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Beyond the Usual Suspects: Job Desperation as a Driver of Turnover Intention and Job Search Behaviour

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Article abstract

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Beyond the Usual Suspects: Job Desperation as a Driver of Turnover Intention and Job Search Behaviour

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Abstract

Workers may experience job desperation, characterized by frustration, pressure to quit and readiness to take extreme steps to secure a new job position. We examined the psychometric properties of a French-language version of the Job Desperation Scale by administering a survey to three independent cohorts of French-speaking employees, with a view to assessing the antecedents of job search behaviour and intention to quit. The first (n = 253) and second (n = 184) cohorts, composed of employees from France and Canada respectively, responded to the survey for the exploratory and confirmatory stages of analysis. The third sample (n = 252) of French employees responded both to the survey and to additional measures that typically identify antecedents of job search behaviour and turnover intention. The findings confirm the single-factor structure and robustness of the French-language version. More importantly, they show the substantial and incremental predictive power of job desperation in explaining job search behaviour and turnover intention. These insights help explain job desperation as a critical factor in contemporary labour markets and contribute to the vocational behaviour literature.

Keywords: job desperation; liquid society; organismic integration theory; France; Canada; job search behaviour; intention to quit; vocational behaviour; employee turnover

Résumé

Les travailleurs peuvent éprouver un sentiment de **désespoir professionnel**, caractérisé par de la frustration, une pression à quitter leur emploi et une disposition à recourir à des mesures extrêmes pour obtenir un nouveau poste. Premièrement, cette étude examine les propriétés psychométriques d'une version française de l'**Échelle du désespoir professionnel** (*Job Desperation Scale*). Deuxièmement, à partir de trois échantillons indépendants de salariés francophones, elle analyse les antécédents du comportement de recherche d'emploi et de l'intention de quitter l'organisation. Le premier échantillon (n = 253) et le deuxième (n = 184), composés respectivement de salariés de France et du Canada, ont complété la version traduite de l'échelle afin d'appuyer les étapes exploratoires et confirmatoires. Le troisième échantillon (n = 252), constitué de salariés français, a complété l'Échelle du désespoir professionnel en français ainsi que d'autres mesures généralement identifiées comme des antécédents du comportement de

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recherche d’emploi et de l’intention de départ. Les résultats confirment la structure unifactorielle et la robustesse de la version française de l’échelle. Plus important encore, ils mettent en évidence la puissance prédictive substantielle et additionnelle du désespoir professionnel dans l’explication du comportement de recherche d’emploi et de l’intention de quitter. Ces résultats renforcent la compréhension du désespoir professionnel comme un facteur critique des marchés du travail contemporains et contribuent à la littérature sur les comportements vocationnel.

1. Introduction

An increasing number of workers feel trapped in unfulfilling jobs. According to the Direction de l'Animation de la Recherche (DARES, 2023), 39% of French regular employees are dissatisfied with their work life, a figure that rises to 86% among temporary workers. Discontent is particularly acute among younger employees, with 51% reporting unhappiness. Such statistics suggest a mounting crisis of workplace disillusionment beyond mere dissatisfaction or fleeting disengagement. A similar pattern can be observed in the broader French-speaking world, notably in Quebec, where employee retention remains a key priority of employers (St-Denis, 2023). An OSMET study at the Université de Montréal from 2021 to 2023 found that over 38% of workers experienced psychological distress, around 25% reported burnout and 12% to 15.9% had symptoms of depression or anxiety, with young adults aged 18 to 34 being the most affected (OSMET, 2023). Moreover, a 2023 ASPQLéger survey reported that 54% of Quebeckers (54%)—and even more among youth, parents and students—wish they could slow down, a sign of systemic pace-related strain. These findings suggest that labour market resilience is coexisting with deep-seated stress.

A key concept has received recent attention in organizational research: job desperation. First introduced by Stevenor and Zickar (2023), it captures a state of urgency, frustration and perceived entrapment experienced by individuals who feel compelled to escape their current job at all costs. Unlike job dissatisfaction, where employees may grumble but remain in place, job desperation fuels action, often prompting workers to resign abruptly or even make suboptimal career choices. This extreme psychological tipping point distinguishes job desperation from traditional antecedents of turnover, such as job dissatisfaction or burnout.

The term “desperation” requires critical reflection. It carries potential moral and stigmatizing undertones, suggesting irrationality or lack of resilience. It risks casting employees as being deficient rather than situating their experiences within the structural and organizational context (Haslam, 2006). For this study, we deliberately employ it as a neutral analytical construct, rather than as a moral label, to describe the intensity of psychological urgency that compels an exit. Theoretically, its scope overlaps with, but is distinct from, other extreme states. Unlike “moral distress,” which arises when employees know the right course of action but feel constrained from acting (Jameton, 1984), desperation is not necessarily rooted in ethical conflict. Similarly, unlike “helplessness,” which implies passivity and resignation (Seligman, 1972), desperation is inherently action-oriented; it mobilizes employees to escape, sometimes at personal or professional cost. By clarifying these boundaries, we avoid conceptual slippage and highlight the distinctness of job desperation.

Existing turnover models suggest that job search behaviour is the primary mechanism through which employees transition from intention to action (Blau, 1993; Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000). However, research has largely overlooked the conditions under which dissatisfaction intensifies into an urgent drive to leave. Traditional models, such as Mobley’s (1977) turnover process and Lee and Mitchell’s (1994) unfolding model, emphasize rational decision-making and job alternatives but fail to capture the emotional volatility of job desperation. The literature also suggests that not all voluntary turnover follows the standard pathway from dissatisfaction to job search to exit; instead, unplanned departures driven by desperation can bypass typical decision-making (Lee, Mitchell, Wise, & Fireman, 1996).

Our study builds upon Stevenor and Zickar’s (2023) seminal findings by proposing job desperation as a distinct and robust predictor of turnover intention and job search behaviour. While turnover intention reflects an employee’s cognitive decision to leave, job search behaviour represents the action-oriented phase that leads to voluntary turnover. Although prior research has confirmed the

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link between the two (Blau, 2006; Wandycz-Mejias et al., 2024), the role of job desperation has been little studied as a catalyst that transforms passive dissatisfaction into active job-seeking. By validating a French version of the Job Desperation Scale and empirically testing its relationship to turnover intention and job search behaviour, we advance understanding of the psychological mechanisms that drive the intention to leave. In doing so, we challenge existing models and offer a fresh perspective on why employees leave—and how an organization might intervene before they reach the point of desperation.

