

## **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

### **A Structural Equation Modeling Approach to Aspirations and Job Burnout: A Study of New Zealand Leaders**

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## **A Structural Equation Modeling Approach to Aspirations and Job Burnout: A Study of New Zealand Leaders**

Self Determination Theory (SDT) asserts aspirations (life goals) of personal growth, relationship, community and health (intrinsic aspirations) support optimal functioning including in employees and leaders, whereas aspirations for wealth, image and fame (extrinsic aspirations) are detrimental. Furthermore, the pursuit of extrinsic aspirations has been associated with the undermining of leadership capabilities, as well as negatively related employee's wellbeing, and the wellbeing of wider society. Consequently, leaders can be viewed as being concerned with self interest and the pursuit of extrinsic aspirations, or viewed as acting with concern for others and intrinsic aspirations. While we understand that aspirations are important, little is understood about the influence intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations have towards job burnout. The following study explores seven dimensions of aspirations on a sample of 386 New Zealand leaders towards emotional exhaustion and cynicism. Data was collected in two waves (1=predictors and 2=outcomes) and structural equation modeling was used to test the influence. Two models were tested. In model 1 (direct effects only), findings showed that, in general, extrinsic aspirations were positively related to job burnout and intrinsic aspirations were negatively related. Wealth and image aspirations were significantly and positively related to emotional exhaustion and cynicism, while fame aspirations (an extrinsic aspiration) were found to be significantly and *negatively* related to both outcomes. Similarly, personal growth and health aspirations were found to be significantly and negatively related to both emotional exhaustion and cynicism, while community aspirations (an intrinsic aspiration) were found to be significantly and *positively* related to both outcomes. Aspirations towards relationships were not related to either dimension of job burnout. Overall, aspirations accounted for moderate amounts of variance (25% for emotional exhaustion and 22% for cynicism). A mediation model (model 2) was also tested and found to be significantly superior to model 1, with aspirations influencing emotional exhaustion which in turn influenced cynicism. In model 2, wealth and image aspirations were significantly and positively related to emotional exhaustion, while health aspirations were significantly and negatively related. Emotional exhaustion was significantly and positively related to cynicism. Model 2 showed that emotional exhaustion fully mediated the influence of intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations towards cynicism. Furthermore, while model 2 accounted for slightly less variance towards emotional exhaustion (19%), it accounted for significantly greater amounts towards cynicism (59%). Overall, extrinsic aspirations generally acted as expected, with leaders with life goals focused on themselves (e.g. wealth and image) leading to greater emotional exhaustion. Similarly, leaders with life goals focused on intrinsic aspects (e.g. health) had less emotional exhaustion, and ultimately this is important because emotional exhaustion played a large part in influencing cynicism. This study shows the importance that life goals can play towards job burnout and encourages further exploration of SDT dimensions towards similar outcomes.

Keywords: *aspirations, job burnout, SEM, mediation.*

## **Introduction**

In an era in which the demand for quality leaders exceeds supply, the ability to grow leaders requires an understanding of leaders' motivations, and the implication of these for the leader's themselves. Hence, a greater understanding of leaders' motivations matter, as these can enhance or detract from leader development and wellbeing, and can facilitate, or thwart, these up-and-coming leaders ability to influence others positively (Spreitzer, 2006; Avolio, Walumbwa & Weber, 2009). The current backlash against leaders who have been personally profiting, enhancing their own fame and notoriety, and receiving massive payouts, while the companies they lead have failed, has led to disenchantment with leaders on whom we rely on to act with responsibility and integrity (Sinclair, 2007; Schyns & Hansbrough, 2010). Kasser, Cohn, Kanner and Ryan (2007) stated the motivation of leaders via financial rewards, self interest and competition, not only undermine the psychological wellbeing of leaders, but also the wellbeing of employees, communities and wider society. Cartwright and Homes (2006) suggest that the breakdown of community, the growing culture of consumerism, dominating commercial values and "continuing corporate scandals challenge the confidence and trust which shareholders, employees and customers now have in business leaders" (p. 200).

Furthermore, the current economic uncertainty, organisational dynamics, pressure to conform coupled with performance related rewards, place pressure on leaders to act quickly, based on self interest and as such at the expense of employees (Maner & Mead, 2010). Hannah, Woolfolk and Lord (2009) suggest that as leaders are faced with unpredictable and conflicting demands, this challenges not only their skills and abilities but also their very sense of self. Related to this, is the undermining of leaders wellbeing. Kaplan, Drath and Kofodimos (1991) found those who ascend the hierarchy of leadership, though becoming more outwardly successful, demonstrated a paucity of wellbeing. Positive leadership scholars, drawing from positive psychology, emphasise how understanding desirable leadership motivations, characteristics, and

behaviours, results in enhanced organisational performance, and individual and wider community wellbeing (Hannah et al, 2009; Cameron, 2008; Avolio & Luthans 2006; Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Hart, Conklin & Allen, 2008; Quick & Quick, 2004; Avolio et al., 2009; Greenleaf, 1998; Wright & Quick, 2009a, 2009b). These researchers contended that in order to meet the increasingly unpredictable and complex demands, such as those outlined above, and in order to positively influence followers, leaders require a positive growth and community orientated perspective (Cameron, 2008; Hannah & Avolio, 2010; Quick & Quick, 2004).

