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I WON'T MAKE THE SAME MISTAKE AGAIN: BURNOUT HISTORY AND JOB PREFERENCES

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I Won't Make the Same Mistake Again: Burnout History and Job Preferences

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Abstract

The existing burnout literature has predominantly focussed on the determinants of burnout, whereas its consequences for individual careers have received little attention. In this study, we investigate whether recently burned-out individuals and persons with a very high risk of clinical burnout differ in job preferences from non-burned-out workers. Moreover, we link these differences in preferences with (1) diverging perceptions of job demands and resources in a job, as well as (2) distinct weighting of such perceptions. To this end, a high-quality sample of 582 employees varying in their history and current risk of burnout judged fictitious job offers with experimentally manipulated characteristics in terms of their willingness to apply as well as perceived job demands and resources. We find that recently burned-out employees appreciate possibilities to telework and fixed feedback relatively more, while being relatively less attracted to opportunities for learning on the job. Moreover, employees with a very high risk of burnout are more attracted to part-time jobs. These findings can be partially explained by differences in the perceived resources offered by jobs.

Keywords: burnout, labour market, job search, job preference, factorial survey experiment.

JEL: J62, I12, C91, C83.

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1. Introduction

Job burnout has become a major burden on the labour force as it is a leading cause of sick leave and has become increasingly prevalent over the years.[1] For instance, Riziv, the National Institute for Health and Disability Insurance (2020), found that 19.4% of the currently active population in Belgium (i.e., our study population) who are on sick leave because of mental health problems are suffering from burnout. Moreover, the yearly burnout prevalence in Belgium increased by 32.4% from 2016 to 2020 (Riziv, 2020). Research conducted by Woo and colleagues (2020) shows similar dynamics, as they found that nowadays, 11.2% of the healthcare workers included in their global meta-analysis reported having burnout symptoms. These striking figures, on top of being problematic on an individual level, also carry a massive societal cost. More specifically, Han and colleagues (2019) found that the cost of physician burnout in the United States amounted to approximately $4.6 billion, attributable to both staff turnover costs and reduced working hours.

Consequently, large numbers of clinical burnout patients eventually need to be reintegrated into the labour market. This necessitates research on sustainable return-to-work processes and subsequent labour market outcomes. In contrast to the broad literature on the determinants of burnout (e.g., Adriaenssens et al., 2015; Pines & Aronson, 1988), research on supply and demand-side factors affecting burnout patients' labour market outcomes remains scarce. Nevertheless, the limited number of available studies have identified several challenges that (recent) burnout patients could encounter upon returning to work. As such, studies of the demand side (the 'employer side', see e.g. Fric, 2017) of labour from Sterkens and colleagues (2021a; 2021b) have evidenced that former burnout patients have limited access to gainful employment because of stigmatisation and discrimination in the labour market. Other recent studies – on the supply side of labour – have concluded that lingering burnout symptoms (Rooman et al., 2021) and job characteristics (e.g. supervisor support) are determinants of returning to work after burnout (Boštjančič & Galič, 2020; Kärkkäinen et al., 2017; Rooman et al., 2021).

However, in the literature, we find that one under-researched demand-side factor influencing burnout patients' labour market outcomes could be their (changed) job preferences. Indeed, earlier empirical work suggests that burnout and job preferences are related. More concretely, through a series of interviews, Boštjančič and Koračin (2014) discovered that recently burned-out employees who had returned to work effectively reported having changed personalities and personal values related to work. Furthermore, burnout is related to higher levels of staff turnover (Willard-Grace et al., 2019), and the job characteristics that are evidenced to affect burnout, such as emotional demands, shift work, and work-home interference, also increase employees' turnover intentions (Scanlan & Still, 2019). However, to the best of our knowledge, there is but a single study, from Huber and colleagues (2018), that directly assesses the job preferences of workers suffering from (non-clinical) job burnout (see footnote 1). More

[1] Burnout is described by Schaufeli et al. (2020) as 'a work-related state of exhaustion that occurs among employees, which is characterized by extreme tiredness, reduced ability to regulate cognitive and emotional processes, and mental distancing. These four core dimensions of burnout are accompanied by depressed mood as well as by non-specific psychological and psychosomatic complaints.' In the current study, we furthermore make a distinction between experiencing burnout symptoms, as indicated by workers' current BAT score, and clinical burnout. We exclusively employ the clinical term 'burnout patient' or 'recently burned-out worker' when the individual reported suffering from clinically significant exhaustion and impaired performance, which motivated seeking professional help (Grossi et al., 2015, p.626) and resulted in sick leave.

specifically, they found that, compared to their colleagues, physicians who suffered from burnout would sooner switch jobs when the new job had a higher salary and more exemplary colleagues. However, by having narrowed down the scope of their study to the preferences of physicians who were currently experiencing burnout symptoms, scholars remain unaware of (changes in) job preferences across professions and the preferences of workers who returned to work after a sick leave resulting from burnout – as suggested by Boštjančič and Koračin (2014).

To understand the relationship between job preferences and burnout, the seminal JD-R theory (Demerouti et al., 2001) can be applied. The JD-R framework identifies various job demands (i.e. aspects of the job that require sustained mental or physical effort) and job resources (i.e. aspects of the job that might help with achieving work goals, reducing the costs associated with the job demands, or help with stimulating personal growth), along with modelling how these interact with burnout (Demerouti et al., 2001). Since the development of the theory, a myriad of studies have found a positive relationship between job demands and burnout, and a negative relationship between job resources and burnout (e.g. Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker & de Vries, 2021). Next, in an extension of these findings, we could predict that (recently) burned-out workers' job preferences will shift towards those jobs they perceive as providing additional resources rather than demands.

Therefore, in the current study, we investigate whether (recently) burned-out employees, in comparison to non-burned out workers, are more attracted to certain job characteristics (i.e. research question 1), perceive these job characteristics more strongly as job demands or job resources (i.e. research question 2) and value perceived job demands or resources differently in their decision to apply for a job (i.e. research question 3); the corresponding conceptual model is presented in Figure 1. By addressing these questions, we make two substantial contributions to the scarce literature on the consequences of burnout – and job preferences more concretely. First, compared with earlier work (Huber et al., 2018), we substantially expand the scope of the study by sampling both workers who are currently at a very high risk of developing clinical burnout as well as recently burned-out individuals, and by encompassing workers across professions. Second, and based on the JD-R framework, we complement the literature by actually exploring explanations for the differences in preferences from burned-out workers in terms of perceived job demands, resources and their weights in decisions to apply. To do so, we conduct a factorial survey experiment in which we present fictitious job descriptions to (recently) burned-out employees and workers who have never experienced burnout. In doing so, we follow the example of, for instance, Abraham and colleagues (2010, 2013), who successfully applied vignette techniques to investigate job-searching behaviours.

2. Method

Our factorial survey experiment was developed based on the methodological guidelines from Auspurg and Hinz (2014) and was administered to a high-quality sample of workers who were currently employed and who differed in their current burnout symptoms as well as history of clinical burnout. Data were exclusively collected for this study. The factorial survey set-up of the experiment allowed us to simultaneously manipulate job characteristics and to examine trade-offs made between different job characteristics.