2. Theoretical Background

Unlike job dissatisfaction, which may persist without immediate action, job desperation is a state of urgency where employees feel they must escape their current job at any cost (Stevenor & Zickar, 2023). Theoretically, Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and its Organismic Integration Theory (OIT) subcomponent provide a compelling lens for study, positioning job desperation within a framework of controlled motivation where an intense desire to leave is driven by external pressures, such as financial insecurity, toxic work conditions or career stagnation. OIT aligns with Proximal Withdrawal States Theory (Hom et al., 2012), and this alignment suggests that turnover intention varies in intensity, with some employees feeling reluctant to leave while others, in a state of desperation, perceive departure as an imperative rather than a choice (Holtrop et al., 2024). Moreover, Blau's (1993) job search model differentiates between preparatory and active job search, where desperation catalyzes a shift in employee behaviour from passive browsing to full-scale job-seeking (van Hooft et al., 2004). Unlike rational turnover models (Mobley, 1977; Lee & Mitchell, 1994), which assume deliberate, stepwise decision-making, job desperation short-circuits cognitive deliberation, intensifying both the intention to quit and the likelihood of job search behaviour beyond what dissatisfaction alone can explain. Empirical findings indicate that job desperation explains unique variance in turnover intention and job search behaviour, even when the researcher controls for such traditional predictors as job dissatisfaction and financial strain (Rubenstein et al., 2017).

Furthermore, turnover contagion theory (Hekman et al., 2009) suggests that exposure to coworkers in distress can amplify one's sense of urgency, thereby fueling exit intentions. In French and Canadian labour markets, where employee dissatisfaction is surging, job desperation provides a missing explanation as to why some employees tolerate dissatisfaction while others act swiftly to escape. By investigating job desperation as a distinct antecedent of turnover intention and job search, we hope to advance turnover theory and offer practical insights for organizations that wish to mitigate the risk of desperate departures.

3. The Growing Relevance of Job Desperation

The concept of job desperation aligns with increasing interest in understanding how employees respond to workplace adversity, particularly in modern, unstable labour markets. It has become increasingly relevant to understanding of contemporary "liquid" labour markets (Bauman, 2000) and the "Great Resignation" (Klotz & Bolino, 2016). Desperation has risen across industries because of the instability and impermanence of employment relationships, combined with employees' reassessment of their priorities for work life and well-being during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. This desperation is no longer solely financial but reflects a broader struggle for autonomy, well-being and fulfillment at work (Singh & Loncar, 2010; Ng & Stanton, 2023).

3.1 Psychometric Properties of the Job Desperation Scale (JD-Fr)

We must accurately measure job desperation to understand how it impacts employee behaviour. As a distinct psychological construct, it captures a sense of urgency and distress beyond general job dissatisfaction, job insecurity or burnout. A precise and reliable measuring tool is needed. Although Stevenor and Zickar (2023) introduced the original Job Desperation Scale, its applicability across different cultural and linguistic contexts remains untested, thus raising the need for a validated French version (JD-Fr). Therefore, for theoretical and practical purposes, we wish to determine whether the JD-Fr has the same psychometric validity in a French-language context. Validation of the JD-Fr must show its original unidimensionality, internal consistency and reliability, in line with best practices in scale adaptation and measurement equivalence (Rubenstein et al., 2017). Moreover, previous research on turnover antecedents has shown that measurement accuracy is crucial to distinguish between passively dissatisfied employees and those who are desperate to leave (Blau, 1993; Hom et al., 2012). To ensure that the JD-Fr captures job desperation among French-speaking individuals, we sought to confirm that it retains its theoretical integrity, high internal consistency and strong psychometric robustness. To this end, we propose the following hypothesis:

> **Hypothesis 1:** The JD-Fr is a unidimensional construct with strong psychometric properties, including high internal consistency and reliability among French-speaking individuals.

3.2 Antecedents of Turnover Intention and Job Search Behaviour

While traditional models of voluntary turnover emphasize rational decision-making and availability of job alternatives (Mobley, 1977), emerging research shows that employees often leave not because they desire a better job, but because they feel compelled to escape an unbearable situation (Stevenor & Zickar, 2023).

First, meta-analyses from the withdrawal and turnover literature have identified the most robust predictors of intention to quit and job search behaviour. Emotional exhaustion strongly correlates with turnover intention, as evidenced by more than 231 independent samples (Alarcon, 2011). Perceptions of unfair treatment are significantly associated with withdrawal cognition (Colquitt et al., 2001; 2013). Organizational self-esteem has been confirmed as a decisive protective factor, with low self-esteem reliably predicting turnover intention (Bowling et al., 2010). Job insecurity is a critical driver of withdrawal across diverse contexts (Sverke et al., 2002). Social dynamics, particularly coworker relationships, are crucial in influencing commitment and turnover-related attitudes (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008). Financial strain and compensation issues are distal yet powerful stressors according to large-scale reviews of turnover antecedents (Rubenstein et al., 2017). Lastly, insufficient workplace well-being and insufficient resources reliably predict higher withdrawal intentions and job search behaviours (Lesener et al., 2019).

Second, existing organizational psychology theories provide a strong foundation for understanding how specific workplace stressors push employees toward turnover intention and job search behaviour. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001) shows that emotional exhaustion impairs employees' ability to cope with workplace stressors, thereby increasing their desire to leave and prompting desperate job-seeking (Alarcon, 2011). Organizational Justice Theory (Colquitt, 2013) suggests that perceptions of unfair treatment erode trust, intensify workplace dissatisfaction and push employees toward withdrawal intentions and active job searches (Greenberg & Colquitt, 2013).

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) explains how low organizational self-esteem exacerbates job dissatisfaction, particularly when employees feel undervalued or misaligned with their organization, thus strengthening their need to escape through job search and turnover

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intentions (Pierce & Gardner, 2004). Similarly, Job Insecurity Theory (De Witte, 1999) presents job uncertainty as a key driver of turnover intention and job search behaviour, as employees experiencing fear of job loss engage in proactive exit strategies to regain control over their employment situation (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2006).

Workplace social dynamics also play a crucial role. Poor relationships with coworkers increase stress and emotional exhaustion, thereby reducing organizational commitment and triggering turnover intention and active job search (Rhee et al., 2017). Financial resources are another critical determinant. When employees experience economic instability, they may feel financially trapped and intensify their job search, whereas greater financial stability provides a buffer against turnover pressures (Chen et al., 2023). Finally, workplace well-being, including autonomy, supportive leadership and a positive work environment, is a protective factor that reduces the sense of entrapment and mitigates the likelihood of turnover and job search (Lesener et al., 2019; Chia, 2024).

