

Commitment, Psychological Well-Being and Job Performance: An Examination of Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory and Job Burnout

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Based on conservation of resources (COR) theory, the present study, composed of 50 human services counselors, provided an empirical test among Maslach's three dimensions of burnout, psychological well-being, organizational commitment and job performance. Bivariate relations were established among psychological well-being, organizational commitment, and job burnout. In addition, psychological well-being and emotional exhaustion, but not depersonalization, diminished personal accomplishment and organizational commitment, were related to composite job performance. Finally, hierarchical regression analysis clearly established the unique contribution of psychological well-being in the prediction of each of the job burnout dimensions. The implications and future research directions of an expanded role of COR theory in organizational research are presented.

Seek not, my soul, the life of the immortals; but enjoy to the full the resources that are within thy reach.

~ Pindar, *Pythian Odes*, III, l. 109.

INTRODUCTION

Employee burnout is a topic of major interest for management researchers because it has consequential implications for both individuals and organizations (Cropanzano, Rupp, & Byrne, 2002; Lee & Ashforth, 1993a, 1996; Zohar, 1997). From the individual perspective, burnout is related to a myriad of health-related issues, including decreased self-esteem, anxiety, depression, gastro-intestinal problems, headaches, sleep disturbances, diminished psychological well-being, cholesterol and triglyceride levels (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Kahill, 1988; Maslach, 1982; Maslach, 1993; Shirom, Westman, Shamai, & Carel, 1997; Wright & Bonett, 1997a). From the organizational perspective, burnout is linked with intention to turnover, decreased levels of employee commitment, and job dissatisfaction (Jackson, Schwab, & Schuler, 1986; Leiter & Maslach, 1988; Wolpin, Burke, & Greenglass, 1991).

Regarding behavioral correlates, preliminary research indicates that one dimension of burnout, emotional exhaustion, may be negatively related to job performance (Wright & Bonett, 1997b; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). However, relations have yet to be established between the two other burnout dimensions, depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment, and job performance. Using conservation of resources (COR) theory as the theoretical framework (Hobfoll, 1988, 1989, 1998; Lee & Ashforth, 1996), the present study was designed to extend prior research and provide an empirical test among each of Maslach's three dimensions of burnout, psychological well-being, organizational commitment and job performance.

The Burnout Construct

Maslach and Jackson (1986, p. 1) defined burnout as "a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do 'people work' of some kind." Emotional exhaustion describes the affective, feeling states of the individual characterized by depleted emotional resources and a lack of energy (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Depersonalization is characterized by negative, cynical attitudes and feelings about one's clients. Employees come to view their clients as somehow deserving of their lot in life. Finally, diminished personal accomplishment refers to the tendency to evaluate oneself negatively. Employees experience increased dissatisfaction with their accomplishments on the job, coupled with a heightened perception of failure to make work-related progress. Thus, a sense of diminished personal accomplishment would be increasingly demonstrated when workers feel ineffective and incompetent (Maslach, 1982; Lee & Ashforth, 1990).

Burnout and the COR Model

Several researchers have noted that a better understanding of burnout requires further theoretical refinement (Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). To address this limitation in prior research, Shirom (1989) adopted Hobfoll's (1988, 1989) COR theory of stress as a framework that affords a clearer and more contextual understanding of burnout.

In his valuable review on burnout, Shirom (1989) noted that resource depletion is a central facet of job burnout and concluded that COR theory (Hobfoll, 1988, 1989, 1998; Lee & Ashforth, 1996) is of particular relevance for the study of how stress leads to burnout. According to COR theory, individuals strive to obtain and maintain what they prize or value—resources. Burnout is most likely to occur in situations where there is an actual resource loss, perceived threat of resource loss, a situation in which one's resources are inadequate to meet work demands, or when the anticipated returns are not obtained on an investment of resources (Hobfoll, 1988; Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Hobfoll (1989, p. 516) defined resources "as those objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued by the individual or that serve as a means for attainment of these objects." Examples of resources include social support, job enhancement opportunities, degree of participation in decision making, being psychologically well or having an optimistic personality, level of autonomy, and established behavior-outcome (i.e., reward) contingencies (Hobfoll, 1989; Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Workload level, role ambiguity, role conflict, and stressful events in general are examples of work demands.

