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Young managers' drive to thrive:

A personal work goal approach to burnout and work engagement

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Abstract

This study approaches young managers' occupational well-being through their work-related goal pursuit. The main aim was to identify content categories of personal work goals and investigate their associations with background variables, goal appraisals, burnout, and work engagement. The questionnaire data consisted of 747 young Finnish managers (23–35 years; $M = 31$ years) who were mostly men (85.5%). Seven work-related content categories were found on the basis of qualitative data analysis: 1) competence goals (30.5%), 2) progression goals (23.7%), 3) well-being goals (15.2%), 4) job change goals (13.7%), 5) job security goals (7.4%), 6) organizational goals (5.6%), and 7) financial goals (3.9%). ANCOVA analyses, where goal appraisals and significant background variables were controlled for, indicated that organizational goals were related to low burnout and the highest level of work engagement, whereas well-being and job change goals were related to higher burnout and lower work engagement. The study shows that the contents of young managers' work-related goals can contribute to the understanding of individual differences in occupational well-being.

Keywords: personal work goals, goal contents, goal appraisals, work engagement, burnout, occupational well-being.

Young managers' drive to thrive: A personal work goal approach to burnout and work engagement

Introduction

The investigation of personal work-related goals can bring a new perspective to research on occupational well-being since goals embody the individual's self-imposed intentions and demands within their own work environment (Pomaki & Maes, 2002; Pomaki, Maes, & ter Doest, 2004). The analyses of personal goals, in this study coined "personal work goals," incorporate both the employee and the context (Grant, Little, & Phillips, 2007). Proceeding from these assumptions, we examined the association between what young managers strive to achieve (i.e., the content of their personal work goal) and their occupational well-being (i.e., burnout and work engagement).

Research on work-related goal contents in occupational health literature has received little attention (Harris, Daniels, & Briner, 2003; Pomaki & Maes, 2002; Pomaki et al., 2004; Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 2004) and, therefore, we aspired to make a contribution to the existing literature in three main ways. First, we derived the contents of personal work goals from responses to an open-ended question, which permitted a qualitative analysis of goal pursuit. Methodologically, this study compliments previous personal work goal research that has predominantly been based on goal appraisals or preset categories of goal contents. A multi-method analysis of goal pursuit yielded information about the contents of ideographic goals, and more broadly, about how different goal content categories are associated with occupational well-being. Second, we focused on managers, who are in a key position on the organizational hierarchy due to their role in setting the direction for their subordinates and in communicating across organizational levels. Third, our target group comprised young managers (35 years or under), who are still establishing their careers. These personal work- and career-related goals can give an indication of the factors guiding career development and career paths (Dik, Sargent, & Steger, 2008).

Research on personal goals

Informed by a social ecological model of adaptation and well-being (Little, 1972, 2000, 2007), our study approached individuals through their personal action within their own occupational

context. In this type of research, *personal action construct* (PAC) is an umbrella term for units that describe persons' action intentions (e.g., Little, 2007). The breadth of studies in this area has been steadily increasing, and has included various closely-related PAC units (for reviews see Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Karoly, 1993); for example, "personal projects" (Little, 1983), "personal strivings" (Emmons, 1986), and "life tasks" (Cantor, Norem, Niedenthal, Langston, & Brower, 1987). These types of action constructs are personally salient and can extend from lifelong goals to shorter term plans for achieving the expected outcomes (Little, 2007). Personal goals build a foundation for the initiation and regulation of behavior and emotions, as well as guide strategies to manage in a variety of contexts (Ford, 1992; Pomaki & Maes, 2002; Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 2004).

The content or the appraisals of goals are two primary approaches for personal goal analyses. The *contents* of personal goals describe the person's orientation towards the future, uncovering the wants, wishes, concerns, and intentions of the person. According to Little and Gee (2007), goals can be, to a high degree of reliability, classified according to the orientation of personal goals. For instance, working adults' work goals were classified into nine goal content categories of success/higher position, further education/training/learning, doing a good and efficient job, job security, job satisfaction and positive job attitudes, social relationships at work, finances, openness to job-related changes, and other (Wiese & Salmela-Aro, 2008). In the context of career development, participants' ratings of career development strivings on the dimension of self-efficacy, outcome expectation, sense of calling, spiritual significance, and materialism were associated with conceptually similar measures such as religious commitment, intrinsic and extrinsic work motivation, providing evidence for the reliability and validity of self-set goals (see Dik et al., 2008).

The orientation of goals reflects the opportunities, demands, and restrictions of the current life stage that, to an extent, is tied to age-related developmental tasks (e.g., Salmela-Aro, 2001; Salmela-Aro, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2007). For example, as young adults get older, their personal goals begin leaning strongly towards work, family, and health, while goals related to education, friends, and travelling become less pronounced (Salmela-Aro, Aunola et al., 2007). Goal *appraisals*, in turn,

address the cognition and affect regarding the goal. Appraisals can reveal the meaning of the goal to the person, incorporating aspects such as the manageability of the goal, perceived support from other people, as well as positive and negative affect (Little & Gee, 2007). Goals can be evaluated on characteristics, such as relevance, importance, attainability, and emotional salience (Ford, 1992).

Personal goals and well-being

According to Little's (e.g., 2007) social ecological model of well-being, people tend to have some core goals that remain fairly permanent features in their lives. Well-being, then, depends on whether the internal (e.g., personality traits) and external (e.g., schooling opportunities) aspects are successfully orchestrated to sustain the personal goals that are most central to the person. A balance between different areas of life would be beneficial for well-being, whereas excessive focus on a single area can have a detrimental impact on psychological well-being (Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 2004). For example, a susceptibility to lower health and well-being has been observed among employees with strong work orientation (Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 2004). This may reflect a lack of focus on other areas of life, such as recreational or family-related activities, which could in turn facilitate recovery during leisure time (Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 2004; Sonnentag & Zijlstra, 2006).