Furthermore, previous studies highlight that learning, close working relationships, autonomy and need satisfaction are more important than money as motivators (see Cartwright & Holmes, 2006 for a review). As such, this means that *leaders* motivation could fulfil a variety of needs other than financial and ego enhancing (Warr, 1987) and that this could have positive benefits for leader wellbeing, yet this remains to be fully understood (Kasser et al., 2007). The present study tests the relationships between aspirations and leaders job burnout, exploring the two main dimensions of (1) emotional exhaustion, and (2) cynicism. Overall, the paper makes three major contributions. (1) The relationships between intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations towards job burnout has never before been tested; (2) we find generally intrinsic aspirations reduce job burnout and extrinsic aspirations increase job burnout; and (3) a partial mediation model fits the data best, where aspirations influence emotional exhaustion, which in turn predicts cynicism, showing emotional exhaustion fully mediates the influence of aspirations on cynicism. Overall, the paper makes significant contributions towards the job burnout and Self Determination Theory (SDT) literature, by testing and empirically supporting the links between aspirations and job burnout.

## **Self Determination Theory**

SDT is a motivation theory based on the premise that people actively seek opportunities to develop their fullest potential (Deci & Ryan 2000; Greguras & Diefendorff 2009). SDT maintains development is via striving to broaden knowledge, connect with people, seek challenges, and to integrate these experiences into an authentic sense of self (Ryan, Huta & Deci 2008; Vansteenkiste, Neyrinck, Niemic, Soenens, De Witte, & Van den Broeck (2007; Sheldon & Kasser 2008; Greguras & Diefendorff 2009). Consequently, engagement in growth, competence building, and enhanced relationships, culminates in psychological wellbeing (Sheldon & Niemiec 2006; Vansteenkiste et al. 2007). SDT takes into account both optimal functioning (eudaimonic wellbeing) and malfunctioning (the dark side of personality and behavior), and studies the conditions which stimulate the former or elicit the latter (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

SDT has both theoretical and practical importance in terms of leadership. Individual endeavors of optimal or malfunction tendencies in leaders' aspirations will either support or detract from their own growth orientated potential and their ability to build relationships, both of which are fundamental to leadership success (Ryan et al. 2008; Cameron, 2008). Moreover, SDT states that leaders are likely to display optimal performance and wellbeing when psychological wellbeing is enhanced (Vansteenkiste et al. 2007; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Central to SDT is the unifying concept of *psychological needs fulfillment*. As a person has their psychological needs for autonomy (psychological freedom), competence (enhancement of ones abilities and skill) and relatedness (meaningful connections with others) met, wellbeing is enhanced. As such, psychological needs fulfillment provides the "framework for integrating findings", such that aspirations either support psychological wellbeing (positive functioning), or thwart psychological wellbeing (malfunctioning behavior) (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 263). Hence, SDT asserts that people who pursue aspirations and goals that allow or support their psychological need satisfaction, will benefit by enhanced wellbeing. In short, psychological wellbeing requires a

synthesis between needs satisfaction, motivation and the goals and aspirations of the individual leaders (Deci, Connell & Ryan, 1989; Vansteenkiste et al., 2007).

### **Aspirations**

SDT asserts that it is the *nature* of the aspiration that supports or detracts from wellbeing. Ryan, Sheldon, Kasser and Deci (1996) argued that the pursuit and attainment of some goals provide greater satisfaction of psychological wellbeing than the pursuit and attainment of others. Aspirations towards personal growth, relationships, community and health enhance wellbeing, whereas those goals pursued in terms of wealth, fame, image and power undermine wellbeing (Deci & Ryan 2000, Kasser & Ryan 1993, 1996; Kasser, Ryan, Couchman, & Sheldon 2004). Kasser and Ryan (1993, 1996) distinguished between *intrinsic aspirations* (growth, affiliation, community contribution and health), and *extrinsic aspirations* (wealth, image and fame). The terms *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* aspirations are used to highlight that some goals are expected to be more closely linked to satisfaction of the three basic needs (autonomy, competence and relatedness) than others. Goals that are labeled intrinsic *are satisfying in their own right* hence they provide direct satisfaction of the three basic needs. Intrinsic aspirations are positively related to positive psychological and physical wellbeing, and positive adjustment (Deckop et al. 2010; Sheldon & Filak 2008; Ryan, Williams, Patrick & Deci 2009), while extrinsic goals have an ‘external’ orientation (Williams, Cox, Hedberg, & Deci 2000) or a ‘having’ orientation (Fromm 1976; Van Boven & Gilovich 2003).

