

A Work Project, presented as part of the requirements for the Award of a Master's degree in  
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EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERSON-JOB FIT AND BURNOUT:  
THE MEDIATING ROLE OF PERCEIVED INCLUSION AND MODERATING  
INFLUENCE OF INCLUSIVE AND TRANSACTIONAL LEADERSHIP

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of person–job fit on burnout, highlighting the mediating role of perceived inclusion and the moderating effect of two leadership styles in this relationship: transactional and inclusive leadership. It is proposed that person-job fit mitigates burnout and perceived inclusion contributes to this negative relationship. Inclusive and transactional leaders are believed to intensify these effects. Our hypotheses were tested using a sample of 148 respondents. The results provide empirical evidence for perceived inclusion mediating the negative relationship between person-job fit and burnout. They further reveal a moderating effect of transactional leadership.

**Keywords:** Leadership, Transactional Leadership, Inclusive Leadership, Person-Job Fit, Perceived Inclusion, Employee Burnout, Organizational behavior

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## 1 – INTRODUCTION

In recent years, burnout has emerged as one of the most urgent organizational challenges of our time as workplaces have become increasingly fast-paced, complex, and subject to constant change (Russell and Liggans 2022). Increased demands, work overload, and acute stress have been exacerbated by factors such as technology, blurring the boundaries between work and personal life (Gallup Inc. 2020). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has also highly impacted our social and work environment and aggravated the prevalence of burnout, thereby raising awareness and concerns on the topic (Leiter and Maslach 2021).

Many efforts have been made to address the effects of burnout in the workplace (i.e. reduced productivity). Yet, little attention is paid to the root causes of the problem (Leiter and Maslach 2023). Research has shown that situational and organizational factors, such as organizational culture and leadership practices, often outweigh individual ones in the development of burnout (Maslach et al. 2001), suggesting that the work environment and social exchange relationships (Halbesleben and Buckley 2004) should not be overlooked.

To contribute to the literature on burnout, this master thesis aims to investigate one potential source of burnout, that is person-job fit. Person-job fit represents the degree to which an individual's abilities, skills, and values are compatible with the responsibilities and requirements of a specific job, as defined by Carless (2005). High levels of person-job fit indicate a good alignment between the employee and his position within the organization. Investigations by Kristensen and co-authors (2005) disclose that 60 per cent of participants in the quartile with the most severe levels of burnout have reservations about selecting the same job again, underlining the importance of considering person-job fit and psychological responses to it (i.e. perceptions of inclusion) as a potential factor affecting burnout.

While prior research has shed some light on the direct relationship between person-job fit and burnout already (i.e. Maslach et al., 2001), the mechanisms linking the two are poorly

understood. Therefore, this study aims to narrow the gap in existing literature by analyzing the mediating role of employees' perceptions of inclusion which pertain to the impression of being accepted and valued in the workplace (Chen and Tang 2017). Given that employees spend a significant amount of time at work, the extent to which they feel valued or included could impact their overall job satisfaction, their well-being (Fleischmann 2022), and ultimately, their experience of burnout. Lastly, Gerstner and Day (1997) highlighted the influential role of leadership styles in shaping employees' work experience. Hence, inclusive and transactional leadership styles will be examined as potential moderators of the relationship between person-job fit and perceived inclusion, impacting the likelihood of burnout.

The analyses conducted for this thesis seek to contribute to the understanding of the complex dynamics between person-job fit, perceived inclusion and burnout under the influence of two different leadership styles with the purpose of providing valuable insights for organizations and managers to work out effective mechanisms to prevent and mitigate burnout in the workplace. The following sections will present the theoretical background and a review of relevant literature on person-job fit, burnout, perceived inclusion, and inclusive as well as transactional leadership, followed by a presentation of the research methodology and data analysis. In the last part, findings will be discussed, and theoretical and practical implications will be drawn.

## **The Construct of Burnout**

The World Health Organization (2019) refers to burnout as a phenomenon occurring specifically in the occupational context, that is characterized by chronic physical and emotional exhaustion resulting from prolonged exposure to excessive levels of work-related stress. Burnout typically comprises three dimensions: *Emotional exhaustion* refers to feeling

overwhelmed, while *depersonalization or cynicism* involves the detachment from and the development of attitudes of indifference towards the job and those associated with it (Halbesleben and Buckley 2004). Previous literature provides a number of potential causes, including but not limited to unrealistic personal expectations (Stevens and O'Neill 1983), work overload (Murray-Gibbons and Gibbons 2007) and inadequate stress coping strategies (Erera-Weatherley 1996). The third dimension, *diminished personal accomplishment*, entails a lowered sense of effectiveness and abilities on the job (Halbesleben and Buckley, 2004). A lack of positive feedback and recognition (Jackson and Schuler, 1983), feelings of incompetence or inadequacy (Houkes et al. 1999), and limited opportunities to be part of the decision-making processes (Miller et al. 1989) have been presented as possible reasons.

Burnout can manifest in physical as well as cognitive, emotional and behavioral symptoms and does not only affect employees' well-being, but also has negative consequences for their organizational commitment and their performance at work. Studies have suggested that burnout can lead to decreased job satisfaction and productivity (Leiter et al., 2001), resulting in increased absenteeism and turnover (Muhammad and Hamdy, 2005). As this can also impact others in performing their tasks, Leiter and colleagues (2001) argue that burnout might even be "contagious" within a team. Thus, burnout incurs costs for employees, but also for organizations (i.e. absenteeism, turnover and medical costs, reduced productivity).

A significant portion of empirical knowledge on burnout has been derived from research conducted in the human service sector (Schaufeli et al., 1993), i.e. nursing. While the antecedents of burnout may vary across different professions (Toppinen-Tanner 2011), there is evidence that job demands and job resources, including workload, the presence of risks and a lack of autonomy (Nahrgang et al. 2011) can act as antecedents along with time pressure, limited promotion opportunities, and interpersonal difficulties (Moczydłowska 2016). In

addition to work-related factors, cultural, social and economic aspects also play a role (Schaufeli and Enzmann 1998). This paper intends to expand these findings across various industries by exploring the impact of yet another potential contributor to burnout: a lack of person-job fit.