2.1. Vignettes

In this study, we presented fictitious job descriptions that varied in eight different job characteristics and asked if the participants would be interested in applying for such jobs. The chosen job characteristics are discussed below and are presented in table 1.

Our selection of included job characteristics was based on considerations of their (i) ecological validity (i.e., their prominence in actual job vacancies), (ii) the dimensions employed in the work from Moens and colleagues (mimeo) and (iii) each characteristic's link with the causes of burnout (and, thereby, job demands and resources) based on earlier literature. The study's goal was to investigate whether these job characteristics, which are proven to be related to burnout, are taken into account when recently burned-out employees or employees with a very high risk of burnout are searching for a job.

The first characteristic that we included in this respect was *hourly wage*. The salary for the fictitious job was presented in terms of a comparison with the participant's current wage. By sampling from a population of currently employed individuals, a comparison to one's current job made for a logical point of reference and enabled us to administer the vignettes to workers employed in diverse occupations. The potential job offered '10 percent less', 'equal', '10 percent more', '20 percent more' or '30 percent more' salary per hour in comparison to the participant's present job. Importantly, research has indicated that insufficient rewards, either material or immaterial, relate to a higher sense of inefficacy, which is a burnout symptom (Leiter & Maslach, 2003).

A second dimension we included was *contract type*, which represented the type of contract the potential job would offer. This job characteristic consisted of three levels: 'full time', '4/5^{ths}' and 'half time'. More working hours are associated with a higher workload, which is found to result in a higher chance of burnout (Hu et al., 2016).[2]

Third, we added *duration of the commute by car (daily total)*, varying over five levels: '10 minutes', '30 minutes', '60 minutes', '90 minutes' and '120 minutes'. Besides the fact that, realistically, employees can almost always deduct this variable from vacancies, this dimension was included because of the positive relationship between commuting time and burnout's core symptom of exhaustion (Gotholmseder et al., 2009; Hansson et al., 2011).

A fourth job characteristic was *amount of telework possible*. The levels of this dimension were: '0%', 'maximum 20%', 'maximum 40%', 'maximum 60%' and 'maximum 80%'. Sardeshmukh and colleagues (2012) discovered that the possibility to telework is positively related to autonomy (job resource) and negatively related to workload (job demand). Moreover, in a recent survey among a representative panel of Flemish employees, two-thirds stated that telework improves work-life balance (job resource), while about half of the respondents believed that telework helps to minimise both work-related stress and the risk of developing burnout (Moens et al., 2021). However, the relationship between burnout and telework could be more complex. For instance, too much telework is positively related to an increased burnout risk through both lack of feedback and lack of social support (both job resources;

[2] To construct an ecologically valid set of vacancies for participants to rate, we allowed full-time jobs to appear in 50% of the vignettes because full-time jobs are still more common than part-time jobs. The remaining half of the vignettes consisted of 25% half-time jobs and 25% 4/5ths jobs.

Sardeshmukh et al., 2012). Indeed, in addition to highlighting teleworks' benefits on perceived autonomy (job resource), work-family conflict (job demand) and role stress (job demand), meta-analyses furthermore emphasise the risks of telework in terms of social and professional isolation (Charalampous et al., 2019; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007).

Fifth, we included *contact with third parties*. This dimension was described to the participant as being in contact with, for instance, patients or clients (see table 1), and covered the following levels: 'daily', 'weekly' and 'none'. Brotheridge and Grandey (2002) have found that a high amount of contact with third parties can be seen as a job demand or a job resource, depending on the person and situation. However, both the study by Dormann and Zapf (2004) and that by Demerouti and colleagues (2000) concluded that contact with third parties is mostly positively related to burnout. More specifically, Dormann and Zapf (2004) concluded that contact with clients is positively related to the burnout symptom depersonalisation ('mental distance'), and contact with patients is positively related to exhaustion (Demerouti et al., 2000).

The next dimension we added was *task execution*. This job characteristic provided the participant with an indication of how frequent and intensive the contact with colleagues would be in terms of potential collaboration with co-workers. This dimension consisted of the levels: 'individual', 'teamwork' and 'both individual and teamwork'. In this respect, Charoensukmongkol and colleagues (2016) found that co-worker support is negatively related to exhaustion and depersonalisation. We can also see this in terms of a job resource, according to Maslach and colleagues (2001), as they found that employees require a context providing social support.

The seventh dimension we took into account was *supervisor contact*, which had the following levels: 'direct guidance', 'fixed feedback moments' and 'limited supervision'. Research performed by Charoensukmongkol and colleagues (2016), Gibson and colleagues (2009) and Weigl and colleagues (2016) found that more supervisor support is significantly related to a lower risk of burnout, partially by increasing the self-efficacy of employees.

The last job characteristic that we inserted was *opportunities for education*. This dimension indicated how often the opportunities for education presented themselves in a fictitious job offer. The levels for this dimension were: 'continuous', 'yearly' and 'not specified'. Besides the fact that this job characteristic is often present in real-life advertisements, we deemed this relevant to include because studies by Van Ruysseveldt and colleagues (2011) and Zis and colleagues (2014) showed that more opportunities for development are negatively related to, respectively, emotional exhaustion and burnout in general.

The eight dimensions and corresponding levels led to a 5 (wage) × 5 (commute duration) × 5 (telework) × 3 (contract type) × 3 (contact with third parties) × 3 (task execution) × 3 (supervisor contact) × 3 (opportunities for development) design of 30,375 unique vignettes, also known as the vignette universe. As it would have been practically impossible to have each employee rate 30,375 separate vignettes, we opted to only use a subset of this vignette universe and present them with one set ('deck') of five vignettes. Thus, according to the recommendations of Auspurg and Hinz (2014), we opted for a D-efficient design. Through this design, a D-efficiency algorithm generated 62 decks, each containing five unique vignettes from the larger universe. This algorithm ensured that the combinations of vignettes

included in the final subset offered the most precise parameter estimates possible for each level and, hence, minimised the loss of statistical efficiency in comparison to the implementation of the complete vignette universe. Our subset of vignettes had a D-efficiency score of 90.226 (out of 100), which indicates that only minimal correlations are present between the vignette dimensions (Auspurg & Hinz, 2014). This was also confirmed by our analysis, as we found a maximum correlation of r = 0.057 between the dimensions in our study.

2.2. Sample

First, a pilot study was conducted through Qualtrics among 56 students in Applied Economics (mean age = 18.82 years; female = 57.1%) to ensure that the dimensions, levels and questionnaires used in the experiment (see subsection 2.3) were both clear and sufficient.

Next, main data collection (March 2021 – April 2021) was also conducted through Qualtrics and employed 2,910 (582 × 5 vignettes) fictitious job descriptions, in which, adhering to Auspurg and Hinz (2014), every separate vignette was evaluated a minimum of five times.