External aspirations are more related to obtaining contingent approval or external signs of worth, and are therefore concerned with external manifestations of importance rather than with meeting internal psychological need satisfaction. Furthermore, when people are focused on extrinsic goals, they tend to be more oriented toward interpersonal comparisons (Lyubomirsky & Ross 1997; Sirgy 1998), acquiring external signs of self-worth (Kasser, Ryan, Couchman, &

Sheldon 2004), and unstable self-esteem (Kernis, Brown, & Brody 2000), and have poorer wellbeing (Sheldon & Kasser, 2008), less leadership efficacy (Hannah & Avolio, 2010), and less optimal functioning (Kasser & Ryan, 1996).

## **Job Burnout**

The present study tests the effects of leaders' aspirations towards two dimensions of job burnout, which Maslach and Jackson (1981) defined as: (1) *emotional exhaustion*, which “describe feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work” (p. 101) and (2) *cynicism*, which relates to indifference or distant attitude of work. Burnout can be “manifested by both physical fatigue and a sense of feeling psychologically and emotionally drained” (Zohar, 1997, p. 110). These two dimensions are detailed in more depth below.

### *Emotional Exhaustion*

Emotional exhaustion, or burnout, is a “chronic state of physical and emotional depletion that results from excessive job demands and continuous hassles” (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998, p. 489). It entails the sentiment of being emotionally overextended and fatigued by your individual duties. Theorists have argued that emotional exhaustion is one of the early and crucial elements of employee burnout (Maslach, 1978, 1982; Leiter & Maslach, 1988; Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). It is characterised by a feeling of lack of energy and depleted emotional resources (Posig & Kickul, 2004) which can in effect debilitate the state of an individual's mental health. Emotional exhaustion is highly responsive to work stressors (Leiter, 1991) such as work-family conflict (Haar, 2006). Work overload (Kahn, 1978; Posig & Kickul, 2004) and work-role expectations (Cooke & Rousseau, 1984) have been identified as two factors which are likely to contribute to emotional exhaustion. Work-role expectations are derived from colleagues and superiors

expectations of in-role behaviour. Where these expectations are incompatible with time or psychological resources this is likely to drain a person's emotional capital.

Maslach and Goldberg (1998) offered congruent evidence that job demands and quantitative work overload are influential factors leading to emotional exhaustion. Quantitative work overload describes incompatible time pressures or more specifically, when the amount of work exceeds the amount of time available to complete it (Kahn, 1978). Consequently, emotional exhaustion exists where an employee expending large amounts of time and emotional energy endeavouring to meet work-role expectations has deficient time and resources to do so. Furthermore, emotional exhaustion has been linked to decreased job satisfaction (Lee & Ashforth, 1996) and a decline in job performance and subsequently higher turnover (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). It is evident that a feeling of lack of energy and deficient emotional resources can affect an individual's performance in the workplace.

Swider and Zimmerman (2010) stated that "antecedents to job burnout are traditionally grouped into three categories: organizational, occupational, and individual. While scholars have meticulously outlined a number of possible organizational and occupational predictors of burnout, the study of individual-level predictors has been far less systematic" (p. 499). In their meta-analysis, Swider and Zimmerman (2010) found compelling evidence "underscoring the importance of individual-level predictors of job burnout" (p. 499), in particular personality traits. They found that employees who are "higher in neuroticism and lower in extraversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness are more prone to experience job burnout" (p. 499). However, despite the extensive study of job burnout and the focus on personality, there has been little exploration of the influence of aspirations on job burnout.

### *Cynicism*



Research with the *Maslach Burnout Inventory* in the area of cynicism has also yielded well established findings (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). Despite this, theorists have yet to provide a uniform definition of the concept of cynicism and thus a consensus of the definition and measure of cynicism is yet to be established (Andersson & Bateman, 1997; Wanous, Reichers, & Austin, 2000; Stanley, Meyer, & Topolnytsky, 2005). Currently, there are two competing paradigms towards cynicism: (1) divulges the concept as a reflection of a stable personality trait, and (2) depicts cynicism as an explicit construct focussed on society, vocations, institutions and organizational change (Qian & Daniels, 2008). The primary difference between the two formulations denotes the first as a personal attribution, and the second a situational attribution. It has also been argued that cynicism is more accurately described as a learned response as opposed to a predisposition of personality (Wanous et al., 2000). But for the purpose of this study we will focus on the latter situational attribution as this is aligned with the *Maslach Burnout Inventory* (Maslach et al., 1996).

