

From Well-being to Burnout: The Mediating Role of Workplace Conflicts

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Abstract:

Workplace well-being and burnout represent critical concerns for organizational effectiveness, yet the psychological mechanisms linking affective states to burnout dimensions remain incompletely understood, particularly in post-communist European contexts. Grounded in Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and the Job Demands-Resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001), this study investigates how interpersonal conflict at work mediates the relationships between job-related affective well-being and burnout dimensions among Romanian employees. A sample of 640 Romanian employees completed Warr's (1990) Job-Related Affective Well-Being Scale (measuring Anxiety-Contentment and Depression-Enthusiasm dimensions), the Interpersonal Conflict at Work Scale (Spector & Jex, 1998), and the Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey (Maslach et al., 1996), assessing Emotional Exhaustion and Professional Inefficacy. Data were analyzed using bivariate correlations, hierarchical regression, and path analysis-based mediation with 10,000 bootstrap replications in Jeffrey's Amazing Statistics Program (JASP). Results revealed strong intercorrelations between affective dimensions and significant negative associations between both Anxiety-Contentment and Depression-Enthusiasm with Interpersonal Conflict at Work. Interpersonal Conflict positively predicted Professional Inefficacy and Emotional Exhaustion. Hierarchical regression models incorporating both affective dimensions and Interpersonal Conflict explained 47.1% of variance in Emotional Exhaustion and 36.4% in Professional Inefficacy. Mediation analyses revealed differential pathways: Depression-Enthusiasm exhibited partial mediation for both Emotional Exhaustion and Professional Inefficacy, whereas Anxiety-Contentment showed direct effects only on Emotional Exhaustion but complete mediation through Interpersonal Conflict at Work for Professional Inefficacy. Interpersonal Conflict at Work demonstrated stronger effects on Professional Inefficacy than Emotional Exhaustion. These findings demonstrate that interpersonal conflict serves as a critical mediating mechanism through which affective states influence burnout, with distinct pathways for different affective and burnout dimensions. The results extend theoretical understanding of resource depletion processes and highlight the importance of conflict management interventions in burnout prevention strategies.

Keywords: *Anxiety-contentment, depression-enthusiasm, emotional exhaustion, interpersonal conflict, professional inefficacy, Romanian employees*

1. Introduction and Literature Review

Burnout is a serious and widespread problem, affecting anywhere from 10 to 46% of healthcare professionals globally, with limited understanding of the psychological mechanisms involved. Workplace well-being has emerged as a critical concern for organizations worldwide, with burnout representing one of the most pressing challenges to employee health and organizational effectiveness. Burnout is understood as a complex condition with three interconnected dimensions: emotional depletion, a sense of detachment from others, and a decline in one's sense of competence and effectiveness at work (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Research demonstrates that emotional exhaustion and professional inefficacy constitute the most critical dimensions affecting job satisfaction (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007), with exhaustion representing the primary indicator of resource depletion and inefficacy amplifying loss spirals through diminished competence perceptions (Vallasamy, 2025). Burnout develops through chronic exposure to workplace stressors and manifests in diminished job satisfaction, impaired performance, and elevated turnover intentions (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). While extensive research has examined burnout's antecedents and consequences in Western contexts, understanding of the psychological mechanisms linking affective states to burnout remains incomplete, particularly in post-communist European settings such as Romania.

Contemporary theoretical frameworks, notably Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and the Job Demands-Resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001), propose that workplace stressors deplete psychological resources through dual pathways: directly through resource loss and indirectly through interpersonal strain. Interpersonal conflict at work represents a particularly salient stressor because it simultaneously drains emotional reserves and undermines social support networks that typically buffer against burnout. It refers to disagreements, hostility, or friction between employees that create psychosocial strain. This construct represents a particularly potent job demand because it simultaneously depletes emotional resources and undermines social support (Fujiwara et al., 2003). The Interpersonal Conflict at Work Scale (ICAWS) developed by Spector and Jex (1998) has demonstrated robust validity across multiple cultural contexts (Fox et al., 2001; Wojcik et al., 2022). Despite growing recognition of interpersonal conflict's role in workplace well-being, its mediating function in transmitting the effects of job-related affective states onto burnout dimensions remains underexplored.

