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## GOAL CONFLICT AND OCCUPATIONAL WELL-BEING

### Conflicting personal goals: A Risk to Occupational Well-being?

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### **Abstract:**

#### **Purpose:**

The research investigates the moderating role of goal conflict in the relationship between the contents of managers' personal work goals and occupational well-being (burnout and work engagement). Eight goal categories (organization, competence, well-being, career-ending, progression, prestige, job change, and employment contract) described the contents of goals. Goal conflict reflected the degree to which a personal work goal was perceived to interfere with other life domains.

#### **Design/methodology/approach:**

The data were drawn from a study directed to Finnish managers in 2009 ( $n = 806$ ). General Linear Models (GLM) were conducted to investigate the associations between goal content categories and occupational well-being and to test whether goal conflict moderates the relationship between goal content categories and occupational well-being.

#### **Findings:**

Career-ending goals related to significantly higher burnout than progression goals. Participants with organization, competence, or progression goals reported the highest goal conflict, whereas participants with well-being, career-ending, or job change goals reported lower goal conflict. Goal conflict was found to have a moderating role: In a high goal conflict situation, participants with organizational, competence, and progression goals reported lower occupational well-being, whereas participants with job change goals reported higher occupational well-being.

#### **Originality/value:**

The research highlights that both the contents and appraisals (e.g., goal conflict) of personal work goals should be taken into account when investigating the relationship between personal goals and well-being at work.

Keywords: managers, goal content, goal appraisals, goal conflict, burnout, work engagement

## Introduction

Employees have self-set, personal goals in different life domains which are competing for the individual's resources. The present research draws attention to personal work goals, and whether the conflict experienced between these goals and other areas of life has a specific association with occupational well-being. Personal work goals bring a new, dynamic perspective on the interaction between the person and his/her work environment (Grant *et al.*, 2007; Hyvönen, 2011) since they reflect the future-oriented, career-related intentions of employees who are balancing the demands and opportunities of their career as well as different life domains. The contents of personal work goals have been found to contribute to occupational well-being in previous studies (Hyvönen *et al.*, 2009, 2010). More studies have, however, investigated appraisals of personal work goals which have been found to contribute to outcome measures such as job attitudes, work-related well-being, and health indicators, as well as general health and satisfaction indicators (for a review, see Hyvönen, 2011; Pomaki and Maes, 2002). Only a few studies have looked at conflicts related to personal work goals (Kehr, 2003; Pomaki *et al.*, 2004; Wiese and Salmela-Aro, 2008), showing, for example, that higher goal conflict is associated with lower occupational well-being. To the best of our knowledge, there is no previous research focusing on the moderating role of goal appraisals (e.g., goal conflict) in the interaction between the contents of personal work goals and occupational well-being. This research can therefore shed light on the relationship between personal work goals and occupational well-being by complimenting previous goal research in the context of occupational health literature with a more thorough investigation of personal work goals as multi-dimensional constructs.

The aim is to investigate the association between the contents of personal work goals and occupational well-being among managers with a wider age range than has been studied previously (Hyvönen *et al.*, 2009, 2010). This research particularly contributes to the understanding regarding whether personal work goals are experienced to infringe on family/leisure activities. That is, there can be differences between participants with different personal work goals in the extent to which they experience their goals to be in conflict with other areas of life. The aim is to generate new knowledge regarding which personal work goals might be a particular risk to

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unfavorable work–nonwork conflicts from the occupational well-being perspective. Our main aim is therefore to address the moderating role of goal conflict in the interaction between the contents of personal work goals and occupational well-being.

Valuable practical contributions stem from focusing on a large sample of a wide age range of managers ( $n = 806$ ) who are acting in middle- or top-level positions. They represent a key group for the study of personal work goals, occupational well-being and goal conflict: First, personal work goals have implications on organizations' functioning and performance (for a review, see Pomaki and Maes, 2002) and managers are in a central position in facilitating the achievement of organization-wide goals and targets. Second, managers have high job control that accommodates decisions regarding the goals they want to pursue. It has already been shown that, among managers, goal conflict can hinder the attainment of new personal work goals (Kehr, 2003). Third, managers and professionals are at risk for experiencing higher conflicting demands between work–nonwork domains than other workers which is most likely due to their strong psychological and temporal commitment towards work. These conflicts then are associated with lower occupational well-being (Bellavia and Frone, 2005). Fourth, the occupational well-being of managers can also impact the well-being of their subordinates as shown by previous studies (for a review, see Skakon *et al.*, 2010).