In the workplace, employee cynicism can manifest as “feelings of frustration and disillusionment as well as negative feelings toward and distrust of a person, group, ideology, social convention, or institution” (Andersson & Bateman, 1997, p. 450). Another definition is offered by Dean, Brandes, and Dharwadkar, (1998) who describe employee cynicism as the product of (1) “a belief that the organization lacks integrity”, (2) “negative affect towards the organization”, and (3) “tendencies for disparaging and critical behaviour towards the company that are consistent with these beliefs and affect” (p. 345). In this respect, cynicism is considered as a passive reaction (Qian & Daniels, 2008) which is congruent with a definition based on situational attribution. Generally, cynicism in the workplace is deemed to be of a destructive nature to the organization (Andersson & Bateman, 1997). However, some theorists challenge this notion and note the positive aspects of the construct. As such, some credit cynicism as a motivational factor (Qian & Daniels, 2008) and others argue that a cynical employee has a more

realistic perspective on potential issues and challenges facing an organization (Watt & Piotrowski, 2008; Foy, 1985). Consequently, cynicism may provide the employee with a more realistic perception of their organization. However, Leiter and Maslach (1988) found cynicism to be negatively correlated to organizational commitment, while Kline and Verbeke (1999) found cynicism to negatively predict autonomic feedback, highlighting the literatures consistent findings of negative influences from cynicism.

The literature uses psychological contract violation theory to explain the root cause of employee cynicism (Qian & Daniels, 2008; Wanous et al., 2000; Watt & Piotrowski, 2008). Breach of a psychological contract involves the cognitive recognition that an employer has not fulfilled one or more of its perceived obligations (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). The breach or violation is therefore defined as a calculative identification of injustice (Pate, 2005). Research has identified several factors which have been linked with engendering cynicism in employees. These factors include flawed organizational design, lack of faith in leadership, unrealistic or frustrated expectations, and organizational change (Watt & Piotrowski, 2008; Bernerth, Armenakis, Field, & Walker, 2007). Cynicism has been linked with increased beliefs of unfairness, feelings of distrust, decreased commitment, decreased job/life satisfaction and feelings of alienation (Andersson & Bateman, 1997; Watt & Piotrowski, 2008). In addition, a cynical employee is likely to be significantly less engaged at work, experience increased absenteeism and overall lower role performance (Wanous et al., 2000).

## **Hypotheses**

Studies of aspirations have found intrinsic aspirations are linked positively to outcomes, while extrinsic aspirations are linked negatively. The present study focuses on job burnout of leaders. As described above, empirical studies of job burnout typically focus on emotional exhaustion and cynicism. We hypothesize that *extrinsic aspirations* (wealth, image and fame) will lead to greater

job burnout because the leader will be too focused on external aspects, such as building their own wealth, fame and looking good, rather than enhancing their leadership skills, through building teams, consensus and positive and supportive workplace climates. Conversely, *intrinsic aspirations* (growth, relatedness, community contribution, and health) will lead to lower burnout because the leader will have congruity between their aspirations and job functions (e.g. building relationships). As such we expect those leaders with intrinsic aspirations to be focused on building relationships, positive workplace ‘communities’ and personal growth, and as such, gain greater value from, and satisfaction with, their jobs. These are provided below:

*Hypothesis 1: Higher extrinsic aspirations (a) wealth, (b) image, (c) fame, will be linked to higher job burnout.*

*Hypothesis 2: Higher intrinsic aspirations (a) growth, (b) affiliation, (c) community, and (d) health, will be linked to lower job burnout.*

### **Mediation Effects**

Maslach et al. (2001) stated the “common assumption has been that burnout causes mental dysfunction”—that is, it precipitates negative effects in terms of mental health” (p. 406). Furthermore, there has been study of the directionality of the various job burnout dimensions. Toppinen-Tanner, Kalimo and Mutanen (2002) suggested that the relationships between emotional exhaustion and cynicism were unclear, with mixed approaches and findings indicating more research were required. However, in their 8-year longitudinal study, they found strong support for emotional exhaustion leading to cynicism and this effect held over the 8-year study. This finding reinforced other cross-sectional studies that have supported that emotional exhaustion leads to cynicism (Bakker, Schaufeli, Sixma, Bosveld & Van Dierendonck, 2000; Cordes, Dougherty & Blum, 1997), as well as more theoretical suggestions (Maslach & Goldberg, 1998). Overall, there appears stronger support for emotional exhaustion predicting

cynicism, and we test this effect. As such, we argue the influence of aspirations on cynicism will be mediated by emotional exhaustion.