COR theory recognizes the importance of individual motivation in the burnout process. More specifically, a key motivational decision involves how employees acquire, maintain and foster the necessary resources to both meet their current work demands and to help guard against further resource depletion. For instance, prolonged strain or emotional exhaustion occurs when employees feel that they no longer have the necessary emotional, personality, social or status resources to predict, understand and control the stressors confronting them (Hobfoll, 1989; Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Sutton & Kahn, 1986; Tetrick & LaRocco, 1987). Using COR theory, similar arguments can be made for depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment. For example, depersonalization can be viewed as an attempt to minimize the emotional resource loss that results from the constant need to solve

intense client problem situations with limited material resources. In other words, from the perspective of COR theory, depersonalization involves the recognition that in order to survive in a client-centered situation, employees must wisely choose strategies that help utilize and conserve their available resources.

The third burnout dimension, diminished personal accomplishment, denotes a decline in employees' personal feelings of competence and successful work achievement (Maslach, 1993). Feelings of diminished personal accomplishment are related, conceptually, to such phenomena as reduced self-efficacy and poor self-esteem (Bandura, 1989; Buunk & Schaufeli, 1993). In this regard, Cherniss (1993) reported that a strong negative linkage exists between self-efficacy and stress. Situations are perceived as being less stressful when individuals believe that they can cope successfully with them.

COR theory further suggests that the consequences of initial resource loss can result in a cascading of ongoing resource loss. This resource loss occurs when negative emotional sequelae (e.g., emotional exhaustion) and a distancing from potential supportive resources that might otherwise be available occurs (e.g., alienation, which reduces availability and likelihood to seek social support). With increasing emotional distress and decreased support, a diminished sense of competence and work achievement is likely to emerge. This, in turn, makes individuals increasingly more vulnerable for further resource loss, as with each loss they are less capable of stress resistance aimed at offsetting the loss process (Taris, 1999). Hence, where employees might initially have high self-efficacy that helps them address job demands, job failures diminish their sense of self-efficacy. When further demands occur, these workers have even less self-efficacy to support their on-going coping efforts and further resource loss is likely to ensue.

While COR theory does not predict which of the three components of burnout would precede another, it does suggest that the appearance of each increases the likelihood of exacerbation of another, and that this spiraling process gains momentum over time. Furthermore, once these loss cycles are initiated, the subsequent loss of resources makes individuals decreasingly resilient to confront the inevitable continuation of demands (Hobfoll, 1998). As a result, employees often resort to conserving their remaining resources by lowering their morale, reducing their commitment to the organization and decreasing their performance efforts. However, to date, research examining the proposed negative relations among job burnout and such correlates as job performance has been limited.

Personality Resources and Burnout

COR theory also posits that personal characteristics can act as key resources (Hobfoll, 1998). There is evidence that various individual resource characteristics are related to job burnout (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). For instance, Wright and Cropanzano (1998) found that positive affectivity (PA) was negatively, and negative affectivity (NA) was positively related to emotional exhaustion. Recent research has proposed the possible role of another personality variable, psychological well-being, as a resource capable of assisting individuals to better cope with various work and life demands, while also helping to protect them from further resource depletion (Wright & Bonett, 1997a).

Psychological well-being refers to a subjective and global judgment that one is experiencing high levels of positive emotion and low levels of negative emotion (Argyle, 1987; Bradburn, 1969; Diener & Larson, 1993; Warr, 1990). Psychological well-being measures the hedonic or pleasantness-based dimension of individual feelings and is widely conceptualized in terms of the overall effectiveness of an individual's psychological and social functioning. Psychological well-being is typically considered as an affectively-based "context-free" or global construct, one which is not tied to any particular situation (Wright & Bonett, 1997a). While psychological well-being has been considered as both a disposition or trait and a state or mood (e.g., Diener, 1984; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999), most typically it is viewed as a relatively constant and stable trait.