The contents of personal goals have demonstrated their significance in predicting psychological well-being. For example, focusing on developmentally appropriate goals predicted higher subjective well-being among young adults (Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 1997a) and transition-related goals predicted decrease in depressive symptoms among expectant women (Salmela-Aro, Nurmi, Saisto, & Halmesmäki, 2001). The personal goals that correspond with the opportunities, demands, and challenges of the specific phase relate to a higher level of well-being. Personal goals are also indicative of the extent to which transitions have been satisfactory and have enabled the attainment of new goals, for instance, achieving professional accreditation creates employment opportunities that might not been otherwise accessible (Salmela-Aro, Aunola et al., 2007).

A proportion of participants in various populations have been found to focus on intrapersonal goals (i.e., self-related goals directed to developing self, personality, health, or life;

e.g., Little & Gee, 2007; Salmela-Aro, Pennanen, & Nurmi, 2001). Intrapersonal goals can signal self-concerns, ruminating, and attachment to the past (e.g., Salmela-Aro, Pennanen et al., 2001). This may, however, be dependent on the appraisal of the intrapersonal goal; whether the goal is appraised positively as a development or negatively as self-concern (Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 1997b). Focusing on many intrapersonal goals have been typically associated with lower well-being and a higher incidence symptoms of depression among employees (Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 2004), young adults (Nurmi & Salmela-Aro, 2002), and university students (Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 1997a).

Numerous research findings have indicated that goal appraisals play a part in psychological well-being: For example, the attainment of goals was connected to positive affect (Sheldon & Elliot, 2000) and appraising goals as important related to the successful transition from vocational school to work (Nurmi, Salmela-Aro, & Koivisto, 2002). Within the occupational context, goal attainability, progress, and commitment were shown to contribute to changes in job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Maier & Brunstein, 2001) and the attainment of personally important work goals was linked to positive affect outcomes (Harris et al., 2003). Proceeding from these consistent findings, we investigated whether work goal contents have an independent contribution to occupational well-being after controlling for the effect of goal appraisals.

In the present study, the investigation of both negative and positive indicators of occupational well-being was operationalized through the concepts of burnout and work engagement. Burnout is considered to be a consequence of prolonged job stress and it is characterized most often by exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996; Maslach & Leiter, 2008). Exhaustion describes the core component of the syndrome, that is, the depletion of resources in doing one's work. The cynicism component reflects negative or distant attitude towards one's work in general, and it can be characterized as dysfunctional coping, in which employees develop cynicism about their work to distance themselves from it. Reduced professional efficacy represents a decline in one's feelings of competence and effectiveness in regard to both the social and non-social aspects of occupational accomplishments.

Work engagement describes positive affective-motivational experiences of vigor, dedication, and absorption at work (e.g., Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Vigor is associated with high levels of energy, resilience, and personal investment at work; dedication refers to feelings of pride, meaningfulness, challenge and enthusiasm about the work; and, absorption describes being fully immersed in the work and losing the sense of time while working. Work engagement is not assumed to be a mere fleeting experience of fulfillment, but rather a more consistent state of mind that is not dependent on a single object, event, individual, or behavior (e.g., Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Job resources (e.g., autonomy, social support, and opportunities for professional development; e.g., Hakanen, Schaufeli, & Ahola, 2008; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007) and sufficient recovery and detaching from work outside work time (Sonnentag, 2003; Sonnentag, Mojza, Binnewies, & Scholl, 2008) can have a direct effect on work engagement. Furthermore, effective recovery can, through work engagement, mobilize employees to engage in proactive behavior and seek learning opportunities (Sonnentag, 2003).

Researchers have established a negative relationship (correlations typically ranging from -.30 to -.65) between work engagement and burnout (e.g., Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli, Martínez, Marques Pinto, Salanova, & Bakker, 2002; Schaufeli, Taris, & van Rhenen, 2008). Work engagement has shown to have a positive relationship with self-rated health and work ability (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006), whereas burnout has been linked to depression (e.g., Ahola & Hakanen, 2007; Hakanen et al., 2008) and decreased life satisfaction (e.g., Burke & Greenglass, 1995). Work engagement and burnout have also been associated with job characteristics such as perceived job insecurity and employment contract. For example, when job insecurity was experienced by permanent staff, they reported lower job satisfaction and work engagement as well as higher exhaustion than their counterparts employed on a fixed-term basis (Mauno, Kinnunen, Mäkikangas, & Nätti, 2005). In addition to the associations with job security, one's gender (i.e., being female), higher managerial level and working in private (vs. public) sector organizations have shown to be related to higher work engagement (Kinnunen, Feldt, & Mäkikangas, 2008; Mauno et

al., 2005). In the present study, these background factors (gender, managerial level, employment sector, employment contract, and career instability, i.e., lay-offs and redundancies) were also taken into consideration due to their associations with burnout and work engagement.

Young managers' personal work goals and occupational well-being

In the present study, the focus was on the contents of self-set work goals of young managers, because the relationship between personal work goals, and particularly the contents of goals, and occupational well-being could benefit from further scientific inquiry (e.g., Pomaki & Maes, 2002; Pomaki et al., 2004; Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 2004). The boundaries of work and home are becoming more ambiguous, for example, due to the increasing flexibility of working hours enabled by technology (Jones, Burke, & Westman, 2006). Therefore, personal work goals can also reflect, as well as embody, wider life goals.

We expected that young managers produce goals that reflect the vocational development stage relevant to this age group (i.e., 23–35 years). According to Super (1969, 1985, 1990), early adulthood (broadly 25–40 years) relates to “career establishment” incorporating periods of stabilization, consolidation, and advancement. The main development tasks related to these periods are suggested to involve six tasks: adapting to the culture of the organization, adequate performance of position-related duties, establishing good work habits and a positive attitude toward the job, maintaining good co-worker relations, and considering career choice and setting goals (see Crites, 1982; Dix & Savickas, 1995). The developmental tasks should be considered within the framework of “career adaptability” that refers not only to dealing with these developmental tasks, but also adjusting to changeable and unpredictable working environments (Savickas, 1997). According to previous research the goals that are in line with transition and development related intentions predict a higher level of well-being (e.g., Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 1997a; Sheldon & Elliott, 2000). Therefore, we expected that the personal work goals that reflect developmental tasks related to career establishment are associated with higher occupational well-being.