A substantial body of empirical research documents relationships among job-related affective states, interpersonal conflict, and burnout dimensions, with growing evidence for mediation mechanisms linking these

constructs. Job-related affective well-being is examined through Warr's (1990) circumplex model, which positions workplace emotions along two orthogonal dimensions: anxiety-contentment and depression-enthusiasm. These dimensions reflect arousal-related and pleasure-related affect, respectively, with job demands typically increasing negative affect while insufficient resources undermine positive affect (Huang et al., 2019). Extensive international validation studies confirm the psychometric soundness of Warr's scales across diverse occupational contexts (Satuf et al., 2018). While research demonstrates that affective states predict burnout (Yu et al., 2022) and that interpersonal conflict mediates relationships between organizational factors and burnout (Maidaniuc-Chirila & Constantin, 2016), few studies integrate these constructs within a unified mediation framework. Despite substantial international research, several gaps remain. Most studies examine simple mediation models without integrating both dimensions of Warr's affective well-being framework as simultaneous predictors of burnout dimensions with interpersonal conflict as an explicit mediator. Romanian research has contributed valuable insights through two complementary theoretical perspectives: the Job Demands-Resources model and Conservation of Resources theory (Virgă et al., 2020; Okros & Virgă, 2022), but has not specifically examined Warr's two-dimensional affective well-being framework or tested interpersonal conflict as a mediator between affective states and burnout dimensions.

The Romanian occupational context presents unique characteristics warranting specific investigation. Post-communist organizational cultures, evolving labour market conditions, and distinctive workplace relationship patterns may influence how affective well-being, interpersonal conflict, and burnout interrelate (Maidaniuc-Chirila & Constantin, 2016). Maidaniuc-Chirila & Constantin (2016) provided initial evidence that workplace conflicts mediate organizational climate-burnout relationships among Romanian university employees, but did not examine affective well-being dimensions or distinguish between emotional exhaustion and professional inefficacy as distinct outcomes. Moreover, psychometric validation of key measurement instruments in Romanian samples remains limited, creating uncertainty about the cross-cultural applicability of findings from Western contexts.

The present study addresses these gaps by examining how job-related affective well-being dimensions (anxiety-contentment and depression-enthusiasm) influence burnout outcomes (emotional exhaustion and professional inefficacy) through the mediating mechanism of interpersonal conflict at work.

2. Research Methodology

Drawing on data from 640 Romanian employees across diverse organizational settings, this study tests a comprehensive mediation model that integrates affective well-being, interpersonal conflict, and burnout within the theoretical frameworks of Conservation of Resources theory and the Job Demands-Resources model. By elucidating the pathways through which workplace emotions and interpersonal dynamics combine to produce burnout, this research contributes to both theoretical understanding and practical intervention development for promoting employee well-being in contemporary Romanian organizations.

The primary data were collected through a survey of Romanian employees and analysed using the open-source software JASP. The questionnaire combined Job-related Anxiety-Contentment and Job-related Depression-Enthusiasm Scale with 2 dimensions, Anxiety-Contentment and Depression-Enthusiasm, with 12 items (6 per dimension) (Warr, 1990), Interpersonal Conflict At Work Scale (ICAWS) with 1 dimension of 4 items (Spector & Jex, 1998), and from the Maslach Burnout Inventory - General Survey (Maslach et al., 1996), Emotional Exhaustion and Professional Inefficacy. To these items were added several socio-demographic variables. The dimensions were measured using the 5 Likert scale.

3. Results and Discussions

The study sample consisted of 640 Romanian employees, whose demographic characteristics are summarized in Table 1. Female respondents constituted the majority of the sample (65.90%). With respect to age distribution, young adults between 18 and 25 years represented the largest cohort (45.90%). In terms of educational attainment, university graduates accounted for the highest proportion of respondents (40.50%), while more than half reported not being currently enrolled in further education (54.40%). Regarding employment conditions, the majority of participants were engaged under standard full-time contracts of eight working hours per day (76.90%).