*Hypothesis 3: The influence of aspirations on cynicism will be through emotional exhaustion (mediating effects).*

## **Method**

### ***Sample and Procedure***

Data were collected from over 250 organizations, spread across a wide regional location in New Zealand. Supervisors and leaders were the target of this survey, and a question was included in the front of the survey to confirm they were in a position of authority (supervisor or manager). A total of 386 surveys (from 500) were returned for a response rate of 77.2%. Survey one included items relating to the six dimensions of aspirations, as well as demographic variables. Two weeks later survey two was administered to the same participants (containing the job satisfaction measure). On average, the participants were 37.4 years old (SD=13), 58% were male, married (59%), parents (54%), and union members (12%). Respondents worked 39.7 hours per week (SD=13.4), had job tenure of 5.7 years (SD=6.6) and organizational tenure of 9 years (SD=9.3).

### ***Measures***

All reliability scores were above  $\alpha = .70$  and are shown in table 2.

*Outcome variable:* Emotional Exhaustion and Cynicism were measured using 4-items for each dimension from Maslach and Jackson (1981). A sample item for emotional exhaustion is “I feel emotionally drained from my work” and for cynicism is “I have become more cynical about whether my work contributes anything”. Responses were coded 1=never, 5=always. Thus, higher scores indicate greater emotional exhaustion and greater cynicism respectively.

*Predictor variables:* Aspirations were assessed using 28-items (4 per dimension) of the Aspirations Index by Kasser (2002), coded 1=not at all, 5=very. Questions followed the stem “Please circle the number that best represents your opinion relating to the following goals or aspirations that you hope to accomplish over the course of your life”. These items relate to seven dimensions, which relate to *intrinsic aspirations* (meaningful relationships, personal growth, community contributions and health) and *extrinsic aspirations* (wealth, fame, and image). Sample items of intrinsic aspirations are “To have good friends that I can count on” (Relationships), “To grow and learn new things” (Personal Growth), “To work for the betterment of society” (Community) and “To be physically healthy” (Health). Sample items of extrinsic aspirations are “To be a very wealthy person” (Wealth), “To have my name known by many people” (Fame), and “To successfully hide the signs of aging” (Image). To test the factor structure of the seven dimensions, an exploratory factor analysis (principal components, varimax rotation) was run to explore the nature of the measure. This supported the seven factor structure of the aspirations index.

### *Measurement Models*

To confirm the separate dimensions of measures, items were tested by structural equation modeling (SEM) using AMOS. Typically, SEM studies use a large number of goodness-of-fit indices. However, Williams, Vandenberg and Edwards (2009) have criticized the literature, suggesting that some of these indices are meaningless (e.g. chi-square goodness-of-fit statistic). They suggested the following goodness-of-fit indices: the comparative fit index (CFI,  $\geq .95$ ), the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA,  $\leq .08$ ), and the standardized root mean residual (SRMR,  $\leq .10$ ). The hypothesized measurement model and alternative models are shown in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

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Overall, the hypothesized measurement model fit the data best. To confirm this, the CFA was re-analyzed following Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson's (2010) instructions on testing comparison models and this showed the alternative models were all significantly worse than the hypothesized model.

### *Analysis*

Hypotheses were tested using SEM in AMOS to assess the direct and meditational effects of the study variables.

### **Results**

Descriptive statistics for the study variables are shown in Table 2.

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Insert Table 2 about here

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Table 2 shows the intrinsic aspirations dimensions are all significantly correlated with each other (all  $p < .01$ ), and the extrinsic aspirations dimensions are all significantly correlated with each other also (all  $p < .01$ ). Emotional exhaustion and cynicism were both significantly correlated with all the extrinsic aspirations dimensions (all  $p < .01$ ). Cynicism is significantly correlated with all intrinsic aspiration dimensions (all  $p < .05$ ), while relationships ( $r = -0.13$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and health ( $r = -0.16$ ,  $p < .01$ ) are both significantly correlated with emotional exhaustion.

Regarding testing the relationships, three alternative structural models were tested, to determine the most optimal model based on the data: (1) a direct effects only model, where

intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations predicted emotional exhaustion and cynicism; (2) a partial mediation model, where intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations predicted emotional exhaustion and cynicism and emotional exhaustion also predicts cynicism; and (3) a full mediation model, where intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations predicted emotional exhaustion and emotional exhaustion predicts cynicism.

The three structural models and comparisons between them are shown in Table 3.

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Insert Table 3 about here

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We tested comparison models (Hair et al., 2010) and found that model 2 (partial mediation model) and model 3 (full mediation model) were both superior to model 1 (direct effects model), while models 2 and 3 were not significantly different from each other. In these cases, Bryne (2010) suggested that the AIC and CAIC values address the issue of parsimony in the assessment of model fit with the data, with the smallest value indicating best fit. As such, model 3 (full mediation model) is superior to the other models. The structural model (direct effects) is shown in Figure 1 and the final structural model (model 3 full mediation model) is shown in Figure 2.