Young managers have fairly recently commenced their managerial career and are in a central role in leading their team towards corporate goals. To an extent, managers at all levels are involved in the general leadership task of influencing the behavior of others in order to reach organizational goals (Shackleton & Wale, 2000). The task of leadership could include interpersonal aspects (e.g., leading the members of the team), as well as department-level goals (e.g., achieving sales targets). The opportunities in the workplace may be crucial to the pursuit of personal work goals related to the leadership task. Maier and Brunstein (2001) showed that when new employees are committed to their personal work goal and perceive the working environment as favorable for goal attainment, there was an increase in job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Within a managerial population, an enduring goal conflict was also found to hinder managers' ability to attain new goals in the workplace (Kehr, 2003). It could be that managers who state personal work goals that reflect the managerial leadership task experience more favorable conditions and less goal conflict in the workplace. In light of previous research, we expected that the personal work goals that reflect the managerial leadership task are associated with higher occupational well-being.

The prevalence of intrapersonal goals has been linked to a lower level of well-being (e.g., Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 2004). Within the work context, however, employees' perception of the facilitation of personal growth goals and physical well-being goals at work was associated with a higher level of job satisfaction (ter Doest, Maes, Gebhart, & Koelewijn, 2006). In less favorable circumstances, intrapersonal goals related to self-concern at work (e.g., managing work stress or reducing working hours) may be set when it is felt that the demands of the work overload the individual. Self-concern goals may also suggest a difficulty in, or a lack of opportunity for, detaching from work during off-work hours and engaging in activities that promote recovery. Insufficient recovery during leisure time has been linked to negative well-being outcomes in various studies (Sonnentag, 2003; Sonnentag, Binnewies, & Mojza, 2008; Sonnentag & Zijlstra, 2006). Therefore, we expected personal work goals that reflect self-concern at work are related to lower occupational well-being. Taken together, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What types of personal work goals do young managers have? We expected that the contents of young managers' personal work goals reflect development tasks related to career establishment, the managerial leadership task, and self-concern at work.
2. How are personal work goal categories associated with goal appraisals on the dimensions of importance, commitment, progress, effort, and strain? A lack of evidence regarding the effect of the contents of personal work goals on the goal appraisals among managers prevented us from stating clear expectations with respect to this research question.
3. How are personal work goal categories associated with burnout and work engagement after controlling for goal appraisals and significant background variables? We expected that the content categories that reflect the development tasks related to career establishment are associated with higher occupational well-being (low burnout and high work engagement). We also expected that the content category that reflects the managers' leadership task is associated with higher occupational well-being (low burnout and high work engagement). By contrast, we predicted that the content category that incorporates personal work goals relating to self-concern is associated with lower occupational well-being (high burnout and low work engagement).

Method

Participants and Procedure

The participants in this study consisted of 747 young managers (23–35 years) who responded to a questionnaire study in spring 2006. The sample consisted of all members of two Finnish national labor unions (the Union of Salaried Employees and the Union of Professional Engineers) whose professional title referred to management position and who were 35 years or younger. These criteria were met by 1904 union members. In Finland, a large majority of employees (71.2%) belong to a labor union organized on the basis of industry (Ahtiainen, 2001) and, therefore, this sample is relatively representative of the target group.

A total of 933 questionnaires out of 1 904 were returned, of which 186 respondents were currently not in managerial position or in employment (e.g., maternity leave, studying, or

unemployed over 3 months). Therefore, these respondents were omitted from the original sample, which yielded a response rate of 43.4%. The attrition analysis showed that the participants did not differ in terms of gender from nonrespondents ($n = 971$), $\chi^2(1) = 0.70$, *ns*. The data on the nonrespondents' age was only available for the members of the Union of Salaried Employees; these respondents ($n = 331$) did not differ from nonrespondents ($n = 379$) in age, $t(708) = 1.53$, *ns*.

The average age of the participants was 31 years (range 23–35, $SD = 3.2$). A large majority of participants were men (85.5%), and 8.5% of participants were in upper management, 48.8% in middle management, and 42.7% in lower management. The majority of participants were engineers (67.4%) and other participants were technicians (6.1%) or had other professional qualifications (24.6%). Only 1.9% of participants had no professional qualification. The main employment fields included technology (metal and electronics; 27.8%), the building industry (12.8%), forestry (8.8%), information technology (8.2%), and the chemical industry (6.8%). Of the participants, 35.6% were working in other-than-the-listed fields, such as consultancy, food industry, customer service, sales, and logistics. A large majority of the participants had a permanent employment contract (93.3%) as opposed to a fixed-term employment contract (6.7%). The private sector employed 95.4% of participants whereas the rest (4.6%) worked in public sector organizations. Of the participants, 31.3% had experienced periods of unemployment or lay-offs since graduation. In addition, 48% of the participants had children (one or more child).

Measures

Personal work goals were investigated by posing an open-ended question, in response to which participants produced a personal goal that related to their work or career, “Write down your most important personal goal that relates to your work or career” (Salmela-Aro, 2002). On a couple of occasions where a participant had mentioned more than one goal, only the first goal was included in the analysis, thereby ensuring that each participant could be in only one content category. To achieve a reliable categorization, four coders participated in goal categorization: a professor in adult developmental psychology who is also an adjunct professor in occupational psychology with 13

years of research experience in managerial work and occupational well-being; two doctorate-level psychologists who are specializing in occupational psychology; and a masters-level psychologist. The participants' responses were approached using a generic and data-driven qualitative analysis that did not rely on preset categories (Namey, Guest, Thairu, & Johnson, 2008; Silverman, 2006).

The first step was for three of the coders to independently familiarize themselves with the data by open reading and considering the different themes emerging from participants' responses. After that the coders met and discussed the main themes of the qualitative data. As a conclusion of this discussion, the themes were grouped into seven thematic categories: learning, performance, progression, well-being, job security, changing jobs, and finance. In the second step, participants' responses were coded autonomously by the same three coders on the basis of these thematic categories. The three coders compared their coding and discussed those goals where there were disagreements on which would be the most suitable thematic category. During this step, the categories were specified further and the category relating to performance at work was divided into two sub-categories (i.e., personal performance goals and company performance goals). The goals relating to personal performance were added into the category that included learning goals and this formed one content category that was labeled as "competence goals" while the goals relating to the performance of the organization were labeled as "organizational goals".