All things being equal, most people would prefer to be psychologically well (Cropanzano & Wright, 2001). In fact, a belief fundamental to many theories of motivation is that humans seek what is pleasurable and avoid what is painful (Velasquez, 1998). Unfortunately, at the present, recent research indicates an increasing number of individuals reporting heightened feelings of psychological distress (Wright & Wright, 2002). As a result, psychological well-being can be considered as a valuable, though sometimes scarce, resource (Hobfoll, 1998). More specifically, according to COR theory, this inherent value or worth placed on psychological well-being, coupled with the issue of potential scarcity, underscores the importance of conserving, maintaining or possibly even enhancing one's well-being whenever possible (Hobfoll, 1988, 1989, 1998). In fact, given the great value that most people attach to being psychologically well, coupled with the fact that not everyone has enough of it, one can begin to better understand the proposed relations among psychological well-being and the dimensions of burnout. In addition, recent research has proposed relations among psychological well-being and such work-related outcomes as job performance.

Staw, Sutton, and Pelled (1994) re-analyzed a longitudinal data set to determine whether a single dimension measure of well-being could predict changes in performance outcomes. Staw et al. found support that their well-being measure predicted positive changes in salary, performance evaluations, and social support. Staw and Barsade (1993) obtained similar results in an experimental study involving MBA students using a hedonically-toned composite measure of well-being. Finally, Wright and his colleagues have also found support for a positive relation between psychological well-being and performance (Wright, Bonett, & Sweeney, 1993; Wright & Staw, 1999; Wright, Larwood, & Denney, 2002).

Commitment to Invest Resources

Organizational commitment continues to remain one of the most enduring topics in the organizational sciences (Bauer & Green, 1998). Although various conceptualizations and measurements of the commitment construct abound (Meyer & Allen, 1997), the concept most frequently studied has been attitudinal commitment. Attitudinal commitment is the strength of employees' emotional attachment to an organization and acceptance of the organization's goals and values (Brett, Cron, & Slocum, 1995; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). Thus, employees with a strong level of attitudinal commitment remain with the organization because they *want* to—because they feel part of the organization's psychological and social community (Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin, & Jackson, 1989).

From a COR theory perspective, employees must not only be willing, but also able, to invest valuable resources in order to maintain a high level of emotional attachment to their organization. More specifically, according to COR theory, this emotional attachment or commitment to one's employing organization provides a primary source for social resources (Hobfoll, 1998). For example, committed employees are proud to inform others of their association with their organization and report that they proactively "talk-up" their organization to friends as a great place to work (Mowday et al., 1982). This emotional attachment is not without cost, however. In particular, this relation suggests a dynamic notion of exchange (Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1972; March & Simon, 1958). Potential employees come to organizations with certain needs and resources, expecting to find a work environment where they can utilize their abilities and satisfy their needs. That is, employees are most likely to be willing and able to invest the necessary resources to initiate and maintain an emotional attachment or commitment to an organization if two (2) conditions are met. First, individuals must have the necessary resources available. Second, the organization must be perceived as providing the necessary work environment for employees to utilize their abilities and satisfy their needs.

Based on COR theory, we propose that as individuals reduce their organizational commitment, they correspondingly withdraw their investment of resources into work. As such, they are less likely to expend the necessary energy, give up other outside rewards, or remain in the fray as work hassles are encountered (Taris, Schreurs, & Schaufeli, 1999). This, in turn, produces further loss cycles where greater emotional exhaustion, diminished personal accomplishment and a greater sense of depersonalization follow. Hence, we predict that organizational commitment is negatively related to the burnout dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment.

Status Resources

COR theory similarly provides a framework for why certain demographic variables may act as status resources. Research has clearly demonstrated that having greater status increases access to better pay and working/living conditions (Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1969). In fact, such potential status resources as education, age, marital status, and being male have long been associated with higher income, better employment conditions, having a position with more control, access to better benefits, and employment security (Becker, 1964; Granovetter & Tilly, 1988; Hall, 1989). COR theory proposes that having these basic demographic or status resources will facilitate the emergence of personal and social resources (i.e., psychological well-being and organizational commitment). In this regard, Hobfoll (1998) has introduced the concept of resource caravans, adapted here to suggest that demographic or status variables such as age, gender and ethnicity can provide a background net of potential resources that help facilitate individual adaptation and coping. Regarding burnout, Maslach and Jackson (1986) reported that level of expressed employee burnout may vary based on age, gender and ethnicity. Using the theoretical framework provided by COR theory, the present research examines the potential role of the status resources, age, gender and ethnicity in job burnout.

