

The behaviour of police officers in conflict situations: how burnout and reduced dominance contribute to better outcomes

MARTIN C. EUWEMA,[†][★], NICOLIEN KOP[‡] and
ARNOLD B. BAKKER[†]

[†] Department of Social and Organizational Psychology, Utrecht University,
Heidelberglaan 1, PO Box 80140, 3508 TC Utrecht, The Netherlands

[‡] Dutch Police Academy, PO Box 1201 Apeldoorn, The Netherlands

Keywords: Burnout; Dominance; Conflict behaviour; Policing.

Dominance plays an important part in police–civilian interactions. However, burnout is associated with a reduction in dominance, and this might, paradoxically, lead to more effective outcomes in conflict situations. There is a lack of knowledge about the effects of burnout in professional practice, and this multi-method study was conducted to better understand these dynamics. It is unique in that it combined self-reported burnout with observed behaviour in interactions with civilians. In this study, the relationships between the imbalance between demands and rewards, occupational burnout and police officers' behaviour in conflict situations (in terms of dominance and effectiveness) were examined. A questionnaire was used to assess job demands, rewards and burnout among 358 Dutch police officers. In addition, police officers' interactions with civilians were observed over 122 days. The results of structural equation modelling analyses showed that the imbalance between job demands and rewards was predictive of burnout (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization). Burnout, in its turn, predicted a *decrease* in dominant behaviour in conflict situations and, consequently, more effective conflict outcomes. These findings show that reduced dominance associated with burnout could in fact have positive consequences for professional behaviour in conflict situations. The benefits of reduced dominance in these situations should be taken into account in the training of professionals.

1. Introduction

The job effectiveness of human service professionals largely depends on the way in which they interact with their clients, patients, students or civilians. These professionals are particularly challenged when conflicts occur with or among clients. There seems to be a growing amount of such conflict, as clients become more and more demanding and assertive. General practitioners, for example, are faced with patients demanding specific treatments or medicines (Bakker, Schaufeli, Sixma, Bosveld, & Van Dierendonck, 2000b), students argue over the evaluation by their teachers (Van Horn, 2002), and in social welfare, clients start arguing or even become aggressive when they feel that they have been mistreated (Brockmann, 2002). Dealing effectively with these situations is therefore an

[★] Author for correspondence. e-mail: M.Euwema@fss.uu.nl

important element of professional behaviour. In this study, we relate conflict behaviour to burnout and performance. We conducted the study among police officers, who have both a stress- and conflict-prone occupation (Biggam, Power, MacDonald, Carcary, & Moodie, 1997; Evans & Coman, 1993). Surprisingly, only a few studies have combined insights in conflict behaviour with employee well-being and burnout, although such a relationship seems to be obvious (De Dreu, Van Dierendonck, & DeBest-Waldhober, 2003; Friedman, Tidd, Currall, & Tsai, 2000).

According to Maslach (1993), the quality of job performance is seriously threatened when professionals become burned out. Human service professionals are at relatively high risk of job stress and burnout (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). Many studies in human service occupations underscore the risks of burnout, not only for job performance, but also for physical, emotional and social well-being at the individual, group and organizational level (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). When professionals reach a level of chronic job stress that can be described as burnout, they are often no longer able to work, and it might be obvious that in such circumstances effectiveness is low indeed. However, that situation is not reached overnight and many professionals experience burnout to a lesser extent (Bakker *et al.*, 2000b; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). The present study aims to improve our understanding of the behavioural consequences of burnout, more specifically regarding conflicts between police officers and civilians. Before discussing these behavioural effects, we address the concept and causes of burnout.

1.1. *Imbalance between job demands and rewards fosters burnout*

Burnout is conceived as a set of negative psychological experiences, reflecting a 'wearing out' from prolonged exposure to the stress of work (Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993). Burnout has been recognized as a serious problem, in particular for human service professionals (Maslach, 1993). The core dimensions of burnout are emotional exhaustion, which refers to the draining of emotional resources; and depersonalization, a callous and cynical attitude towards clients. Often, also a decrease in the perception of one's personal accomplishments is included in the definition of burnout. High levels of burnout are related to negative outcomes, such as reduced commitment, absenteeism and impaired job performance (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998).

Several theories postulate that an imbalance between high efforts and low rewards form the root causes of job stress and burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Schaufeli, Van Dierendonck, & Van Gorp, 1996; Siegrist, 1996). The imbalance between efforts and rewards, in particular high demands-low gain conditions, defines a state of inequity that leads to emotional distress. If this imbalance turns into a chronic condition, it may eventually deplete emotional resources (Farber, 1991), and result in psychosomatic complaints, cardiovascular diseases and burnout (Bakker, Killmer, Siegrist, & Schaufeli, 2000a; Bosma, Peter, Siegrist, & Marmot, 1998; Peter *et al.*, 1998; Siegrist, Peter, Junge, Cremer, & Seidel, 1990; Stansfeld, Bosma, Hemingway, & Marmot, 1998).