### *Personal work goals and well-being*

Little's (2007) theoretical framework of a social ecological model of well-being and personal projects was adopted to investigate the role of personal work goals in occupational well-being. The model describes the continuous negotiation between the personal and contextual features in order to pursue the goals in life that are the most central to the person. There is an indirect effect from personal and contextual features through personal goals on well-being and adaptation in addition to the direct effect of personal and contextual features on well-being. These relationships are described as reciprocal in the model. Well-being and adaptation are promoted through the sustained pursuit of personal projects that provide meaning and coherence throughout one's life-span.

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Personal goals can reflect how personal features, such as psychological needs, are acted out in various life domains (Little, 2007). For instance, the self-determination theory (SDT) has outlined fundamental needs promoting meaningful and healthy lives, namely the needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Moreover, research has emphasized that a balanced need satisfaction (e.g., feeling competent at work and relatedness through spending time with family) can have further beneficial well-being outcomes than maximizing need satisfaction only in one area of psychological needs (Sheldon and Niemiec, 2006).

Personal goal research typically focuses on appraisals of goals on dimensions, such as importance, commitment, difficulty, or conflict (for a review, see Austin and Vancouver, 1996). It has been shown however that appraisals of goals differ depending on the goal content (Nurmi *et al.*, 2009). The contents can reflect the “what” of an individual’s goal pursuit, such as intrinsic and extrinsic goal contents (e.g., Sheldon *et al.*, 2004). The contents of personal work goals utilized in this study have been coded into eight categories previously reported by Huhtala *et al.* (2013): organization (success and performance of the company; 35.4%), competence (professional development and training; 26.1%), well-being (health, motivation, and job satisfaction; 12.1%), career-ending (retirement, financial independence; 7.3%), progression (promotion and advancement; 6.8%), prestige/influence (influence and appreciation of work; 4.2%), job change (finding a new job or setting up a company; 4.2%), and employment contract (renewing contract, pay rise and bonus; 3.9%). The goals varied from shorter term (e.g., finishing a project) to long-term goals (e.g., developing leadership skills, to retire in ten years).

In the present study, burnout and work engagement were selected as the indicators of occupational well-being. Burnout is seen as the result of a prolonged exposure to job stress causing an increase in emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy which represent the three dimensions of burnout (Maslach and Leiter, 2008). Exhaustion is the affective dimension characterized by feelings of fatigue and depletion of emotional energy. Cynicism is the interpersonal dimension describing distant and negative attitudes towards different aspects of one’s work. Inefficacy, in turn, describes the decline in one’s feelings of competence, effectiveness, and productivity at work. This study focuses on the dimensions of exhaustion and cynicism, which have shown

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a consistent relationship, whereas the inefficacy dimension sometimes is seen as a more distinct, independent construct (Maslach and Leiter, 2008). Engagement is operationalized through the concept of work engagement (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002, 2006) describing a positive motivational experience of vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor refers to high levels of energy, resilience and personal investment at work; dedication describes feelings of pride, meaningfulness, challenge, and enthusiasm about one's work; and absorption describes being fully immersed in one's work and losing the sense of time while working.

The contents of personal work goals have been found to be associated with occupational well-being among young managers (Hyvönen *et al.*, 2009): Job change and well-being goals were associated with lower occupational well-being whereas organizational goals were related to higher occupational well-being. Work conditions could partly explain the positive well-being associations of organizational goals since better organizational culture was found to contribute to naming organizational goals among managers in this sample (Huhtala *et al.*, 2013) and more favorable psychosocial work environment among young managers (Hyvönen *et al.*, 2010). Moreover, less favorable work conditions were reported by managers with job change goals, as well as by managers with career-ending goals (Hyvönen *et al.*, 2010; Huhtala *et al.*, 2013).