STUDY OVERVIEW

As noted, COR theory considers personal characteristics as a potential resource (Hobfoll, 1998). More specifically, psychological well-being is proposed to be positively related to job performance (Wright & Staw, 1999; Wright et al., 2002). COR theory also provides the theoretical basis for better understanding the role of a social resource, organizational commitment, in employee burnout. A high level of employee attitudinal commitment can be considered as a decision to dedicate or invest potentially valuable or scarce resources to the workplace, while low levels of commitment can be considered as indicative of a decision to withhold or withdraw potential resources from the workplace. In addition, based on the framework of COR theory, and past research endeavors (Wright & Bonett, 1997b), one could also expect relations among each of the burnout dimensions and job performance. Building on the work of Hobfoll (1988, 1989, 1998) and Lee and Ashforth (1996), the present study adopts the COR framework in an attempt to more adequately explain job burnout.

Research Hypotheses

With the COR model as the theoretical basis, this study was conducted to provide an empirical test of the proposed relations among emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, diminished personal accomplishment, organizational commitment, psychological well-being and job performance. To that end, we examined the following four research hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Negative relations are predicted among (a) emotional exhaustion, (b) depersonalization, (c) diminished personal accomplishment, and job performance.

Hypothesis 2: Negative relations are predicted among psychological well-being and (a) emotional exhaustion, (b) depersonalization, and (c) diminished personal accomplishment.

Hypothesis 3: Psychological well-being will be positively related to job performance.

Hypothesis 4: Commitment to invest resources in the workplace will be negatively related to (a) emotional exhaustion, (b) depersonalization, and (c) diminished personal accomplishment.

METHOD

The present study was specifically designed to further investigate the relations among psychological well-being, organizational commitment, job performance and Maslach's three dimensions of job burnout. Incorporating aspects of a committed-to-participant research (CPR) perspective (Wright & Wright, 1999; Wright et al., 2002; Wright & Wright, 2002), the first author asked all human services counselors employed in a city-sponsored, public sector agency ($N = 75$) to participate in the study by means of a direct contact procedure. More specifically, the first author formally discussed research requirements with each prospective study participant. Later, at the conclusion of the study, each participant was offered a written summary of the findings. Based upon the findings, participants deemed "burnout at-risk" were made aware of the problem and offered the opportunity to discuss potential solutions to burnout with the first author.

The actual sample included original data from 50 employees, representing a response rate of 67%.¹ All respondents had completed their bachelor's degree, were employed in the same department, and performed the same job duties. The position of counselor is a client-centered management position, involving substantial supervision and delegation. The mean age for the mostly male (68%) sample was 40.3 years. The reliance on self-report data collected at the same time, with the same instrument, can be problematic. In order to help minimize the problems associated with common method variance, data for the personality variable, psychological well-being, was collected on the same day, but measured with a separate, independently administered questionnaire.

Measures

Burnout. The 22-item Maslach Burnout Inventory was used to measure the three dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). The inventory uses a 7-point scale and respondents were asked to indicate how frequently (i.e., from "never" to "every day") they experienced the feelings described in the item. Sample items for the 9-item emotional exhaustion scale include: "I feel emotionally drained from my work," "I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day," and "I feel I'm working too hard on my job." Sample items for the 5-item depersonalization scale include: "I've become more callous toward people since I took this job" and "I don't really care what happens to some recipients." Finally, sample items for the 8-item diminished personal accomplishment scale (reverse coded) include: "I can easily understand how my recipients feel about things," "I feel I'm positively influencing other people's lives through my work," and "I can easily create a relaxed atmosphere with my recipients." The present study established Cronbach coefficient alphas of 0.90 for emotional exhaustion, 0.80 for depersonalization and 0.84 for diminished personal accomplishment.

Psychological Well-Being. As a measure of psychological well-being, this study utilized the eight-item Index of Psychological Well-being developed by Berkman (1971). The Berkman scale uses many of the same items as Bradburn and Caplovitz' (1965) earlier measure, but with a more general time horizon. For example, respondents were asked how often they felt: "depressed or very unhappy," "particularly excited or interested in something," "pleased about having accomplished something," and "on top of the world." The reader is referred to

¹ In field research, where research participants are often difficult to obtain, it is important to determine the minimum number of respondents necessary for the detection of meaningful effects (Bonett & Wright, 2000; Wright et al., 2002). Guilford (1956, p. 145) noted that a squared correlation of .25 is indicative of a substantial or meaningful relation. Since prior research has typically found simple, bivariate correlations among various personality resources, organizational commitment and job burnout dimensions in the .40 range (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998; Lee & Ashforth, 1996), it is not unreasonable to expect a multiple correlation of .50 when jointly considering these variables as correlates of job burnout. Using a standard sample size procedure (Cohen, 1988), a sample size of 42 would be adequate to detect a squared correlation of .25 with power equal to .75 and alpha equal to .05. Thus, the obtained samples used in the regression analyses can be considered acceptable for testing the hypothesized relations investigated in this field study.

