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# L'intenzione di turnover nell'intreccio tra Leader-Member Exchange e Micromanagement: Un'ampia indagine in un contesto sanitario italiano

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## Abstract

Il ruolo della leadership nel plasmare la cultura organizzativa e nel promuovere la sostenibilità della vita organizzativa è fondamentale. Sebbene in alcuni casi la leadership positiva (Leader-Member-Exchange, LMX) e quella distruttiva (ad esempio il micromanagement) siano considerate separatamente, questo studio si concentra sul loro intreccio, con l'obiettivo di osservare come si distribuiscono le percezioni dei dipendenti riguardo allo stile di leadership del loro diretto superiore e analizzare le differenze rispetto all'intenzione di turnover (TI), una variabile molto rilevante nel contesto sanitario. Hanno partecipato alla ricerca 1287 dipendenti di un'azienda sanitaria locale. L'analisi dei cluster ha evidenziato 4 sottogruppi caratterizzati da diverse esperienze di leadership. Il TI più alto si osserva nel gruppo con alto micromanagement e basso LMX, seguito dal gruppo «trascurato» (basso LMX e basso micromanagement). Il gruppo con LMX e micromanagement elevati ha un TI medio-basso. Il TI più basso si osserva nel gruppo con LMX alto e micromanagement basso. Questi risultati evidenziano come, all'interno della stessa organizzazione, le persone possano sperimentare diverse forme di leadership e come, talvolta, le luci e le ombre della leadership si sovrappongono. La relazione tra stile di leadership e intenzione di turnover merita ulteriori approfondimenti.

## Parole chiave

Leadership, LMX, Micromanagement, Intenzioni di turnover, Leadership positiva, Leadership distruttiva, Sanità, Cluster analysis.

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# Turnover Intention in the intertwining of LMX and Micromanagement: A Broad Survey in an Italian Healthcare Context

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## Abstract

The role of leadership in shaping organizational culture and promoting the sustainability of organizational life is crucial. While positive leadership (Leader-Member-Exchange, LMX) and destructive leadership (e.g. micromanagement) are sometimes considered separately, this study focuses on their intertwining, aiming to examine how employees' perceptions of their direct superior's leadership style are distributed and to analyse differences in turnover intention (TI), a particularly relevant variable in the healthcare sector. Participants in the study are 1287 employees from a local health authority. Cluster analysis revealed 4 subgroups characterized by different leadership experiences. The highest TI was observed in the group experiencing high micromanagement and low LMX, followed by the «neglected» group (low LMX and low micromanagement). The group with high LMX and high micromanagement exhibited a medium-low TI. The lowest TI was observed in the group with high LMX and low micromanagement. These findings suggest that within the same organization, people may experience different forms of leadership and sometimes light and dark sides of leadership overlap. The relationship between leadership style and turnover intention warrants further investigation.

## Keywords

Leadership, LMX, Micromanagement, Turnover intentions, Positive leadership, Destructive leadership, Healthcare, Cluster analysis.

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## Introduction

The important role of leadership in organizational culture was clearly identified by Schein (1985) further confirming what decades of studies on the subject had already outlined. Leadership is a crucial dimension of organizational life (Bass, 1990). Today, leadership is also central to approaches that focus on organizational sustainability: studies have observed the link between positive leadership (PL) and the sustainability of organizational life (Peirò et al., 2023). Over the last few years, increasing efforts have been made to also examine the toxic dynamic and the role of destructive leadership (DL) in association with phenomena of work invasion in personal life (Dolce et al., 2020; Molino et al., 2019).

While PL and DL (Ghislieri, 2024) are sometimes treated as «separate» phenomena, the present study focuses on their intertwining (Spagnoli et al., 2021) and examines differences in turnover intention, in the specific context of a healthcare organization. We consider the LMX model to represent PL (Monzani & Van Dick, 2020) and micromanagement to be a common aspect of destructive leadership (Shaw et al., 2011).