## **The Impact of Person-Job Fit on Burnout**

Typically, job seekers choose to apply for positions based on their perceived fit with the job and the company (Judge & Cable 1997). Person-job fit refers to the alignment between an individual's skills, abilities, and interests with the specifications and demands of the job (Zhou et al., 2011). Job mismatch, consequently, describes a lack of congruence.

Leiter and Maslach (2023) highlighted the negative impact of a mismatch by identifying six areas in which a bad fit can increase the risk of burnout: workload, control, rewards, community, fairness, and values. Associated stressors can impact employees' involvement and energy, thereby promoting exhaustion, cynicism, and feelings of inefficacy. Trying to cope with a job that does not align with their skills or interests can further deplete employees' resources and lead to frustration, dissatisfaction, and unfulfillment when they feel that their abilities are not being effectively used at work (Murray-Gibbons and Gibbons 2007). This may exacerbate emotional exhaustion and result in detachment, two key components in defining burnout. Similarly, when employees perceive a lack of challenge and opportunities for professional growth or when they view their job tasks as monotonous or repetitive, a sense of diminished personal accomplishment may be the consequence (Jackson and Schuler 1983).

On the other hand, employees are more likely to encounter personal accomplishment, job satisfaction and engagement, and overall well-being (Kristensen et al. 2005) when they believe that their abilities are utilized to their full potential. Employees who are well-suited to

the job requirements may have more resources and be more willing to devote them to their work, resulting in higher involvement. As a consequence, detachment could be prevented and emotional exhaustion decreased while employees experience a boost in motivation and personal accomplishment.

The suggestion is that person-job fit is associated with a lower risk of burnout:

**Hypothesis 1.** Person-job fit has a negative effect on burnout.

### **The Mediating Role of Perceived Inclusion**

As previously mentioned, perceived inclusion refers to employees' perceptions of acceptance and recognition in the workplace (Chen and Tang 2017). According to Gartner's inclusion index (2020), inclusion is about "fair treatment, integrating differences, decision-making, psychological safety, trust, sense of belonging and diversity", with an inclusive workplace being one "where all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully, have equal access to opportunities and resources and can contribute fully to the organization's success".

Access to resources and information, involvement in work groups, and the opportunity to participate in decision-making can promote employees' positive experiences and contribute to psychological (job) satisfaction within the organization (Mor Barak and Cherin, 1998). As specified by Bourke and Titus (2020), the company's overall mission, values, and practices, as well as co-workers' behaviors play a major role in people's perception of inclusion.

Existing literature suggests that person-job fit should contribute to the establishment of a positive work environment that fosters favorable interactions and nurtures positive relationships with managers and colleagues (Leiter and Maslach, 2001). Moreover, employees oftentimes define themselves in terms of their job or company if it matches their interests and abilities (Saks and Ashforth, 1997). Shared values increase the likelihood of identification and

involvement with one's team and the company and its mission. The bond is strengthened, thereby stimulating loyalty, and diminishing turnover (Cable and DeRue, 2002).

Summarized, the compatibility of individual skills and values with requirements and organizational principles should foster perceptions of inclusion due to an enhanced sense of competence, contribution and belongingness.



**Figure 1** – *Proposed mediation*

Inclusion in turn, has been shown to have positive effects on employees' organizational commitment (Chen and Tang 2017) and their self-esteem (Vakalahi, 2012), possibly serving as protective factor against depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment. It is further believed to unlock the workforce's potential (Romansky et al. 2021), which could improve work performance and reinforce an individual's sense of personal accomplishment. In cases where there may be a mismatch between the employee and the job, perceptions of inclusion – the mere feeling of belonging and being part of a common mission – may already alleviate stressors and prevent from the preconditions that ultimately cause burnout. In a supportive and collaborative work environment, employees who experience a misalignment between abilities and demands may be more likely to seek assistance, reducing feelings of helplessness and task ambiguity or uncertainty.

When employees feel included, they may feel more comfortable in communicating their needs and concerns as well as in sharing honest feedback and criticism. They may also be more willing to endure tasks or situations that they dislike. Additionally, when feeling

eligible to participate in decision-making processes, employees may feel empowered and consequently sense greater job control and personal accomplishment.

Perceived inclusion might evoke positive emotions in general, and make employees feel valued and appreciated, acting as a buffer against burnout by reducing the likelihood of emotional exhaustion and feelings of detachment. When employees feel valued, they may be more inclined to tolerate higher workloads (Maslach et al. 2001).

In conclusion, high person-job fit should lead to increased organizational and social identification favoring higher overall perceptions of inclusion that should then enhance employees' resilience to burnout. Thus, the positive effect of good person-job fit on burnout is accomplished via inclusion. The model for the predicted interactions is illustrated in Figure 1.

It is proposed that:

**Hypothesis 2.** Inclusion mediates the negative relationship between person-job fit and burnout.

## **The Moderating Role of Leadership Styles**

Employees oftentimes view their leader as powerful, symbolic representative of the organization they work for. Ergo, subordinates strongly connect their overall work experience to perceptions of their leader's behavior (Gerstner and Day 1997). Given their role, managers are in a good position to detect potential sources of irritation to subordinates and take preventive action. Bourke and Titus (2020) report that leadership actions have a major impact on an employee's sense of belongingness, accounting for up to a 70 per cent of the difference. Similarly, Barak (2011) proposes that leaders are significant drivers in subordinates' perception of workplace inclusion. Accordingly, leaders can either worsen or alleviate their subordinates' impressions of workplace stress (Harms et al. 2017). Maslach and colleagues (2001) argue that burnout is closely linked to a lack of support from supervisors.

This leads to believe that the applied leadership style might impact the relationship between Person-Job Fit and Perceived Inclusion, acting as moderator, as shown in Figure 2. For the purpose of this master thesis, the moderating effects of inclusive and transactional leadership will be examined. In the further course of this work, the terms “leader” and “manager” as well as “subordinates” and “followers” will be used interchangeably.