The final sample (n = 582),[3] which we obtained through a specialised research agency, was representative of age (*M* = 46.52 years; *SE* = 0.46) and gender (male = 47.3%; female = 52.4%; other = 0.7%) for the population in Belgium, where this study was conducted (see appendix table 1). Representativeness in terms of age and gender was assured by the research agency since it used a panel of respondents assembled in a proportional, stratified and random manner.[4]

To be able to conduct the proper analyses for our research questions, we required a substantive number of (recently) burned-out employees (see subsection 2.3.1) because they would act as a potential moderator in analyses. To achieve this, we included a second screening question asking whether the participant had ever taken sick leave because of burnout. We aimed at including 200 people with burnout in our final sample, meaning that we eventually, after gathering 350 participants without burnout history, only let participants who answered this screener question affirmatively continue the survey. Consequently, this resulted in a 39.9% share of the sample indicating they have a history of clinical burnout (n = 232).

2.3. Survey framework

We will next discuss the three main components of the survey, namely, pre-experimental survey, experimental survey and post-experimental survey.

2.3.1. Pre-experimental survey

First, socio-demographics were administered (see appendix table 1 for an overview), including several questions on participants' burnout history (see table 2).

[3] In the analyses including control variables, up to 10 participants were excluded from the sample because they failed to provide data for all control variables.

[4] An additional screening question was included that asked whether the participant was currently 'employed' (n = 582), 'unemployed' (n = 80) or 'self-employed' (n = 7). Only participants who answered 'employed' were allowed to continue the survey and could provide their informed consent to study participation.

One crucial question in this part of the survey was whether the participant had ever taken sick leave due to burnout, hence qualifying as a burnout patient according to the definition in footnote 1. Hereafter, only participants who answered 'yes' were presented with the follow-up questions on their earlier history of clinical burnout (see table 2 for all burnout-related questions). Specifically, the question 'When did you return to work after your last sick leave due to a burnout?' was of interest to us. Based on their response to this item, participants were classified into one of two groups: 'recent burnout' (n = 148; 25.4%), meaning that the return to work occurred five or fewer years ago, or 'no recent burnout' (n = 434; 74.6%), meaning that the return to work was more than five years ago or the participant never experienced clinical burnout (see footnote 1). We decided to use five years as a cut-off since Boštjančič and Koračin (2014) report that the aftermath of burnout could linger for four years after onset.[5]

Next, we included a scale to measure big 5 personality (see Donnellan et al., 2006), which is the dominant framework regarding personality in psychological literature, and psychological capital (see Lorenz et al., 2016), given their relation to burnout (see appendix table 2).[6] Big 5 personality traits, especially neuroticism and extraversion, are known as consistent predictors of burnout (Bakker et al., 2006). Neuroticism is positively related to both depersonalisation and exhaustion (Bakker et al., 2006). Extraversion, on the other hand, is negatively associated with depersonalisation (Bakker et al., 2006). Finally, psychological capital (Lorentz et al., 2016) is shown to be negatively related to burnout (Bitmis & Ergeneli, 2017), and is moreover known to buffer the relationship between stress and developing burnout (Herbert et al., 2011).

2.3.2. Experimental survey

Following the pre-experimental survey, five fictitious job descriptions – each depicting the job characteristics from subsection 2.1 – were presented to the participants in a randomised order. In the experimental instructions, we explained that in terms of job content, the fictitious jobs were very similar to the participant's current job and that the proposed hourly wage was to be interpreted in comparison to the participant's current wage. Participants subsequently indicated for each job the likelihood they would apply for it (0 'very unlikely'; 10 'very likely').

In addition, they shared further perceptions concerning the job's characteristics employing seven items (0 'completely disagree'; 10 'completely agree'). These perception statements were formulated in such a way that they gauged how strongly participants expected job resources (four statements) and job demands (three statements) to be present in the job. One example statement was: 'I expect this job to have a high workload' (see appendix table 3 for a complete overview). The cluster of job resources consisted of autonomy, feedback, social support and developmental opportunities (α = 0.781), whereas the cluster of job demands contained workload, emotional demands and physical demands (α = 0.771). We included this selection of job demands and resources as they had been included together in previous studies (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Lee & Ashforth, 1996) and because of their proven link with burnout

[5] Alternative analyses with a more lenient cut-off, that is recent burnout ≤ 10 years ago, were run and rendered comparable results. These results are available upon request.

[6] An article revising the psychological capital scale was published on 3 March 2021 (Dudasova et al., 2021). Because we sent out our survey on 9 March 2021, we were unable to implement the revised scale before rolling out the survey.

(Charoensukmongkol et al., 2016; Bakker et al., 2003; Bakker et al., 2004; Bakker et al., 2005; Idris & Dollard, 2014; Jacobs & Dodd, 2003; Jennings, 2009; Maslach et al., 2001; Montgomery et al., 2015; Zis et al., 2014).

2.3.3. Post-experimental survey

After the experimental survey, the Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT) (Schaufeli et al., 2020) was administered to measure participants' current level of burnout. Based on this score, we once more divided the participants into two groups. According to the BAT guidelines from Schaufeli and colleagues (2020), the first group (n = 58) had a very high risk of developing clinical burnout (i.e. BAT score > 3.29 (out of five)) at the time of survey participation. Therefore, we referred to them as 'very high burnout risk' in the remainder of the manuscript. The second group (n = 524) had a lower burnout risk (i.e. BAT score ≤ 3.29).

Finally, we added a scale to measure social desirability, specifically the short form of the Marlowe-Crown scale (version X1 from Fischer & Fick, 1993), and a measure of risk aversion, being the risk aversion scale created by Mandrik and Bao (2005). The social desirability scale was added as we aimed to include these scores as control variables. We decided to incorporate the scale measuring risk aversion since van Huizen and Alessie (2019) have proven that more risk-averse persons are less inclined to move to other jobs, hence making the construct relevant to control for.

3. Results

To explore the experimental data for the entire sample and capture our job characteristics' effects on probabilities to apply for jobs, we conduct a first linear regression.[7] Herein, we regress probabilities to apply on the job descriptions' manipulated characteristics (subsection 2.1). The results presented in appendix table 4 show that the full sample's job preferences indicate reasonable decision-making throughout the experiment. For instance, we find that higher wages (β = 0.044; p < 0.001) and more opportunities to telework on a voluntary basis (β = 0.008; p < 0.001) increase probabilities to apply.

To answer our three research questions (section 1 and figure 1), we estimate three consecutive series of moderation analyses, i.e. linear regressions with two-way interaction terms. In response to research question 1, we first estimate whether the associations between the job characteristics and the probability to apply are moderated by participants' recent history of clinical burnout or current risk of developing clinical burnout. Subsequently, we estimate whether recent burnout or current risk interact with job characteristics in predicting job perceptions in terms of job demands and resources (research question 2). Finally, to answer our third research question, we estimate whether the associations between job perceptions and the probability to apply are moderated by burnout history and risk. We first focus on the moderating role of recent burnout history (subsection 3.1) and then on very high burnout risk (subsection 3.2) as a moderator.

[7] All regressions are run in Stata/MP 15. In these regressions, standard errors are consistently corrected for clustering at the participant level.