Rewards may be tangible, for example salary or a financial bonus, but may also be immaterial, e.g. appreciation from one's supervisor or from clients. Moreover, Bakker and his colleagues (Bakker, Demerouti, & Euwema, 2003a; Bakker, Demerouti, Taris, Schaufeli, & Schreurs, 2003b) have shown that job rewards, such as supervisory coaching and performance feedback, may play an important role in buffering the relationship between job demands and burnout (particularly exhaustion and cynicism). Furthermore, burnout has also been described as a *process*, in which the imbalance between demands and rewards or resources is reinforcing itself into a negative spiral of exhaustion and cynicism

(Bakker *et al.*, 2000a; Leiter & Maslach, 1988). In this process, the working relations of professionals with their colleagues and clients typically becomes less rewarding, as emotional exhaustion evokes negative attitudes towards clients, colleagues and the organization at large (Kop, Euwema, & Schaufeli, 1999; Schaufeli *et al.*, 1996). Therefore, we stated the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: The imbalance between (high) job demands and (low) job rewards is positively related to burnout.

1.2. Burnout and conflict behaviour

Over the past 25 years, research has shown that burnout has negative consequences for the individual as well as for the organization at large. For example, relationships have been found between burnout and depression, a sense of failure, fatigue, and loss of motivation (Glass & McKnight, 1996), as well as absenteeism, personnel turnover, poor productivity (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998), and reduced organization commitment (Lee & Ashforth, 1996).

The quality of work is also influenced by burnout (Wright & Bonett, 1997). Although the number of empirical studies examining the relationship between burnout and professional behaviour is limited, there are some studies illustrating the negative consequences of burnout. The core activity of human service professions is the interaction with clients, varying from patients (for healthcare workers) and students (for teachers) to civilians (for police officers). Professionals experiencing burnout typically decrease their investment in the relationship with clients (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). Their negative, callous attitude (depersonalization) is related to impaired performance, and has been shown to be detrimental to the quality of human service work (Maslach, 1993; Noworol, Zarczynski, Fafrowicz, & Marek, 1993). Moreover, Bakker *et al.* (2000b) showed that general practitioners who attempt to gain emotional distance from their patients, as a way of coping with their exhaustion, evoke demanding and threatening patient behaviour. In a similar vein, Roter and Hall (1992) have shown that behaviour of patients toward their physicians is a reciprocal response of the attitude of the physicians toward their patients. Thus, a more negative and distant attitude of burned-out general practitioners toward their patients seems to reinforce not only the subjective experience of emotionally taxing relationships with patients, but also the actual demanding behaviour of patients (Bakker *et al.*, 2000b). Furthermore, burnout is related to less sensitive and less attentive behaviour, and a decreased tolerance towards clients (Motowidlo, Packard, & Manning, 1986) and withdrawn, passive, unco-operative, and irritable behaviours (Mills & Huebner, 1998). Lawson and O'Brien (1994) found a relationship between emotional exhaustion and negative patient interaction. This negative interaction results in avoidance behaviour of the professional towards patients. Finally, in an observation study among police officers, Kop and Euwema (2001) found that officers using verbal or physical force in interactions with civilians, all scored high on burnout, particularly on depersonalization. Taken together, results of previous research indicate that, with increased exhaustion and depersonalization, the interaction between professional and client becomes less effective, and could even be frustrating or hostile, and less satisfying for both client and professional. Given this central place of the interaction between professional and client in the burnout process, a better understanding of the dynamics that take place seems important. To grasp these dynamics, the concept of *dominance* or leading behaviour based on interaction theory (Kiesler, 1983) may be helpful in understanding the behavioural effects of burnout.

1.3. *Dominance and effective conflict management*

In interactions between a human service professional and a client, it is likely that the professional takes the initiative and is the leading party who therefore acts (somewhat) dominantly. This holds particularly for professionals with an authoritative character towards their 'clients', such as physicians, teachers or policemen with a relatively high status, high expertise and high powered position. According to Kiesler's interaction theory, leading behaviour of one party is complemented by submissive behaviour of the other party (Kiesler, 1983). In the case of professional interactions, the client or patient follows, while the professional, being a teacher, nurse or police officer, leads and directs the interaction. When the professional acts in a submissive or passive way, the client usually perceives this as out-of-role behaviour, resulting in confusion and doubts about the skills of the professional (Schein, 1999). Friedlander (1993) found some evidence that dominance on the part of therapists and submissiveness on the part of clients may be optimal in early sessions of individual treatment. We conclude that dominant or leading behaviour by professionals in non-conflicted interactions is functional.

This professional leading behaviour is, however, challenged when *conflicts* with clients occur. In such a situation, dominance may easily trigger power struggles. In conflicts, dominant behaviour is typically experienced as fighting, and is reciprocated with resilience, either in defensive forms or in open resistance. Indeed, many studies have demonstrated the negative effects of dominant behaviour in conflicts (see, for a review, Nauta, 1996). Usually, dominant behaviour exacerbates dominant and aggressive responses, instead of submissive behaviour, often resulting in a power struggle (Nauta, 1996). Also, in conflicts between parties with differences in formal status, as is typically the case in relations between professionals and clients, the more powerful party often tends to use power, and tries to dominate the other party (Euwema, 1992). This behaviour contributes to escalation and less effective outcomes. To manage professional conflicts, it is important to prevent such escalations. Preventive behaviour includes less dominant behaviour. Many conflict studies demonstrate the importance of a power balance to achieve integrative solutions (Van de Vliert, 1997). Power balance is reflected in 'neutral'—neither dominant nor submissive—behaviour (Nauta, 1996). Given the 'natural' dominant position and behaviour of professionals in interaction with their clients, conflict resolution will be more effective when the professional acts with less dominance.