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Insert Figures 1 and 2 about here

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### *Structural Models*

Aligned with the recommendations of Grace and Bollen (2005), unstandardized regression coefficients are presented. Figure 2 shows that wealth aspirations is significantly linked with emotional exhaustion (path coefficient = 0.16,  $p < 0.01$ ) as was image aspirations (path coefficient = 0.19,  $p < 0.001$ ). Furthermore, health aspirations is also significantly linked with

emotional exhaustion (path coefficient = -0.14,  $p < 0.01$ ). Overall, these findings support Hypotheses 1a and 1c, as well as Hypothesis 2d. Figure 2 also shows support for Hypothesis 3, with emotional exhaustion being a significant predictor of cynicism (path coefficient = 1.5,  $p < 0.001$ ). To confirm the mediation effects of emotional exhaustion on the direct effects of intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations on cynicism, comparisons were made between model 3 (full mediation model) and model 1 (direct effects model). In the direct effects model, there were six significant relationships between the various aspiration dimensions and cynicism, and these are all no longer significant when emotional exhaustion predicts cynicism. As such, there is strong evidence of full mediation effects. Overall, the structural model towards emotional exhaustion accounts for moderate amounts of variance ( $r^2 = 0.19$ ) and large amounts for cynicism ( $r^2 = 0.59$ ). Furthermore, the full mediation model shows the amounts of variance towards cynicism increased from  $r^2 = 0.22$  to  $r^2 = 0.59$ .

## **Discussion**

The present study tested differences in extrinsic and intrinsic aspirations amongst a sample of leaders towards job burnout, and found that all three extrinsic aspiration dimensions were significantly and positively correlated with emotional exhaustion and cynicism. Furthermore, all four intrinsic aspiration dimensions were significantly and negatively correlated with cynicism, while only relationship and health aspirations were significantly and negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion. Consequently, for the first time, we find significant relationships between the SDT dimensions associated with goal orientation and job burnout. These findings support the notion that the nature of aspirations, whether intrinsic and positive or extrinsic and negative, can influence the wellbeing of people at work (Deckop et al, 2010). While our study supports Deci and Ryan's (2000) assertion that the pursuit of some goals (intrinsic aspirations) provides greater



satisfaction of psychological wellbeing than the pursuit of others (extrinsic aspirations), we extended this to include job burnout amongst our leaders sample.

From the final structural model, we can see that extrinsic aspirations appear more important towards predicting job burnout than intrinsic aspirations. Indeed, the extrinsic aspirations of wealth and image were found to be detrimental and positively related to emotional exhaustion, while only health aspirations, an intrinsic aspiration, was negatively related. Hence, leaders who are focused on being wealthy and focus on their image are likely to feel more exhaustion and tired at work. Perhaps this represents the additional pressures of working long hours or taking on challenging work assignments to increase their wealth potential, such as being promoted. Regarding image, this might require additional time pressures from keeping up with image developments (e.g. hair, dress, makeup etc.) leaving the leader more exhausted and burnt out. Regarding health aspirations, a leader focused on being physically health and being physically active are less likely to report high emotional exhaustion, which supports links between emotional exhaustion and physical health (Maslach & Goldberg, 1998). Consequently, having an orientation and goal to be physically healthy can be enough to help reduce job burnout, essentially though being health and active, which is likely to allow the leader to burn off tension and stress.

The present study also tested and found support for a full mediation model, where the direct effects of aspirations on cynicism were fully mediated by emotional exhaustion. This supports the emerging consensus that emotional exhaustion leads to cynicism (Toppinen-Tanner et al., 2002; Bakker et al., 2000; Cordes et al., 1997). It also suggests that studies of cynicism should include emotional exhaustion to provide a stronger understanding of this outcome; otherwise cynicism models may be mis-specified. For example, this study found the total amount of variance for cynicism increased from 22% to 59%, a 37% increase. As such, we encourage future studies of cynicism to include emotional exhaustion.

Overall, the present study suggests leaders focused on personally attaining greater wealth and being focused on image and dress style may suffer detrimental outcomes such as higher emotional exhaustion, and this in turn increases their cynicism about their workplace and job. These findings are important because Kasser et al. (2007) noted that extrinsic aspirations undermine trust in leadership, and furthermore, a leader's focus on their own self interest (money, looks) can also create distrust in leadership (Sinclair 2007). As such, we find support for the notion that extrinsic aspirations can be personally detrimental for leaders and indeed this may have negative flow on effects for subordinates and wider society. However, these aspirations and life goals were not usually negative. A leader focused on personal health is likely to provide a good role model for subordinates and other leaders, especially given the benefits of reduced exhaustion and, indirectly, reduced cynicism. As such, leaders should be encouraged to focus on their health and fitness as this is likely to extend beyond personal fitness and also influence their job outcomes, such as lowering job burnout. Moreover, while relatedness and community aspirations are linked to positive leadership (Spreitzer, 2006), we found they are also beneficial in relation to leaders' own job burnout.