Data analysis was carried out using a multi-step analytical approach. *Bivariate correlations* were first computed to explore associations among the study variables. *Hierarchical linear regression analyses* were subsequently conducted to determine the incremental variance explained by each set of predictors. Finally, a *path analysis-based mediation model* was tested to assess the indirect pathways through which affective well-being dimensions influence burnout outcomes via interpersonal conflict at work.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	422	65.90
	Male	208	32.50
	Other	3	0.50
	No answer	7	1.10
Age	18-25 years	294	45.90
	26-35 years	150	23.40
	36-45 years	88	13.80
	46-55 years	81	12.70
	over 55 years	27	4.20
Completed Study	High school	162	25.30
	College	57	8.90
	University	259	40.50
	Master's	149	23.30
	Doctorate	13	2.00
Studying Now	Not studying	348	54.40
	College	12	1.90
	Undergraduate	168	26.30
	Master's	99	15.50
	Doctorate	13	2.00
Contract Daily Working Hours	8 hours/day	492	76.90
	6 hours/day	87	13.60
	4 hours/day	52	8.10
	2 hours/day	9	1.40
Working Years	0-5 years	348	54.40
	6-10 years	81	12.70
	11-15 years	58	9.10
	over 15 years	153	23.90
Managerial Position	Non-managerial position	447	69.80
	Managerial position	193	30.20

Source: Authors' compilation

Bivariate Correlations (Pearson's r)

The bivariate correlation reveals significant relationships among workplace well-being variables. Anxiety-Contentment and Depression-Enthusiasm demonstrate a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.785$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting these emotional states co-vary substantially. Negative workplace experiences show expected patterns: Interpersonal Conflict at Work correlates negatively

with positive states like Anxiety-Contentment ($r = -0.460$) and Depression-Enthusiasm ($r = -0.530$), while correlating positively with burnout dimensions including Professional Inefficacy ($r = 0.529$) and Emotional Exhaustion ($r = 0.466$). The burnout components themselves are moderately intercorrelated ($r = 0.549$) between Emotional Exhaustion and Professional Inefficacy (Table 2).

Table 2: Bivariate Correlations among Study Variables (N = 640)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Anxiety-Contentment	—				
2. Depression-Enthusiasm	.785**	—			
3. Interpersonal Conflict at Work	-.460**	-.530**	—		
4. Emotional Exhaustion	-.644**	-.626**	.466**	—	
5. Professional Inefficacy	-.441**	-.527**	.529**	.549**	—

Note. ** $p < .001$ (2-tailed).

Source: Authors' compilation

All correlations achieved statistical significance at $p < 0.001$, demonstrating robust relationships among psychological well-being, burnout symptoms, and interpersonal conflicts in this occupational sample.

Hierarchical Linear Regressions

Two hierarchical regression analyses were performed to examine whether interpersonal conflict at work explained additional variance in Emotional Exhaustion and Professional Inefficacy beyond that accounted for by Depression-Enthusiasm and Anxiety-Contentment (Table 3).

The first hierarchical linear regression analysis was conducted to examine whether Interpersonal Conflict At Work contributed additional variance to Emotional-Exhaustion beyond the effects of Depression-Enthusiasm and Anxiety-Contentment. The initial model (M_0) included Depression-Enthusiasm and Anxiety-Contentment as predictors and explained 45.3% of the variance in emotional exhaustion, with both variables showing significant negative associations. When Interpersonal Conflict at Work was

added in the second model (M_1), the model fit improved significantly, explaining 47.1% of the variance. In this expanded model, all three predictors remained significant: Depression-Enthusiasm ($\beta=-0.244$, $t=-4.998$, $p<.001$, 95% CI [-0.422, -0.184]), Anxiety-Contentment ($\beta=-0.377$, $t=-8.078$, $p<.001$, 95% CI [-0.615, -0.375]), and Interpersonal Conflict ($\beta=0.163$, $t=4.772$, $p<.001$, 95% CI [0.149, 0.357]). These findings indicate that Interpersonal Conflict makes a unique positive contribution to Emotional Exhaustion even after accounting for affective well-being dimensions, suggesting that workplace relational difficulties represent an independent risk factor for burnout. Collinearity diagnostics showed acceptable tolerance values (ranging from 0.348 to 0.714) and VIF scores (1.401 to 2.875), and no influential cases were detected.