The final step was to investigate the intercoder agreement of the categorizations. A fourth coder, who had previously not been involved in the process of forming the categories, applied the seven content categories to participants' responses. The goal categorization of the fourth coder was then compared with the categorization agreed on by the first three coders. The intercoder agreement between these content categorizations was 92%. The categorization agreed on by the first three coders has been utilized in the following data analyses. Since this categorization, the categories have also been presented to and validated by three external auditors who work for the labor unions as heads of their research departments. The external auditors were experts in both the research methods and the fields represented by the union members who were the target group of this study.

Goal appraisals were measured with 5 single items comprising importance (“How important is your goal?”; see Tuominen-Soini, Salmela-Aro, & Niemivirta, 2008), commitment (“How committed are you to your goal?”; see Tuominen-Soini et al., 2008), progress (“How far have you progressed in reaching this goal?”; see Salmela-Aro, Vuori, & Koivisto, 2007; Tuominen-Soini et al., 2008; Vasalampi, Salmela-Aro, & Nurmi, in press), effort (“How much time and effort have you invested in this goal?”; see Tuominen-Soini et al., 2008; Vasalampi et al., in press), and strain (“How strenuous or burdening is your goal?”; Salmela-Aro, Vuori et al., 2007; Tuominen-Soini et al., 2008). Items were answered on a 5-point scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*).

Burnout was assessed with the Bergen Burnout Indicator 15 (BBI-15; Näätänen, Aro, Matthiesen, & Salmela-Aro, 2003). The scale has 15 items and includes three dimensions: emotional exhaustion (5 items; e.g., “I am snowed under with work”), cynicism (5 items; e.g., “I frequently question the value of my work”), and reduced professional efficacy (5 items; e.g., “My expectations to my job and to my performance have reduced”). Items were answered on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 6 (*completely agree*). The Cronbach’s alphas for the total sample were, for the total scale, .89, and for exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy, .81, .80, and .76, respectively. The construct validity of the scale has been tested in previous studies in Finland (see Näätänen et al., 2003). Emotional exhaustion ($r = .87$) and cynicism ($r = .88$) have a strong positive correlation with the corresponding dimensions of Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI; Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach, & Jackson, 1996). The third dimension of reduced professional efficacy showed a weaker correlation ($r = .30$) with the respective MBI dimension (see Näätänen et al., 2003).

Work engagement was measured by the Utrecht Engagement Scale with nine items (UWES-9; Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006). The scale has three dimensions, comprising vigor (3 items; e.g., “At my work, I feel bursting with energy”), dedication (3 items; e.g., “My job inspires me”), and absorption (3 items; e.g., “I am immersed in my work”). Responses were given on a 7-point scale from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*every day*). The construct validity of the short version (vs. the 17-item

scale) of the UWES has proven to be better with this sample of young Finnish managers, as well as with other Finnish occupational groups (Seppälä et al., in press). The internal consistencies (Cronbach's alpha) for the total sample were, for the total scale, .91, and for vigor, dedication, and absorption, .81, .87, and .81, respectively.

The *background variables* included gender, managerial level (upper/middle/lower), employment contract (permanent/fixed-term), employment sector (private/public), career instability (yes/no periods of unemployment or lay-offs), and children (yes/no children).

Analyses

To examine the relationship between the content categories – identified through the qualitative data analysis of the participants' personal work goals – and the categorical background variables, we calculated the χ^2 -tests. Correlations among the background variables, burnout, and work engagement were calculated to identify significant covariates for Analyses of Covariance (ANCOVA). Goal appraisals between the content categories were investigated by means of ANCOVA. In previous research, goal appraisals have been associated with well-being (e.g., Maier & Brunstein, 2001). Therefore, goal appraisals (importance, commitment, progress, effort, and strain) were used as covariates, in addition to significant background variables, when calculating ANCOVAs for burnout and work engagement.

Results

Personal work goals categories

The following seven content categories were found (listed in a descending order of size): 1. *competence* goals; 2. *progression* goals; 3. *well-being* goals; 4. *job change* goals; 5. *job security* goals; 6. *organizational* goals; and 7. *financial* goals (see Table 1). As expected, the personal work goals of young managers reflected career establishment, particularly those goals relating to competence and progression. Together these two categories comprised over half of the participants (54.2%). We also found a small category with just over 5% of participants whose goals reflected the leadership task of managers (organizational goals). Self-concern goals, on the other hand, were less

evident as an individual category; instead, self-concerns were incorporated with goals that were directed towards health and job satisfaction (well-being goals). This category included approximately 15% of participants. As opposed to the intrapersonal goals that signaled self-concern, the intrapersonal goals directed toward developing one's own skills and abilities pertaining to the profession were considered as developing professional competence (i.e., competence goals). We found three further goal content categories – job change (13.7%), job security (7.4%), and financial goals (3.9%) – that were directed towards evaluating career options and incentives for working for the organization. These seven content categories bore resemblance to the work goal categories identified by Wiese and Salmela-Aro (2008), which also related to the goal taxonomy by Ford and Nichols (1987).

[Insert Table 1 about here]

In addition to the aforementioned categories, there were 58 participants who did not respond to the question; two participants who expressed satisfaction with their current state (e.g., “I have reached the goal I have set myself thus far”); and two participants who did not mention a work- or career-related goal (e.g., “Paternity leave”). The further data analyses were restricted only to the participants who had produced personal work goals ($n = 685$).