Beyond these workplace stressors, job desperation has emerged as a key driver of turnover intention and job search behaviour (Stevenor & Zickar, 2023). Unlike job dissatisfaction, which can persist for years without action, job desperation is an emotionally charged state that transforms passive frustration into an immediate need to escape.

Theoretically, Proximal Withdrawal States Theory (Hom et al., 2012) suggests that not all dissatisfied employees develop turnover intentions, and not all who intend to leave act on such intentions. However, employees experiencing high levels of desperation are far more likely to progress from merely intending to actively searching for a job. These observations align with Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), which suggests that intense negative emotional experiences prompt employees to make impulsive, emotion-driven decisions, such as the urgent need to leave a job. Moreover, van Hooft et al. (2004) and Blau (1993) found that job search behaviour is influenced by dissatisfaction and high-arousal emotions that drive immediate action. Given the urgency embedded in job desperation, we posit that its effect on turnover intention and job search behaviour is incremental and goes beyond the effects of traditional workplace stressors.

In sum, we propose that turnover intention is positively predicted by emotional exhaustion (H2a), perceptions of unfair treatment (H2b), low organizational self-esteem (H2c), job uncertainty (H2d), poor relationships with coworkers (H2e), limited financial resources (H2f) and low workplace well-being (H2g). Similarly, job search behaviour is positively predicted by emotional exhaustion (H3a), perceptions of unfair treatment (H3b), low organizational self-esteem (H3c), job uncertainty (H3d), poor relationships with coworkers (H3e), limited financial resources (H3f) and low workplace well-being (H3g). Finally, job desperation explains turnover intention (H4a) and job search behaviour (H4b) above and beyond the effects of other workplace stressors.

4. Methodology

4.1 Sample

The participants were full-time employees recruited from an online platform in three cohorts (“waves”) and compensated for completing the survey. The three waves were surveyed between September 2024 and February 2025, with each wave being separated from the others by at least one month. Table 1 presents their demographic characteristics.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Three Waves of Full-time Employees

	Wave 1		Wave 2		Wave 3	
	n = 253		n = 184		n = 252	
	Country: France		Country: Canada		Country: France	
Age	18-22	2 (0.79%)	18-22	2 (1.09%)	18-22	8 (3.21%)
	23-27	80 (31.62%)	23-27	36 (19.57%)	23-27	93 (37.40%)
	28-32	66 (26.09%)	28-32	54 (29.35%)	28-32	63 (25.30%)
	33-37	44 (17.39%)	33-37	37 (20.11%)	33-37	47 (18.88%)
	38-42	27 (10.67%)	38-42	21 (11.41%)	38-42	17 (6.83%)
	43-47	15 (5.93%)	43-47	14 (7.61%)	43-47	9 (3.61%)
	48-52	10 (3.95%)	48-52	15 (8.15%)	48-52	4 (1.61%)
	53-57	6 (2.37%)	53-57	0 (0%)	53-57	4 (1.61%)
	58-62	2 (0.80%)	58-62	2 (1.09%)	58-62	2 (0.80%)
	63-67	1 (0.40%)	63-67	2 (1.09%)	63-67	1 (0.40%)
	68 +	0 (0%)	68 +	0 (0%)	68 +	1 (0.40%)
	Mean	*32.92*	*Mean*	*34.18*	*Mean*	*31.24*
Gender	Women	101 (40.24%)	Women	83 (47.22%)	Women	109 (43.3%)
	Men	150 (59.76%)	Men	101 (52.77%)	Men	143 (56.7%)
	Other	2 (0.01%)	Other	0 (0%)	Other	0 (0%)
Degree	Elementary	1 (0.40%)	Elementary	0 (0%)	Elementary	0 (0%)
	Junior high school	4 (1.58%)	Junior high school	21 (11.41%)	Junior high school	0 (0%)
	High school	16 (6.32%)	High school	26 (14.13%)	High school	12 (4.76%)
	Associate	25 (9.88%)	Associate	24 (13.04%)	Associate	22 (8.73%)
	Bachelor's	43 (17%)	Bachelor's	46 (25.00%)	Bachelor's	45 (17.86%)
	Master's	147 (58.10%)	Master's	54 (29.35%)	Master's	144 (57.14%)
	PhD	17 (6.72%)	PhD	13 (7.07%)	PhD	29 (11.51%)

4.2 Instruments

Job search behaviour. We used a 4-item scale, initially developed by Blau (1993), to evaluate job search activities. Responses were made on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree), to capture the degree of time and effort individuals invest in finding alternative employment. Sample item: "I devoted significant time to exploring job alternatives."

Intention to quit. We used a single-item measure adapted from Spector, Dwyer and Jex (1988). The participants were asked to report how often they considered leaving their current job within their organization. Responses were made on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (extremely often). Although multi-item measures are usually preferred, prior research has shown that single-item measures in the turnover-related literature are reliable, valid and highly predictive of actual turnover (e.g., Nagy, 2002).

Job desperation. We used a 9-item job desperation scale recently introduced by Stevenor and Zickar (2023). It assesses the intensity of urgency or desperation experienced by individuals. Responses were made on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Sample item: "I am desperate for a new job."

Emotional exhaustion: We used a 4-item scale developed by Rutherford et al. (2009). It assesses the extent to which individuals feel emotionally drained and fatigued by their work. Responses were made on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Sample item: "I feel emotionally drained by my work."

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Job uncertainty. We used a set of four specific questions, adapted from the Questionnaire on the Experience and Assessment of Work (QEAW) developed by van Veldhoven et al. (1997) and available in French (Lequeurre et al., 2013). Responses were made on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Sample item: “Do you need more certainty that you will still be working in one year's time?”

Workplace well-being. We used a 9-item subscale derived from the Employee Well-Being Scale developed by Pradhan and Hati (2019). Responses were made on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Sample item: “I attach great importance to my work”

Relationships with coworkers. We used the QEAW (van Veldhoven et al., 1997) available in French (Lequeurre et al., 2013). It evaluates employees' interactions with coworkers, focusing on such key aspects as support, collaboration and communication. The questionnaire has four items. Responses were made on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Sample item: "Can you rely on your coworkers when you face challenges at work?"

Financial resources. Perceptions of financial resources were evaluated using the four items from the QEAW (van Veldhoven et al., 1997) available in French (Lequeurre et al., 2013). Responses were made on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Sample item: “Do you think your company offers competitive salaries?”