### **Transactional Leadership**

As suggested by the term “transactional” which implies “giving and taking”, transactional leadership is centered around exchanges (of efforts and rewards) between leaders and followers as fundamental element of their relationship (Conger and Kanungo 1998). This leadership style is classified by the leader’s active role. The leader’s involvement is reflected in the establishment of clear goals and expectations which are subsequently communicated to followers. Along with that, managers employ pecuniary and nonpecuniary instruments to reward or sanction subordinates based on performance and efforts (Bass 1985, 256). Pecuniary rewards may include bonuses, for instance, while nonpecuniary means may take the form of praise or punishment in the case of inadequate task fulfillment.

The central objective of transactional leadership is to stimulate the development and pursuit of self-interest in attaining organizational goals. This can be achieved by offering appropriate incentives to align the interests of the individual with those of the company (Jensen et al. 2019). Transactional managers convey well-defined roles and provide precise instructions such that employees find themselves in a structured environment with unambiguous expectations, which minimizes role conflict and role ambiguity, two factors that contribute to burnout (Maslach et al. 2001). This can help setting a framework in which followers can effectively perform their tasks whereas rewards reinforce good task execution. Hence, a sense of accountability and fairness is created among employees who have a clear understanding of the consequences of their actions. It could be argued that transactional

leaders are more attentive to changes in their followers' behaviors as they closely monitor their performance, thus, being able to intervene at an early stage of potential symptoms.

In addition to aiding in the fulfillment of duties, frequent feedback can also be viewed as a form of validation and recognition, this aspect is particularly meaningful because a lack of feedback has been found to correlate with burnout (Maslach et al. 2001).

When transactional leadership is high the positive impact of person-job fit on perceived inclusion is expected to be enhanced through structured guidance and clear role expectations created by transactional behaviors, promoting employees' sense of contribution, competence and ultimately inclusion. In contrast, less transactional leaders may undermine perceptions of inclusion as task ambiguity and uncertainty may result in a decreased sense of belongingness. In conclusion, these considerations lead to the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 3a.** Transactional Leadership moderates the positive relationship between Person-Job Fit and Perceived Inclusion such that this relationship will be stronger when Transactional Leadership is high, than when it is low.

**Hypothesis 3b.** The conditional indirect effect of Person-Job Fit on burnout via Inclusion will be stronger when Transactional Leadership is high than when it is low.

### **Inclusive Leadership**

Inclusive leadership emerged as a crucial attempt for companies to adapt to modern business landscapes requiring increasingly diverse and multidisciplinary workforces (Bourke and Titus 2019; 2020). Inclusive leaders face the challenging responsibility of maintaining a balance between honoring each team member's uniqueness while fostering a common sense of belonging (Fleischmann 2022). In order to do so, leaders must embody certain qualities such as openness, availability, and accessibility (Carmeli et al. 2010).

Inclusive leaders are approachable, trustworthy, and willing to listen (Bourke and Titus 2020). They value their subordinates' input (Nembhard and Edmondson 2006), and notice their needs, such that their leadership becomes a collective process (Fleischmann 2022). Bourke and Titus (2019) have defined inclusive leadership to combine the following traits: commitment to diversity, humility in terms of own capabilities and mistakes, awareness about bias, curiosity, an open mindset as well as cultural intelligence and lastly, effective collaboration. In addition to acknowledging all team members as individuals and advocating overall fairness, inclusive leaders must also prioritize empathy and maintain awareness of their own weaknesses, biases, and prejudices. A consistent and deliberate application of these practices is essential for inclusive leadership to be effective (Bourke and Titus 2019).

Inclusive leaders set directions but welcome subordinated input. They create a secure environment for idea sharing and encourage risk-taking as well as seizing opportunities (Carmeli et al. 2010). The authors (2010) have also found that inclusive leadership positively impacts feelings of psychological safety, a key component of Gartner's inclusion index (2020).

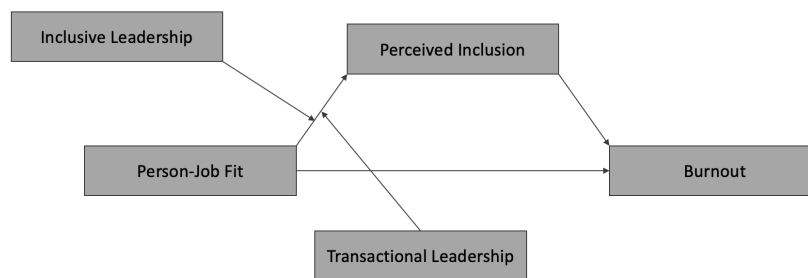
In conclusion, inclusive leaders prioritize their employees' personal and professional development and growth, providing them support and guidance. They encourage open communication, making employees comfortable in sharing opinions without fear of judgement. By seeking out diverse perspectives they craft a sense of belonging for all team members (Carmeli et al. 2010).

These factors could contribute to higher perceptions of inclusion. Concretely, it is anticipated that highly inclusive leaders yield stronger perceptions of inclusion for any given level of person-job fit as they embrace the uniqueness of every single employee, crafting an inclusive workplace. Classified by caring characteristics and their availability, they have the potential to enhance perceptions of inclusion by promoting a sense of belonging and support

thereby alleviating burnout by addressing its preconditions. On the other hand, the positive relationship between person-job fit and perceived inclusion might be weaker under the supervision of less inclusive managers. Predictions are as following:

**Hypothesis 4a.** Inclusive Leadership moderates the positive relationship between Person-Job Fit and Perceived Inclusion such that this relationship will be stronger when Transactional leadership is high, than when it is low

**Hypothesis 4b.** The conditional indirect effect of Person-Job Fit on burnout via Inclusion will be stronger when Inclusive Leadership is high than when it is low



**Figure 2 - Proposed moderated mediation model**

## 2 – METHOD

### Sample and Procedures

Several employees from various companies were approached and asked to participate in the study (refer to Appendix 1). The corresponding link was sent to friends and family, encouraging them to take the survey and to forward it to their contacts. Additionally, popular social media channels such as LinkedIn and Instagram were leveraged to reach a wider audience of potential participants.