3.1. Recent burnout as a moderator

3.1.1. Job characteristics and probability to apply

Investigating whether workers with a recent history of clinical burnout weigh job characteristics differently in their decision to apply for a job, we indeed find several differences from employees without a recent history of clinical burnout. As apparent from table 3 column (1), jobs that offer more opportunities to telework (β = 0.009; p = 0.019) and have fixed feedback moments (β = 0.670; p = 0.009) are relatively more appreciated by participants who suffered a recent burnout. On the other hand, jobs wherein opportunities for education are granted are relatively less attractive for that group (β = −0.423; p = 0.046). Adding the control variables discussed in subsection 2 (table 3 (2)) does not change the significance of these results.[8] The interpretation of the telework coefficient goes as follows: an increase from 0% telework to a maximum of 20% telework results in a 1.2 percentage point (0.006×20×10 (adjusting the scale from 10 to 100)) in probability to apply for workers without recent burnout. Conversely, this increases to 3.0 percent point ((0.006+0.009)×20×10) for workers with a recent burnout. The interpretations of coefficients from categorical variables such as supervisor contact are similar yet more straightforward.

Our findings that workers with a recent history of burnout attach relatively more weight to telework opportunities and feedback – as instances of supervisor support – can be interpreted within the JD-R framework; namely, both are almost prototypical examples of job resources offered by the organisation, hence constituting a protective factor against the development of burnout. Voluntary telework, as a concrete example, is typically associated with an improved work-life balance (Chung & Van Der Lippe, 2020). However, interestingly, workers with a history of burnout indicated appreciating opportunities for education less, while, conversely, learning opportunities are typically associated with lower burnout (Van Ruysseveldt et al., 2011; Zis et al., 2014). As further explored in the subsections below, differences in job perceptions (subsection 3.1.2) and their weights (subsection 3.1.3) could lie at the foundation of this association.

3.1.2. Job characteristics and job perceptions

We now analyse whether, relatively to workers without a recent history of clinical burnout, the recently burned-out perceive certain job characteristics differently in terms of job demands and resources (research question 2). The results of our regressions with job demand and resource perceptions as outcomes and job characteristics, recent burnout and the controls as predictors are presented in table 4's columns 1 and 3. Given the statistically insignificant interaction terms between recent burnout and telework, we find no different demand (β = −0.001; p = 0.677) and resource (β = 0.001; p = 0.783) perceptions for telework. Nonetheless, perceptual differences emerge for other job characteristics. For instance, once more, we find significant interaction terms for supervisor contact. Here, both fixed feedback (β = 0.554; p < 0.001) and direct guidance (β = 0.394; p = 0.007) are associated with perceptions of more job resources. Next, examining the interaction between recent burnout and opportunities for

[8] The significance of other terms did change after adding control variables in addition to the interactions. However, this is not unexpected, given that these terms now represent very specific reference categories.

education, we find marginal evidence that education is perceived as less of a job resource by the recently burned-out (β = −0.217; p = 0.082). Interestingly, recently burned-out employees additionally perceive cooperation with colleagues more strongly as a demand (β = 0.331; p = 0.013) and a resource (β = 0.307; p = 0.012). This peculiar finding could be explained by the employees' mixed prior experiences with (un)supportive co-workers as contributors or buffers to their burnout. Indeed, within the JD-R framework, professional relationships could serve as either a demand or resource.

3.1.3. Job perceptions and probability to apply

In response to our third research question, we now investigate if there is an association between workers' history of burnout, demands and resources perceptions of jobs and their probabilities to apply. Indeed, compared to workers without a history of clinical burnout, the employees with a recent clinical burnout might assign different weights to demands and resources perceptions of jobs in their decisions to apply.

Therefore, as presented in table 5, we regress probabilities to apply on perceived job demands and resources, in interaction with recent burnout, as well as on job characteristics and control variables. Our results indicate that recently burned-out employees do not attach distinct weights to job demand perceptions in their decisions to apply (β = −0.129; p = 0.135). Conversely, there is marginal statistical evidence that they value job resources perceptions more in their job choices (β = 0.177; p = 0.088). This finding is what could have been expected from the existing literature, since Bakker and Demerouti (2007) and Bakker and de Vries (2021) found that job resources are negatively related to the development of burnout and could, consequently, be more attractive for those employees with a recent history of burnout.

3.2. Very high burnout risk as a moderator

In subsections 3.2.1 to 3.2.3, we perform the same set of regressions with two crucial distinctions from our earlier analyses. First, we exchange the variable 'recent burnout' (i.e. having a recent history of clinical burnout) for 'very high burnout risk' (i.e. having a very high BAT score according to the guidelines from Schaufeli and colleagues (2020), subsection 2.3). In doing so, we answer our three research questions through the eyes of employees who are currently at a very high risk of developing (clinical) burnout instead. Second, we exclude workers who already have a recent history of clinical burnout from our analysed sample. As a result, our category of reference consists exclusively of workers without substantial burnout symptoms, and the models' estimates are not biased by our deliberate oversampling of workers with a recent history of clinical burnout.

3.2.1. Job characteristics and probability to apply

When we examine the effects of job characteristics on application probabilities, we find associations between very high burnout risk and contract types. Indeed, individuals who are currently at a very high risk of developing clinical burnout appreciate jobs offering lower working time more than other workers. Rather specifically, as presented in table 3 column 3, they appreciate working 4/5^{ths} (β = 0.859; p = 0.047) or half time (β = 1.105; p = 0.052) relatively more. After expanding the model with participant-side control variables (column 4), only the association between very high burnout risk and working 4/5^{ths} remains marginally significant (β = 0.935; p = 0.055). Despite its marginal level of statistical significance, the effect's size and confidence interval (−0.020; 1.889) are substantial compared to the estimates of other manipulations (appendix table 4). Therefore, this interaction could still represent a meaningful difference between workers with and without a very high current risk of burnout. We do not find other differences in the effects of job characteristics on probabilities to apply.

Our findings that individuals with very high burnout scores desire the jobs offering working time reductions – compared to (standard) full-time employment – is in line with the core burnout literature and, more specifically, with the symptoms of exhaustion and mental distance (Schaufeli et al., 2020). Indeed, preferences for part-time work could be an expression of both the worker's urgent need to rest ('exhaustion') and their coping through distancing oneself from work ('mental distance'), here in a quite literal manner (Schaufeli et al., 2020). Moreover, interpreted within the JD-R framework, less working time should, typically, go hand in hand with a reduced workload (i.e. the major job demand). Fewer job demands, in turn, would curb the exhaustion process through which job burnout accumulates (Demerouti et al., 2001).

3.2.2. Job characteristics and job perceptions

As in subsection 3.1.2, we next investigate whether a diverging perception of job characteristics as job demands and resources could explain individuals' distinct preferences for job characteristics. Applied to workers who are currently at a very high risk of burnout, columns 2 and 4 from table 4 report no evidence for diverging perceptions of working 4/5^{ths} in both demands (β = 0.138; p = 0.709) and resources (β = −0.111; p = 0.725). The fact that a very high risk of burnout is not associated with perceptual differences of working time offers, however, does not imply that part-time work is generally perceived to be as demanding as full-time work. On the contrary, regressing job demand (and resources) perceptions on vacancy characteristics, we find that jobs offering 4/5^{ths} schedules are perceived as less demanding (β = −0.156; p = 0.030) and providing equal resources (β = −0.083; p = 0.230) compared to full-time employment, regardless of current burnout risk.