Berkman (1971) and Wright and his colleagues (Wright & Bonett, 1992; Wright & Cropanzano, 2000; Wright & Staw, 1999) for a more complete description of the scoring and validation of the Index using a probability sample of 6928 adults from Alameda County, California.

Organizational Commitment. The widely used 15-item Organizational Commitment Questionnaire developed by Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian (1974) was used to measure organizational commitment. Each of the organizational commitment items used a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Sample items include: "I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help the organization be successful" and "I really care about the fate of the organization." Cronbach alpha was .74.

Job Performance. The performance evaluation procedure validated by Wright and his colleagues (Wright & Staw, 1999; Wright et al., 2002) was used in the present study. Management personnel from the current organization confirmed four dimensions (support, goal emphasis, team building and work facilitation) and a one-item, global rating as appropriate and relevant for assessing the performance of the human services counselors. Responses on each of the five items were obtained from each participant's supervisor for the relevant one year review period and were summed to form a composite measure of performance (coefficient alpha = .81).

RESULTS

Correlation Analyses: Hypotheses 1-4

The means, standard deviations and intercorrelations for each of the study variables are contained in Table 1. Hypothesis 1 predicted negative relations among the 3 dimensions of

TABLE 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations for the Study Variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	40.3	7.3	—	-.09	.03	.16	-.03	-.33*	-.12	-.27*	-.21
2. Gender ¹	1.3	0.5	—	-.02	.11	.20	.11	-.20	-.20	-.20	-.21
3. Ethnicity ²	1.2	0.4	—	—	.38**	.16	-.16	-.19	-.25*	-.25*	.03
4. Org. Commitment	3.2	0.8	—	—	—	(.74)	.06	-.03	-.25*	-.31*	-.35**
5. Psych. Well-Being	3.7	1.3	—	—	—	—	(.73)	.37**	-.67***	-.49***	-.37**
6. Composite Perf.	3.5	0.6	—	—	—	—	—	(.81)	-.29*	-.08	-.16
7. Emotional Exhaustion	2.6	1.2	—	—	—	—	—	—	(.90)	.72***	.28*
8. Depersonalization	1.9	1.4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(.80)	.40**
9. Dim. Pers. Accomplishment	4.2	0.9	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(.84)

Note: All tests were one-tailed.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

Cronbach alphas listed on the diagonal

¹ Gender was dummy coded "1" for male and "2" for female

² Ethnicity was dummy coded "1" for white and "2" for other

burnout and job performance. As predicted, support was obtained for the predicted relation between emotional exhaustion and composite performance ($r = -.29, p < .05$). However, neither depersonalization ($r = -.08, ns$) nor diminished personal accomplishment ($r = -.16, ns$) were related to composite performance. Hypothesis 2 predicted negative relations among psychological well-being and the dimensions of job burnout. These predictions were supported. As predicted, emotional exhaustion ($r = -.67, p < .001$), depersonalization ($r = -.49, p < .001$), and diminished personal accomplishment ($r = -.37, p < .01$) were all negatively related to psychological well-being. Hypothesis 3 predicted a positive relation between psychological well-being and job performance. As predicted, psychological well-being ($r = .37, p < .01$) was positively related to job performance. Hypothesis 4 predicted a negative relation among the dimensions of job burnout and organizational commitment. As predicted, emotional exhaustion ($r = -.25, p < .05$), depersonalization ($r = -.31, p < .01$), and diminished personal accomplishment ($r = -.35, p < .01$) were negatively related to organizational commitment.