In total, responses from 204 individuals were received. However, after careful screening and removing incomplete submissions, only 148 respondents were considered

suitable for further analysis, which composed the final sample. Among the final sample (N=148) 58.1 per cent were women. Most participants were in their twenties, with 70.3 per cent falling between the ages of 20 and 29, and 71.6 per cent reported having a full-time position. When examining their tenure, 46.6 per cent of participants had been in their current position for less than a year, and 44.6 per cent had been in their current organization for less than a year. Furthermore, the sample was composed of 32.4 per cent interns or working students as well as 25 per cent entry-level, 20.9 per cent mid-level, and 16.9 per cent senior-level positions. Only 4.7 percent of respondents indicated holding executive-level employment.

## **Measures**

In terms of demographics, we collected information on age, gender, current employment status, duration of employment in current role and organization as well as job level/seniority.

***Control Variables.*** For a more robust examination and to account for confounding effects and a potential impact of demographic variables on the relationships under investigation (i.e. on emotional exhaustion (Halbesleben and Bowler 2007)), controls for employees' gender, age, employment status, tenure in current organization and job level were incorporated. All analysis were conducted with and without the inclusion of these controls, yielding similar results. The results section presents tests including the control variables.

***Person-Job Fit.*** The assessment of Person-Job Fit was conducted using the three items of person-organization fit developed by Cable and DeRue (2002) on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The three items were: "The things that I value in life are very similar to the things that my organization values", "My personal values match my organization's values and culture", and "My organization's values and

culture provide a good fit with the things that I value in life". The internal consistency was examined using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a high value of .93, indicating strong reliability.

***Inclusive Leadership.*** Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon and Ziv (2010) identified three key dimensions that characterize inclusive leaders, namely openness, availability, and accessibility. These can be assessed by a total of nine items that participants rated on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (to a large extent). Sample items were "The manager is open to hearing new ideas", "The manager is available for consultation on problems" and "The manager encourages me to access him/her on emerging issues".

The internal consistency was determined to be high, with a Cronbach's alpha of .96.

***Transactional Leadership.*** To measure transactional leadership, a three-item scale was adapted from the nine-item scale developed by Jensen et al. (2019). The scale measures the use of contingent pecuniary and nonpecuniary rewards as key aspects of transactional leadership. The three items with the highest factor loadings were selected for this study, showing good reliability, as indicated by a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .88. Again, respondents rated all items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

***Perceived Inclusion.*** Respondents' perceived inclusion was measured using a scale from Chung et al. (2019). The four items with the highest factor loadings, capturing the dimensions of belongingness and uniqueness, were selected for this questionnaire. Sample items included statements such as "I feel like I belong in my work group" and "I am able to share a perspective on work issues that is different from my group members".

Cronbach's alpha was .88.

***Burnout.*** In order to assess burnout, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981) was adapted to include only the two items with the highest factor

loadings measuring the emotional exhaustion component which has been demonstrated to be the most widely reported manifestation (Maslach et al. 2001), making it a particularly effective measure in capturing burnout. The two items used were "I feel emotionally drained from my work" and "I feel burned out from my work". To facilitate accurate recall of their experiences, participants were instructed to reflect on their experiences in the past week and rate the frequency of occurrence on a scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). A Cronbach's alpha of .84 suggests a good reliability.

## Analysis

A linear regression analysis was conducted to explore the relationship between person-job fit and burnout (i.e., H1). Due to its suitability for small sample sizes (Preacher et al. 2007), bootstrapping analysis using the SPSS macro, PROCESS, Model 4 and Model 9 (Hayes 2012) was employed to assess indirect effects through mediation and moderated mediation (i.e., H2-H4b). Furthermore, this approach helped to mitigate potential statistical power issues arising from asymmetric and other non-normal sampling distributions when testing for indirect effects, as suggested by MacKinnon et al. (2004). The main results are presented in Table 1-4.

## Results

Before testing the hypotheses, correlations were computed and are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1 – Correlations

|                 | PJF     | Incl. LS | Trans. LS | Perceived Incl. | Burnout | Gender | Age | Current empl. status | Duration in current organization | Job level/ seniority |
|-----------------|---------|----------|-----------|-----------------|---------|--------|-----|----------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| PJF             | 1       |          |           |                 |         |        |     |                      |                                  |                      |
| Incl. LS        | .491**  | 1        |           |                 |         |        |     |                      |                                  |                      |
| Trans. LS       | .370**  | .740**   | 1         |                 |         |        |     |                      |                                  |                      |
| Perceived Incl. | .411**  | .619**   | .597**    | 1               |         |        |     |                      |                                  |                      |
| Burnout         | -.394** | -.512**  | -.504**   | -.445**         | 1       |        |     |                      |                                  |                      |

|                                  |         |         |        |       |         |      |        |         |        |   |
|----------------------------------|---------|---------|--------|-------|---------|------|--------|---------|--------|---|
| Gender                           | -.097   | -.132   | -.131  | -.092 | .148    | 1    |        |         |        |   |
| Age                              | -.154   | -.156   | -.109  | -.055 | .185*   | .098 | 1      |         |        |   |
| Current employment status        | .031    | .183*   | .129   | .086  | -.233** | .006 | -.166* | 1       |        |   |
| Duration in current organization | -.239** | -.251** | -.184* | -.078 | .207*   | .038 | .699** | -.077   | 1      |   |
| Job level/seniority              | -.125   | -.279** | -.155  | -.091 | .220**  | .081 | .658** | -.337** | .624** | 1 |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

## Hypotheses testing

Consistent with hypothesis 1 and summarized in Table 2, the results of a linear regression show that higher levels of person-job fit are associated with lower levels of burnout. These effects were significant ( $B = -0.37$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

TABLE 2 – Linear Regression Results

| Predictors                                            | Unstandardized B | <i>t</i>      | <i>p-value</i>  |
|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| (Constant)                                            | 3.493            | 7.443         | <.001           |
| <i>Control Variables</i>                              |                  |               |                 |
| Gender                                                | .159             | 1.350         | .179            |
| Age                                                   | -.004            | -.027         | .978            |
| Current employment status                             | -.367            | -2.486        | .014            |
| Duration in current role                              | .230             | 1.709         | .090            |
| Duration in current organization                      | -.039            | -.298         | .766            |
| Job level/seniority                                   | .032             | .352          | .726            |
| <b>Person-Job Fit</b>                                 | <b>-.366</b>     | <b>-4.553</b> | <b>&lt;.001</b> |
| <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> .244 ( $F=6.466$ , $p < .001$ ) |                  |               |                 |

Dependent Variable: Burnout

Hypothesis 2 predicted that perceived inclusion mediates the negative relationship between person-job fit and burnout. The outcomes of the performed bootstrapping analysis (SPSS macro, PROCESS, Model 4; Hayes, 2012) are presented in Table 3.