Background variables in the personal work goal categories

The background variables that were significantly related to the content categories according to the χ^2 -tests are presented in Table 2. There were significant differences in the distributions of management levels in the content categories. Upper-level managers were overrepresented in the category including organizational goals. Middle-level managers were overrepresented in the job change category, and underrepresented in the categories including well-being and financial goals. Lower-level managers, in turn, were overrepresented in the job security category and underrepresented in the categories including job change and organizational goals.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Employment contract (i.e., permanent/fixed-term) and career instability (i.e., yes/no unemployment or lay-offs) characterized the job security category. Participants on permanent employment contracts were underrepresented and participants on fixed-term employment contracts were overrepresented in the job security category. Similarly, participants with a stable career were underrepresented, and those with career instability were overrepresented in the job security category. There were no significant differences between the content categories in terms of background variables of gender, $\chi^2(6) = 9.78$, *ns*; employment sector (private/public), $\chi^2(6) = 4.70$, *ns*; or children (yes/no children), $\chi^2(6) = 4.45$, *ns*. The correlations among the background variables, burnout, and work engagement are presented in Table 3. In addition to the significant background variables identified with the χ^2 -test, gender was found to have a significant correlation with work engagement; therefore, gender was controlled for in the ANCOVA analyses alongside managerial level, employment contract, and career instability.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

Goal appraisals in the personal work goal categories

The results from ANCOVA, shown in Table 4, indicated that the content of personal work goals had a significant main effect on goal appraisals (importance, commitment, progress, effort, and strain). The Bonferroni comparison revealed that progression goals were rated as significantly less important than some of the other goals (competence, well-being, job security, and organizational goals). Organizational goals were associated with higher goal commitment than progression and job change goals. Job change and well-being goals were rated lower in goal progress than some of the other goals (competence, job security, and organizational goals). In addition, job change goals were rated lower in goal progress than progression goals. In terms of effort invested into goals, job change goals were rated significantly lower than competence and organizational goals. Furthermore, competence goals were rated significantly higher in effort than progression goals. Job change goals were considered as significantly less strenuous than competence, job security, and organizational goals.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

Burnout and work engagement in the personal work goal categories

The content categories had a significant main effect on burnout and its dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy as indicated by ANCOVAs (goal appraisals, gender, managerial level, employment contract, and career instability controlled for) shown in Table 5. Similarly, the content categories had a significant main effect on the total work engagement scale, as well as on its dimensions of vigor, dedication, and absorption.

[Insert Table 5 about here]

Our expectation regarding higher occupational well-being in the categories that reflect career establishment received partial support as competence and progression goals were related to relatively low burnout and high work engagement. In addition, job security and financial goals were associated with a low level of burnout, but with an average level of work engagement. Participants who named organizational goals rated their burnout low and their work engagement highest, in line with our expectation regarding high occupational well-being in the category that reflects the managerial leadership task.

The category incorporating goals reflecting self-concern was expected to relate to a low level of occupational well-being. This received some support since the well-being goals reflect, to a certain extent, the participants' concerns for their job satisfaction and contentment, and furthermore, this category was associated with high burnout and low work engagement, particularly in regard to the dimensions of vigor and dedication. This category was similar to the category including job change goals, which was connected to high burnout and the lowest level of work engagement.

As a final step, the 62 participants – those who did not produce goals, named an unrelated goal, or expressed satisfaction with their current state (hf. the *no work goals* category) – were compared to the other participants. The participants in the *no work goals* category ($M = 4.99$, $SD = 1.29$) had significantly lower work engagement than the other participants ($M = 5.45$, $SD = 1.02$), $t(742) = 2.65$, $p = .01$, but they did not differ from the other participants in burnout, $t(740) = -.55$, *ns*.

Discussion

Young managers' personal work goals at their career establishment stage provided a novel approach for investigating occupational well-being viewed through a social ecological model of well-being (e.g., Little, 2000, 2007). Personal work goals were classified into seven categories on the basis of goal contents (i.e., goals oriented towards competence, progression, well-being, job change, job security, organization, or finance). In the present study, the content categories were associated with burnout and work engagement, and most importantly, the categories explained independent variance in burnout and work engagement beyond the goal appraisals and managers' background factors. Previous studies have shown consistent findings regarding the links between employee well-being and work goal appraisals (e.g., Maier & Brunstein, 2001; Pomaki et al., 2004). Nevertheless, the relationship between the content of personal work goals and occupational well-being has remained largely unexplored (Pomaki et al., 2004).

In spite of the small size of the category, the strongest beneficial associations with occupational well-being were found among managers whose personal work goals reflected the leadership task of managers (organizational goals; $n = 38$; 5.6%). These managers experienced a low level of burnout and the highest level of work engagement. Organizational goals were mentioned by managers who accommodated wider departmental or organizational goals as their own personal work goal. These goals were also more likely to be set by upper-level managers. It could be that these goals are quite specific for the management population since these types of organizational goals did not emerge as an individual category in the study by Wiese and Salmela-Aro (2008) with a range of professionals. Organizational goals also showed prominent links to goal appraisals. This category's managers placed importance upon, were committed to, made progress towards, and put time and effort into reaching their goals. On the other hand, this group also rated their goals as most strenuous.

In light of previous research, this group of managers may have tackled the previous vocational development tasks successfully (e.g., performance and advancement) and moved to

making career choices and plans, including combining personal and company goals (see Dix & Savickas, 1995). Previous research has also indicated that job involvement has a strong link with positive job attitudes, such as job satisfaction (see Brown, 1996, for review). Moreover, goal congruence can promote health and psychological well-being (e.g., Sheldon & Kasser, 1995), and among managers, goal conflict was found to hinder the attainment of new goals (Kehr, 2003). Therefore, it may be that managers with organizational goals have more opportunities in the workplace sustaining focus on their core leadership task.

The vocational development stage of career establishment was manifested particularly in the goals that related to competence ($n = 209$; 30.5%) and progression ($n = 162$; 23.7%). Over a half of the young managers named goals relating to these career establishment tasks that, additionally, had positive associations with occupational well-being. Competence goals formed the largest category that included personal work goals orientated towards learning, job performance, and other self-development goals related to technical and relational skills. The competence category is also in line with previous findings by Wiese and Salmela-Aro (2008) who found that about a third of working adults named goals related to learning and job performance goals. Furthermore, ter Doest et al. (2006) showed that facilitation of personal growth goals – such as learning and development – in the workplace had a strong relationship with job satisfaction among the employees who considered these goals as fairly important. Goals related to progression, in turn, were orientated towards promotion and moving upwards on the career ladder. Interestingly, when compared to managers in other categories, these managers experienced their goals as less important and were less committed to them.