The second hierarchical regression analysis examined the extent to which affective well-being dimensions and interpersonal conflict at work predicted professional inefficacy. Model 0, comprising Depression-Enthusiasm and Anxiety-Contentment as predictors, explained 28.0% of the variance in Professional Inefficacy. Among the entered predictors, Depression-Enthusiasm was a significant negative predictor, such that greater Enthusiasm was associated with lower levels of perceived Professional Inefficacy. In contrast, Anxiety-Contentment failed to reach statistical significance. The addition of Interpersonal Conflict at Work in Model 1 yielded a significant increase in explained variance, with the final model accounting for 36.4% of the variance in Professional Inefficacy. Interpersonal Conflict at Work was a significant positive predictor, indicating that employees experiencing greater levels of workplace conflict reported higher degrees of Professional Inefficacy. The predictive contribution of Depression-Enthusiasm remained statistically significant, while Anxiety-Contentment continued to exert a non-significant effect. Assessment of multicollinearity revealed no cause for concern, as VIF values ranged from 1.40 to 2.88, substantially below the threshold of 10 commonly cited in methodological literature. These findings suggest that while emotional well-being matters, workplace interpersonal dynamics play a particularly crucial role in determining Professional Inefficacy, adding substantial explanatory power beyond emotional state alone.

Table 3: Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Emotional Exhaustion and Professional Inefficacy

Predictor	Emotional Exhaustion	Professional Inefficacy	VIF
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	Model 0	Model 1	Model 0	Model 1	
Depression-Enthusiasm	-0.392** *	-0.303** *	-0.472** *	-0.320** *	2.88/2.88
Anxiety-Contentment	-0.519** *	-0.495** *	-0.070	-0.031	2.62/2.62
Interpersonal Conflict at Work	—	0.253***	—	0.345***	1.40/1.40
R^2	.453	.471	.280	.364	
Adjusted R^2	.451	.469	.277	.361	
ΔR^2	.453***	.019***	.280***	.085***	
F	263.30** *	189.10** *	123.60** *	121.60** *	

Note. $N = 640$. Standardized regression coefficients (β) are reported. VIF values are shown for Model 1 (Emotional Exhaustion) / Model 1 (Professional Inefficacy). Model 0 includes Depression-Enthusiasm and Anxiety-Contentment for both outcomes. Model 1 adds Interpersonal Conflict at Work.

Source: Authors' compilation

The models demonstrated sound statistical properties with no multicollinearity concerns ($VIF < 3$) and no influential outliers, supporting the reliability of these results.

Mediation Model Results: Description and Discussion

A mediation model was tested using path analysis with maximum likelihood estimation, in which Interpersonal Conflict at Work (ICA) was specified as a mediator of the relationships between the two affective well-being dimensions, Depression-Enthusiasm (DpE) and Anxiety-Contentment (AnC), and burnout outcomes, namely Emotional Exhaustion (EmE) and Professional Inefficacy (PrI). The analysis was achieved using structural equation modeling with maximum likelihood estimation and bias-corrected percentile bootstrap confidence intervals based on 10,000 replications, a methodologically rigorous approach recommended for mediation analysis. The structural equations were defined accordingly, with e

representing the error terms associated with each endogenous variable, a coefficients reflecting predictor-to-mediator effects, b coefficients denoting mediator-to-outcome effects, and c coefficients indicating direct predictor-to-outcome effects:

Mediator Equation:	
(1)	$ICA = a_1(DpE) + a_2(AnC) + e_1$
Outcome Equations:	
(2)	$EmE = b_1(ICA) + c_1(DpE) + c_2(AnC) + e_2$
(3)	$PrI = b_2(ICA) + c_3(DpE) + c_4(AnC) + e_3$
Residual Covariance:	
(4)	$EmE \leftrightarrow PrI$
Indirect Effects:	
(5)	$DpE \rightarrow ICA \rightarrow EmE = a_1b_1$
(6)	$AnC \rightarrow ICA \rightarrow EmE = a_2b_1$
(7)	$DpE \rightarrow ICA \rightarrow PrI = a_1b_2$
(8)	$AnC \rightarrow ICA \rightarrow PrI = a_2b_2$

A residual covariance was estimated between EmE and PrI. In the equations above, indirect effects are obtained as the product of their respective a and b coefficients.

The mediation model demonstrated adequate explanatory power across all endogenous variables, accounting for 47.1% of the variance in Emotional Exhaustion, 36.4% in Professional Inefficacy, and 28.6% in Interpersonal Conflict at Work. Furthermore, a significant residual covariance was detected between Emotional Exhaustion and Professional Inefficacy ($r = .290, p < .001$), suggesting the presence of shared variance attributable to factors beyond those explicitly modeled (Figure 1 and Table 4).

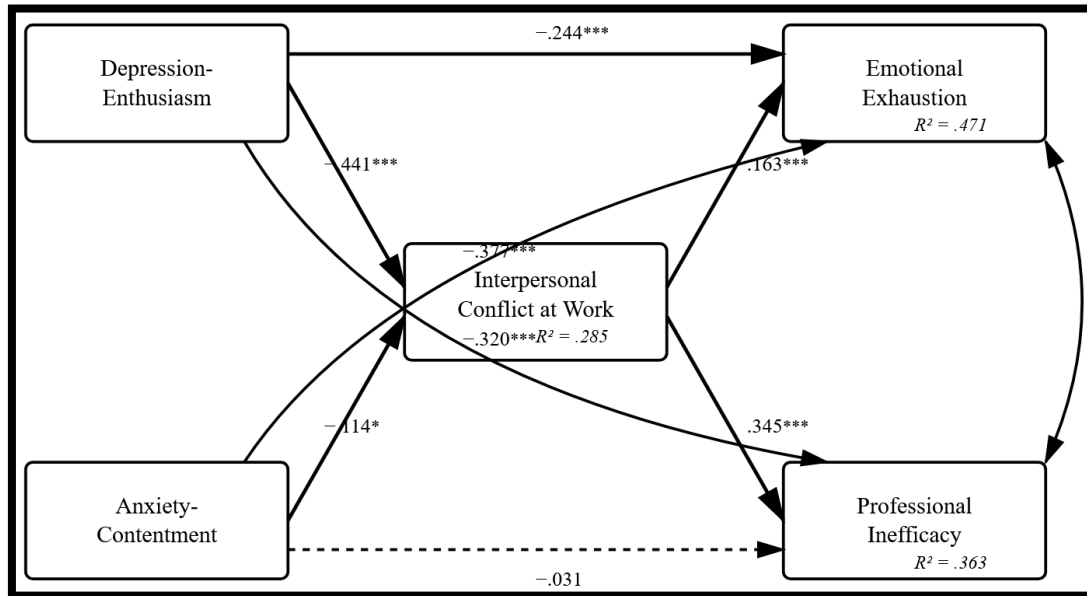


Figure 1: Mediation Model Path Diagram

Note: Standardised coefficients shown. Dashed line = non-significant path. $*p < 0.05$, $***p < 0.001$.

Source: Authors' compilation

Both affective dimensions significantly predict Interpersonal Conflict at Work. Depression-Enthusiasm demonstrated a strong negative association ($\beta = -0.441$, $p < .001$), indicating that lower levels of enthusiasm and higher depression were linked with greater Interpersonal Conflict. Anxiety-Contentment also showed a significant negative relationship ($\beta = -0.114$, $p = .035$), though the effect was considerably smaller in magnitude.