In line with previous predictions, the results demonstrated that person-job fit has a significant, positive impact on perceived inclusion ( $B = 0.35$ ; 95% CI [0.21, 0.48]) and perceived inclusion has a significant, negative direct effect on Burnout ( $B = -.37$ ; 95% CI [-0.56, -0.18]). The indirect effect of person-job fit via perceived inclusion was also significant ( $B = -0.13$ ; 95% CI [-0.23, -0.05]). Thus, Hypothesis 2 could be confirmed.

TABLE 3 – Bootstrapping Results for Mediation

| Predictors                       | Outcomes                  |               |              |                     |                           |                |              |                       |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------|--------------|---------------------|---------------------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------------|
|                                  | Perceived Inclusion       |               |              |                     | Burnout                   |                |              |                       |
|                                  | Coeff.                    | t             | p-value      | 95% CI              | Coeff.                    | t              | p-value      | 95% CI                |
| Constant                         | 2.7726                    | 7.1020        | .0000        | [2.00, 3.54]        | 4.5104                    |                |              | []                    |
| <i>Control Variables</i>         |                           |               |              |                     |                           |                |              |                       |
| Gender                           | -.0511                    | -.5198        | .6041        | [-0.25, 0.14]       | .1407                     |                |              | []                    |
| Age                              | .0506                     | .4664         | .6416        | [-0.16, 0.27]       | .0150                     |                |              | []                    |
| Current employment status        | .0918                     | .7479         | .4557        | [-0.15, 0.33]       | -.3330                    |                |              | []                    |
| Duration in current role         | -.3651                    | -3.2627       | .0014        | [-0.59, -0.14]      | .0958                     |                |              | []                    |
| Duration in current organization | .2012                     | 1.8553        | .0657        | [-0.01, 0.42]       | .0350                     |                |              | []                    |
| Job level/seniority              | -.0208                    | -.2749        | .7838        | [-0.17, 0.13]       | .0244                     |                |              | []                    |
| <b>Direct effect</b>             |                           |               |              |                     |                           |                |              |                       |
| <b>Person-Job Fit</b>            | <b>.3462</b>              | <b>5.1727</b> | <b>.0000</b> | <b>[0.21, 0.48]</b> | <b>-.2393</b>             | <b>-2.8513</b> | <b>.0050</b> | <b>[-0.4, -0.73]</b>  |
| Perceived Inclusion              |                           |               |              |                     | -.3670                    | -3.7804        | .0002        | [-0.56, -0.18]        |
| <b>Indirect Effect</b>           |                           |               |              |                     |                           |                |              |                       |
| <b>Perceived Inclusion</b>       |                           |               |              |                     |                           |                |              |                       |
| <b>(Mediator)</b>                |                           |               |              |                     | <b>-.1271</b>             |                |              | <b>[-0.23, -0.05]</b> |
| <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>            | .2374 (F=6.2278, p=.0000) |               |              |                     | .3148 (F=7.9817, p=.0000) |                |              |                       |

Hypothes 3a predicted that transactional leadership would moderate the positive relationship between person-job fit and perceived inclusion such that this relationship would be stronger for high levels of transactional leadership than it would be for low levels.

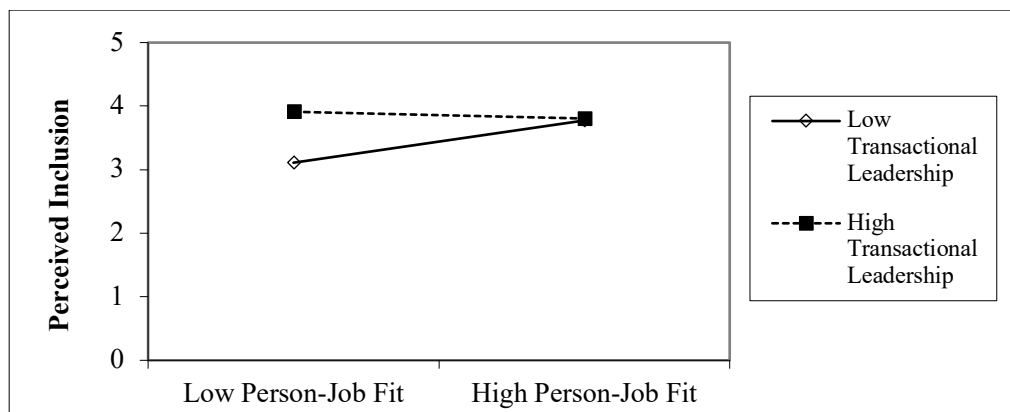


Figure 3 - Interactive effects of Person-Job Fit and Transactional Leadership on Perceived Inclusion

The results revealed a significant interaction effect between person-job fit and transactional leadership ( $B = -0.21$ , 95% CI  $[-0.37, -0.06]$ ). In contrast with the expectations, a simple slope analysis (Cohen et al., 2003) showed that as person-job fit increases, perceived inclusion increases when transactional leadership is low ( $t = 3.41$ ;  $p = .001$ ) but the slope was

flat or not different from zero for high levels of transactional leadership ( $t = -.59$ ;  $p = .56$ ). The difference between slopes was significant ( $t = -2.7$ ,  $p = .01$ ).

Therefore, H3a was not supported. Figure 3 provides a visual representation of the described mechanisms (refer to Appendix 2 and 3).