Unfair treatment. Experiences of perceived unfair treatment at work were evaluated using items such as: “How often do you feel that you need to work twice as hard as others to receive the same recognition or evaluation?” Responses to the three items were made on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 indicates "once a week or more," 2 "a few times a month," 3 "a few times a year," 4 "less than once a year" and 5 "never." This scale is adapted from the Chronic Work Discrimination and Harassment scale developed by Sternthal et al. (2011).

4.3 Analytical Strategy

Before administering it for the first wave of data collection, the Job Desperation Scale was carefully translated into French and then back-translated, as recommended by Brislin (1970). Throughout this process, we worked closely with two experienced English teachers and one bilingual management professor to ensure linguistic accuracy and conceptual equivalence. Together, we conducted the translations and back-translations, followed by a thorough review to resolve discrepancies and adapt the scale to achieve a culturally appropriate and conceptually faithful final version.

We then conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with a sample of respondents. This stage of analysis allowed the underlying factor structure to emerge organically, thereby accommodating cultural nuances. Once the structure was identified and deemed satisfactory, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted with a second sample from Canada to validate the identified structure and assess its robustness. Following these analyses, the scale was further tested with a third sample of French participants. These analyses not only strengthened the generalizability of the scale across different French-speaking populations but also further proved its robustness and applicability.

5. Results

All statistical analyses for Wave 1 (exploratory factor analysis), Wave 2 (confirmatory factor analysis) and Wave 3 (hierarchical regressions) were conducted using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, version 30) and AMOS (Analysis of Moment Structures, version 30).

5.1. Wave 1: Exploratory Factor Analysis (n = 253)

5.1.1. Participants

The questionnaire was distributed via an online platform for efficient data collection. The respondents (n = 253) were regular full-time employees residing in France during the survey period. The sample had 101 women, 150 men and two individuals identified as "other." See Table 1 for detailed demographic characteristics.

5.1.2. Preliminary Assessment

No responses were missing on the JD-FR scale. Although a few outliers were detected, we retained them, as job desperation could vary significantly among individuals. The Bartlett test of sphericity indicated a significant chi-square value (Bartlett, 1954). Additionally, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.916, indicating that the data were highly suitable for factor analysis (Kaiser, 1974).

The inter-item correlations for the nine items on the scale were examined to ensure that they were appropriately related to one another without redundancy. The correlations ranged from 0.47 to 0.80, with most falling within the recommended range of 0.3 to 0.7, indicating moderate to strong relationships among the items. These results suggest that the items were sufficiently interrelated to measure the same construct while avoiding multicollinearity. The items thus collectively contributed to a consistent and reliable scale (Hair et al., 2010).

5.1.3. Exploratory Factor Analysis

Exploratory factor analysis identified a single dominant component that accounted for 66.85% of the variance. Consistent with this result, principal component analysis (PCA) yielded eigenvalues exceeding the threshold of 1.

5.1.4. Reliability and Validity Testing

We then examined item communalities and factor loadings. The communalities for all items ranged between 0.56 and 0.78, indicating that each item shared sufficient variance within the factor. Additionally, the factor loadings ranged from 0.75 to 0.89 (Table 2), well above the commonly recommended threshold of 0.4 (Hair et al., 2010). These results confirm that the items are meaningfully contributing to their respective factors, in line with the robustness and clarity of the identified factor structure.

The scale's internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a high value of 0.937. This result indicates excellent reliability, exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010). The high internal consistency suggests that the items on the scale are highly correlated and measure the same underlying construct, a finding that further supports the robustness and reliability of the French-language Job Desperation Scale. Moreover, the Cronbach’s alpha for “if item deleted” was examined for each of the nine items (see Table 2). Values ranged between 0.926 and 0.934, all lower than or equal to the overall alpha of 0.95. Thus, no item artificially inflated reliability, and all items contributed meaningfully to the construct. Retaining all nine items thus provided the most robust representation of job desperation.

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Next, we compared the psychometric properties of the JD-Fr with those reported in the original validation study by Stevenor and Zickar (2023). Both scales demonstrated excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha having values of 0.937 in our sample and 0.93 in the original study. Factor loadings across the nine items were highly consistent between the two validations. Stevenor and Zickar (2023) reported loadings in the range of 0.73–0.84, and our analyses yielded comparable values of 0.75–0.89 (see Table 2). These findings confirm that the JD-Fr closely replicates the psychometric robustness of the original scale and support its use in French-speaking populations.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Items, Communalities and Components

Item	Mean (SD)	h^2	Loadings	α if item deleted
1. Je désire fortement un nouvel emploi. **I am desperate for a new job.**	3.06 (1.27)	0.66	0.82 **0.82**	0.930
2. Je ressens une pression pour trouver un nouvel emploi. **I feel pressure to find a new job.**	2.51 (1.34)	0.69	0.83 **0.81**	0.929
3. Il est crucial que je décroche un nouvel emploi. **I need to find a new job.**	2.31 (1.37)	0.75	0.87 **0.82**	0.926
4. Obtenir un nouvel emploi réduirait la pression qui pèse actuellement sur moi. **Getting a new job would ease the pressure I am currently feeling.**	2.83 (1.40)	0.66	0.81 **0.73**	0.930
5. Ma situation professionnelle actuelle est inconfortable. **My current employment status makes me feel uneasy.**	2.70 (1.23)	0.56	0.75 **0.78**	0.934
6. Je suis prêt(e) à faire tout ce qui est raisonnable pour décrocher un nouvel emploi. **I will do just about anything within reason to find a new job.**	2.67 (1.32)	0.63	0.79 **0.80**	0.932
7. La recherche d'un nouvel emploi est ma priorité absolue. **Finding a new job is a top priority of mine.**	2.11 (1.20)	0.78	0.89 **0.84**	0.926
8. Je suis prêt(e) à tout pour trouver un nouvel emploi. **I will go to extreme lengths to find a new job.**	2.12 (1.20)	0.65	0.81 **0.74**	0.931
9. Je souhaite sortir de ma situation professionnelle actuelle. **I desire to escape my current employment situation.**	2.60 (1.30)	0.64	0.80 **0.79**	0.931

Note: h^2 = communalities. Items and Loadings in bold are from Stevenor and Zickar (2023).