### *Research Implications*

The initial factor analysis on aspirations, and the subsequent CFA in SEM, confirmed the structure of aspirations and noted the seven dimensions are fundamentally different within their sample of leaders, which supports theoretical and empirical studies. Future studies might test aspirations longitudinally to see whether aspirations change over time for leaders, especially through the junior to senior leadership and onto the CEO position. Furthermore, testing other established antecedents of job burnout such as workload (Maslach & Goldberg, 1998), time pressures (Toppinen-Tanner et al., 2002) and work-family conflict (Haar, 2006), may also provide a clearer understanding of where aspirations may fit into the job burnout model. For example,

while health aspirations may reduce emotional exhaustion, perhaps wealth and image aspirations are mediated by time pressures and workload. Clearly, further research is required. Furthermore, research needs to address the lack of studies focusing on CEO aspirations, which needs to be explored to established similarities and differences between employees, leaders and CEOs, who might be seen as representing the highest levels of leadership.

### *Limitations*

Overall, while the studies here provide strong support for a relationship between aspirations and job burnout, there are some limitations. The present study drew on a sample of leaders only, and while this sample is large and from a wide range of organizations and industries, it is still focused on a professional job type. Clearly further exploration of this amongst other job types (e.g. blue collar workers) is desirable. However, the cultural setting of New Zealand is new for aspirations studies and highlights these SDT dimensions appear to translate similarly in other western cultures. Finally, while data collection method was cross-sectional and a limitation common to the OB literature, the collection of independent and dependent variables at separate times, and the use of SEM (Kenny, 2008) does limit the potential influence of common method variance.

### *Conclusion*

Overall, the present study was centered on understanding the influence of aspirations on leader's job burnout, and this was largely supported. By testing these relationships on a large sample of leaders from numerous organizations in New Zealand it aids our confidence in generalizing these findings, at least amongst leaders. To our knowledge, no study has tested the influence of leaders' aspirations towards job burnout, and the present study provides a unique contribution in this regard. The implications are that what a leader focuses on will ultimately influence their own wellbeing, and as such, organizations and leaders themselves, should strive to control their focus

towards more intrinsic aspirations such as personal health, over extrinsic aspirations such as wealth. This way, the potential benefits will be more positive and advantageous for leaders and their wider stakeholders, and potentially move us away from the detrimental press of leaders benefiting from large wealth while their organizations foundered and failed.

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**Table 1. Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Study Measures**

Model	Model Fit Indices					Model Differences			Details
	$\chi^2$	df	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR	$\chi^2$	$\Delta$ df	p	
1. Hypothesized 9-factor model: Three extrinsic aspirations: wealth, image and fame; four intrinsic aspirations: community, relatedness, growth, and health; two job burnout dimensions: emotional exhaustion and cynicism.	960.6	558	.95	.04	.05				
2. Alternative 8-factor model: Three extrinsic aspirations: wealth, image and fame; four intrinsic aspirations: community, relatedness, growth, and health; and a combined job burnout dimension: emotional exhaustion and cynicism combined.	1157.3	566	.93	.05	.05	196.7	4	.001	Model 2 to 1
3. Alternative 4-factor model: one global extrinsic aspirations: wealth, image and fame combined; one intrinsic aspirations: community, relatedness, growth, and health combined; two job burnout dimensions: emotional exhaustion and cynicism.	2983.6	588	.70	.10	.08	2023	30	.001	Model 3 to 1