Regression Analyses

Although these correlational results provide consistent support for the bivariate relations posited in Hypotheses 1-4, they do not address either the possibility of various third-variable explanations or the issue of the relative contribution of each predictor variable (i.e., psychological well-being and organizational commitment) in the determination of job burnout. For example, even though all the participants were employed within the same department and performed similar job duties, they did vary in terms of age, gender and ethnicity. Maslach and Jackson (1986) noted the potential for relations between burnout and such status resources as age, gender and ethnicity. Finally, the possible roles of age, gender and ethnicity in determining the social resource, organizational commitment, have been widely investigated (Meyer & Allen, 1997). To address these issues, three separate, three-step hierarchical regression analyses were performed. The first regression assessed the relative contributions of the demographic variables (i.e., age, gender and ethnicity) in step 1, organizational commitment in step 2, and psychological well-being in step 3, to emotional exhaustion. The same procedure was undertaken in the second regression for depersonalization, while diminished personal accomplishment was examined in the third regression.

Relative Contribution to Emotional Exhaustion

We assessed the incremental contribution to emotional exhaustion in three steps. In step 1, age, gender and ethnicity were entered into the equation ($F(3,41) = 0.74, ns$). Organizational commitment was added during step 2 ($F(4,40) = 0.72, ns$). The change in R^2 from step 1 to step 2 represents the increase in emotional exhaustion variance explained by organizational commitment above and beyond the demographic control variables. The change in R^2 was not significant ($R^2 = .02, t(40) = -0.83, ns$), indicating that organizational commitment did not account for a significant proportion of the variance in emotional exhaustion above and beyond the control variables (see Table 2). The personality variable, psychological well-being, was added in Step 3 ($F(5,39) = 6.80, p < .001$). As displayed in Table 2, the change in R^2 was significant, resulting in a change in $R^2 = .40$ ($p < .001$), indicating the importance of psychological well-being in the prediction of emotional exhaustion.

TABLE 2
Regression Results for the Incremental Effects on Emotional Exhaustion

Criterion Variable Emotional Exhaustion	<i>b</i>	<i>se b</i>	β
Step 1: Demographics Control Variables			
Age	.01	.03	.02
Gender	-.46	.40	-.18
Ethnicity	-.40	.47	-.13
Change in $R^2 = .05$			
Step 2: Intent to Commit Resources			
Organizational Commitment	-.21	.25	-.14
Change in $R^2 = .02$			
Step 3: Personality Resources			
Psych. Well-Being	-.63	.12	-.65***
Change in $R^2 = .40***$			

Note: All tests were one-tailed.

*** $p < .001$

Relative Contribution to Depersonalization

As with emotional exhaustion, we assessed the incremental contribution to depersonalization in three steps. In step 1, age, gender and ethnicity were entered into the equation ($F(3,41) = 2.11$, ns). Organizational commitment was added during step 2 ($F(4,40) = 1.76$, ns). The change in R^2 from step 1 to step 2 represents the increase in depersonalization variance explained by organizational commitment above and beyond the demographic control variables. The change in R^2 was not significant ($R^2 = .02(t(40) = -0.87$, ns), indicating that organizational commitment did not account for a significant proportion of the variance in depersonalization above and beyond the control variables (see Table 3). Finally, the personality variable, psychological well-being, was added in step 3 ($F(5,39) = 3.86$, $p < .01$). As displayed in Table 3, the change in R^2 was significant, resulting in a change in $R^2 = .18$ ($p < .01$), indicating the importance of psychological well-being in the prediction of depersonalization.

Relative Contribution to Diminished Personal Accomplishment

The incremental contribution to our third dimension of burnout, diminished personal accomplishment, was also assessed in three steps. In step 1, age, gender and ethnicity were entered into the equation ($F(3,41) = 1.06$, ns). Organizational commitment was added during Step 2 ($F(4,40) = 1.43$, ns). The change in R^2 was not significant ($R^2 = .05(t(40) = 1.56$, ns), indicating that organizational commitment did not account for a significant proportion of the variance in diminished personal accomplishment above and beyond the control variables (see Table 4). The personality variable, psychological well-being, was added in step 3 ($F(5,39) = 2.74$, $p < .05$). As displayed in Table 4, the change in R^2 was significant, resulting in a change in $R^2 = .13$ ($p < .05$). Taken together, these results clearly demonstrate the contribution of the