Conversely, marginally significant associations emerge where workers with a currently very high risk of burnout perceive wages to contribute relatively less to demand (β = −0.018; p = 0.093) and resource (β = −0.021; p = 0.084) perceptions of jobs. Furthermore, there is marginal evidence that such workers also perceive collaborations with colleagues to be relatively more demanding (β = 0.400; p = 0.091). These potential perceptual differences, however, did not translate into elevated application probabilities (subsection 3.2.1).

3.2.3. Job perceptions and probability to apply

Similar to workers with a recent history of burnout (subsection 3.1.3), we find no evidence that employees who are currently at a very high risk of developing burnout attach different weights to job demand perceptions in application decisions (β = 0.049; p = 0.750, column 4 from table 5). Furthermore, we again find marginal evidence that, compared to other workers, those who currently are at a very high risk of burnout attach additional weight to job resources perceptions (β = 0.314; p = 0.081) when assigning application probabilities to job descriptions.

The positive association between a very high burnout risk, resources perceptions and probabilities to apply is helpful to understand another finding from subsection 3.2.1. More concretely, back then, we established that, in contrast to working 4/5^{ths}, employees had similar preferences for working half time, regardless of their current burnout risk (β = 0.453; p = 0.478).

However, when we regress job demand and resources perceptions on vacancy characteristics, we find that jobs offering half-time schedules are generally perceived as requiring fewer demands (β = −0.400; p = 0.001), but also offering fewer resources (β = −0.245; p = 0.230), than full-time employment – the latter not being the case for 4/5^{ths} employment (subsection 3.2.1). Considering the increased value that workers who are currently at risk of developing clinical burnout could attach to job resources (β = 0.314; p = 0.081), the demands-resources trade-off perceived in applying for a half-time versus full-time job makes half-time work relatively less interesting to high-risk employees.

4. Conclusion

This study adds to the literature on the return-to-work process following burnout by investigating associations between (former) burnout and job preferences. In contrast to earlier work from Huber and colleagues (2018), our study investigated dynamics in job preferences among both workers who are currently at a very high risk of developing (clinical) burnout as well as individuals with a recent history of clinical burnout. Additionally, our study distinguished itself from earlier publications by exploring underlying explanations for burnout patients' job preferences based on the seminal JD-R framework (Demerouti et al., 2001). Practically, these ambitions translated into a state-of-the-art vignette experiment wherein participants with and without a (recent) burnout were asked how likely it was they would apply for a fictitious job description that varied on eight different job characteristics. Thereafter, we gauged how they perceived each job in terms of job demands and resources and statistically estimated whether these perceptions were associated with their intentions to apply.

For the subsample of workers with a recent history of clinical burnout, the results showed that employees with a recent burnout were relatively more attracted to jobs wherein more telework opportunities and fixed feedback moments were present. Also, they appreciated jobs with opportunities for education less than workers without a recent history of clinical burnout. We find partial evidence for an explanation of these findings in terms of demands and resources perceptions. Indeed, fixed feedback moments were more strongly perceived as a job resource by workers who recently suffered from clinical burnout, whereas opportunities for education were less likely to be interpreted as a resource by them.

For the subsample of workers who are currently at a very high risk of developing clinical burnout, we found that they, specifically, appreciated 4/5^{ths} jobs more than participants without such current risk.

Here, however, we could not find evidence for an explanation for this association in terms of job demands and resources perceptions diverging from other workers.

Strikingly, the different preferences for job characteristics across the burnout subsamples and workers without recent or very high burnout risk indicate that even five years after a sick-leave spell, burnout still plays a role in the formation and perception of workers' job preferences. Furthermore, the dissimilar response patterns of workers with a recent history of clinical burnout and workers who are currently at a very high risk suggest that the influence of burnout on job preferences is a complex phenomenon that cannot be generalised across stages in the burnout-recovery process. Therefore, to further our understanding of this topic, we call for further research administering validated JD-R and recovery-related instruments to workers who experience(d) burnout.

Next, we discuss our findings' conversion to more practical insights. First, job crafting seems to be an essential tool to accommodate (recently) burned-out employees in their quest for sustainable (re-)employment. Job crafting entails employees being active participants in deciding, together with the employer – or perhaps even a job-placement institution – on the levels of job demands and resources (Tims & Bakker, 2010). It allows for a more individual touch to employment and for individuals to draw attention to their needs in terms of working conditions. For instance, our results indicate that workers with a recent history of burnout attach particular value to feedback processes in the job design. Participation in the job (re)design process could be beneficial in terms of employee engagement (Tims et al., 2015), which is the antithesis of burnout (Leiter et al., 2015). More so, job crafting could have positive outcomes for employers as well. Employers could adapt the working situation to the individual needs of the (recently) burned-out employee and, hence, buffer the organisational burden of burnout in the shape of sick-leave spells, productivity loss or staff turnover. Second, when the formerly burned-out systematically shy away from further education, it might be crucial to install a follow-up that stimulates formerly burned-out employees to participate in job training that is tailored to their individual needs. This is because it has been shown that lifelong learning is positively related to mental and psychological health outcomes (Hammond, 2004) and aids workers in the long term to maintain a competitive position in the labour market (Kim & Park, 2020).

To conclude our research paper, we briefly touch upon its limitations. A first limitation of our factorial survey experiment is that the moderation analyses with (recent clinical) burnout (risk) cannot be given a causal interpretation because there is no ethical procedure to manipulate employees' current or past burnout. However, we controlled for a series of potential confounding variables, such as personality, proven to correlate with job burnout. Based on the discrepancies we found between workers who are currently burned-out and workers with a recent history of burnout, we suggest that future research incorporates additional correlates or, preferably, takes a longitudinal approach following the parallel development of (clinical) burnout and job preferences. A final limitation, or rather caveat, is our sample of choice in the sense that we did not include unemployed persons. More concretely, we limited our scope of study to a representation of the current working population because it would have been disproportionally challenging to expand our sample with a similarly representative set of individuals who were both unemployed and suffered from burnout. Nonetheless, we are convinced that furthering this line of research through sampling from the complete labour force holds promise too.