Table 4: Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects of Depression-Enthusiasm and Anxiety-Contentment on Emotional Exhaustion and Professional Inefficacy via Interpersonal Conflict at Work

Path	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	95% CI
Emotional Exhaustion				
Depression-Enthusiasm	-0.244***	-0.072***	-0.316***	[-0.106, -0.038]
Anxiety-Contentment	-0.377***	-0.018	-0.395***	[-0.037, 0.000]
Professional Inefficacy				

Depression-Enthusiasm	-0.320***	-0.152***	-0.472***	[-0.199, -0.105]
Anxiety-Contentment	-0.031	-0.039*	-0.070	[-0.076, -0.002]
<i>R</i> ² Emotional Exhaustion	.471			
<i>R</i> ² Professional Inefficacy	.364			
<i>R</i> ² Interpersonal Conflict at Work	.286			

Note. $N = 640$. All values are standardized coefficients. CI = confidence interval for indirect effects. The residual covariance between Emotional Exhaustion and Professional Inefficacy was .290 ($p < .001$).

Path coefficients:

Depression-Enthusiasm \rightarrow Interpersonal Conflict at Work = -0.441^{***} ,

Anxiety-Contentment \rightarrow Interpersonal Conflict at Work = -0.114^* ,

Interpersonal Conflict at Work \rightarrow Emotional Exhaustion = 0.163^{***} ,

Interpersonal Conflict at Work \rightarrow Professional Inefficacy = 0.345^{***} .

* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Source: Authors' compilation

The relationship between Depression-Enthusiasm and Emotional Exhaustion was characterized by partial mediation through Interpersonal Conflict at Work, with both the direct and indirect effects attaining statistical significance. The magnitude of the total effect was substantial, indicating that Depression-Enthusiasm influences Emotional Exhaustion via two distinct mechanisms, a direct pathway and an indirect pathway operating through its impact on interpersonal workplace conflict.

In contrast, the relationship between Anxiety-Contentment and Emotional Exhaustion followed a direct-only pattern. The direct effect was strong and statistically significant, representing the largest single path coefficient in the model. The indirect effect through Interpersonal Conflict at Work did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance, although it approached marginal significance. Notwithstanding, the total effect remained robust, underscoring the prominent role of Anxiety-Contentment as a direct predictor of Emotional Exhaustion.

Consistent with the pattern observed for Emotional Exhaustion, the relationship between Depression-Enthusiasm and Professional Inefficacy demonstrated partial mediation through Interpersonal Conflict at Work, with both direct and indirect effects reaching statistical significance. Of particular note, the indirect effect through Interpersonal Conflict was more than twice the magnitude observed for Emotional Exhaustion, suggesting that Interpersonal Conflict at Work plays a comparatively more prominent role in transmitting the influence of Depression-Enthusiasm onto feelings of Professional Inefficacy. The total effect of this pathway was the strongest in the model.

Most notably, Anxiety-Contentment exhibited full mediation through Interpersonal Conflict at Work in predicting Professional Inefficacy. The direct effect failed to reach statistical significance, whereas the indirect effect through Interpersonal Conflict was significant. Correspondingly, the total effect was also non-significant, indicating that the relationship between Anxiety-Contentment and Professional Inefficacy operates exclusively through its impact on Interpersonal Conflict at Work, with no evidence of a residual direct influence.

Interpersonal Conflict at Work emerged as a significant predictor of both burnout dimensions. The path coefficient linking interpersonal conflict to Emotional Exhaustion was positive and statistically significant. The corresponding coefficient for Professional Inefficacy was notably stronger, suggesting that Interpersonal Conflict at Work maintains a more pronounced association with diminished feelings of Professional Efficacy than with Emotional Exhaustion per se.

Taken together, these findings underscore the differential role of Interpersonal Conflict as a mechanism through which affective well-being dimensions exert their influence on distinct facets of burnout.