TABLE 3
Regression Results for the Incremental Effects on Depersonalization

Criterion Variable Depersonalization	<i>b</i>	<i>se b</i>	β
Step 1: Demographics Control Variables			
Age	-.04	.03	-.22
Gender	-.60	.42	-.21
Ethnicity	-.84	.49	-.25*
Change in $R^2 = .13$			
Step 2: Intent to Commit Resources			
Organizational Commitment	-.23	.27	-.14
Change in $R^2 = .02$			
Step 3: Personality Resources			
Psych. Well-Being	-.46	.14	-.44**
Change in $R^2 = .18^{**}$			

Note: All tests were one-tailed.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

TABLE 4
Regression Results for the Incremental Effects on Diminished Personal Accomplishment

Criterion Variable Diminished Personal Accomplishment	<i>b</i>	<i>se b</i>	β
Step 1: Demographics Control Variables			
Age	.02	.02	.19
Gender	.34	.26	.20
Ethnicity	-.15	.31	-.08
Change in $R^2 = .07$			
Step 2: Intent to Commit Resources			
Organizational Commitment	.26	.16	.25
Change in $R^2 = .05$			
Step 3: Personality Resources			
Psych. Well-Being	-.24	.09	-.38**
Change in $R^2 = .13^{**}$			

Note: All tests were one-tailed.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

personality variable, psychological well-being, in the prediction of the burnout dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment.

DISCUSSION

The present research was designed to help provide a further integration of COR theory into burnout research. With the COR model as the theoretical framework, several relevant work-related correlates of job burnout were examined. Hypothesis 1 predicted negative relations among the dimensions of burnout and composite job performance. As predicted, support was obtained for a negative relation between emotional exhaustion and job performance. However, neither depersonalization nor diminished personal accomplishment were related to job performance. Hypothesis 2 proposed negative relations among psychological well-being and the dimensions of burnout. These predictions were supported. Hypothesis 3 predicted a positive relation between psychological well-being and job performance. This prediction was supported. Hypothesis 4 proposed negative relations among the burnout dimensions and organizational commitment. As predicted, each dimension of job burnout was negatively related to organizational commitment.

It is interesting to note that the personality resource, psychological well-being, appeared to be more critical than the social resource variable, organizational commitment, in the prediction of burnout. One possible reason for this finding is that the overall level of employee attachment or commitment to the study organization is somewhat low (commitment mean = 3.2 on a 7 point scale, with the SD = 0.8). Thus, consistent with COR theory, many of the present employees may perceive that the organization no longer provides the necessary work environment for them to utilize their abilities and satisfy their needs. This result is also consistent with Wright and Cropanzano's (1998) finding that the personality resources, negative and positive affectivity, were directionally related to each of the Maslach dimensions of burnout. However, in the Wright and Cropanzano study, neither PA or NA were related to job performance. Alternatively, in the present study, a significant bivariate relation was established between psychological well-being and job performance. Given that prior research has established significant relations among psychological well-being, PA and NA in the .40 to .60 range (cf., Wright & Staw, 1999), it is possible that PA and NA may be related to job performance depending on the content of the job (e.g., sales versus human services counselors). For example, the predominance of activation-based descriptors in the PA scale (i.e., "alert, active, enthusiastic") might prove predictive of performance in occupations like sales where performance is typically measured quantitatively.

Taken together, the present results, along with those of Wright and Cropanzano (1998), point to the importance of personality factors, especially psychological well-being, in the burnout process. However, it may also indicate the effects of ongoing burnout. In this regard, although these variables have been shown to be fairly stable traits, they are likely to be influenced by long-term burnout processes that are generated at times over years. As a result, conditions leading to chronic burnout could have influenced employee psychological well-being and indicate that prior resource loss processes are already ongoing (Taris, 1999). One potential consequence of these findings is the relevance for individuals to seriously consider the possible benefits from proactively moderating their level of job burnout by self-monitoring or managing their personal perceptions. Quick, Quick, Nelson, and Hurrell (1997) provide a

detailed overview of various cognitive restructuring techniques designed to be beneficial in providing both temporary and more permanent or dispositionally-based changes in human behavior.