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Figures

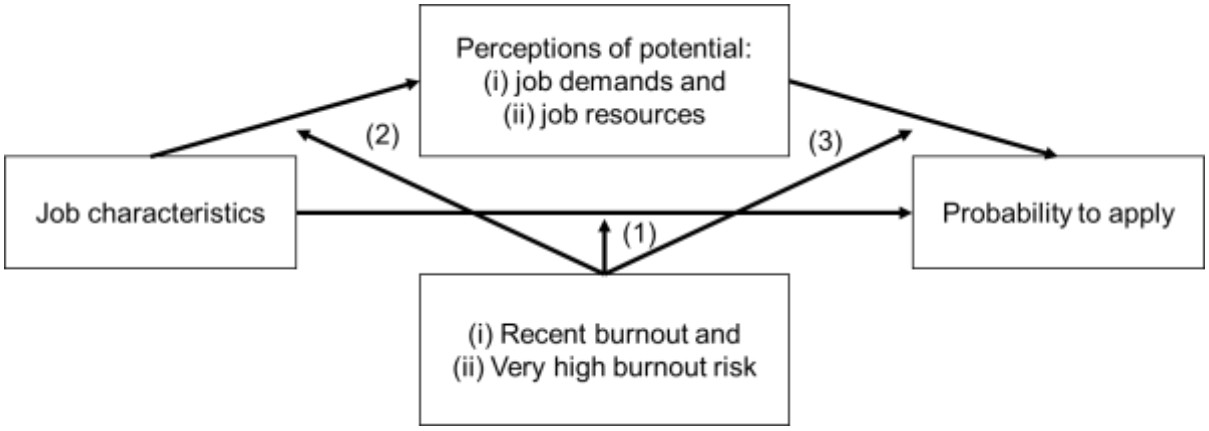

Figure 1. Conceptual model

Tables

Table 1. Vignette dimensions and levels.

Dimensions	Levels
Wage	{10% less than current job; equal to current job; 10% more than current job; 20% more than current job; 30% more than current job}
Contract type	{full time; 4/5th; half time}
Duration of commute by car (daily total)	{10 minutes; 30 minutes; 60 minutes; 90 minutes; 120 minutes}
Possibility of telework	{0%; maximum 20% of the time; maximum 40% of the time; maximum 60% of the time; maximum 80% of the time}
Contact with third parties (such as patients or clients)	{daily; weekly; none}
Task execution	{individual; teamwork; both individual and teamwork}
Supervisor contact	{direct guidance; fixed feedback moments; limited supervision}
Educational opportunities	{continuous opportunities; yearly opportunity; not specified}

Table 2. Self-reported burnout.

	Number of participants (proportion of sample)
SELF-REPORTED BURNOUT (N = 582)	
Have you ever taken sick leave because of a burnout?	
Yes	232 (39.9%)
No	350 (60.1%)
N	582
FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS AMONG THE SUBSAMPLE WITH A SELF-REPORTED BURNOUT (N = 232)	
Was your burnout officially diagnosed by a physician?	
Yes	198 (85.3%)
No	34 (14.7%)
Which of the following elements were responsible for this burnout?	
Workload too high	120 (51.7%)
No adequate social support by colleagues or supervisor	126 (54.3%)
Emotionally too draining	78 (33.6%)
No adequate social support outside of work	33 (14.2%)
Not enough autonomy	23 (9.9%)
Not enough feedback	24 (10.3%)
Physically too draining	21 (9.1%)
Other	51 (22.0%)
When did you return to work after your latest sick leave due to a burnout?	
More than ten years ago	49 (21.1%)
Five to ten years ago	35 (15.1%)
Two to five years ago	71 (30.6%)
One to two years ago	22 (9.5%)
Less than a year ago	30 (12.9%)
Still on sick leave at this moment	25 (10.8%)

Table 3. Moderation analyses with probability to apply as the dependent variable and recent burnout or very high burnout risk as moderators.

	Dependent variable: probability to apply			
	(1)	**(2)**	**(3)**	**(4)**
JOB CHARACTERISTICS				
Hourly wage (c.)	0.044*** (0.004)	0.006 (0.053)	0.046*** (0.004)	−0.017 (0.063)
Contract type (ref. = full time)				
4/5th	0.305** (0.130)	0.964 (1.931)	0.275** (0.136)	0.529 (2.350)
Half time	−0.780*** (0.161)	−1.944 (2.040)	−0.829*** (0.168)	−4.089 (2.577)
Duration of commute by car (c.)	−0.023*** (0.001)	−0.245 (0.021)	−0.023** (0.002)	−0.028 (0.025)
Amount of telework possible (c.)	0.006*** (0.002)	−0.008 (0.029)	0.005** (0.002)	−0.008 (0.035)
Contact with third parties (ref. = no contact)				
At least weekly contact	0.272** (0.120)	−3.177* (1.655)	0.313** (0.123)	−3.987* (1.998)
Task execution (ref. = no cooperation with colleagues)				
Cooperation with colleagues	−0.026 (0.118)	−1.529 (1.659)	−0.018 (0.123)	−1.268 (0.549)
Supervisor contact (ref. = limited supervision)				
Direct guidance	0.118 (0.126)	0.607 (1.699)	0.098 (0.130)	−0.558 (2.070)
Fixed feedback moments	−0.123 (0.128)	4.479** (1.757)	−0.152 (0.132)	3.987* (2.142)
Opportunities for education (ref. = not specified)				
Opportunities present	0.460*** (0.110)	−1.266 (1.409)	0.500*** (0.114)	−0.627 (1.649)
PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS				
Clinical burnout (ref. = more than 5 years ago or no burnout)				
Recent burnout	−0.205 (0.437)	−0.301 (0.485)		
Burnout risk (ref. = low, medium, high)				
Very high risk			0.575 (1.008)	0.477 (1.032)
INTERACTIONS WITH BURNOUT				
Recent burnout × hourly wage (c.)	−0.001 (0.007)	−0.000 (0.008)		
Recent burnout × 4/5th contract	0.226 (0.265)	0.130 (0.275)		
Recent burnout × half-time contract	0.275 (0.306)	−0.009 (0.317)		
Recent burnout × duration of commute by car (c.)	−0.003 (0.003)	−0.001 (0.003)		
Recent burnout × amount of telework possible (c.)	0.009** (0.004)	0.010** (0.004)		
Recent burnout × contact with third parties	0.036 (0.228)	0.004 (0.247)		
Recent burnout × cooperation with colleagues	0.097 (0.233)	0.058 (0.249)		
Recent burnout × direct guidance	0.010 (0.238)	0.033 (0.245)		
Recent burnout × fixed feedback moments	0.670*** (0.254)	0.729*** (0.275)		
Recent burnout × opportunities for education present	−0.432** (0.216)	−0.522** (0.242)		
Very high burnout risk × hourly wage (c.)			−0.019 (0.017)	−0.020 (0.018)

Very high burnout risk × 4/5th contract			0.859** (0.431)	0.935* (0.486)
Very high burnout risk × half-time contract			1.105* (0.567)	0.453 (0.637)
Very high burnout risk × duration of commute by car (c.)			0.010 (0.007)	0.009 (0.007)
Very high burnout risk × amount of telework possible (c.)			0.007 (0.009)	0.008 (0.009)
Very high burnout risk × contact with third parties			−0.220 (0.503)	0.052 (0.525)
Very high burnout risk × cooperation with colleagues			−0.267 (0.426)	−0.271 (0.460)
Very high burnout risk × direct guidance			0.378 (0.359)	0.386 (0.585)
Very high burnout risk × fixed feedback moments			0.500 (0.536)	0.517 (0.652)
Very high burnout risk × opportunities for education present			−0.669 (0.423)	−0.694 (0.505)
Control variables included	No	Yes	No	Yes
Control variables in interaction with recent burnout included	No	Yes	No	No
Control variables in interaction with burnout risk included	No	No	No	Yes
R^2	0.166	0.221	0.170	0.231
N	2,910	2,860	2,170	2,155

Notes. Abbreviations used: ref. (reference category), c. (continuous). The presented statistics are coefficient estimates and their standard errors in parentheses for the linear regressions outlined in subsections 3.1 and 3.2. This table represents the relations depicted by (i) in figure 1. The control variables are the following participant characteristics: age; gender; marital status; dependent children; big five personality; psychological capital; risk aversion. Complete estimates are shared upon request. *** (**) ((*)) indicate significance at the 1%, (5%) and ((10%)) significance levels.