The professional who is perhaps most regularly confronted with interpersonal conflicts is the police officer. Police officers have to cope with conflicts when civilians violate rules and regulations and they have to maintain order. Also, police officers regularly have to intervene in conflicts between civilians. The professional challenge in these conflict situations is two-fold; on the one hand it is important to prevent escalation as much as possible (including aggression), and on the other hand it is important to achieve one's professional goals, maintaining or restoring order (De Dreu & Van de Vliert, 1999). Dominant behaviour by the police is often required, including in conflict situations. However, a demonstration of police power usually has escalating effects. Offenders feel intimidated or even provoked by dominance. For example, officers arriving at a 'scene' where they have to interact with civilians, leaning out of their car window, directly commanding young people, or approaching people with their hands on their weapon, are experienced as highly dominant, unpleasant and provocative. Also, in the case of intervention in conflicts between civilians, the calming down of parties is not likely to be achieved by a dominant approach of the police officer. The primary instruction in much police training therefore is to arrive at the 'scene' calmly. Acting in a dominant way

increases the risk of raised emotions and aggression shifting from the original parties towards the police (Shusta, Levine, Harris, & Wong, 1995).

For conflicts in which the police intervene, acting either as a primary or a third party, effective conflict outcomes do include restoring order. This usually implies reducing or preventing escalation of the situation, and solving the issue in an efficient way. Particularly escalation, with the threat, for example, of having to make arrests, implies a great deal of work for the police and the judicial system. Therefore, preventing escalation is a key element of effective conflict management by the police. Another element of effective conflict management is satisfaction of both parties with the outcomes (Euwema, Van de Vliert, & Bakker, 2003). Respectful behaviour by police officers towards civilians, whether they are offenders, victims or bystanders, is often seen as key in obtaining a satisfactory outcome.

Thus, our second hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 2: In conflict situations, dominant behaviour by police officers is associated with less effective conflict outcomes.

1.4. *Burnout and dominant behaviour*

What impact does burnout have on the behaviour of professionals in conflicts with clients? The few empirical studies investigating the relationship between stress and conflict behaviour have: (a) not looked at relationships with clients; and (b) typically focused on the effect of conflicts on job stress, and not the other way around (for a review, see De Dreu *et al.*, 2003). We therefore have to postulate our hypothesis on more general insights. We argued before that burnout is related to reduced professional effectiveness in human service work (Bakker *et al.*, 2002b; Maslach, 1993; Noworol *et al.*, 1993, Wright & Bonett, 1997). The burned-out professional does not want to invest energy in the interactions with clients because of emotional withdrawal. This means that the professional will be less active and dominant towards the client. In most cases, however, contact is inevitable. This is particularly true in conflict situations, where the professional has to respond to claiming, deviating, or demanding behaviour of a client, patient or civilian. Burnout theory predicts that burned-out professionals will be less tolerant towards clients and will avoid contact with the client (Lawson & O'Brien, 1994).

Only a few studies have investigated the relationship between burnout and dominance. Mills and Huebner (1998) found that school psychologists who reported higher emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment, often displayed tendencies toward introverted behavioural responses (e.g. withdrawn, passive, reserved reactions), implicating less dominant behaviour. Some evidence has been found for a relationship between burnout and dominance as a personality trait. Forey, Christensen, and England (1994) found in their study among teachers a positive relationship between emotional exhaustion and avoiding (submissive, low dominance) personality traits. In addition, in a study by Eastburg, Williamson, Gorsuch, and Ridley (1994), a negative correlation was found between emotional exhaustion and dominance. Thus, generally, burnout seems to coincide with less dominant behaviour.

Will burnout result in less or more effective conflict management? This question is not so easy to answer as it may seem. In general, one would expect that burnout leads to less effective conflict management, as conflicts involve complex and challenging tasks, requiring cognitive, emotional and social skills and a motivation to work out conflicts. Both skills and motivation reduce with an increased level of burnout and, therefore, effectiveness will

generally decrease. However, given the important role dominance plays in police-civilian interactions, one may argue that increased emotional exhaustion and depersonalization corresponds with *less* initiative and *less* dominance in professional conflicts. Indeed, this hypothesis is consistent with the available evidence on conflict behaviour. Particularly in the initial phase of a conflict, the professional presumably prefers to stay out of the complicated situation, is reluctant to invest in the interaction, and does not want to lead the process. This all reflects less active and dominating behaviour when professionals arrive at a conflict situation with civilians. When a police officer initially acts in a less dominating manner, this behaviour will most likely be reciprocated, resulting in less power-oriented behaviour during the whole interaction. When there is less dominant behaviour by both parties, less power conflict and less escalation will occur. This implies more effective conflict management, as was argued before. Thus, our third hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 3: Burnout in police officers is negatively related to dominant behaviour in conflict situations.