To our knowledge, there are no previous studies investigating the relationship between goal contents and occupational well-being with a wider age range of employees. In this sample of managers, managers reporting organizational ( $M = 48$  years) and career-ending goals ( $M = 55$  years) were significantly older than managers with progression goals who were on average the youngest ( $M = 39$  years) (Huhtala *et al.*, 2013). Previous studies have, in fact, supported age differences in work motivation (for a review, see Kooij *et al.*, 2011); in an older age, a reduction in growth-related motivation (e.g., training and advancement) and motivation towards generative-related tasks (working with and passing knowledge to others) increased with age (Stamov-Roßnagel and Biemann, 2012). Managers with career-ending goals and their occupational well-being could be of particular interest in terms of preventing early retirement.

As previous research suggests (Huhtala *et al.*, 2013; Hyvönen *et al.*, 2010), it could be that managers who focus on career-ending goals – as well as those managers focusing on well-being or job change goals –

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perceive their work conditions as less favorable and are therefore less likely to experience need satisfaction. In light of theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Little, 2007) and previous research (e.g., Sheldon and Niemiec, 2006), personal goals can reflect strategies through which individuals attempt to achieve balance in their various life contexts in order to increase well-being and happiness. Thus, our first study aim is to investigate the relationships between the contents of personal work goals and occupational well-being with a wide age range of participants.

H1: Goals related to well-being, job change, and career-ending are associated with lower occupational well-being (higher burnout and lower work engagement).

H2: Goals related to organizational goals are associated with higher occupational well-being (lower burnout and higher work engagement).

### *The role of goal conflict in relation to the content of goals and occupational well-being*

Individuals strive for multiple personal goals and their work goals can hinder or facilitate the achievement of goals in other life domains. Goal conflict is defined as a situation where one goal is experienced as interfering with the achievement of other goals, which can be a key contributor to low psychological and physical well-being (e.g., Emmons and King, 1988; Riediger and Freund, 2004). Although personal goals are considered as multi-level constructs (Nurmi *et al.*, 2009), remarkably little research has been done to combine both aspects of goal analyses (i.e., goal contents and appraisals) within the work domain.

To our knowledge, there is only one study that has looked at differences in goal appraisals (importance, commitment, progress, effort, and strain) between different personal work goals (Hyvönen *et al.*, 2009). However, this study did not include appraisals of goal conflict. Participants with competence and organizational goals rated their goals as more strenuous and effortful when compared to participants with job change goals. Organizational goals were also rated as high on importance, commitment, and progress. It could be that the goals that require higher effort and are more strenuous reflect strong temporal and psychological commitment towards work. Particularly among professionals and managers, strong commitment has been suggested to predispose to unfavorable work–nonwork conflicts and consequently lower occupational well-being (Bellavia

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and Frone, 2005). Job change goals, in turn, were rated lowest on effort and strain (Hyvönen *et al.*, 2009), and therefore, these goals could be associated with lower goal conflict. Our second aim is to investigate the differences in goal conflict between participants with different personal work goals and our hypotheses are based on previous research on goal appraisals (Hyvönen *et al.*, 2009) and work–nonwork conflict (Bellavia and Frone, 2005):

H3: Goals related to organization and competence are associated with higher conflict with other life areas.

H4: Goals related to job change are associated with lower conflict with other life areas.

Previous research has shown that higher goal conflict is related to increased burnout and psychological distress among employees (Pomaki *et al.*, 2004). In addition, higher family-to-work goal conflict and work-to-family goal conflict have been associated with lower work satisfaction but had no significant association with work engagement (Wiese and Salmela-Aro, 2008). Among managers, persistent goal conflict over 5-months contributed to reduced attainment of new goals (Kehr, 2003). However, goal conflict did not have a direct effect on subjective well-being; instead lower goal attainment was related to a reduction in positive affect.