These findings from the two largest content categories are in accord with previous research that has indicated that developmentally appropriate personal goals facilitate positive well-being outcomes (e.g., Nurmi et al., 2002; Sheldon & Elliot, 2000) and these categories closely resemble the developmental tasks of position performance and advancement (Dix & Savickas, 1995). It is possible that these goals reflect a situation where managers have adapted to the culture of the

organization and are now striving forwards in their career. On the basis of the social ecological model of well-being (e.g., Little, 2000, 2007), the three categories comprising organizational, competence, and progression goals may represent the managers who, on average, are navigating through the demands of their work environment that matches their personal characteristics and expectations.

Goals orientated towards job security ($n = 51$; 7.4%) and finances ($n = 27$; 3.9%) can be timely to this age group of managers, but these goals also signal a certain level of uncertainty about the continuity or financial rewards of their employment. These goals were related to moderate occupational well-being with relatively low burnout (particularly in relation to reduced professional efficacy for financial goals) and average work engagement. These results parallel the findings from a study where employees who viewed their work mainly as a job providing financial means rather than giving enjoyment, reported significantly lower job and life satisfaction than employees who viewed their work as a calling (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997).

Managers with job security goals were more likely to be from lower management, on a fixed-term employment contract, and have experienced career instability (i.e., unemployment and/or lay-offs) since graduation than managers in the other categories. These background factors may partly explain their goals towards securing future employment. There exists contradictory evidence regarding the job attitudes and occupational well-being of temporary workers (see De Cuyper et al., 2008; Virtanen et al., 2005, for reviews). Some research has even indicated that temporary employees have better well-being than permanent employees especially under uncertain employment conditions (e.g., a threat of redundancy; Mauno et al., 2005). Job security goals may echo the hopes and concerns of young managers who are at the beginning of their career relatively well, especially when taking into consideration the trend towards an increased flexibility within the employment relationship (Parent-Thirion, Macías, Hurley, & Vermeulen, 2007).

Due to the small size of the financial goals category, less statistically significant differences in comparison with the other categories emerged. We additionally analyzed whether there were

actual differences in wages between the managers in this category and other managers. However, our analysis indicated no significant differences; therefore it does not seem that these goals have arisen due to lower levels of salaries. It could be that the young managers in this category perceived an imbalance between their actual pay and what would be a fair level of pay for their contributions.

Personal work goals relating to well-being ($n = 104$; 15.2%) or changing jobs ($n = 94$; 13.7%) were associated with a lower level of occupational well-being than other goal orientations. Well-being goals related to satisfaction or general well-being at work, for example, managing stress, moving away from shift work, or reducing overtime hours. These managers had the highest burnout, with particularly high scores on exhaustion, as well as low levels of vigor and dedication. On average, the managers with well-being goals felt that they had made some progress towards their goal, but significantly less than those in some of the other categories.

Job change goals referred to moving to another job, starting a business, or even changing profession. In this study, these goals were represented by a larger percentage of participants than reported in the previous study (4.9%) by Wiese and Salmela-Aro (2008). This could be due to the age of the managers, since establishing one's career may involve also reconsidering career choices and making new plans (Dix & Savickas, 1995). However, these goals were linked with a lower level of occupational well-being and overall, this category's managers had a high level of burnout and the lowest level of work engagement. Compared to other participants, on average, the managers in this category felt less committed to their goal, made the least progress toward their goal, and reported investing the least amount of time and effort in pursuing their goal. However, job change goals were also rated as less strenuous than other goals.

Well-being and job change goals convey concerns of managers regarding their current situation, and the lower level of occupational well-being of the managers naming well-being or job change goals could be due to various factors. Firstly, goals related to well-being and job change may be the types of goals that indicate a potential conflict between work goals, other life goals, and organizational goals, which in previous research has been linked to reduced psychological well-

being (e.g., Emmons & King, 1988; Karoly & Ruehlman, 1996; Kehr, 2003; Mitchell & Silver, 1990). For example, a number of managers in the well-being category mentioned goals relating to improving work-life balance or reducing work spill-over to other areas of life. Adverse effects on well-being have also been noted among employees whose work- and self-related goals dominate their orientation in life (Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 2004) and who view work-related activities as infringing on their leisure time (e.g., Sonnentag & Zijlstra, 2006).

In the social ecological model of well-being (Little, 2000, 2007), the goals related to job change and well-being could be examples of the challenges of balancing the personal and contextual features, as well as finding a suitable course of action in order to achieve some of the core goals in life. These two categories included young managers who may feel dissatisfied with their work or working environment, and therefore are attempting to resolve the situation by adapting to the demands of the work environment (well-being goals) or by searching for other alternatives to their current working environment (job change goals). From the perspective of career adaptability (e.g., Dix & Savickas, 1995; Savickas, 1997), these goals exemplify how young managers are purposefully attempting to adapt their career to the different roles and contexts in their life. However, their work environment may not be conducive to resolving some of the core development tasks of this age group.

Study strengths and limitations, and suggestions for future studies

The strength of the study was that qualitative and quantitative data analyses were employed to investigate personal work goal pursuit with a large sample of young managers. In combining these levels of analyses, a person-oriented approach can be extended to study differences between these identified “groupings” (Dik et al., 2008; Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 2004). In this study, we ventured into a reasonably novel area of occupational well-being research; personal work goal research from the perspective of Little’s (2000, 2007) social ecological model. Finally, the target group comprised young managers, and thus, this study generated new information about the goal pursuit and well-being of managers who are at the establishment stage of their career.

There were also some limitations in the study that should be considered when making inferences on the basis of these findings. Because we had a specific target population, this will also impact the extent to which these findings can be generalized in regard to other employees in other countries. In addition to the generalizability, goal appraisals were based on single item measures and thus more comprehensive measures of goal appraisals would be required in future studies. The questionnaire data present well-known limitations associated with self-report data. Additional objective outcome measures may be required in future studies to establish the health and well-being of managers, thus avoiding the pitfalls of self-report data and same-source bias. The main limitation of the cross-sectional design should be addressed in the future by investigating whether a certain type of goal leads to improved occupational well-being or whether a goal is chosen as a result of, for instance, increasing levels of stress. For example, research evidence has already shown that depressive symptomatology predicts negative intrapersonal goals (e.g., Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 1997b). Longitudinal research design would also shed light on the effects of goal achievement on burnout and work engagement.