In addition, we exported factor loadings into Excel to calculate Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) following their respective formulas. Results yielded CR = 0.948 and AVE = 0.669, which exceed the recommended thresholds of 0.70 for CR (Hair, 1997) and 0.50 for AVE (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). These indicators further support the conclusion that the JD-Fr has high internal consistency and convergent validity, while avoiding redundancy or overly narrow coverage of the construct.

5.2. Wave 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (n = 184)

5.2.1. Participants

For Wave 2, the questionnaire was distributed via the same online platform. The respondents (n = 184) were regular full-time employees residing in Canada, with French as their mother tongue. The sample had 83 women and 101 men (Table 1).

The inter-item correlations for the nine items on the Job Desperation Scale were evaluated within the CFA sample to confirm the appropriateness of the items for measuring the same underlying construct. The correlations ranged from 0.54 (items 5 and 6) to 0.80 (items 7 and 8), with the majority falling within the moderate to strong range. These results show that the items are closely interrelated, supporting their inclusion in a unidimensional factor structure. Moreover, the absence of excessively high correlations (e.g., >0.9) indicates a reduced risk of multicollinearity.

5.2.2. Reliability and Validity Testing

The scale's internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a high value of 0.95. This result indicates excellent reliability, exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2019). The high internal consistency suggests that the items on the scale are highly correlated and measure the same underlying construct, further supporting the robustness and reliability of the French-language Job Desperation Scale.

5.2.3. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

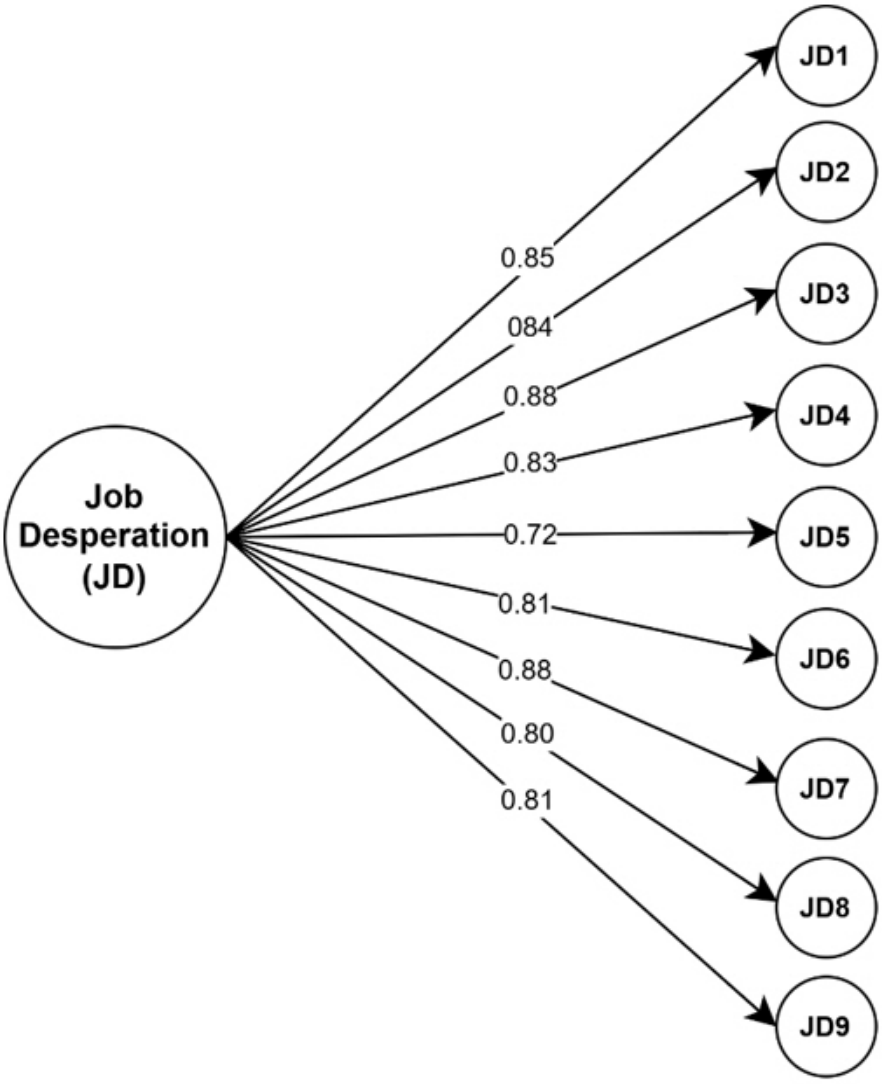
The CFA provides strong evidence for the unidimensionality of the Job Desperation Scale among French employees, although the chi-square statistic ($\chi^2 = 74.716$, df = 25, $p < 0.001$) indicates a significant departure from perfect fit, an expected outcome given its sensitivity to sample size (Kline, 2016). The overall fit indices paint a compelling picture of a suitable model. The CMIN/DF ratio of 2.99 falls comfortably within acceptable limits, reflecting a balance between fit and parsimony. The Goodness of Fit Index (GFI = 0.923) and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI = 0.966) exceed the conventional thresholds, underscoring the model's ability to capture the underlying structure of the scale (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Moreover, the Root Mean Square Residual (RMR = 0.047) and the standardized RMR (0.0299) indicate minimal residual discrepancies (Hu & Bentler, 1999). While the RMSEA value of 0.10 (90% CI: 0.078–0.132) is slightly above the ideal benchmark of 0.08, it remains within an acceptable range (Browne & Cudeck, 1992), particularly when interpreted alongside the high Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI = 0.951) and high Incremental Fit Index (IFI = 0.966) (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Parsimony-adjusted measures such as the PNFI (0.660) and the PCFI (0.671) further validate the model's simplicity and efficiency without sacrificing interpretability (Mulaik et al., 1989). Hoelter's critical N values (93 at $p < 0.05$, 109 at $p < 0.01$) confirm the adequacy of the sample size, ensuring the robustness of the findings (Hoelter, 1983). Figure 1 shows the JD-FR scale and its items' standardized factor loadings.

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Figure 1

CFA Graphical Output and Estimates of the Job Desperation Scale



Note 1: Numbers on the arrows correspond to regression estimates for each item.
Note 2: Errors of covariances were freely estimated between JD5 and JD99 (i.e., 0.24) and between JD7 and JD8 (i.e., 0.14).

As a final stage of analysis, we sought to strengthen the discriminant validity of the Job Desperation (JD) Scale in relation to workplace well-being (WWB), job uncertainty (JU) and emotional exhaustion (EE), given that conceptually similar items appear across these workplace psychological and behavioural domains.