It could be that some personal work goals make more demands on resources and create higher conflict with other areas of life: For instance, a manager's aim to progress on career can be in conflict with the hope of spending more time with family. In line with the SDT (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Sheldon and Niemiec, 2006) and social ecological model of well-being (Little, 2000, 2007), some goals could relate to difficulties in leveling the personal and environmental demands in various life domains, and thus predispose an individual to an imbalance of need satisfaction and reduced occupational well-being. High goal conflict among participants with organizational or competence goals could be a signal of an imbalance in need satisfaction and related to lower occupational well-being. In turn, lower goal conflict among participants with job change goals can have a buffering effect and thus be related to higher occupational well-being. As a result, we address the moderating role of goal conflict in the relationship between the contents of personal work goals and occupational well-being with the following hypotheses:

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H5: In a high conflict condition goals related to organizational and competence are associated with low occupational well-being (high burnout and low work engagement).

H6: In a low conflict condition goals related to job change are associated with high occupational well-being (low burnout and high work engagement).

## Method

### *Participants and procedure*

The managerial population ( $N = 3000$ ) of this study was randomly selected from the membership registers of two Finnish national labor unions. The sample can be considered as relatively representative of the target group since the majority of employees (67.4%) belong to a labor union organized on the basis of industry in Finland (Ahtiainen, 2011). Surveys were sent to the home addresses of the participants in 2009. Respondents ( $n = 369$ ) who did not fill the study criteria were omitted from the original sample and altogether 902 respondents were included in the sample (response rate 34.3%; for further information regarding data collection and attrition analyses, see Huhtala *et al.*, 2013).

Participants in the present study include all those managers who responded to the study variables ( $n = 806$ ). On average, participants were 46.3 years old (range 25–68 years;  $SD = 9.2$  years). Of participants, 69.4 % were men and 68.6 % had one child or more living in the household. They worked on average 46 hours per week (range 13–80 hours;  $SD = 6.9$  hours). Of participants, 47.5% worked in top and 52.5% in middle management, mainly in the private sector (81.4%). The majority had a permanent contract (98.4%) and an academic degree (90%). Participants represented a range of industries: manufacturing (40.3%), information processing (14.8%), real estate (12.2%), and other (32.7%, e.g., finance, service, health care, public administration and education).

### *Measures*

*Personal work goals* were measured with an open-ended question “Write down your most important personal goal that relates to your work or career”. The process of coding the contents of personal goals with this sample of managers has been previously reported in a study by Huhtala and colleagues (2013). The contents of

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personal work goals were thematically categorized by independent coders. If the participant had mentioned more than one theme, only the first theme was included in the analysis. Thus, each participant could be only in one of the final categories: *organizational, competence, well-being, career-ending, progression, prestige/influence, job change, or employment contract* goals. The inter-rater reliability was assessed with the Cohen's kappa coefficient and the result of  $K = .83$  indicates an excellent agreement (Landis and Koch, 1977). The differences in coding were noted and those goals were carefully considered and classified among the coders.

*Goal conflict* was measured with a question “To what extent is your goal in conflict with other areas of your life (e.g., family, leisure time)?” The participants responded on a scale from 1 (*very little*) to 5 (*extremely*). Higher ratings indicated more goal conflict experienced ( $M = 2.40; SD = 1.01$ ).

*Burnout* was measured with the Bergen Burnout Indicator with nine items, which has proved to have better reliability and construct validity than the original 15-item measure (Salmela-Aro *et al.*, 2011). The scale has also shown factorial group invariance across cross-sectional samples and factorial time invariance over measurement times (Feldt *et al.*, 2014). The dimensions of exhaustion (3 items; e.g., “I often sleep poorly because of the circumstances at work”) and cynicism (3 items; e.g., I feel dispirited at work and I think of leaving my job) were included. Items were answered on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 6 (*completely agree*). The Cronbach's alpha for burnout consisting of exhaustion and cynicism was .77 ( $M = 2.69; SD = 0.84$ ). The discriminant validity for goal conflict and burnout was indicated by Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA) ( $r = .06$ ).

*Work engagement* was assessed using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale with 9 items (UWES-9; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006). The scale comprises 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 Cronbach's alpha was .94 ( $M = 5.77; SD = 1.03$ ). The UWES-9 has been tested in previous studies in Finland and shown good construct validity (Seppälä *et al.*, 2009). CFA showed discriminant validity for goal conflict and work engagement ( $r = -.01$ ), as well as for burnout and work engagement ( $r = -.33$ ).