1.5. *The present study—Test of a Burnout-Conflict Behaviour Model*

The overall goal of the present study was to test the burnout-conflict behaviour model presented in the previous paragraph. We developed a multi-method study (Kop, 1999) using both questionnaires and observation of actual conflict behaviour by Dutch police officers, as this is a conflict-prone profession. The theoretical notions are summarized in the model that is graphically depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1 includes our three hypotheses. We predict that an imbalance between job demands and rewards is positively related to more burnout (*Hypothesis 1*). Burnout, in its turn, is associated with less dominant behaviour in conflict with civilians (*Hypothesis 3*). Police officers' less dominant behaviour results in de-escalation and more effective outcomes (the converse of *Hypothesis 2*). Paradoxically, we therefore predict that burnout will indirectly contribute to *more effective* professional behaviour in conflict situations.

2. Method

2.1. *Participants and procedure*

For this multi-method study, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected in two Dutch police forces, both of them active in middle-sized cities in The Netherlands. This research was restricted to police officers on patrol, who always work in pairs. They are responsible for the patrol in a specific area and come in contact with civilians in a variety of situations. All officers essentially work in the same area. Data were collected through both observation of the participants and questionnaires. Observations were made for 61 days in two regional police forces (122 days). In total, 769 interactions between police officers and citizens were observed, involving 110 officers. Almost half of the interactions were coded as conflicts ($N = 342$), illustrating the conflict-prone character of police work.

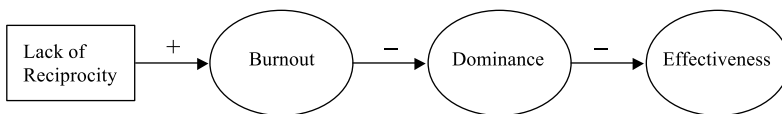


Figure 1. Burnout-Conflict Behaviour Model.

As is characteristic of Dutch police forces, the large majority of the respondents was male (83%). The mean age of the officers was 32.7 years ($SD = 7.70$ years), while their average work experience was 13.9 years ($SD = 7.2$ years). All respondents were executive police officers working in patrol services, of whom 70% held the rank of police officer (less than 5 years' experience), or senior officer (more than 5 years' work experience), while 30% held the rank of police sergeant. For the purposes of analysis, the respondents from the two forces were combined, as no significant differences between the groups were found regarding the study variables.

2.1.1. *Questionnaire*: Questionnaires were sent to the home of 471 police officers during the observation period with a guarantee of anonymity. Three hundred and fifty-eight were returned, representing a response rate of 76%.

2.1.2. *Participant observation*: For a period of 10 months, three observers separately accompanied the regular police car patrols, typically manned in pairs by police officers. Patrols were selected at random. The observers made a description of every conflict interaction between police and civilians and also filled out an observation list. Observations were made for 122 days, mostly from 14:00 to 22:00 hours. Individuals were judged to be in conflict when they were obstructed or irritated by another individual or group (Van de Vliert, Nauta, Euwema, & Janssen, 1997). This definition includes: (1) situations with conflict between civilians, for example reports of neighbourhood fights, and (2) conflicts between civilians and police officers, for example, issuing a ticket. Dutch police officers are allowed considerable discretion in how to handle these conflicts when on duty. The observers recorded all available information about conflict issues, place, time, police officers involved, as well as the way in which police officers handled the conflict situation.

To achieve good inter-rater reliability, the three observers were trained before the observation in a test period of 3 weeks. After this training, they watched videos of police actions and independently filled out the observation form. This resulted in an acceptable inter-observer reliability (Cohen's κ (kappa) = .82, $N = 27$).

Questionnaires ($N = 358$) and observation forms ($N = 342$) were matched through a 'police officer code'. Not all observed officers filled out a questionnaire, and not all officers who filled out a questionnaire were observed, so a smaller group was left for the combined analyses ($N = 263$). This final group did not differ significantly from the total group regarding demographics. Within this group there were officers who had been observed once, and others who had been observed more often. Therefore, there is some dependence between officer and observed situation. To control for possible effects of this dependence, an analysis of covariance was conducted with a dummy-variable for the officer being observed once or more than once. No significant effects were found for this dummy-variable on conflict behaviour. We therefore use all observed situations in the analyses.

2.1.3. *Imbalance between demands and rewards*: Respondents were asked with open questions to list up to three most demanding and up to three most rewarding aspects of their work. A categorization of demanding and rewarding aspects of work was made through qualitative content analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). First, in the exploring phase, central aspects of the answers were underlined. Next, during the specification phase, comparable aspects were clustered and taken together. In the reduction phase, categories were established and the mutual relations between categories were determined. To achieve good inter-rater reliability, two judges were asked to classify the answers of the police officers

into the categories. The result was a satisfactory inter-rater reliability of rewarding (Cohen's $\kappa = .95$, $N = 963$) and demanding work aspects (Cohen's $\kappa = .94$, $N = 878$).

