their teaching.

This disjunction could be regarded as a double instructional paradox. First, if this is happening in schools where principals are investing highly in professional development and teachers are not recognising improvement in their practice, understanding this broken link would warrant a closer examination. Second, if the aim of teacher professional development is to improve student outcomes, the best way for this to be achieved is through the improvement of teachers' instructional practices, which raises another point. Even though most teachers in this study did not perceive an impact on their practice, this does not necessarily mean that it has not occurred. This insight invites different ways for measuring teaching practice, particularly in light of recent meta-analysis claiming a size effect of 0.35 between 'principals' instructional management efforts and the quality of teachers' instructional practices' (Liebowitz and Porter 2019, 805).

*Professional relationships.* In terms of teacher–teacher relationships, the findings suggest teachers did not perceive that a change in leadership had influenced their relationships with their colleagues. Moreover, the overarching comment was that a change in leadership shouldn't influence their professional relationships. Similarly, Teacher–student relationships, were not perceived by teachers as being affected by a change in principal.

## Conclusion

This study explored teachers' perceptions of an NP. The findings suggest that NPs' personal and leadership qualities and behaviours informed how teachers formulated a perception of these leaders. Three contextual factors were identified, which informed how teachers perceived their NP: school leadership history, new principal origin and teacher expectations. In addition, these perceptions had an influence within teachers' work environment: namely, teacher well-being, teacher capacity and, to a lesser extent, teachers' professional relationships.

The presence of an NP on school grounds, as much as on the school website, has a profound impact on a school. The cyclical nature of principal succession indicates that as soon as NPs begin their tenure, their actions and behaviours begin to shape the perceptions and expectations of those who will follow them. This study has demonstrated, unequivocally, that principal succession does not have to be a negative process for those who experience the new arrival. A successful change of principal may bring optimism and opportunities for transformative change. Success is dependent not only on the new leaders' actions but also on how these actions are perceived and influence the actions and behaviours of others. By paying special attention to teacher perceptions and experiences, principal succession can be enhanced to promote positive organisational outcomes that benefit everyone in the school community.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributor

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