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*Background variables* included gender (1 = male, 2 = female), age in years, managerial level (1 = top, 2 = middle), working hours per week, and children (0 = no child at home, 1 = one child or children at home). On the basis of a previous personal work goal studies (Huhtala *et al.*, 2013; Hyvönen *et al.*, 2009), these background variables were related to the outcome measures used, and therefore, were controlled for in the following analyses.

### Results

Correlations among goal conflict, burnout, work engagement and background variables are seen in Table 1. General Linear Models (GLM) were conducted to investigate the associations between goal content categories and occupational well-being and to test whether goal conflict moderates the relationship between goal content categories and occupational well-being. Separate analyses were performed for burnout and work engagement in which the same background variables served as covariates. The first step of the GLM analyses included the effect of background variables and the second step included the main effect of goal content categories, which was significant for burnout,  $F(7, 785) = 2.75, p < .01, \eta^2 = .02$ , but not for work engagement,  $F(7, 783) = 1.74, \text{ns}$ . The cumulative  $R^2$  of background variables was .02 for burnout and .06 for work engagement. The  $R^2$  change of goal content categories was .03 for burnout and .03 for work engagement. The third step included the main effect of goal conflict, which was significant for burnout,  $F(1, 785) = 7.58, p < .01, \eta^2 = .01$ , but not for work engagement,  $F(1, 783) = .01, \text{ns}$ . The  $R^2$  change of goal conflict was .07 for burnout and .01 for work engagement. The fourth step included the interaction effect of goal content categories and goal conflict, which was significant for burnout  $F(7, 785) = 7.07, p < .001, \eta^2 = .06$ , and for work engagement,  $F(7, 783) = 2.78, p < .01$ . The  $R^2$  change of interaction effect was .05 for burnout and .02 for work engagement.

– Insert Table 1 here –

H1 and H2 received modest support since personal work goal categories had a main effect on burnout. Bonferroni pairwise comparisons indicated that participants with career-ending goals reported significantly higher burnout than participants with progression goals. In order to ascertain the intercept values and regression coefficients of the moderator effects in addition to the level of significance for each goal content category,

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comparisons were performed where each category was set as a reference category and contrasted with the seven other categories (see Table 2). A high goal conflict condition was related to significantly higher burnout among participants with organizational, competence, and progression goals as indicated by the regression coefficients, and thus, H5 received support. Similarly, a high conflict condition was associated with significantly lower work engagement among participants with organization and competence goals. Against our expectation stated in H6, participants with job change goals reported low burnout and relatively high work engagement in a high goal conflict condition as well as relatively high burnout and low work engagement in a low goal conflict condition. Thus, they significantly differed from all the other participants in the level of burnout and they differed from participants with organizational, competence, and progression goals in the level of work engagement.

– Insert Table 2 here –

Analysis of Covariance was calculated to investigate whether goal content categories differ in goal conflict (see Table 3). H3 received support since participants with organizational, competence and progression goals reported significantly higher goal conflict especially when compared to well-being and career-ending goals. H4 received also some support, since job change goals were related to significantly lower goal conflict than competence goals. Participants with progression goals reported the highest level of goal conflict and significantly differed from all the other participants with the exception of participants whose goals related to employment contract.

– Insert Table 3 here –

## **Discussion**

The study highlighted that participants with career-ending goals reported significantly higher burnout and lower goal conflict. For them, as well as for participants with well-being goals who also reported lower goal conflict, the presence of goal conflict appeared not to play a moderating role in occupational well-being. In contrast, participants with progression goals reported low burnout but the highest goal conflict. For them, goal conflict moderated the relationship with occupational well-being, and more specifically, high goal conflict could be a potential risk factor for reduced occupational well-being. Similar findings emerged also in relation to

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participants with organizational and competence goals. An interesting subgroup of participants with job change goals showed the opposite tendency: Participants with job change goals who reported high goal conflict had a good level of occupational well-being, in fact, similar levels as participants with organizational, competence and progression goals in a low conflict condition.