To assess discriminant validity, we compared a series of confirmatory factor models with different combinations of the focal constructs. The hypothesized four-factor model (job desperation, workplace well-being, job uncertainty, emotional exhaustion) had the best fit to the data, $\chi^2(287) = 587.63$, $p < 0.001$; $\chi^2/df = 2.05$; CFI = 0.92; TLI = 0.91; RMSEA = 0.08 (90% CI = 0.07–0.08). Fit indices were markedly superior to alternative specifications, including the three-factor model with job

uncertainty and emotional exhaustion combined ($\chi^2(290) = 1218.36$, $\chi^2/df = 4.20$, CFI = 0.75, RMSEA = 0.13), the two-factor model contrasting job desperation with a combined factor for the other constructs ($\chi^2(292) = 1418.14$, $\chi^2/df = 4.86$, CFI = 0.69, RMSEA = 0.15) and the one-factor model with all items loaded onto a single factor ($\chi^2(293) = 1778.42$, $\chi^2/df = 6.07$, CFI = 0.59, RMSEA = 0.17). The superior performance of the four-factor solution provides strong evidence that job desperation is empirically distinct from other stressor-related constructs.

5.3. Wave 3: Predictive Characteristics of Job Desperation

We collected data from French employees in February 2025 for the third wave. Demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1. Before conducting the hierarchical regression analyses, we examined the bivariate correlations among all study variables to assess the potential risks of multicollinearity (Table 3).

Table 3

Correlation Matrix of Variables in Subsequent Regression Models

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Emotional exhaustion (1)											
Unfair treatment (2)	0.31**										
Organizational self-esteem (3)	0.08	-0.26**									
Financial resources (4)	-0.20**	-0.18**	0.10								
Workplace well-being (5)	0.05	-0.28**	0.35**	0.31**							
Job uncertainty (6)	0.22**	0.33**	-0.05	-0.05	0.07						
Relationships with coworkers (7)	-0.07	-0.38**	0.61**	0.15*	0.41**	-0.11					
Job desperation (8)	0.23**	0.42**	-0.09	-0.30**	-0.35**	0.16*	-0.27**				
Intention to quit (9)	0.14*	0.30**	-0.09	-0.28**	-0.42**	-0.01	-0.24**	0.75**			
Job search behaviour (10)	0.19**	0.35**	-0.13*	-0.22**	-0.26**	0.14*	-0.26**	0.74**	0.60**		
Age (11)	0.08	-0.09	-0.04	0.05	-0.11	0.01	-0.07	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	
Gender (12)	-0.05	-0.05	0.10	0.14*	0.01	-0.11	0.05	-0.04	-0.03	-0.04	0.16*

Note: ** denotes 99% significance and * denotes 95% significance.

As expected, job desperation showed strong positive associations with intention to quit ($r = 0.75$, $p < 0.001$) and job search behaviour ($r = 0.74$, $p < 0.001$), supporting its role as a central predictor of withdrawal. This is theoretically expected, as both constructs capture related aspects of withdrawal (i.e., cognitive deliberation versus urgency-driven affect). In their original validation, Stevenor and Zickar (2023) showed that job desperation is closely tied to withdrawal-related behaviours rather than general job attitudes. Specifically, job desperation correlates strongly with job search behaviour ($r = 0.83$) and job search intensity ($r = 0.78$), indicating its action-oriented nature. It also shows a robust relationship with turnover intentions ($r = 0.59$), suggesting that desperation amplifies employees' cognitive withdrawal processes.

In our study, job desperation was also positively associated with perceived unfair treatment ($r = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$) and mental workload ($r = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$), while being negatively associated with workplace well-being ($r = –0.35$, $p < 0.001$), financial resources ($r = –0.30$, $p < 0.001$) and relationships with coworkers ($r = –0.27$, $p < 0.001$). These patterns of association align with theoretical expectations, suggesting that job desperation is heightened when employees suffer

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resource deficits, poor social relationships or unfair treatment and is alleviated when they enjoy strong workplace well-being and support. Intention to quit showed a very similar pattern of associations, further strengthening its conceptual proximity to job desperation. Control variables such as age, education and gender had only weak and mostly non-significant correlations with the main study variables, suggesting they are unlikely to confound the key relationships. Significantly, none of the associations among predictors exceeded 0.75, remaining well below the conventional thresholds (0.80–0.85) of multicollinearity (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

We then conducted an initial hierarchical regression analysis to examine whether job desperation predicts intention to quit beyond other factors (Table 4). In Model 1, emotional exhaustion, unfair treatment, organizational self-esteem, financial resources, workplace well-being, job uncertainty and relationships with coworkers explained 32% of the variance (R^2 = 0.32, F(9,242) = 12.91, p <0.001). In Model 2, adding job desperation significantly improved the model, which now explained 62% of the variance. The substantial increase in explained variance (ΔR^2 = 0.30, F(10,241) = 38.95, p < 0.001) showed the unique predictive power of job desperation. Among the predictors in Model 1, emotional exhaustion (β = 0.36, p < 0.001) and workplace well-being (β = −0.24, p < 0.001) were significant. However, in Model 2, their effects weakened, while job desperation emerged as the strongest predictor (β = 0.67, p < 0.001), providing further evidence of its dominant role in explaining the intention to quit.

Table 4

Hierarchical Regression with Intention to Quit as the Dependent Variable

	Model 1			Model 2		
	β	SE	t	β	SE	t
Emotional exhaustion	**0.36**	0.08	5.31	**0.16**	0.06	2.95
Unfair treatment	0.04	0.09	0.60	-0.08	0.07	-1.50
Organizational self-esteem	**0.13**	0.18	1.95	0.03	0.14	0.54
Financial resources	-0.11	0.08	-1.89	-0.02	0.06	-0.34
Workplace well-being	**-0.24**	0.13	-3.68	**-0.14**	0.10	-2.82
Job uncertainty	-0.04	0.06	-1.04	**-0.09**	0.05	-2.08
Relationships with coworkers	-0.07	0.12	-1.08	-0.01	0.09	-0.86
Gender	0.04	0.14	0.71	0.01	0.10	0.28
Age	0.01	0.04	0.14	-0.01	0.03	-0.27
Job desperation				**0.67**	0.05	13.60
			R^2 = 0.32			R^2 = 0.62
						ΔR^2 = 0.30
			F = 12.91			F = 38.95
						ΔF= 26.04

Note. n = 253. The dependent variable is the intention to quit.
Statistically significant standardized regression coefficients are in bold (p < 0.05).