One of the most theoretically interesting findings is the differential mediation pattern observed for Anxiety-Contentment across the two burnout dimensions. While Anxiety-Contentment showed only a direct effect on Emotional Exhaustion (no significant indirect effect through conflict), it demonstrated complete mediation through Interpersonal Conflict in predicting Professional Inefficacy. This pattern suggests that the mechanisms through which Anxiety-Contentment influences different burnout dimensions are qualitatively distinct.

The strong direct effect of Anxiety-Contentment on emotional exhaustion ($\beta = -0.377$) without significant mediation through Interpersonal Conflict suggests that anxiety and lack of contentment may directly deplete emotional resources through physiological and cognitive mechanisms rather than primarily through interpersonal pathways. This is consistent with research showing that anxiety and negative affective states are directly

associated with emotional exhaustion through mechanisms such as rumination, heightened physiological arousal, and cognitive depletion (Qin et al., 2023).

In contrast, the complete mediation pattern for professional inefficacy suggests that anxiety-contentment influences feelings of professional competence primarily through its impact on interpersonal relationships at work. When individuals experience anxiety and low contentment, they may be more likely to experience or perceive interpersonal conflict, which in turn undermines their sense of professional efficacy (Fujiwara et al., 2003; Maidaniuc-Chirila & Constantin, 2016). This finding aligns with social-cognitive theories of self-efficacy, which emphasize the importance of social support and positive interpersonal interactions in maintaining beliefs about one's professional competence (Fox et al., 2001). The absence of a significant direct effect indicates that, once interpersonal conflict is accounted for, anxiety-contentment has no additional independent influence on professional inefficacy.

The direct effects may reflect cognitive pathways through which depression and low enthusiasm directly deplete energy and undermine efficacy beliefs (Qin et al., 2023; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). The indirect effects through interpersonal conflict suggest that these affective states also create or exacerbate interpersonal difficulties, which further contribute to burnout (Fox et al., 2001; Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

The present outcomes extend the literature by demonstrating that Interpersonal Conflict at Work mediates relationships not only from external stressors but also from internal affective states (Spector & Jex, 1998). The model explained 28.6% of the variance in interpersonal conflict, suggesting that affective states are important but not exclusive predictors of workplace conflict. Other organizational and individual factors likely contribute to the remaining variance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Demerouti et al., 2001; Hobfoll, 1989).

The findings have several practical implications for organizational interventions aimed at preventing burnout. First, the identification of interpersonal conflict as a key mediating mechanism suggests that interventions targeting conflict resolution, communication skills, and positive workplace relationships may be effective in reducing burnout, particularly professional inefficacy. Second, the differential patterns for anxiety-contentment suggest that interventions addressing anxiety may need to target both interpersonal processes (to reduce professional inefficacy) and individual coping strategies (to reduce emotional exhaustion). Third, the substantial variance explained in emotional exhaustion (47.1%) and professional inefficacy (36.4%) indicates that affective states and

interpersonal conflict are important but not exclusive contributors to burnout, highlighting the need for comprehensive, multi-level interventions.

4. Conclusions

This research investigated the mediating role of Interpersonal Conflict at Work in the relationships between job-related affective well-being dimensions (Anxiety-Contentment and Depression-Enthusiasm) and burnout components (Emotional Exhaustion and Professional Inefficacy) among 640 Romanian employees. Grounded in Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and the Job Demands-Resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001), the findings demonstrate that interpersonal conflict functions as a critical transmission mechanism through which internal affective states influence burnout outcomes, with distinct mediation patterns emerging across affective-burnout pathways.

Depression-Enthusiasm demonstrated partial mediation for both burnout dimensions, indicating that low enthusiasm and depressive affect operate through dual pathways: directly depleting psychological resources and indirectly exacerbating burnout through increased Interpersonal Conflict. The significant direct effects ($\beta = -0.244^{***}$ for Emotional Exhaustion; $\beta = -0.320^{***}$ for Professional Inefficacy) alongside significant indirect effects ($\beta = -0.072^{***}$ and $\beta = -0.152^{***}$, respectively) suggest that depressive affective states simultaneously drain energy reserves and create interpersonal difficulties that compound burnout (Qin et al., 2023; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007).