### *Research implications on the personal work goal –occupational well-being relationship*

The research supported Little's (2007) social ecological model of well-being by indicating that personal work goals can be considered as multi-dimensional constructs (i.e., goal content and goal conflict). The association between goal content and goal conflict – and the interaction effect of content and conflict on occupational well-being – gave good evidence for the need to consider both goal aspects. First, some personal work goals might be inherently more in conflict (e.g., becoming a member of the executive board) with hobbies and family. Second, occupational well-being seemed to co-vary as a function of the interaction between goal content and conflict. Among participants with organizational, competence, and progression goals who comprised the majority of the studied population, a higher goal conflict condition was associated with higher burnout and lower work engagement (except among participants with progression goals). A similar trend in relation to burnout was also observed among participants with prestige/influence and employment contract goals, but findings failed to reach a level of significance which could be partly attributed to smaller sizes of these categories. Goal conflict can therefore be a relevant consideration among employees balancing the needs and demands of career and family, and especially among managers, for whom, work duties can spillover to leisure time (Bellavia and Fronie, 2005).

In contrast, participants with well-being, career-ending, and job change goals reported on average low levels of occupational well-being and low goal conflict. Clear differences between these participants when interpreting the moderator role of goal conflict stood out. Participants with job change goals were the only participants among whom high goal conflict was associated with higher occupational well-being. It is notable that for some people higher goal conflict with other areas of life is related to higher well-being, which is in line with the suggestion of the protective role of goal conflict on well-being when personal work goals become

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unattainable (Kehr, 2003). The relationship between high goal conflict and higher psychological distress is somewhat ambiguous since several studies have found no or only weak relationship (Kelly *et al.*, 2011; Segerstrom and Solberg Nes, 2006). For example, goal conflict can be indicative of higher self-complexity that can buffer against stressful life events (Linville, 1987). Work stressors can provoke goals to be adjusted or compensated which might be the case for some of the participants with job change goals. On the other hand, beneficial occupational well-being can provide psychological resources to pursue new job opportunities even though they are in conflict with other life domains. These participants may have various psychological and social resources (e.g., high self-efficacy, optimism, and social support) creating “resource caravans” for new goal pursuits (Hobfoll, 2002).

Job change goals can also represent aims towards which participants want to be approaching.

Underlying to approach-avoidance goals distinction (e.g., Elliot and Thrash, 2010) is either approach motivation aiming towards flourishing, or alternatively, avoidance motivation that supports survival functions. Therefore, participants who are focused on job change goals, which are not in conflict with other areas of life, might be considering alternative employment in order to avoid ongoing stressful work context (i.e., avoidance goals). This explanation is supported by a previous study among this sample of managers in which unfavorable organizational culture contributed to naming job change goals (and career-ending goals) (Huhtala *et al.*, 2013). Similarly, among young managers, higher work stressors and increases in stressors were associated with engaging in job change goals (Hyvönen *et al.*, 2011). In line with motivational and personal goal theories (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Little, 2007), job change goals could be a strategy to complement personal goals in other life domains when a new job is seen as a solution to better health and psychological well-being.

### *Practical implications*

The research deepened the understanding regarding the associations between goal contents and occupational well-being among a wider age range of managers. The largest differences were seen in burnout between participants with progression goals (low burnout) and career-ending goals (high burnout). In a previous study with this sample of managers by Huhtala and colleagues (2013), career-ending goals were typically

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mentioned by older participants (mean 55.2 years). The age around mid-fifties can be a critical time for managers to make retirement plans and therefore their lower occupational well-being is a concern. Firstly, there is mixed evidence regarding retirement transition and well-being: Some studies have found retirees reporting reduced physical and psychological well-being, whereas other studies have found positive effects on life satisfaction and health during the transition (for a review, see Wang and Shultz, 2010). For some participants the retirement transition itself can be thought-provoking and unsettling which could be reflected in their attitudes and energy towards work. Secondly, various studies have attributed earlier retirement decisions on health factors (for a review, see Wang and Shultz, 2010). For instance, a 10-year longitudinal study indicated that aging managers whose work ability had been consistently poor retired significantly earlier (at 55.4 years) than other managers (Feldt *et al.*, 2009). That is, an early focus on career-ending goals can signal poor or declining occupational health prompting retirement planning. Career-ending goals were also rated as lower in goal conflict which might reflect a need to invest more personal resources in off-job activities (e.g., hobbies and family). On the basis of our findings which complement previous findings (Huhtala *et al.*, 2013; Hyvönen *et al.*, 2011), participants with career-ending and job change goals – and some participants with well-being goals – could be an important target group for occupational health interventions, which should take into account their work conditions. For them, a low conflict with other areas of life could signal the need for resolving work-related issues, for instance, for the sake of family through changing job or career, or for older employees through retirement.