Further, the conditional indirect effect of the previously described interaction (i.e., H3b) was examined. When transactional leadership was high, the relationship between person-job fit and burnout via inclusion was not significant ( $B = .02$ ; CI  $[-.06, .11]$ ). For low levels of transactional leadership, the analyses reveal a significant indirect effect ( $B = -.13$ ; CI  $[-.24, -.03]$ ). The index of moderated mediation was significant as well ( $B = .08$ ; CI  $[0.01, 0.16]$ ). However, taken together, these results do not support H3b.

Finally, the interaction effect of inclusive leadership (i.e., H4a) was analyzed. The results did not indicate a significant interaction ( $B = .05$ , 95% CI  $[-0.11, 0.22]$ ), thus not providing support for H4a. Moreover, H4b, that is the indirect effect of person-job fit on burnout via perceived inclusion, conditioned to different levels of inclusive leadership, was not supported.

The main results of mediated moderation analyses (SPSS macro, PROCESS, Model 9; Hayes, 2012) are displayed in Table 4 (in addition, refer to Appendix 4).

TABLE 4 – Bootstrapping Results for Mediated Moderation

| Predictors                          | Outcomes            |               |                |                     |               |                |                |                      |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------|----------------|---------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------|
|                                     | Perceived Inclusion |               |                |                     | Burnout       |                |                |                      |
|                                     | Coeff.              | <i>t</i>      | <i>p-value</i> | 95% CI              | Coeff.        | <i>t</i>       | <i>p-value</i> | 95% CI               |
| Constant                            | 3.6507              | 14.7338       | .0000          | [3.16, 4.14]        | 3.8624        | 7.9944         | .0000          | [2.91, 4.82]         |
| <i>Control Variables</i>            |                     |               |                |                     |               |                |                |                      |
| Gender                              | -.0032              | -.0386        | .9692          | [-0.17, 0.16]       | .1441         | 1.2787         | .2031          | [-0.79, 3.67]        |
| Age                                 | .0526               | -.5792        | .5634          | [-0.23, 0.13]       | .0193         | .1554          | .8767          | [-0.23, 0.27]        |
| Current employment status           | .0099               | -.0961        | .9236          | [-0.21, 0.19]       | -.3316        | -2.3514        | .0201          | [-0.61, -0.05]       |
| Duration in current organization    | .0994               | 1.2481        | .2141          | [-0.06, 0.26]       | .0792         | .7202          | .4726          | [-0.14, 0.3]         |
| Job level/seniority                 | -.0472              | .7338         | .4643          | [-0.08, 0.17]       | .0301         | .3472          | .7289          | [-0.14, 0.2]         |
| <b>Direct effect Person-Job Fit</b> | <b>.1447</b>        | <b>2.3128</b> | <b>.0222</b>   | <b>[0.21, 0.27]</b> | <b>-.2361</b> | <b>-2.8221</b> | <b>.0055</b>   | <b>[-0.4, -0.07]</b> |
| Inclusive LS                        | .2842               | 3.1838        | .0018          | [0.11, 0.46]        |               |                |                |                      |

|                           |        |                            |       |                |              |                           |                     |
|---------------------------|--------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|--------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| PJF x Incl. LS            | .0520  | .6285                      | .5307 | [-0.11, 0.22]  |              |                           |                     |
| Transactional LS          | .2236  | 2.6372                     | .0093 | [0.06, 0.39]   |              |                           |                     |
| PJF x Trans. LS           | -.2145 | -2.6913                    | .0080 | [-0.37, -0.06] |              |                           |                     |
| Perceived Inclusion       |        |                            |       |                | -.3856       | -4.1268                   | .0001 [-0.57, -0.2] |
| <b>Indirect Effect</b>    |        |                            |       |                |              |                           |                     |
| Part. moderated mediation |        |                            |       |                |              |                           |                     |
| Inclusive LS              |        |                            |       |                | -.0201       |                           | [-0.09, 0.06]       |
| <b>Transactional LS</b>   |        |                            |       |                | <b>.0827</b> |                           | <b>[0.01, 0.16]</b> |
| <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>     |        | .4894 (F=13.1311, p=.0000) |       |                |              | .3122 (F=9.0795, p=.0000) |                     |

### 3 – DISCUSSION

This thesis aimed to examine the effect of person-job fit on burnout, by exploring the mediating role of perceived inclusion as well as the moderating role of transactional and inclusive leadership. The results demonstrated that person-job fit is negatively associated with burnout and this relationship is mediated by perceived inclusion.

Further, the effects of person-job fit on inclusion are different for low vs. high levels of transactional leadership. In contrast to the anticipated findings, transactional leadership showed a different pattern, only increasing employees' perceptions of inclusion when person-job fit was low. For high levels of person-job fit, perceived inclusion did not change for high vs. low levels of transactional leadership. Inclusive leadership did not moderate the process.

#### Theoretical Implications

This study broadens the understanding of the relationships between person-job fit, perceived inclusion, burnout, and leadership styles. It further contributes to existing literature on the roots of burnout as well as circumstances that play a mitigating role.

The results indicate that a good fit between an individual and their job may serve as preventive factor against burnout, while mismatches can be an actual source, which reinforces the need for further research on hiring procedures that ensure a suitable match.

When exploring two common leadership styles in today's business landscape, it was found that transactional leadership can enhance the positive effect of person-job fit on perceived inclusion when person-job fit is low. Highly transactional leaders yield higher levels of inclusion, compared to workplaces where transactional leadership is low. Employees who do not match their job may be confronted with uncertainty, task ambiguity and difficulties to meet expectations. They may also struggle with a lack of motivation. The task-oriented nature of transactional leaders who provide clear instructions and guidance might enhance employees' performance, help them overcome these challenges and compensate for a low fit. By using contingent rewards (i.e. as extrinsic motivation) and having compensation tied to performance, transactional leaders could establish a sense of fairness. Both explanations promote workplace inclusion. Employees with a good fit experience an alignment of skills and interest, which tends to result in job satisfaction and fulfillment (Fleischmann 2022) as well as intrinsic motivation for good performance. In this case, transactional leadership becomes less relevant or even redundant. When supervisors do not or only hardly employ transactional leadership methods, a higher level of person-job fit still leads to increased levels of perceived inclusion.