Finally, imbalance scores were calculated by subtracting the amount of demanding aspects from the amount of rewarding aspects, resulting in a score varying from mention of only demanding aspects (-3) to only rewarding aspects ($+3$). A zero score indicates a balance between mention of demanding and rewarding aspects, a positive score indicates more rewarding than demanding aspects, and a negative score indicates more demanding than rewarding aspects.

Burnout was measured with the Dutch version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory—Human Services Survey (Schaufeli & Van Dierendonck, 2000). As indicated in section 1, we focused on the two core dimensions of burnout, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Eight items assessed *emotional exhaustion*, for example 'I feel emotionally drained by my work' (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$) and five items assessed *depersonalization*, for example 'I don't really care what happens to citizens' (Cronbach's $\alpha = .69$). The items were scored on 7-point rating scales, ranging from 'never' (0) to 'every day' (6). High scores on emotional exhaustion and depersonalization are indicative of burnout.

2.2. Observations

Conflict Behaviour—Dominance Based on Nauta (1996) and Verstegen and Lodewijks (1993), three sub-scales for dominant behaviour were developed (all 5-point ratings): executive–subservient, active–passive and dominant–submissive. The observations were made during the first contact between the police officer and the civilian (Phase 1), and during the management of the issue (Phase 2). Reliabilities were sufficient in both phases (Cronbach's $\alpha = .79$ and $.75$, respectively). Here is an example of a conflict situation, and the way it was coded by the observers:

Two police officers on patrol observe a drug addicted woman, sitting in a gateway. Speaking from their car, they order her to get on her feet and walk. When the woman tells the officers to leave her alone, they immediately jump out of the car, stop very closely and tell the woman: 'you heard what I said. Now get on the move!' A friend of the woman now intervenes by saying to the policemen: 'Officers, take it easy! Show a little respect, please. Give her a break, will you?' The officer: 'shut up! Or you can come with me!' This turned into a small fight and request for assistance.

The behaviour of these officers was coded as highly dominant, as well as executive, and active.

Effectiveness of the interaction was observed regarding three aspects; satisfaction of police officers, satisfaction of civilians, and (de-)escalation of the conflict. Satisfaction of the police officers was observed and evaluated on two items ($\alpha = .75$). The observer used the conversation of the police officers and verbal and non-verbal signals expressing satisfaction with the approach of the conflict (1 = not at all, 5 = very much), and the evaluation of the solution that was reached (1 = insufficient, 5 = sufficient). *Satisfaction of civilians* was also observed using two items ($\alpha = .67$). Verbal and non-verbal behaviour was indicative for the acceptance of the solution (1 = insufficient, 5 = sufficient), and civilians' satisfaction (1 = not at all satisfied, 5 = highly satisfied). *(De-)escalation* was assessed by comparing the way civilians behaved at the end of the interaction with the police officer, compared with the behaviour at the start of the interaction. Escalation was operationalized with two observed items ($\alpha = .61$): the degree of escalation at the end of the contact (1 = no escalation, 3 = escalation) and the extent to which civilians were enraged (1 = not at all enraged, 3 = got enraged) during departure of the police officers.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive statistics

Table 1 shows the means and intercorrelations of the scales included in the analyses. Preliminary analyses revealed that demographic variables were not substantially related to the model components, and that inclusion of these variables in the structural equation model did not significantly affect the results. They were therefore omitted from further analyses. Several relationships are worth noting from Table 1. First, the balance between job demands and rewards was generally positive. This implies that, overall, police officers mentioned more rewarding than demanding aspects. This rather positive picture is reflected in the relatively low levels of emotional exhaustion compared to a norm group of 3893 respondents, based on research in a variety of human service jobs in The Netherlands (Schaufeli & Van Dierendonck, 2000); $M = 1.22$ for police officers versus $M = 1.81$ for the norm group. However, the level of depersonalization is relatively high ($M = 1.51$ versus $M = 1.27$) compared with the norm group. Previously, we have argued this may reflect characteristics of both police officers and their culture (Kop, Euwema, & Schaufeli, 1999). Furthermore, the conflict behaviour of the police officers can be described as dominant, and during the interaction this dominance increases significantly, $t(1, 262) = 3.47, p < .001$.