For participants with organizational, competence, and progression goals addressing goal conflict would be a key area. Among young managers, these goals were on average related to high well-being and favorable work conditions (e.g., Hyvönen *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, findings regarding the detrimental associations of goal conflict with occupational well-being provide new insight particularly among these participants. These goals can be beneficial for the functioning of the organization but they potentially also consume the individual's resources and create conflict with other areas of life. Findings support the importance of balanced need satisfaction in different life domains (Sheldon and Niemiec, 2006). That is, goal pursuit towards the functioning

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and success of the organization, as well as career development and progress, should not be made in the expense of nonwork activities. Organizations could promote the occupational well-being of their managers striving towards organizational success and career advancement through investing to family-friendly organizational culture (Kinnunen *et al.*, 2005).

### *Limitations and future directions*

The sample and study design carry limitations which need to be considered when making inferences based on findings. First, a Finnish managerial sample was studied who were randomly selected from the membership registers of national trade unions. They represented upper white-collar employees with good employment opportunities, which can impact the type of personal goals employees focus on. Therefore, investigating personal work goals among other than professional employees would be an important area of research. Second, only the most important personal work goals were investigated. Employees are likely to have complex, hierarchical goal systems which should be addressed in future studies since these other goals could also be significant in terms of occupational well-being. Third, goal conflict was assessed with a single-item measure and it would be preferable to use a multi-item measure in order to evaluate scale reliability. Fourth, participants rated their level of burnout on a 6-point scale which restricts them from taking a neutral stance. Fifth, in a cross-sectional study causal relationships cannot be addressed and thus the associations between personal work goals and occupational well-being are reciprocal. Further longitudinal research could focus on the evaluation of several personal work goals of an employee (i.e., personal work goal profiles) and why differences emerged in associations with burnout and work engagement. A valuable step forwards would be also to address the long-term consequences of goal conflict in relation to employees' experience of work-life balance.

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Table 1

*Correlation Coefficients for Background Variables, Goal Conflict, Burnout, and Work Engagement (n = 804–806)*

| Variables (range)                              | 1      | 2       | 3       | 4    | 5      | 6      | 7       | 8 |
|------------------------------------------------|--------|---------|---------|------|--------|--------|---------|---|
| 1. Gender<br>(1 = male, 2 = female)            | —      |         |         |      |        |        |         |   |
| 2. Age                                         | -.10** | —       |         |      |        |        |         |   |
| 3. Managerial level<br>(1 = top, 2 = middle)   | .08*   | -.14*** | —       |      |        |        |         |   |
| 4. Children<br>(0 = no children, 1 = children) | -.03   | -.07    | -.04    | —    |        |        |         |   |
| 5. Working hours                               | -.07   | .10**   | -.31*** | .03  | —      |        |         |   |
| 6. Goal conflict (1–5)                         | .00    | -.07*   | -.06    | .08* | .18*** | —      |         |   |
| 7. Burnout (1–6)                               | .09*   | .00     | .06     | -.03 | .09*   | .22*** | —       |   |
| 8. Work engagement (1–7)                       | .13*** | .01     | -.14*** | .07* | .16*** | -.01   | -.48*** | — |

*Note.* Spearman correlation coefficient was calculated for dichotomous variables (gender, managerial level, and children) and Pearson correlation coefficient for correlations among age, working hours, goal conflict, burnout, and work engagement.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Table 2