Inclusive leadership, however, may not have the same moderating effect. A plausible explanation could be that previous (negative) experiences could have impacted subordinates' receptiveness to inclusive behaviors such that they do still not engage in sharing opinions, ideas or needs. Additionally, it may take some time to implement an inclusive culture within a team, resulting in long-term effects that this study might not have captured. A good match with the job itself may be sufficient to create a sense of inclusion, thereby limiting the potential of a particular leadership style.

These findings help inform future research on the roles of leadership styles and perceived inclusion in mitigating employee burnout, but individual factors and the nature of the job leave room for further exploration.

## **Practical Implications**

While existing evidence focused on individual factors and solutions for burnout, organizations and managers can derive a number of useful practical implications from the results of this thesis in order to impede employee burnout and associated financial and operational consequences.

The hiring process is subject to asymmetric information in most cases, whereby employers have a better idea of what the tasks and responsibilities of their vacancies look like. Considering the meaningful character of person-job fit in preventing burnout in the workplace, it is important that skills, interests, and abilities are aligned. Companies should optimize their recruiting processes, aiming to provide realistic job specifications for applicants. It is crucial to implement adequate measures to find the right candidate and to take the necessary time to make informed decisions. When identifying a mismatch between a subordinate and his position, managers should consider employing transactional leadership behaviors such as communicating clear instructions and expectations as well as providing immediate feedback and suitable rewards. The dynamic nature of person-job fit (Kim et al. 2018) and potential changes in individual needs, motivations, etc. over time require attentive and understanding leaders who help their followers to find fulfillment in their job (Leiter and Maslach 2023). Similarly, employees' perception of inclusion can also be subject to change in rapidly evolving business environments most companies find themselves in nowadays. In light of the previous COVID-19 pandemic, working cultures have changed towards more flexible models, companies giving up office space and more people working remotely,

making it more difficult and even more important to transmit a sense of belonging.

Regardless, companies should gather employee feedback on perceived inclusion and leadership practices on a regular basis. Based on the results, adaptations have to be implemented.

Earlier literature also states that certain employees, minorities and women for example, oftentimes feel less included than majorities and men (Cho and Mor Barak 2008). Managers must employ practices that foster a sense of belonging in these followers. Nonetheless, as argued by previous research (i.e. Sharma and Jain 2013), there is no “one size fits all” approach: employees have individual needs and different levels of tolerance regarding the mismatch with their job (Maslach et al. 2001), meaning that leaders should adapt their leadership style to the specific context. However, organizations can employ training programs for managers that enhance their skills in promoting inclusion and employ transactional behaviors when needed. Studies have shown that the most effective way of prevention relies on a combination of interventions on both managerial and employee level (Maslach et al. 2001). Apart from minimizing the gap between expectations and realities of a job, employees can benefit from education on coping strategies (i.e. effective time management) and participation in anticipatory socialization programs (Jackson and Schuler 1983).

## **Limitations and further research**

Given its reliance on self-reported data based on employee perceptions, this study is subject to various biases and limitations, which may affect the accuracy and reliability of the findings. Perceptions may be influenced by factors such as memory recall bias, response bias and social desirability bias, particularly when assessing delicate topics such as burnout.

Additionally, the use of Likert scales to assess most variables entails a number of limitations.

Firstly, inconsistencies in ratings throughout the survey may be potential issues. The limited

response options of Likert Scales may also restrict respondents from accurately conveying their precise opinions, and some participants may be more inclined towards more “moderate” answers rather than utilizing the full range of the scale.

Furthermore, the homogeneity of the study participants, consisting mainly of recently graduated young professionals who have recently started their work life, or students, and the relatively small sample size may constrain the generalizability of the findings and impact their statistical power and robustness, thereby requiring a cautious interpretation of the results.

Although the measurement of leadership behavior relied on validated scales, using standardized scales may not fully capture nuances and complexities that may vary from employee to employee and in different organizational settings or industries, hence requiring tailored measurement and conceptualization.

Another limitation of this study is that, as mentioned above, the respondents primarily consist of students and juniors with limited experience in their current roles and within their organization. As a result, they may not have had sufficient exposure to the full extent of leadership practices and implementations in their workplace which may generate distorted perceptions and opinions. Additionally, burnout typically arises at a later stage of employment when individuals are experiencing a persistent mismatch with their job (Maslach et al., 2001).

Lastly, it should be noted that there may be other unmeasured variables that may also play a significant role in shaping employees' perceptions and experiences and could therefore be vital for explaining the relationships and outcomes observed in the study. For further research, first and foremost, efforts should be made to diversify the sample to ensure a broader representation of the population of interest. With regard to Zhang and Long's (2013) observations that individual factors impact the relationship between person-job fit and its outcomes, future studies could explore how personal or individual attributions such as coping

mechanisms and locus of control, in addition to leadership style, may moderate the relationship between person-job fit and burnout.

Another potential approach for further research could be the use of a longitudinal study design involving data collection from the same participants over an extended period of time, allowing for valuable insights into the dynamic interactions of leadership styles and their effects on subordinates' perceptions and experiences. Since this study only considered the effects of inclusive and transactional leadership, other existing and emerging styles can be investigated.

It is important to acknowledge that the data is cross-sectional, limiting the ability to infer causality. The suggested relationships and causalities are predominantly of theoretical nature. Adopting experimental designs, which allow for manipulation of variables, could provide more robust evidence to support the proposed causal links.