3.2. Test of the Burnout-Conflict Behaviour Model

In order to test the Burnout-Conflict Behaviour Model, we performed structural equation modelling (SEM) analyses using the AMOS software package (Arbuckle, 1997). SEM is a statistical modelling technique that is often used to test the fit of a theoretical model to empirical data (confirmatory analysis). Researchers use SEM to determine whether a certain model is valid. A structural equation model implies a structure of the covariance matrix of the measures (hence an alternative name for this field, 'analysis of covariance structures'). Once the model's parameters have been estimated, the resulting model-implied covariance matrix can then be compared to an empirical or data-based covariance matrix. If the two matrices are consistent with one another, then the structural equation model can be considered a plausible explanation for relations between the measures. In the present study, the fit of the model to the data was examined with the goodness-of-fit index (GFI) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). Further, the non-normed fit index (NNFI), the comparative fit index (CFI) and the incremental fit index (IFI; Bollen, 1989) are utilized. In general, models with fit indices $> .90$ and an RMSEA $< .08$ indicate a close fit between the model and the data (Browne & Cudeck, 1989; Hoyle, 1995). The imbalance measure was treated as an exogenous, manifest variable in the model. Exhaustion and depersonalization were included as indicators of the endogenous, latent variable 'burnout'. Dominance at the beginning and at the end of the interaction (each assessed with three observer-ratings) were each used as indicators of the latent variable 'dominance', which was included as an endogenous variable. Finally, the three items introduced before, i.e. satisfaction of police officers, satisfaction of civilians, and escalation of the conflict, indicated effectiveness, and the hypothesized relationships were included in the model.

Results of the SEM analysis showed that the hypothesized model fitted adequately to the data, $\chi^2(18) = 26.92, p = .08, GFI = .98, RMSEA = .04, IFI = .97, CFI = .97,$ and $NNFI = .95$. All fit indices have values higher than .90, and the RMSEA is relatively low. In addition, all indicators loaded on the intended latent factors (burnout, dominance and effectiveness). As can be seen in Figure 2, imbalance had a positive relationship with burnout ($\beta = .25$, where β is an estimate of a proposed parameter). This means that police officers who reported more demanding than rewarding aspects of their work experienced

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of the variables, $N = 263$.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Work experience</i>									
Imbalance between Demands and Rewards	0.57	1.04							
Emotional Exhaustion	1.05	0.65	0.26***						
Depersonalization	1.42	0.68	0.15*	.48***					
<i>Conflict behaviour</i>									
Dominance Phase 1	3.75	0.69	-0.02	-.20***	-0.04				
Dominance Phase 2	3.89	0.65	0.11	-.06	0.00	0.40***			
<i>Effectiveness</i>									
Satisfaction—Police Officer	4.45	0.68	-0.12	-.06	0.02	-0.07	-0.19**		
Satisfaction—Civilian	2.85	1.18	0.01	.03	0.02	-0.13	-0.18**	0.32***	
Escalation	1.19	0.45	-0.04	.02	-0.06	0.18**	0.25***	-0.29***	-0.46***

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

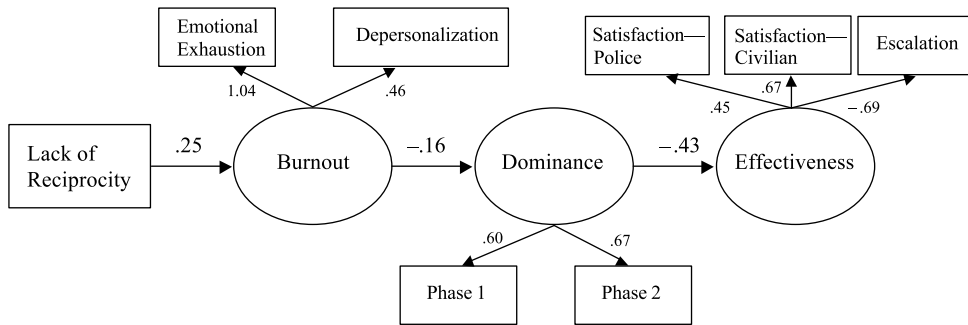


Figure 2. Standardized Solution (Maximum Likelihood Estimates) of the Burnout-Conflict Behaviour Model, $N = 263$.

highest levels of exhaustion and depersonalization. This is consistent with Hypothesis 1. Burnout, in its turn, was associated with dominance ($\beta = -.16$). In line with Hypothesis 3, we found that police officers with the highest levels of burnout behaved least dominantly. Finally, higher levels of dominance coincided with less effective outcomes ($\beta = -.43$), confirming Hypothesis 2. The Burnout–Dominance Model explained 18% of the variance in the outcomes.

4. Discussion

This multi-method study related self-reported imbalance between demands and rewards, and burnout to observed professional conflict behaviour by police officers. Many studies have been conducted to measure burnout in relation to working conditions, job satisfaction, and other outcomes. Despite all these studies, there is still a lack in our understanding of the dynamics of burnout in professional practices and in relation to actual conflict behaviour (De Dreu *et al.*, 2003). This study was conducted to gain a better understanding of these dynamics. The combination of self-reported burnout with independently observed interactive behaviour makes this study unique. Based on the results we formulate four main conclusions.