It would be an interesting avenue for future research to investigate goal facilitation at work, particularly with respect to organizational, competence, and progression goals, which may be supported by more favorable working conditions, such as having a balance between rewards received and efforts invested in the workplace (Siegrist et al., 2004). In terms of some of the other categories (e.g., well-being and job change goals), goal conflict would be an essential addition to the analysis of goal appraisals. In this study, the participants were asked to name only their most important personal work goal. It is possible that the other personal work goals and life goals also influence occupational well-being. A person may be experiencing conflict within his or her own goal structure (e.g., completing a project within a tight deadline and spending more time with the family). On the other hand, it could be that some of these work goals are interwoven together, that is, by achieving professional competence, the managers may be aiming to get a promotion and thus increase their salary. Moreover, investigating the moderating and mediating role of goal content on

occupational well-being would be a valuable step forward establishing a more comprehensive picture of the goal processes that promote occupational well-being and facilitate recovery during off-work time.

Conclusions

This study reinforces the need to take personal work goal processes into account when considering relatively stable work-related moods such as burnout and work engagement. Furthermore, the significant differences in the levels of burnout and work engagement in the personal work goal categories remained even after controlling for goal appraisals, which previous research has linked to well-being within the work context. This confirms that research on burnout and work engagement – and more broadly occupational well-being – can benefit from further understanding of what goals managers strive to achieve and how these goals are appraised. Establishing associations between the goal pursuit of young managers and their well-being can help organizations to facilitate goals that are of benefit for the well-being of managers, while being in line with the aims of the organization.

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Table 1 *The Personal Work Goal Categories, Descriptions of Contents, and Examples of Goals Named by the Young Managers (Total n = 685)*

<i>Personal work goal category</i>	<i>% (n)</i>	<i>Description of contents</i>	<i>Examples of personal work goals produced</i>
1. Competence	30.5 (209)	Starting or finishing training, job performance, and professional development	“Develop myself in the job and deepen my knowledge within my own field”; “Finish training”; and “To develop to be a skillful manager, who recognizes the needs of subordinates and can support them in a right way and enough.”
2. Progression	23.7 (162)	Advancing to a higher position and promotion	“Progress in the hierarchy to the next level”; “Progressing to a more challenging duties”; and “To become a Managing Director in the company.”
3. Well-being	15.2 (104)	Health, work satisfaction, and work-life balance	“Learning to control work-load in such a way that doesn’t disturb family life to an excess”; “Learning to be without stressing”; and “Working in a good-spirited working climate.”
4. Job change	13.7 (94)	A change in career either by changing organization, position or professional field, or by setting up a company	“To find a more interesting profession”; “At some point to move to an independent specialist or designing consultancy – away from managerial duties”; and “To become an entrepreneur.”
5. Job security	7.4 (51)	Receiving a permanent contract and continuation of employment	“Maintain current employment”; “Getting a stable status and sustaining it”; and “To be able to be here.”
6. Organization	5.6 (38)	The success or performance of the organization or department	“Stabilizing the company business”; “To get my team to function even better towards achieving jointly agreed goals”; and “To modernize and increase productivity.”
7. Finance	3.9 (27)	Receiving regular salary and pay rise	“Pay rise”; “To get better pay (pay to correspond performance)”; and “More money.”

Table 2

Differences in Significant Background Variables (%) between the Personal Work Goal Categories (Total n = 685)

Background variables	1. Competence (<i>n</i> = 209)	2. Progression (<i>n</i> = 162)	3. Well-being (<i>n</i> = 104)	4. Job change (<i>n</i> = 94)	5. Job security (<i>n</i> = 51)	6. Organization (<i>n</i> = 38)	7. Finance (<i>n</i> = 27)	χ^2 -test
<i>Managerial level</i>								
upper	8.2	6.5	9.7	6.6	4.0	26.3 ^T	11.1	36.775***
middle	53.6	51.0	40.8 ^{AT}	61.5 ^T	38.0	47.4	29.6 ^{AT}	
lower	38.2	42.5	49.5	31.9 ^{AT}	58.0 ^T	26.3 ^{AT}	59.3	
<i>Employment contract</i>								
permanent	94.7	95.7	93.3	90.4	70.6 ^{AT}	97.4	100	44.376***
fixed-term	5.3	4.3	6.7	9.6	29.4 ^T	2.6	0	
<i>Career instability</i>								
no unemployment	70.3	72.7	61.5	74.5	39.2 ^{AT}	81.6	66.7	28.709***
unemployment	29.7	27.3	38.5	25.5	60.8 ^T	18.4	33.3	

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; ^T = typical, ^{AT} = atypical, adjusted residual $> |2|$