#### 4 – CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study explores the interplay of person-job fit and employees' perceptions of inclusion as buffers against burnout in the workplace. The intention was to highlight the fundamental role that leadership styles can have in that relationship. The findings emphasize the importance of a good fit between employees and their job as prerequisite to increase inclusion and reduce the prevalence of burnout. Moreover, they suggest that in the case of low person-job fit, transactional leadership can be a key component in promoting the feeling of inclusion. Perceptions of inclusion foster a positive work environment, preventing employees from emotional exhaustion, detachment, and a lowered sense of accomplishment, acting as a shield against burnout. On the contrary, the study did not find any significant effects of inclusive leadership as a moderator of the relationship between person-job fit and employees' perceptions of inclusion.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Survey Items

| Variable                 | Abb. | Item                                                                                         |
|--------------------------|------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Person-Job Fit           | Q2.1 | The things that I value in life are very similar to the things that my organization values   |
|                          | Q2.2 | My personal values match my organization's values and culture                                |
|                          | Q2.3 | My organization's values and culture provide a good fit with the things that I value in life |
| Inclusive Leadership     |      | Openness                                                                                     |
|                          | Q4.1 | My manager is open to hearing new ideas                                                      |
|                          | Q4.2 | My manager is attentive to new opportunities to improve work processes                       |
|                          | Q4.3 | My manager is open to discuss desired goals and new ways to achieve them                     |
|                          |      | Availability                                                                                 |
|                          | Q4.4 | My manager is available for consultation on problems                                         |
|                          | Q4.5 | My manager is an ongoing "presence" in this team, someone who is readily available           |
|                          | Q4.6 | My manager is available for professional questions I would like to consult with him/her      |
|                          | Q4.7 | My manager is ready to listen to my requests                                                 |
|                          |      | Accessibility                                                                                |
|                          | Q4.8 | My manager encourages me to access him/her on emerging issues                                |
|                          | Q4.9 | My manager is accessible for discussing emerging problems                                    |
| Transactional Leadership |      | Contingent Pecuniary Rewards                                                                 |
|                          | Q5.1 | My manager rewards the employees' performance when they live up to his or her requirements   |
|                          |      | Contingent Nonpecuniary Rewards                                                              |
|                          | Q5.2 | My manager gives individual employees positive feedback when they perform well               |
| Perceived Inclusion      | Q5.3 | My manager personally compliments employees when they do outstanding work                    |
|                          |      | Belongingness                                                                                |
|                          | Q6.1 | I belong in my work group.                                                                   |
|                          | Q6.2 | I am connected to my work group                                                              |
|                          |      | Uniqueness                                                                                   |
|                          | Q6.3 | While at work, I am comfortable expressing opinions that diverge from my group members       |
| Burnout                  | Q6.4 | I can share a perspective on work issues that is different from my group members             |
|                          |      | Emotional Exhaustion                                                                         |
|                          | Q8.1 | I feel emotionally drained from my work                                                      |
|                          | Q8.2 | I feel burned out from my work                                                               |

## Appendix 2: Covariance Matrix

|                                  | Constant | PJF    | Incl. LS | PJF x Incl. | Trans. LS | PJF x Trans. | Gender | Age    | Current empl. status | Duration in current organization | Job level/ seniority |
|----------------------------------|----------|--------|----------|-------------|-----------|--------------|--------|--------|----------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Constant                         | .0614    |        |          |             |           |              |        |        |                      |                                  |                      |
| PJF                              | -.0015   | .0039  |          |             |           |              |        |        |                      |                                  |                      |
| Incl. LS                         | -.0016   | -.0017 | .0080    |             |           |              |        |        |                      |                                  |                      |
| PJF x Incl.                      | -.0033   | .0004  | .0021    | .0069       |           |              |        |        |                      |                                  |                      |
| Trans. LS                        | .0004    | -.0001 | -.0048   | -.0008      | .0072     |              |        |        |                      |                                  |                      |
| PJF x Trans.                     | .0017    | -.0004 | -.0008   | -.0046      | .0014     | .0064        |        |        |                      |                                  |                      |
| Gender                           | -.0079   | .0001  | .0001    | -.0007      | .0005     | .0006        | .0067  |        |                      |                                  |                      |
| Age                              | -.0077   | .0003  | -.0006   | .0006       | .0002     | -.0001       | -.0007 | .0082  |                      |                                  |                      |
| Current employment status        | -.0163   | .0003  | -.0004   | .0007       | -.0004    | -.0006       | -.0005 | .0003  | .0106                |                                  |                      |
| Duration in current organization | .0016    | .0006  | .0002    | -.0002      | .0003     | .0001        | .0006  | -.0035 | -.0015               | .0063                            |                      |
| Job level/ seniority             | -.0037   | -.0004 | .0010    | .0003       | -.0007    | -.0007       | -.0003 | -.0022 | .0021                | -.0016                           | -.0041               |

## Appendix 3: Descriptive Statistics

|                    | N   | Minimum | Maximum | Mean   | Std. Deviation |
|--------------------|-----|---------|---------|--------|----------------|
| Person-Job fit     | 166 | 1.00    | 5.00    | 3.2932 | .96455         |
| Transactional LS   | 149 | 1.00    | 5.00    | 3.6823 | .93106         |
| Valid N (listwise) | 149 |         |         |        |                |

## Appendix 4: Conditional indirect effects of X on Y

### Indirect Effects of Person-Job Fit on Burnout, via Inclusion

| Indirect Effect:<br>Person-Job Fit → Perceived Inclusion → Burnout |               |              |               |               |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| Incl_LS                                                            | Trans_LS      | Effect       | LLCI          | ULCI          |
| -.9957                                                             | -.9278        | -.1126       | -.2237        | -.0249        |
| -.9957                                                             | .0000         | -.0358       | -.1496        | .0557         |
| -.9957                                                             | .9278         | .0409        | -.1071        | .1783         |
| <b>.0000</b>                                                       | <b>-.9278</b> | <b>-1325</b> | <b>-.2338</b> | <b>-.0360</b> |
| .0000                                                              | .0000         | -.0558       | -.1165        | -.0047        |

|              |              |              |               |              |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| <b>.0000</b> | <b>.9278</b> | <b>.0209</b> | <b>-.0606</b> | <b>.0990</b> |
| .9957        | -.9278       | -.1525       | -.2980        | .0000        |
| .9957        | .0000        | -.0758       | -.1667        | .0208        |
| .9957        | .9278        | .0010        | -.0672        | .0727        |