1. *Imbalance causes stress.* First, this study supports the idea that a distorted balance between efforts and rewards results in burnout. This is in line with the Effort Reward Imbalance Model (Bakker *et al.*, 2000a; Siegrist, 1996), and in line with the Job-Demands-Resources Model (Bakker *et al.*, 2003a; Demerouti *et al.*, 2001), in which the balance between demands and rewards is more predictive of burnout than the amount of stressors *per se*. The present study used a very simple indicator of imbalance, by calculating the difference between the number of demands and rewards that were mentioned by police officers. The greater this quantitative imbalance, the more burnout the police officers reported. This finding supports the contention of Bakker *et al.* (2003a) that job demands can be compensated by different types of rewards, offering opportunities for human resources management, as specific demands do not always have to be met with specific resources or reward structures. As long as employees experience a positive balance, the risk of burnout is reduced.
2. *Burnout coincides with less dominance.* Few studies have examined the relationship between burnout and actual professional behaviour, and, as far as we know, this is

the first study relating burnout to observed conflict behaviour. Burnout is related to *less* dominant behaviour, which in turn leads to more effective outcomes (for instance, less escalation in conflict situations). After an overwhelming amount of studies illustrating the down side of burnout, this result questions the too simple conclusion that burnout always has negative consequences for job performance.

The concept of burnout has gradually transferred from a clinical concept (patients are burned-out or are not), towards a general indicator of job stress, measured on a continuous scale (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001). Lower levels of burnout are related to many job aspects, suggesting that HRM policies should be directed at achieving as little work stress as possible (Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993). This study suggests that low or moderate burnout does not necessarily result in less effective professional behaviour *per se*, implicating that a moderate level of stress may not only be a more realistic, but also a more efficient overall goal of HRM policies. This also questions the current 'inflation' of the use of burnout in both scientific and popular literature.

In a previous study, Kop and Euwema (2001) found that the use of violence in interaction with civilians was conducted only by police officers who experienced high levels of burnout. These officers were emotionally exhausted as well as depersonalized. The same pattern is reported in Demerouti, Verbeke, and Bakker (2003), who found negative consequences for performance, only when employees reported high levels of stress at more than one burnout dimension. These results in combination with the present study, suggest that burnout might become dysfunctional only after reaching a high level. This is in line with the model of Walton (1987), who suggests that moderate levels of stress are related to effective conflict management, whereas high levels of stress result in less effective conflict management. If this effect of moderate levels of burnout holds true for other occupations as well, it is important to consider this in projects launched to reduce occupational stress and prevention of burnout. At least it suggests that burnout, up to a certain point, may not be devastating, but may even contribute to effective coping strategies in conflict situations.

3. *Reduced dominance as avoidance strategy.* In the present study, burnout was related to less dominant behaviour in the contact of police officers with civilians. This finding is in line with Eastburg *et al.* (1994). The predictive value of burnout for the initial behaviour may indicate that the emotional state of the police officer influences how the officer enters into the contact with civilians, and not only the situational demands. What is the value of less dominance for police officers? May this strategy also work for other professionals?

First of all, the specific work context may explain this behaviour. Police officers usually have unique and short interactions with civilians. This is a major difference with other human service professionals, such as teachers or nurses, who are confronted with the same students or patients day-in and day-out. These professionals can hardly escape from such interactions, and emotionally withdraw through detached behaviour. On the other hand, for police officers, it may be a very efficient strategy to act in a neutral, less dominant and directive way, because this prevents escalation and creates the opportunity of ending the interaction as soon as possible. This can be seen as a way of physical withdrawing from situations that are stressful. Thus, the present findings can not be easily generalized to other contexts. In addition, one has to keep in mind that the Dutch police officers were observed. The Dutch society has a low tolerance for power differences and is rather

feminine (Hofstede, 2001). This may partly explain the effectiveness of less dominant behaviour by police officers, whereas in cultures with more power distance, such as the USA, this may not be the case, although Shusta *et al.* (1995) recommend that US police officers, in cases of conflicting situations, 'break the cycle of fear by softening his or her verbal and non-verbal approach' (p. 190), suggesting that this strategy is effective regardless the cultural context. Therefore, new studies in different cultural and professional contexts can highlight this fascinating relation between burnout and professional conflict behaviour (De Dreu *et al.*, 2003).

4. *Professionals deal better with conflict when they are less dominant.* In the previous paragraph the emphasis was on the unique features of police work, compared to professionals who have long-term contact with clients or patients. However, there are many professionals who have short and incidental contact with clients or customers, varying from cabin personnel in air planes, bus drivers and traffic controllers, to tax inspectors, and staff of emergency rooms. In many Western societies, these professionals are confronted with a growing number of conflicts with clients, as customers have become more assertive and demanding in all kinds of situations and show less respect for officials or professionals. Although somewhat speculative, the findings of this study might be relevant for these interactions as well. The results suggest that for effective coping with these professional conflicts, the professional should beware of starting to act too dominantly. Particularly when they are too eager to solve the problem and therefore start the interaction in too dominant a manner, this is likely to be perceived as power play and unco-operative behaviour, resulting in continued struggle. The professional challenge in these situations is to direct the process of the interaction, without dominating the conflict issues. Van de Vliert, Euwema, and Huisman (1995) refer to this behaviour as process controlling. This behaviour is highly assertive and active, without trying to force behaviour. Professional training therefore should be directed at being in control of the interaction process.