**Table 2. Correlations and Means of Study Variables**

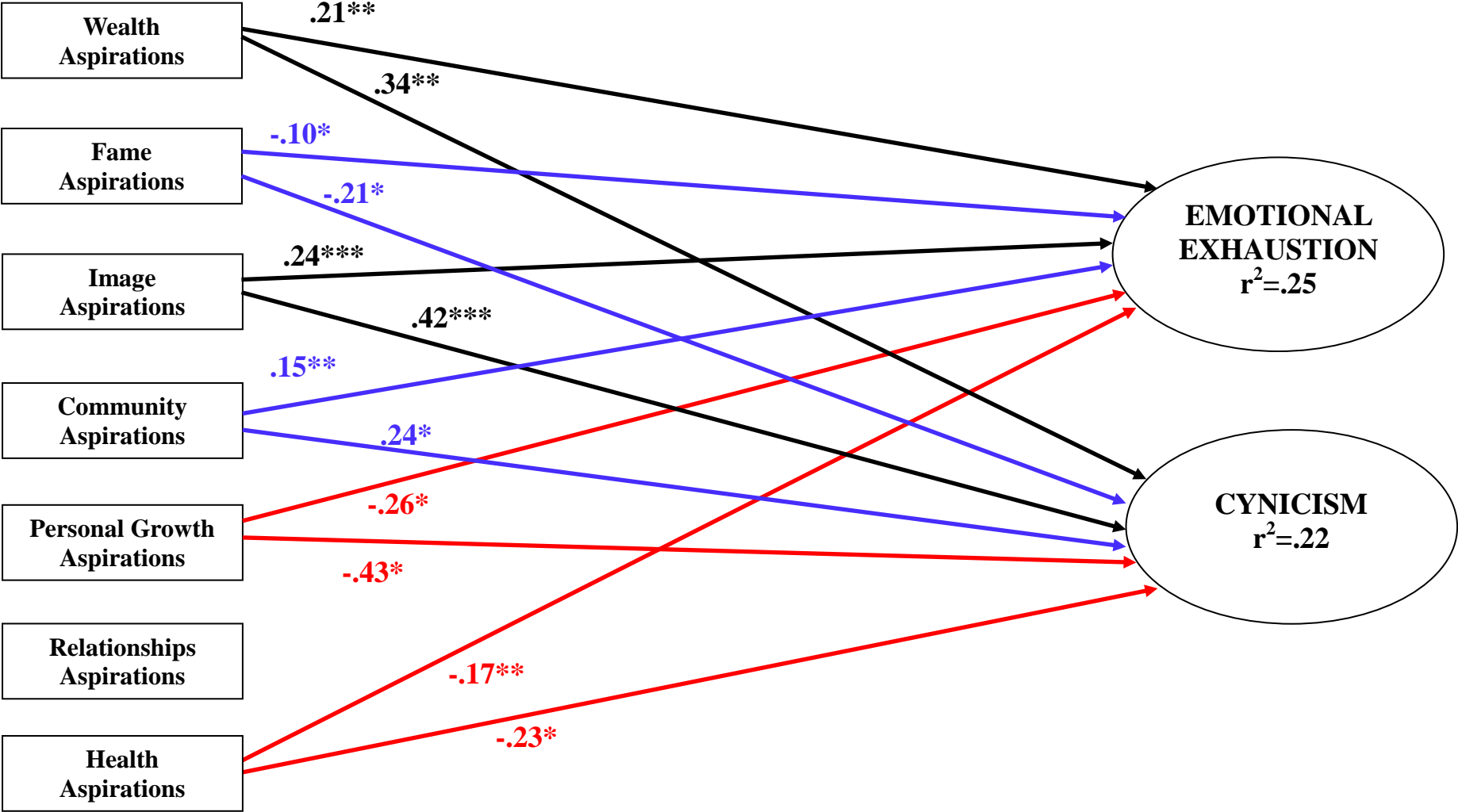
Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
<b>Extrinsic Aspirations:</b>											
1. Wealth	3.4	.82	<b>.83</b>								
2. Fame	2.4	.98	.49**	<b>.89</b>							
3. Image	2.3	1.0	.46**	.58**	<b>.88</b>						
<b>Intrinsic Aspirations:</b>											
4. Personal Growth	4.2	.64	.06	.07	.03	<b>.76</b>					
5. Relationships	4.3	.77	-.00	-.02	-.02	.50**	<b>.89</b>				
6. Community	3.8	.84	-.03	.17**	-.03	.52**	.45**	<b>.89</b>			
7. Health	4.3	.72	.15**	.01	.05	.39**	.47**	.38**	<b>.88</b>		
<b>Job Burnout:</b>											
7. Emotional Exhaustion	2.6	.88	.18**	.21**	.28**	.09	-.13*	-.08	-.16**	<b>.84</b>	
8. Cynicism	2.2	.95	.16**	.17**	.26**	-.13*	-.20**	-.12*	-.16**	.64**	<b>.85</b>

N=386, \*p< .05, \*\*p< .01. Bold scores on the diagonal show reliability scores (Cronbach's alpha).

**Table 3. Model Comparisons for Structural Models**

Model	Model Fit Indices					Model Differences					
	$\chi^2$	df	CFI	RMSE A	SRM R	$\chi^2$	$\Delta$ df	p	Details	AIC	CAIC
1. Partial Mediation Model	1002.4	558	.95	.05	.05					1218	1754
2. Direct Effects Model	1172.0	559	.92	.05	.07	169.6	1	.001	Model 2 to 1	1386	1916
3. Full Mediation Model	1009.2	565	.95	.05	.05	6.8	1	.01	Model 3 to 1	1211	1711
						-162.8	6	nil	Model 3 to 2		

**Model 1: Direct Effects Model [no covariance]**





**Model 2: Partial Mediation Model**