### *Positive leadership: LMX*

Leadership is a classic and ever-present theme in organizational studies: as Bernard Bass already stated in the 1990s, there are almost as many models of leadership as there are people who have studied this subject (Bass, 1990). If, therefore, it appears difficult to provide a univocal definition of leadership, we can refer to the APA dictionary, which considers leadership as the relational process of guiding, which also includes organizing, directing, coordinating and motivating people to achieve group or organizational objectives. Leadership is thus a reciprocal relationship: leaders influence followers and followers influence leaders.

Recently, the role of leadership as a work resource has been widely documented (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014; Tummers & Bakker, 2021). Within this broad framework, Monzani and Van Dick (2020) introduced the concept of PL a few years ago, as a key resource within the broader PL approach (Monzani & Van Dick, 2020).

The «positive» label comes from aligning with the approach of positive psychology applied to the field of organizational behaviour (Luthans & Youssef, 2007; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014) and refers to leadership models «that aim to elevate followers, groups, and other organizational stakeholders and foster organizational excellence, veritable organizational performance, and sustainable processes and practices (Hernandez et al., 2011)» (Monzani & Van Dick, 2020, p. 2).

The PL approach includes several leadership models and in the present study we explore the level of the dyadic relationship between leader and follower in terms of a positive social exchange (Ilies et al., 2005) as defined in Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

The influence of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) on performance (Gottfredson & Aguinis, 2017) and wellbeing dynamics (Ilies et al., 2005; Inceoglu et al., 2018) is well documented. The positive outcomes associated with LMX include improvements in both in-role and extra-role performance, the development of constructive attitudes and psychological states, and a reduction in role conflict and turnover (Dulebohn et al., 1997; Ilies et al., 2007; Martin et al., 2016).

A recent systematic review of leadership research within the framework of the job demands-resources theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) revealed that LMX ranks as the second most frequently examined model, following transformational leadership as the most studied (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). This review highlights that leadership is primarily investigated as a resource, and the majority of studies focus on its impact on other resources. With respect to the link between LMX and turnover intention, the role of LMX appears to be significant, as also confirmed by recent studies in the context of healthcare (Saygili et al., 2025): the creation of collaborative working climates by leaders can significantly influence the reduction of turnover, a goal that healthcare settings must strive to achieve (Jian et al., 2022).

#### *Destructive leadership: micromanagement*

But we do not only observe PL behaviour in organizations. The presence of DL in organizations is a reality: this is confirmed by news reports of real organizational disasters associated with the destructive behaviour of individuals in top positions, as well as by the everyday experiences of people within organizations, including both small and large episodes of intrusion into private lives, despotic attitudes, and a variety of micromanagement and over-control behaviours (Ghislieri, 2024). In the present study, we focus on micromanagement, one of the most frequent destructive behaviours.

The study by Aasland et al. (2010) in Norway is well-known for highlighting the presence of destructive leadership (DL) behavioural styles: primarily the laissez-faire type, followed by the supportive-disloyal type (supportive of followers but disloyal to the organization), the derailed type (opposed to both the organization and subordinates), and the tyrannical type (hostile toward subordinates while supporting the organization). While this study may no longer be recent, it would be premature to assume that the issue of DL has been resolved. DL is a broad construct that encompasses several leadership styles linked to a variety of behaviours that can harm both followers and the organization (Krasikova et al.,

2013; Mackey et al., 2021; Schyns & Schilling, 2013). These destructive behaviours lead to negative consequences for individual well-being and incur significant costs for organizations and society as a whole.