Table 3 *Correlation Coefficients for Study Variables (n = 662–685)*

Variables	1 ¹	2 ¹	3 ¹	4 ¹	5 ¹	6 ¹	7 ²	8 ²	9 ²	10 ²	11 ²	12 ²	13 ²	14 ²	15 ²	16 ²	17 ²	18 ²
1. Gender (1=male 2=female)																		
2. Managerial level (1=upper level, 3=lower level)	-.01																	
3. Organization (1=private, 2=public)	.06	-.02																
4. Employment contract (1= permanent, 2=fixed-term)	.06	.18***	.07															
5. Career instability (1=no, 2=yes)	-.02	.15***	.05	.14**														
6. Children (1=no, 2=yes)	-.06	-.12***	.05	-.13***	.05													
7. Goal importance	.10**	-.02	.01	.07	.06	-.01												
8. Goal commitment	.04	-.06	-.02	.05	.00	.03	.51***											
9. Goal progress	-.07	-.12**	-.03	.03	-.02	.08*	.19***	.46***										
10. Goal effort	-.09*	-.12**	-.03	.04	-.05	.08*	.36***	.52***	.50***									
11. Goal strain	-.02	-.15***	.06	-.05	-.06	.07	.17***	.20***	.11**	.36***								
12. Burnout	.03	-.08*	.02	-.12**	-.04	.02	.01	-.13***	-.24***	-.03	.20***							
13. Emotional exhaustion	.02	-.14***	.04	-.14***	-.09*	.04	.04	-.02	-.11**	.08*	.26***	.82***						
14. Cynicism	-.03	-.03	.04	-.09*	.01	.00	-.04	-.20***	-.27***	-.10**	.09*	.85***	.48***					
15. Reduced professional efficacy	.06	-.03	-.01	-.07	.00	.00	.02	-.13***	-.26**	-.07	.15***	.89***	.55***	.75***				
16. Work engagement	.09	-.07	.03	.00	-.11**	.07	.07	.23***	.30***	.19***	.01	-.36***	-.07	-.49***	-.41***			
17. Vigor	.07	-.01	.00	.00	-.09*	.06	.04	.20***	.29***	.12**	-.07	-.45***	-.21***	-.52***	-.46***	.87***		
18. Dedication	.03	-.04	.04	.01	-.09*	.07	.09*	.25***	.33***	.20***	.00	-.42***	-.11**	-.54***	-.48***	.93***	.79***	
19. Absorption	.13***	-.11**	.03	.00	-.09*	.03	.05	.15***	.18***	.17***	.07	-.11**	.10**	-.25***	-.17***	.85***	.55***	.67***

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; ¹ Spearman correlation; ² Pearson correlation

Table 4

The Results of ANCOVA Analyses for Goal Appraisals in the Personal Work Goal Categories (Gender, Managerial Level, Employment Contract, and Career Instability controlled for)

Goal appraisal (range)	1. Competence (n = 209)	2. Progression (n = 162)	3. Well-being (n = 104)	4. Job change (n = 94)	5. Job security (n = 51)	6. Organization (n = 38)	7. Finance (n = 27)	Total (n = 685)	F -test	Pairwise comparisons ^a	Partial θ^2
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)			
Importance (1-5)	4.32 (0.60)	4.08 (0.71)	4.48 (0.64)	4.23 (0.66)	4.57 (0.77)	4.57 (0.64)	4.22 (0.85)	4.31 (0.68)	6.43***	2 < 1,3,5,6	0.06
Commitment (1-5)	4.13 (0.70)	4.01 (0.76)	4.04 (0.78)	3.97 (0.83)	4.35 (0.79)	4.48 (0.69)	3.98 (0.77)	4.10 (0.76)	3.43***	6 > 2,4	0.03
Progress (1-5)	3.56 (0.83)	3.35 (0.96)	3.01 (0.86)	2.94 (1.01)	3.57 (0.77)	3.58 (0.85)	3.22 (1.17)	3.33 (0.93)	8.30***	3, 4 < 1,5,6 4 < 2	0.07
Effort (1-5)	3.53 (0.93)	3.21 (1.00)	3.28 (0.95)	3.09 (0.94)	3.62 (1.05)	3.74 (0.96)	3.40 (1.13)	3.37 (0.99)	4.55***	4 < 1,6 2 < 1	0.04
Strain (1-5)	3.38 (0.98)	3.10 (1.07)	3.03 (1.04)	2.78 (1.07)	3.38 (0.93)	3.52 (0.97)	2.83 (1.02)	3.17 (1.04)	5.73***	4 < 1,5,6	0.05

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; ^aBonferroni Comparisons

Table 5

The Results of ANCOVA Analyses for Burnout and Work Engagement (Goal Appraisals, Gender, Managerial Level, Employment Contract, and Career Instability Controlled for)

Well-being variables (range)	1. Competence (n = 209)	2. Progression (n = 162)	3. Well-being (n = 104)	4. Job change (n = 94)	5. Job security (n = 51)	6. Organization (n = 38)	7. Finance (n = 27)	Total (n = 685)	<i>F-test</i>	Pairwise comparison ^a	Partial θ^2
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)			
Burnout (1-6)	2.53 (0.69)	2.60 (0.74)	2.96 (0.80)	2.92 (0.92)	2.47 (0.65)	2.44 (0.74)	2.61 (0.78)	2.66 (0.78)	6.78***	3,4 > 1,2,5,6	0.06
exhaustion	2.94 (0.93)	2.98 (0.99)	3.41 (1.08)	3.06 (1.08)	2.75 (0.95)	2.78 (1.06)	2.90 (1.07)	3.01 (1.01)	3.93***	3 > 1,2,5,6	0.04
cynicism	2.16 (0.72)	2.27 (0.79)	2.57 (0.88)	2.70 (0.98)	2.20 (0.57)	2.06 (0.70)	2.55 (0.90)	2.33 (0.82)	7.39***	3,4 > 1,6 4 > 2,5	0.07
reduced professional efficacy	2.49 (0.83)	2.54 (0.86)	2.91 (0.92)	3.00 (1.02)	2.46 (0.79)	2.48 (0.83)	2.38 (0.89)	2.63 (0.90)	6.27***	3,4 > 1,2 4 > 5,6,7	0.06
Work engagement (1-7)	5.63 (0.95)	5.54 (0.90)	5.28 (1.03)	5.00 (1.24)	5.42 (0.93)	5.79 (0.84)	5.39 (1.01)	5.45 (1.02)	5.56***	4 < 1,2,6	0.05
vigor	5.68 (0.99)	5.75 (0.90)	5.41 (1.09)	5.11 (1.33)	5.60 (0.93)	6.00 (0.75)	5.78 (0.95)	5.59 (1.05)	6.02***	3,4 < 6 4 < 1,2,7	0.05
dedication	5.84 (1.02)	5.67 (1.08)	5.41 (1.19)	4.96 (1.45)	5.57 (0.95)	5.86 (0.90)	5.57 (1.17)	5.58 (1.17)	7.31***	3,4 < 1 4 < 2,6	0.06
absorption	5.36 (1.13)	5.18 (1.23)	5.00 (1.32)	4.94 (1.31)	5.09 (1.28)	5.51 (1.07)	4.84 (1.53)	5.18 (1.25)	2.36*		0.02

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$; ^aBonferroni Comparisons