Next, we conducted the second hierarchical regression analysis to examine whether job desperation predicts job search behaviour beyond other factors (Table 5). In Model 1, emotional exhaustion, unfair treatment, organizational self-esteem, financial resources, workplace well-being, job uncertainty and relationships with coworkers explained 22% of the variance (R^2 = 0.22, F(9,242) = 7.51, p < 0.001). In Model 2, adding job desperation significantly improved the model,

explaining 54% of the variance, with a notable incremental effect ($\Delta R^2 = 0.33$, $F(10,241) = 29.92$, $p < 0.001$). Job desperation emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.72$, $p < 0.001$), while all other predictors became non-significant, underscoring job desperation's dominant role in driving job search behaviour.

Table 5

Hierarchical Regression with Job Search Behaviour as the Dependent Variable

	Model 1			Model 2		
	β	SE	*t*	*β*	SE	*t*
Emotional exhaustion	**0.25**	0.08	3.47	0.04	0.07	0.62
Unfair treatment	**0.14**	0.10	1.91	0.01	0.08	0.22
Organizational self-esteem	0.07	0.20	0.94	-0.04	0.15	-0.77
Financial resources	-0.09	0.08	-1.46	0.01	0.07	0.21
Workplace well-being	-0.07	0.14	-0.94	0.04	0.11	0.76
Job uncertainty	0.06	0.07	1.03	0.01	0.05	0.28
Relationships with coworkers	-0.12	0.13	-1.56	-0.05	0.10	-0.78
Gender	0.34	0.15	0.57	0.01	0.12	0.10
Age	0.01	0.05	0.22	-0.01	0.04	-0.15
Job desperation				**0.72**	0.06	13.46
			$R^2 = 0.22$			$R^2 = 0.55$
						$\Delta R^2 = 0.33$
			F = 7.51			F = 29.92
						ΔF= 22.41

Note. n = 253. The dependent variable is job search behaviour.
Statistically significant standardized regression coefficients are in bold (p < 0.05).

6. Discussion

This study had the aim of validating the French-language version of the Job Desperation Scale (JD-Fr) and assessing the antecedents of job search behaviour and turnover intention among French-speaking employees. Our findings contribute to the growing body of research on job desperation by confirming its robust psychometric properties and demonstrating its significant incremental contribution to turnover intention and job search behaviour (Stevenor & Zickar, 2023). While job desperation emerged as a strong predictor in our models, this finding does not diminish the continuing relevance of traditional factors, such as emotional exhaustion, job insecurity or unfair treatment, which may play a more central role in specific professional contexts or groups.

First, the JD-Fr shows high internal consistency and validity, thereby confirming its unidimensional nature and supporting its applicability across French-speaking populations. Job desperation can thus be understood as an extreme psychological state in which employees feel an urgent, almost compulsive need to escape their current employment situation. At the same time, our results also show that workplace stressors, namely emotional exhaustion, job uncertainty, perceptions of unfair treatment, workplace well-being, financial strain and poor relationships with coworkers, play a significant role in predicting turnover intention and job search behaviour. This pattern is consistent with previous findings that high job demands and limited resources are key to withdrawal intentions (Demerouti et al., 2001; Colquitt, 2013; De Witte, 1999).

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However, what sets this study apart is the incremental role of job desperation. When job desperation was introduced into the regression models, its effect on turnover intention and job search behaviour was substantial. The variance explained by the workplace stressors decreased, an indication that desperation may act as an additional pathway through which workplace conditions become linked to withdrawal outcomes. Importantly, our design does not allow us to give this factor a formal mediating role, since mediation was not directly tested. We have simply shown that job desperation explains a unique portion of variance in turnover-related behaviours, above and beyond other stressors. This finding aligns with Stevenor and Zickar's (2023) original results and extends them by demonstrating that job desperation can make a strong incremental contribution in labour markets of the French-speaking world.

Moreover, our findings suggest the presence of a potential psychological tipping point. While employees experiencing general dissatisfaction or workplace stressors may intend to leave, desperation often increases the likelihood of acting on this intention. Such an observation is consistent with Proximal Withdrawal States Theory (Hom et al., 2012), which suggests that not all dissatisfied employees become active job-seekers. Desperation may be one factor that helps explain why some employees transform their dissatisfaction into active escape behaviours. Additionally, our study suggests that job desperation is a crisis response, prompting employees to act even without the alternative of a better job. At the same time, because traditional antecedents remain important and may be more salient in specific professional contexts or groups, our findings call for nuanced interpretation rather than universal claims.

In sum, our study contributes to understanding of job desperation as a psychological force that may reshape turnover. By showing that job desperation is a strong and incremental predictor of voluntary turnover and job search behaviour, we recommend re-evaluation of employee retention strategies and workforce management practices while acknowledging that traditional antecedents continue to play an important role.

While our study provides important insights, caution is needed when extending its findings to other systems of labour relations. The French and Canadian contexts share certain features, such as moderate employment protection, rising job dissatisfaction and exposure to economic precarity. However, they may differ substantially from highly unionized markets, from countries with strong legal job protections or from specific public-sector contexts where job security is institutionally guaranteed. In the latter environments, the dynamics of desperation may manifest differently, being potentially less salient or expressed through alternative withdrawal behaviours.

Finally, given the cross-sectional nature of our design, caution is required in arguing for causal relationships. While our analyses indicate robust associations and incremental predictive power, longitudinal and experimental research is needed to establish whether job desperation consistently precedes, mediates or interacts with other predictors of withdrawal.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

Our study adds to traditional turnover models by suggesting that job desperation may represent more than an extension of dissatisfaction, functioning instead as a distinct and more intense psychological state. Classic frameworks, such as Mobley's (1977) turnover process and Lee & Mitchell's (1994) unfolding model, emphasize a rational, stepwise approach to employee departure. Our findings suggest that desperation can short-circuit this process, bypassing careful deliberation and leading employees to seek exit strategies even when job alternatives are limited. Turnover models should thus be expanded to include emotional and urgency-driven dimensions, while acknowledging that not all departures follow a deliberate decision-making trajectory.

The JD-R model explains how workplace stressors lead to strain and withdrawal (Demerouti et al., 2001). Our results are consistent with this model but extend it by suggesting that job desperation may amplify the effects. While exhaustion and job uncertainty create dissatisfaction, desperation heightens workplace stressors, increasing the likelihood of immediate job-seeking behaviours and turnover intention. This does not mean that traditional job demands and resources are no longer important, but rather that desperation may provide an additional pathway for strain to escalate into withdrawal.