*GLM results in which each goal content category has been contrasted with the other categories showing the moderating role of goal conflict in the personal work goals – occupational well-being relationship*

| <b>Goal content category</b>        |                                 |                               |                             |                                  |                            |                         |                                         |                                       |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
|                                     | 1.<br>Organization<br>(n = 287) | 2.<br>Competence<br>(n = 212) | 3. Well-being<br>(n = 97)   | 4. Career-<br>ending (n =<br>56) | 5. Progression<br>(n = 55) | 6. Prestige<br>(n = 34) | 7. Job change<br>(n = 33)               | 8. Employment<br>contract (n =<br>32) |
| <b>Burnout</b>                      |                                 |                               |                             |                                  |                            |                         |                                         |                                       |
| Mean                                | 2.57                            | 2.62                          | 2.84                        | 2.97                             | 2.37                       | 2.55                    | 2.81                                    | 2.61                                  |
| Intercept                           | 2.04                            | 2.09                          | 2.31                        | 2.44                             | 1.84                       | 2.02                    | 2.29                                    | 2.07                                  |
| Regression coefficient <sup>1</sup> | 0.28***<br>(1 > 3, 4, 7)        | 0.42***<br>(2 > 3 ,4, 7)      | 0.06<br>(3 < 1, 2<br>3 > 7) | 0.02<br>(4 < 1, 2, 5<br>4 > 7)   | 0.31**<br>(5 > 4, 7)       | 0.16<br>(6 > 7)         | -0.61**<br>(7 < 1, 2, 3, 4,<br>5, 6, 8) | 0.29<br>(8 > 7)                       |
| <b>Work engagement</b>              |                                 |                               |                             |                                  |                            |                         |                                         |                                       |
| Mean                                | 5.88                            | 5.88                          | 5.71                        | 5.53                             | 6.01                       | 5.87                    | 5.42                                    | 5.67                                  |
| Intercept                           | 5.29                            | 5.29                          | 5.12                        | 4.93                             | 5.42                       | 5.29                    | 4.83                                    | 5.08                                  |
| Regression coefficient <sup>1</sup> | -0.15*<br>(1 < 3, 7)            | -0.26***<br>(2 < 3 ,4, 7)     | 0.12<br>(3 > 1, 2)          | 0.12<br>(4 > 2)                  | -0.16<br>(5 < 7)           | 0.01<br>(7 > 1, 2, 5)   | 0.43*<br>(7 > 1, 2, 5)                  | -0.07                                 |

*Note.* Background variables (age, gender, managerial level, children, and working hours) adjusted for.

\* p < .05; \*\*p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001. <sup>1</sup>Regression coefficient (i.e., moderating role) of pairwise comparisons with other categories.

Table 3

*Adjusted means and standard deviations of goal conflict in the categories of personal work*

| <b>Goal category</b>                    | <b>Goal conflict</b> | Bonferroni comparisons | <i>goals and results of ANCOV</i> |
|-----------------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Organization ( <i>n</i> = 287)       | 2.49 (0.96)          | 1 > 3, 4 and 1 < 5     | <i>A</i>                          |
| 2. Competence ( <i>n</i> = 212)         | 2.53 (0.99)          | 2 > 3, 4, 7 and 2 < 5  |                                   |
| 3. Well-being ( <i>n</i> = 97)          | 1.84 (0.94)          | 3 < 1, 2, 5, 8         |                                   |
| 4. Career-ending ( <i>n</i> = 56)       | 1.83 (0.86)          | 4 < 1, 2, 5            |                                   |
| 5. Progression ( <i>n</i> = 55)         | 3.11 (0.97)          | 5 > 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7   |                                   |
| 6. Prestige ( <i>n</i> = 34)            | 2.42 (0.96)          | 6 < 5                  |                                   |
| 7. Job change ( <i>n</i> = 33)          | 1.96 (0.88)          | 7 < 2, 5               |                                   |
| 8. Employment contract ( <i>n</i> = 32) | 2.50 (1.11)          | 8 > 3                  |                                   |
| <i>F</i> -value                         | 13.59***             |                        | <i>Note.</i>                      |
| Partial $\eta^2$                        | .11                  |                        | Background variables (age,        |

gender, managerial level, children, and working hours) adjusted for.

\*\*\* *p* < .001.