Defining DL is complex, primarily because it includes various leadership styles (Krasikova et al., 2013; Mackey et al., 2021). The challenge is compounded by the inherent complexity of defining leadership itself, which often leaves room for subjectivity and arbitrariness (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Additionally, many scholars argue that the term «destructive leadership» is inherently contradictory: since leadership involves guiding people toward achieving goals, the notion of destruction seems incompatible with the purpose of leadership. While some authors suggest replacing «leadership» with terms like «supervision» or «headship», the term «destructive leadership» has become widely accepted. It is used to describe those in leadership positions who exhibit a range of destructive, abusive, and toxic behaviours that manifest within the leadership relationship itself. Among the various definitions of DL, Krasikova et al. (2013) offer the following proposal:

Volitional behavior by a leader that can harm or intend to harm a leader's organization and/or followers by (a) encouraging followers to pursue goals that contravene the legitimate interests of the organization and/or (b) employing a leadership style that involves the use of harmful methods of influence with followers, regardless of justifications for such behavior (Krasikova et al., 2013, p. 1310).

It is essential to distinguish that destructive leadership (DL) does not encompass all harmful behaviours of individuals in leadership positions but rather refers specifically to the detrimental actions that a leader engages in attempting to guide followers toward organizational goals (Krasikova et al., 2013). Several key works (Krasikova et al., 2013; Tepper, 2007) and influential meta-analyses (Mackey et al., 2021; Schyns & Schilling, 2013) provide valuable insights into the determinants of DL, though the consequences of DL remain the most extensively explored aspect of this phenomenon.

DL behaviours span a wide spectrum. In certain situations, leadership styles that are generally positive may also incorporate elements of destructiveness (Aasland et al., 2010). For instance, leaders who are goal-oriented and motivate their followers may nonetheless engage in controlling behaviours or infringe on the privacy of employees — especially if such actions are ingrained in the broader organizational culture.

The literature distinguishes between behaviours that stem from incompetence and those that are rooted in a purposeful destructive attitude or intention (Shaw et al., 2011). Incompetent behaviours include poor decision-making, failure to prioritize effectively, an inability to handle conflict, ineffective communication, and challenges with delegation, vision-setting, and emotional intelligence.

Destructive behaviours, by contrast, encompass bullying, unethical practices, micromanagement, over-control, miscommunication about expectations, favouritism, and emotional abuse.

When considering the consequences of DL, both individual and organizational outcomes are consistently negative (Mackey et al., 2021; Schyns & Schilling, 2013). These behaviours are linked to decreased job satisfaction, lower engagement, diminished well-being, and poor performance. Moreover, DL contributes to higher turnover intention, elevated stress, counterproductive workplace behaviours, and challenges in maintaining work-life balance (Ghislieri, 2024).

In this exploratory study, we aim to identify how the two types of leadership intertwine in employees' perceptions, to define groups of people with similar leadership experiences and examine variations in turnover intention.

## Method

### *Participants and procedure*

The sample of this study consisted of 1287 employees from an Italian local health authority, with 899 (70%) of the participants being women and 295 men (23%). Additionally, 92 participants (7%) preferred not to disclose their gender. The age distribution of the participants was as follows: 107 individuals (8%) were under 30 years old, 275 (21%) were between 31 and 40, 373 (29%) were between 41 and 50, 460 (36%) were between 51 and 60, and 72 (6%) were over 60. Regarding seniority, 186 participants (14%) had less than 3 years of service, 289 (22%) had between 3 and 10 years, 326 (25%) had between 11 and 20 years, and 486 (38%) had over 20 years of service. Data were collected from all staff categories, including medical, healthcare, technical, and management personnel. The survey was administered through a link sent via email to employees' corporate email addresses, ensuring anonymity. The survey was conducted using the LimeSurvey platform.

### *Measure*

*Leader-Member Exchange* was assessed using a 5-item frequency scale ( $\alpha = .93$ , Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Molino et al., 2024), with responses ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). An example item is «My supervisor uses his or her influence to help me solve my problems at work».

*Micromanagement* was measured using a 4-item frequency scale ( $\alpha = .73$ , Shaw et al., 2011; Sanseverino et al., 2024), with the same response scale of 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). An example item is «My supervisor attempts to exert total control over everyone».