By showing that job desperation accounts for additional variance in turnover intention and job search behaviour, we provide a strong empirical basis for integrating job desperation into existing turnover theories. Our findings suggest that future turnover researchers should see job desperation not as a marginal factor but as a primary driver of workforce mobility. This perspective aligns with Proximal Withdrawal States Theory (Hom et al., 2017) but further expands it by illustrating how desperation accelerates transitions from intention to action in ways previously underexplored. Desperation does not merely nudge employees toward job search behaviour; it catapults them into action, bypassing cognitive deliberation and rational assessment of job alternatives. This shift necessitates a reconsideration of how organizations conceptualize and mitigate turnover.

Furthermore, our findings contribute to a broader understanding of crisis-driven decision-making, suggesting parallels with theories of learned helplessness and urgency-based action (Seligman, 1972; Kahneman, 2011). Employees in a state of desperation may exhibit behaviours like those seen in high-stress decision-making, where urgency overtakes rational weighing of costs and benefits. Future researchers should therefore explore how job desperation interacts with cognitive biases and heuristic-driven decision-making in employment contexts.

Beyond its personal implications, our study underscores the macroeconomic and labour market consequences of desperation. In increasingly precarious labour markets, characterized by short-term contracts and economic instability, desperation may become a more widespread driver of workforce mobility. If an organization fails to address desperation-driven turnover, it may face talent retention crises, particularly in industries with high job insecurity. Policymakers should consider these findings when designing labour protections and employment policies, as mitigating job desperation could enhance employee well-being and labour market stability. It is important to recognize that the transferability of these findings will depend on the institutional context. In highly unionized labour markets or countries with extensive employment protections, desperation-driven turnover may be less pronounced, as collective bargaining and legal safeguards provide alternative outlets for dissatisfaction. Conversely, desperation may play a stronger role in shaping workforce mobility in deregulated or precarious labour markets.

The implications of job desperation also extend to vocational and career development theories. Traditional career models often assume a linear, goal-directed trajectory of job mobility (Super, 1957; Savickas, 2005). Desperation-driven job changes complicate this view, suggesting that adaptability frameworks should incorporate urgency and crisis responses as potential mobility drivers. Such a perspective may be particularly relevant during global economic changes, when workers must reassess their options under pressing conditions.

Our findings call for a re-evaluation of how job desperation is positioned within turnover theory, career development and organizational psychology. While they highlight its potential importance as an additional predictor, more research is needed to establish whether job desperation acts as a mediator, moderator or independent driver of withdrawal across different contexts.

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6.2 Practical Implications

Given the predictive power of job desperation in our analyses, organizations may benefit from adopting proactive strategies to prevent employees from ending up in this critical state. There is still a need for traditional retention efforts, such as reducing job dissatisfaction and addressing common stressors. Although our findings indicate that job desperation provides additional explanatory value beyond these antecedents, we do not suggest that it mediates their effects. Instead, it should be seen as an urgency-driven factor that complements established predictors of withdrawal.

First, companies should implement burnout prevention programs with a focus on managing workload and providing adequate psychological support (Maslach et al., 2001). Recognizing that emotional exhaustion is a key driver of desperation, HR policies should incorporate wellness programs, flexible work arrangements and mental health resources to mitigate burnout-related stressors. Additionally, fairness audits should be conducted regularly to assess and correct perceived injustices in promotions, compensation and workload distribution (Colquitt, 2013).

Second, organizations can strengthen early detection systems to identify employees at risk of experiencing desperation. HR analytics can track sudden changes in employee engagement, absenteeism and job search activities, while frequent pulse surveys can help detect growing frustration before it escalates. By training supervisors to recognize warning signs, such as withdrawal, increased complaints or explicit expressions of urgency to leave, an organization can provide timely interventions to prevent desperate departures.

Third, financial instability exacerbates job desperation, making financial wellness programs essential to organizational retention strategies. By offering competitive salaries, debt counseling and emergency financial assistance programs, an organization can alleviate economic stressors that push employees toward urgent job-seeking. Additionally, by increasing job security through transparent career progression paths and stable contracts, it can give employees greater control over their career development.

Fourth, through workplace design efforts to emphasize autonomy, meaningful work and supportive leadership, it is possible to create conditions that protect against dissatisfaction and desperation. Employees who feel trapped often lack autonomy and perceive little alignment between their work and their values. By redesigning roles to increase job autonomy and by providing more development opportunities, an organization can enhance job satisfaction and reduce the likelihood of desperation-driven turnover (Lesener et al., 2019; Chia, 2024). Leadership training programs should also focus on creating supportive environments where employees feel valued, recognized and heard.

Job desperation should be recognized as a product of broader labour market dynamics. It may require structural interventions, beyond organizational-level policies, in industries with high job insecurity, such as those involving gig or temporary work. By collaborating with policymakers to improve labour protections, minimum job security standards and fairer employment regulations, an organization can help mitigate systemic drivers of desperation.

Finally, organizations should consider that the importance of job desperation may vary by industry. Strong job protections may keep employees from becoming desperate in public-sector settings or highly regulated labour markets. In contrast, desperation may be more acute in the private sector or in temporary employment. It is therefore essential to tailor interventions to these institutional realities.

7. Conclusion

Our study makes key contributions by validating the French-language version of the Job Desperation Scale (JD-Fr), thus confirming its robust psychometric properties and demonstrating that job desperation significantly predicts turnover intention and job search behaviour beyond traditional workplace stressors. More importantly, it refines existing turnover theories by identifying a critical psychological tipping point beyond which dissatisfaction escalates into an urgent drive to leave.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design prevents causal inferences, suggesting the need for longitudinal studies to track how job desperation evolves. Second, the sample, drawn from France and Canada, may not be fully generalizable to other labour markets, a limitation that warrants future studies across diverse employment settings. Third, although job desperation emerges as the dominant predictor, future researchers should explore how other extreme psychological states, such as learned helplessness or workplace trauma, interact with or mediate its effects on turnover behaviours. Ultimately, the rise of desperation-driven turnover signals an urgent need for organizations to rethink retention strategies. In today's rapidly changing labour market, it is no longer enough to address job dissatisfaction alone; organizations must confront the deeper psychological forces pushing employees toward desperate exit strategies. By positioning job desperation as a dominant factor in workforce mobility, our study opens up new avenues for theoretical advances, organizational interventions and a more nuanced understanding of why employees feel compelled to leave.

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