Table 4. Moderation analyses with job demand or job resource as dependent variables and recent burnout or very high burnout risk as moderators.

	Dependent variable: job demands		**Dependent variable: job resources**	
	(1)	**(2)**	**(3)**	**(4)**
JOB CHARACTERISTICS				
Hourly wage (cont.)	−0.029 (0.031)	−0.012 (0.037)	−0.070** (0.028)	−0.072** (0.034)
Contract type (ref. = full time)				
4/5th	0.905 (1.005)	1.995 (1.248)	0.081 (0.993)	0.492 (1.274)
Half time	−0.421 (1.021)	−0.091 (1.272)	−1.632* (0.955)	−3.204*** (1.195)
Duration of commute by car (cont.)	−0.035*** (0.010)	−0.038*** (0.012)	−0.003 (0.010)	−0.001 (0.013)
Amount of telework possible (cont.)	0.014 (0.014)	0.006 (0.017)	−0.004 (0.014)	−0.009 (0.018)
Contact with third parties (ref. = no contact)				
At least weekly contact	−0.217 (0.995)	0.051 (1.193)	−0.454 (1.012)	−0.918 (1.256)
Task execution (ref. = no cooperation with colleagues)				
Cooperation with colleagues	0.014 (0.954)	0.214 (1.102)	−0.515 (0.772)	−0.236 (0.991)
Supervisor contact (ref. = limited supervision)				
Direct guidance	1.084 (0.956)	0.943 (1.153)	0.060 (0.991)	−0.001 (1.200)
Fixed feedback moments	0.373 (0.945)	0.716 (1.083)	1.001 (0.976)	1.529 (1.256)
Opportunities for education (ref. = not specified)				
Opportunities present	−0.171 (0.854)	−0.507 (1.006)	−1.106 (0.810)	−1.443 (0.986)
PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS				
Clinical burnout (ref. = more than 5 years ago or no burnout)				
Recent burnout	−0.018 (0.260)		−0.629 (0.241)	
Burnout risk (ref. = low, medium, high)				
Very high risk		0.409 (0.526)		0.926* (0.531)
INTERACTIONS WITH BURNOUT				
Recent burnout × hourly wage (c.)	−0.002 (0.004)		−0.001 (0.004)	
Recent burnout × 4/5th contract	−0.120 (0.141)		0.108 (0.139)	
Recent burnout × half-time contract	−0.087 (0.164)		−0.174 (0.151)	
Recent burnout × duration of commute by car (c.)	0.001 (0.001)		0.001 (0.001)	
Recent burnout × amount of telework possible (c.)	−0.001 (0.002)		0.001 (0.002)	
Recent burnout × contact with third parties	−0.088 (0.139)		0.190 (0.116)	
Recent burnout × cooperation with colleagues	0.331** (0.132)		0.307** (0.122)	
Recent burnout × direct guidance	0.172 (0.146)		0.394*** (0.146)	
Recent burnout × fixed feedback moments	−0.016 (0.149)		0.554*** (0.145)	
Recent burnout × opportunities for education present	−0.207 (0.128)		−0.217* (0.125)	
Very high burnout risk × hourly wage (c.)		−0.018* (0.011)		−0.021* (0.012)

Very high burnout risk × 4/5th contract		0.138 (0.370)		−0.111 (0.316)
Very high burnout risk × half-time contract		0.391 (0.277)		−0.017 (0.265)
Very high burnout risk × duration of commute by car (c.)		−0.005 (0.004)		−0.003 (0.003)
Very high burnout risk × amount of telework possible (c.)		0.001 (0.004)		0.002 (0.003)
Very high burnout risk × contact with third parties		0.332 (0.360)		0.159 (0.280)
Very high burnout risk × cooperation with colleagues		0.400* (0.236)		0.037 (0.250)
Very high burnout risk × direct guidance		0.341 (0.331)		−0.333 (0.358)
Very high burnout risk × fixed feedback moments		0.021 (0.192)		0.036 (0.325)
Very high burnout risk × opportunities for education present		−0.092 (0.286)		−0.358 (0.305)
R^2	0.104	0.115	0.151	0.157
N	2,860	2,155	2,860	2,155

Notes. Abbreviations used: ref. (reference category), c. (continuous). The presented statistics are coefficient estimates and their standard errors in parentheses for the linear regressions outlined in subsections 3.1 and 3.2. This table represents the relations depicted by (ii) in figure 1. The control variables are the following participant characteristics: age; gender; marital status; dependent children; big five personality; psychological capital; risk aversion. Complete estimates are shared upon request. *** (**) ((*)) indicate significance at the 1%, (5%) and ((10%)) significance levels.

Table 5. Moderation analyses with probability to apply as the dependent variable and recent burnout or very high burnout risk as moderators.

	Dependent variable: probability to apply			
	(1)	**(2)**	**(3)**	**(4)**
JOB CHARACTERISTICS				
Hourly wage (c.)	0.035*** (0.004)	0.068 (0.049)	0.036*** (0.004)	0.041 (0.059)
Contract type (ref. = full time)				
4/5th	0.370*** (0.110)	0.790 (1.580)	0.334*** (0.115)	−0.042 (1.887)
Half time	−0.584*** (0.141)	−0.273 (1.799)	−0.645*** (0.148)	−0.935 (2.291)
Duration of commute by car (c.)	−0.018*** (0.001)	−0.025 (0.018)	−0.019*** (0.001)	−0.032 (0.023)
Amount of telework possible (c.)	0.004** (0.002)	0.001 (0.024)	0.004* (0.002)	−0.011 (0.029)
Contact with third parties (ref. = no contact)				
At least weekly contact	0.112 (0.105)	−2.863** (1.428)	0.159 (0.109)	−3.161* (1.735)
Task execution (ref. = no cooperation with colleagues)				
Cooperation with colleagues	0.040 (0.104)	−1.003 (1.418)	0.046 (0.107)	−1.007 (1.874)
Supervisor contact (ref. = limited supervision)				
Direct guidance	−0.214* (0.112)	1.133 (1.456)	−0.241** (0.114)	1.173 (1.817)
Fixed feedback moments	−0.333*** (0.113)	4.030*** (1.517)	−0.354*** (0.116)	3.197* (1.785)
Opportunities for education (ref. = not specified)				
Opportunities present	−0.006 (0.099)	−0.181 (1.344)	(0.103)	0.736 (1.608)
PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS				
Clinical burnout (ref. = more than 5 years ago or no burnout)				
Recent burnout	0.073 (0.656)	0.031 (0.755)		
Burnout risk (ref. = low, medium, high)				
Very high risk			−1.789* (1.103)	−2.415** (1.177)
INTERACTIONS WITH BURNOUT				
Recent burnout × hourly wage (c.)	−0.001 (0.007)	−0.002 (0.007)		
Recent burnout × 4/5th contract	0.070 (0.226)	0.005 (0.241)		
Recent burnout × half-time contract	0.321 (0.258)	0.209 (0.280)		
Recent burnout × duration of commute by car (c.)	−0.004 (0.003)	−0.001 (0.003)		
Recent burnout × amount of telework possible (c.)	0.008** (0.003)	0.009** (0.004)		
Recent burnout × contact with third parties	−0.178 (0.203)	−0.171 (0.225)		
Recent burnout × cooperation with colleagues	−0.148 (0.200)	−0.239 (0.211)		
Recent burnout × direct guidance	−0.294 (0.206)	−0.404* (0.228)		
Recent burnout × fixed feedback moments	0.212 (0.228)	0.120 (0.246)		
Recent burnout × opportunities for education present	−0.354* (0.187)	−0.425** (0.215)		
Very high burnout risk × hourly wage (c.)			0.003 (0.015)	−0.002 (0.016)