Anxiety-Contentment exhibited divergent patterns across burnout dimensions. For Emotional Exhaustion, only direct effects emerged ($\beta = -0.377^{***}$), suggesting that anxiety and low contentment deplete emotional energy through immediate physiological and cognitive arousal processes, independent of interpersonal dynamics (Yu et al., 2022). In contrast, the complete mediation pattern for Professional Inefficacy suggests that Anxiety-Contentment influences feelings of professional competence primarily through its impact on interpersonal relationships at work. When individuals experience anxiety and low contentment, they may be more likely to experience or perceive interpersonal conflict, which in turn undermines their sense of professional efficacy (Fujiwara et al., 2003; Maidaniuc-Chirila & Constantin, 2016). This finding aligns with social-cognitive theories of self-efficacy, which emphasize the importance of social support and positive interpersonal interactions in maintaining beliefs about one's professional competence (Fox et al., 2001). The absence of a significant direct effect indicates that, once Interpersonal Conflict is accounted for, Anxiety-Contentment has no additional independent influence on Professional Inefficacy.

The direct effects may reflect cognitive pathways through which depression and low enthusiasm directly deplete energy and undermine efficacy beliefs (Qin et al., 2023; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). The indirect effects through Interpersonal Conflict suggest that these affective states also create or exacerbate interpersonal difficulties, which further contribute to burnout (Fox et al., 2001; Maslach & Leiter, 2016). The present outcomes extend the literature by demonstrating that Interpersonal Conflict at Work mediates relationships not only from external stressors but also from internal affective states (Spector & Jex, 1998). The model explained 28.6% of the variance in interpersonal conflict, suggesting that affective states are important but not exclusive predictors of workplace conflict, with other organizational and individual factors likely contributing to the remaining variance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Hobfoll, 1989).

The stronger effect of Interpersonal Conflict on Professional Inefficacy ($\beta = 0.345^{***}$) compared to Emotional Exhaustion ($\beta = 0.163^{***}$) underscores the particularly damaging impact of workplace relationship difficulties on competence perceptions, consistent with social-cognitive frameworks emphasizing that professional self-efficacy depends heavily on social feedback and collaborative success experiences (Fox et al., 2001).

These findings carry significant practical implications. Effective burnout prevention interventions must be multifaceted, targeting both affective states and interpersonal dynamics. Organizations should implement conflict resolution training, mediation services, and team-building initiatives to reduce interpersonal strain (Maidaniuc-Chirila & Constantin, 2016; Virgă et al., 2020). Anxiety management programs, such as mindfulness, stress inoculation, and cognitive-behavioral approaches, may directly reduce emotional exhaustion while also protecting professional efficacy by preventing conflict escalation (Yu et al., 2022). For depression-related affective states, approaches addressing both individual psychological support and workplace social climate appear necessary, given the dual pathways identified.

Several limitations vindicate consideration. The single-timepoint design limits causal conclusions; longitudinal studies are needed to clarify the direction of the relationship between burnout and well-being. Using only self-reported data may compromise the objectivity of the findings; thus, future studies should incorporate objective conflict indicators and physiological exhaustion markers. The Romanian cultural context may limit generalizability, as post-communist organizational cultures may shape conflict-burnout dynamics differently than Western contexts (Okros & Virgă, 2022), making cross-cultural replication essential. Future research should also explore moderators such as psychological capital and organizational justice climate

(Virgã et al., 2020), and examine whether mediation patterns differ across high-stress occupational groups such as healthcare and education.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that Interpersonal Conflict at Work serves as a critical psychological mechanism through which job-related affective states influence burnout, with theoretically meaningful differential pathways for Anxiety-Contentment versus Depression-Enthusiasm and for Emotional Exhaustion versus Professional Inefficacy. The findings advance understanding of resource depletion processes and provide actionable insights for organizational interventions. Addressing both individual affective well-being and workplace interpersonal climate is essential for comprehensive burnout prevention in contemporary organizations.

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