*Turnover intention* (TI) was measured using a 3-item Likert scale ( $\alpha = .84$ , Wright & Cropanzano, 1998; Ghislieri et al., 2015), with responses ranging from 1 (*disagree*) to 6 (*agree*). An example item is «I often think about quitting my job».

*Data Analysis*

Using SPSS, we conducted a cluster analysis using the k-means algorithm to identify distinct groups based on the mean scores of LMX and Micromanagement. After identifying the clusters, we conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to examine whether turnover intention significantly differed across the clusters.

Differences between specific groups were examined through Tukey’s LSD post-hoc test; effect size was measured using eta squared.

**Results**

- Four clusters were specified, with the initial cluster centres defined as follows:
1. High LMX (4.17), High Micromanagement (4.25)
  2. Low LMX (1.00), Low Micromanagement (1.00)
  3. Very High LMX (5.00), Very Low Micromanagement (1.00)
  4. Very Low LMX (1.00), Very High Micromanagement (5.00).

The minimum distance between initial cluster centres was 3.254. The algorithm ran for seven iterations, converging in the final cluster centres which are reported in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
Final cluster centres with size

Cluster	LMX	Micromanagement	n
1 — Moderate LMX and micromanagement	3.51	3.16	343
2 — Low LMX, low micromanagement	2.05	2.30	351
3 — High LMX, low micromanagement	4.26	1.87	342
4 — Low LMX, high micromanagement	1.55	4.00	251

Clusters 1 to 3 had similar sizes, while cluster 4 contained fewer cases, indicating that the combination of low LMX and high micromanagement was relatively less common but not unimportant.

The means and standard deviations for turnover intention across the four clusters are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**

Means and standard deviation of turnover intention in the four clusters

Turnover intention				
Cluster	Mean	Std. Deviation	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
1	2.92	1.57	2.76	3.09
2	3.51	1.62	3.34	3.68
3	2.38	1.34	2.23	2.52
4	3.96	1.62	3.76	4.16

The one-way ANOVA results showed a significant and moderate effect of cluster membership on turnover intention  $F(3, 1283) = 60.69, p < .001; \eta^2 = 0.12 [0.09, 0.16]$ .

The highest TI is observed in Cluster 4, with high micromanagement and low LMX; this is followed by Cluster 2, the «neglected one» (low LMX and low micromanagement); Cluster 1 with high LMX and high micromanagement has a medium-low TI. Finally, the lowest TI is observed in Cluster 3 with high LMX and low micromanagement.

Post-hoc comparisons revealed significant differences between all pairs ( $p < .001$ ), indicating that employees in Cluster 3 had significantly lower turnover intention compared to all other clusters.

## Discussion

This study highlights how people can experience different intertwining of PL and DL in the same organization: these two aspects sometimes coexist, and sometimes both are weak.

This study, which is exploratory in nature, has many limitations: it represents a static snapshot, based solely on self-report data, of employees' perceptions of leadership within a large sample from the same organization. On the one hand, this may be a problem with the generalizability of the results; on the other hand, the study does not examine differences based on roles or areas of the organization. However, the study aimed to highlight the variety of possible



entanglements between the two types of leadership, their possible coexistence, and their relationship with TI.

Results suggest that micromanagement plays an important role, consistent with previous studies (Ghislieri, 2024), but, in line with the literature, the association between Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) and lower turnover intention seems particularly strong (Jian et al., 2022; Monzani & Van Dick, 2020).

The differences in TI observed between the clusters suggest the importance of jointly studying LMX and micromanagement (Spagnoli et al., 2021) in a more structured and comprehensive manner to reduce turnover. This issue is crucial in any organization, especially in healthcare settings, where staff training is crucial and costly, and the professional knowledge of staff must be preserved and consolidated (Poon et al., 2022). In these contexts, selection and, most importantly, leadership training are vital. Such training should not only focus on promoting PL but also on recognising and discouraging toxic behaviours (Ghislieri & Gatti, 2012; Ghislieri et al., 2019), including micromanagement, from a perspective that supports a sustainable work environment (Peirò et al., 2023).

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