Very high burnout risk × 4/5th contract			0.891** (0.354)	1.160*** (0.403)
Very high burnout risk × half-time contract			0.976** (0.466)	0.541 (0.530)
Very high burnout risk × duration of commute by car (c.)			0.013** (0.006)	0.011** (0.006)
Very high burnout risk × amount of telework possible (c.)			0.004 (0.008)	0.005 (0.008)
Very high burnout risk × contact with third parties			−0.186 (0.412)	−0.197 (0.444)
Very high burnout risk × cooperation with colleagues			−0.201 (0.398)	−0.344** (0.434)
Very high burnout risk × direct guidance			0.633 (0.463)	0.613 (0.545)
Very high burnout risk × fixed feedback moments			0.427 (0.476)	0.402 (0.542)
Very high burnout risk × opportunities for education present			−0.395 (0.365)	−0.370 (0.431)
MEDIATORS				
Job demands	−0.056 (0.047)	0.218 (0.678)	−0.091* (0.050)	0.419 (0.849)
Job resources	0.890*** (0.052)	0.706 (0.699)	0.873*** (0.054)	0.525 (0.831
Burnout × job demands	−0.085 (0.079)	−0.129 (0.086)	0.109 (0.145)	0.049 (0.152)
Burnout × job resources	0.145* (0.086)	0.177* (0.103)	0.178 (0.152)	0.314* (0.180)
Control variables included	No	Yes	No	Yes
Control variables in interaction with recent burnout included	No	Yes	No	No
Control variables in interaction with burnout risk included	No	No	No	Yes
R^2	0.360	0.411	0.358	0.416
N	2,910	2,860	2,170	2,155

Notes. Abbreviations used: ref. (reference category), c. (continuous). The presented statistics are coefficient estimates and their standard errors in parentheses for the linear regressions outlined in subsections 3.1 and 3.2. This table represents the relations depicted by (iii) in figure 1. The control variables are the following participant characteristics: age; gender; marital status; dependent children; big five personality; psychological capital; risk aversion. Complete estimates are shared upon request. *** (**) ((*)) indicate significance at the 1%, (5%) and ((10%)) significance levels.

Appendix

Appendix table 1. Summary statistics.

Characteristic	Number of participants (proportion of sample)
Gender	
Male	275 (47.3%)
Female	305 (52.4%)
Other	2 (0.3%)
Age	Mean = 46.25 (SD = 0.46)
Marital status	
Married	295 (50.7%)
In a relationship and living together	121 (20.8%)
In a relationship and living separately	43 (7.4%)
Single	123 (21.1%)
Dependent children	
Yes	222 (38.1%)
No	360 (61.9%)
Sector of employment	
Sales	28 (4.8%)
Administration	60 (10.3%)
Construction	8 (1.4%)
Communication	5 (0.9%)
Financial	33 (5.7%)
Hospitality & tourism	11 (1.9%)
Human resources	11 (1.9%)
IT	22 (3.8%)
Legal	6 (1.0%)
Agriculture	1 (0.2%)
Logistics & transport	23 (4.0%)
Management	5 (0.9%)
Marketing	5 (0.9%)
Education	73 (12.5%)
Government	106 (18.2%)
Technical	31 (5.3%)
Health care	69 (11.9%)
Other	85 (14.6%)
Experience	Mean = 18.48 (SD = 0.23)
N	582

Notes. This table presents an overview of the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample as discussed in section 2. Age and experience are presented as a mean and standard deviation instead of a number for each separate age and year of experience.

Appendix table 2. Participant-side control variables.

	Mean (standard error)
BIG 5 PERSONALITY	
Openness	3.325 (0.013)
Conscientiousness	3.561 (0.014)
Extraversion	2.820 (0.016)
Agreeableness	3.824 (0.013)
Neuroticism	2.828 (0.015)
PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL	
Hope	3.280 (0.013)
Optimism	3.493 (0.015)
Resilience	3.569 (0.010)
Self-efficacy	3.627 (0.123)
Social desirability	4.079 (0.027)
Risk aversion	3.283 (0.013)
N	582

Notes. This table presents an overview of the control variables as discussed in sections 2.3.1 and 2.3.3. For big 5 personality, psychological capital and risk aversion, the scores are on a five-point scale ranging from completely disagree to completely agree. For social desirability, the scores are on a seven-point scale with a higher score indicating social desirable response tendencies.

Appendix table 3. Statements used to measure perceptions of job characteristics.

	Statement
JOB DEMANDS	
Workload	I expect this job to have a high workload.
Emotional demands	I expect this job to be emotionally demanding.
Physical demands	I expect this job to be physically demanding.
JOB RESOURCES	
Social support	I expect to receive sufficient social support in this job.
Feedback	I expect to receive sufficient feedback in this job.
Autonomy	I expect to have sufficient autonomy in this job.
Professional development	I expect to receive sufficient chances to develop myself professionally in this job.

Note. Each statement was rated on a scale from 0 (completely disagree) to 10 (completely agree).

Appendix table 4. General preferences with probability to apply as the outcome measure.

	Dependent variable: probability to apply
Hourly wage (c.)	0.044*** (0.003)
Contract type (ref. = full time)	
4/5th	0.371*** (0.114)
Half time	−0.708*** (0.138)
Duration of commute by car (c.)	−0.023*** (0.001)
Amount of telework possible (c.)	0.008*** (0.002)
Contact with third parties (ref. = no contact)	
At least weekly contact	0.294*** (0.103)
Task execution (ref. = no cooperation with colleagues)	
Cooperation with colleagues	0.001 (0.102)
Supervisor contact (ref. = limited supervision)	
Direct guidance	0.118 (0.107)
Fixed feedback moments	0.043 (0.111)
Opportunities for education (ref. = not specified)	
Opportunities present	0.355*** (0.095)
R^2	0.161
N	2,910

Notes. Abbreviations used: ref. (reference category), c. (continuous). The presented statistics are coefficient estimates and their standard errors in parentheses for the general statistics outlined in the introduction of section 3. *** (**) ((*)) indicate significance at the 1%, (5%) and ((10%)) significance levels. No control variables were added.