Another possible alternative explanation for the current findings may be that our personality resource, psychological well-being, is not really tapping into constructs distinct from Maslach's burnout dimensions. For example, the high correlation ($r = -.67$) between psychological well-being and emotional exhaustion provides preliminary support for the contention that some measures of distress, such as emotional exhaustion, covary with, and can be viewed as, an alternative measure of psychological distress. For instance, Cooper (2000) recently noted that attempts to more specifically identify the role of psychological distress or negative affectivity (NA) in job stress and strain research have probably received more attention than other personality variables.

To examine the relative contribution of the burnout dimensions and our personality resource, psychological well-being, to job performance, we conducted a post hoc multiple regression analysis. In particular, job performance was regressed on emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, diminished personal accomplishment and psychological well-being. The results demonstrated that only emotional exhaustion was a significant predictor of performance. These results are highly consistent with the growing research consensus regarding the key role played by emotional exhaustion in the prediction of such important organizational outcome variables as job performance (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Shirom, 1989; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). Furthermore, these results also emphasize the significance of conserving and maintaining resources proposed by COR theory. More specifically, since being emotionally exhausted and performing poorly are both typically considered stressful events, employees will try to reduce this stress. However, emotionally exhausted individuals, by definition, usually lack the resources necessary to either reduce their emotional exhaustion or improve their performance. As a consequence, these individuals would be more likely to exhibit increases in various forms of such potentially costly withdrawal behavior as increased tardiness, absenteeism and turnover (Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Taris, 1999).

The pattern of associations among the burnout dimensions and the correlates examined in this study are consistent with COR theory (Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993; Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Taris et al., 1999). COR theory posits that job burnout occurs when employees feel that they do not have the necessary or adequate reserve of physical, social, emotional or status resources to handle job-related strain (Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). This recognition, in turn, leads to selective methods of coping or adapting to the particular situation. Lee and Ashforth (1993a, 1993b) proposed that the prevalent coping strategy for many individuals in these circumstances, especially for social or human services workers, involves some form of withdrawal from the situation, either attitudinal (i.e., reduced organizational commitment) or behavioral (i.e., decreased performance). The present results provide support for both the attitudinal and behavioral theses.

In accordance with COR theory, we framed our hypotheses with the assumption that emotional exhaustion causes diminished performance. One limitation of the present study is that emotional exhaustion and performance ratings were collected at the same point in time. It is not inconsistent with COR theory, however, that the causal direction runs from (decreased)

performance to emotional (and physical) exhaustion (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). For example, the stress associated with receiving negative performance feedback may result in a "ripple effect" where the performance challenged employees become increasingly emotionally exhausted. We suggest that prospective work be undertaken to examine how employees who get into negative spirals and experience accelerated loss differ from those employees better able to resist the negative sequelae of burnout. Needed now is research examining both independent and dependent variables at multiple points in time, to allow for a more precise interpretation of these proposed causal relations.

The subject of employee burnout introduces the very important, but widely neglected, topic of researcher ethical responsibility to the actual study participants. For instance, in the present research, a number of participants self-reported that they experienced high levels of burnout. Consistent with a committed-to-participant research (CPR) perspective (Wright & Wright, 1999; Wright et al., 2002; Wright & Wright, 2002), each research participant in the current study was treated as a research "stakeholder" whose contributions of time and cooperation were highly valued *and* rewarded (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Rosnow, 1997). For example, employees deemed "burnout at-risk" were informed of the problem, counseled that they had an opportunity to do something about the situation, and made aware of a number of specific coping tools for reducing feelings of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment. As one consequence, a number of participants used this knowledge that they were at-risk for burnout to investigate alternative employment opportunities. While further discussion of the CPR approach is beyond the scope of this paper, we close by noting that organizational researchers have an ethical responsibility to carefully consider the interests of all relevant stakeholder groups involved in their research, especially those of the actual research participants.

CONCLUSION

The present research examined the relations among emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, diminished personal accomplishment, organizational commitment, psychological well-being and job performance. Psychological well-being and organizational commitment were related to each of the job burnout dimensions. One dimension of burnout, emotional exhaustion, was negatively, while psychological well-being was positively related to composite performance. Given the continued deterioration of various social structures (i.e., family, church, community) which traditionally provided valuable "stress buffers" for many individuals and the ongoing demands of the workplace (Hobfoll, 1998), burnout will continue to be a relevant organizational topic in the foreseeable future. Until alternative preventive measures are undertaken, we will continue to see the types of maladaptive correlates of burnout examined in the present study.

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