This study has some clear limitations. As mentioned, the context is very specific, reporting observations of conflict behaviour of Dutch police officers. Further research in other occupations, as well as other cultural contexts is required. In addition, the relations between burnout measures and actual behaviour are rather weak. There may indeed be an effect of the methods used, the combination of surveys with field observations. Surveys offer only limited measure of stress, and are sensitive to social desirable answers. Also, the measurement of the imbalance between job demands and rewards is not sensitive to qualitative differences between the issues mentioned. Participant observations in the real world make it impossible to control situational demands, and these demands direct behaviour to a large extent. In future studies, the multi-method approach used here, may be continued under more controlled conditions, such as simulations or even experimental settings, which also allow the use of other measures of occupational stress.

5. Conclusions

In summary, while there are limitations to the present study, they do not undermine the main findings regarding the relationship between burnout and professional conflict behaviour. This study has once again shown that the imbalance between job demands

and rewards is important for the experience of burnout. This implies that as long as employees experience a positive balance, the risks of burnout are reduced. Human resources management should aim at achieving this positive balance, rather than at reducing job demands. Burnout, the combination of emotional exhaustion and cynicism, was found to be related to less dominant behaviour by police officers in conflict with civilians. Less dominant behaviour led to more effective conflict outcomes. These results challenge the assumption that occupational stress necessarily results in impaired professional performance. More likely, the detrimental effect of burnout only becomes visible in professional behaviour, when high 'clinical' levels of burnout are achieved. Finally, professionals are more effective when they restrict dominant behaviour in conflict with clients. This finding should be a key element in the training of professionals in dealing with conflict situations, achieving de-escalation and healthy working relations between professionals and clients.

References

- ARBUCKLE, J. L. (1997). *Amos Users' Guide Version 3.6*. Chicago: Smallwaters Corp.
- BAKKER, A. B., DEMEROUTI, E., & EUWEMA, M. C. (2003a). How job resources buffer the impact of job demands on burnout. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- BAKKER, A. B., DEMEROUTI, E., TARIS, T., SCHAUFELI, W. B., & SCHREURS, P. (2003b). A multi-group analysis of the Job Demands-Resources Model in four home care organizations. *International Journal of Stress Management*, *10*, 16-38.
- BAKKER, A. B., KILLMER, C. H., SIEGRIST, J., & SCHAUFELI, W. B. (2000a). Effort-reward imbalance and burnout among nurses. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *31*, 884-891.
- BAKKER, A. B., SCHAUFELI, W. B., SIXMA, H. J., BOSVELD, W., & VAN DIERENDONCK, D. (2000b). Patient demands, lack of reciprocity, and burnout: A five year longitudinal study among general practitioners. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *21*, 425-441.
- BIGGAM, F. H., POWER, K. G., MACDONALD, R. R., CARCARY, W. B., & MOODIE, E. (1997). Self-perceived occupational stress distress in a Scottish police force. *Work and Stress*, *11*, 118-133.
- BOLLEN, K. A. (1989). *Structural Equations with Latent Variables*. New York: Wiley.
- BOSMA, H., PETER, R., SIEGRIST, J., & MARMOT, M. (1998). Two alternative job stress models and the risk of coronary heart disease. *American Journal of Public Health*, *88*, 68-74.
- BROCKMANN, M. (2002). New perspectives on violence in social care. *Journal of Social Work*, *2*, 29-44.
- BROWNE, M. W. & CUDECK, R. (1989). Single sample cross-validation indices for covariance structures. *Multivariate Behavioral Research*, *24*, 445-455.
- DE DREU, C. K. W. & VAN DE VLIERT, E. (1999). *Using Conflict in Organisations*. London: Sage.
- DE DREU, C. K. W., VAN DIERENDONCK, D., & DE BEST-WALDHOBER, M. (2003). Conflict at work and individual well-being. In M. J. Schabracq, J. A. M. Winnubst, & C. L. Cooper (Eds.), *The Handbook of Work and Health Psychology* (pp. 495-514). New York: Wiley.
- DEMEROUTI, E., BAKKER, A. B., NACHREINER, F., & SCHAUFELI, W. B. (2001). The Job Demands-Resources Model of Burnout. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *86*, 499-512.
- DEMEROUTI, E., VERBEKE, W., & BAKKER, A. B. (2003). Exploring the relationship between a multidimensional and multifaceted burnout concept and performance. Paper presented at the EAWOP Conference, Lisbon, Portugal, 14-17 May 2003.
- EASTBURG, M. C., WILLIAMSON, M., GORSUCH, R., & RIDLEY, C. (1994). Social support, personality and burnout in nurses. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *24*, 1233-1250.
- EUWEMA, M. C. (1992). *Conflicthantering in Organisaties* [Conflict management in organizations.]. Amsterdam: Free University Press.
- EUWEMA, M. C., VAN DER VLIERT, E., & BAKKER, A. B. (2003). Substantive and relational effectiveness of organizational conflict behavior, *International Journal for Conflict Management*, *14*, 119-139.
- EVANS, B. J. & COMAN, G. J. (1993). General versus specific measures of occupational stress: An Australian police survey. *Stress Medicine*, *9*, 11-20.
- FARBER, B. A. (1991). *Crisis in Education: Stress and Burnout in the American Teacher*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- FOREY, W. F., CHRISTENSEN, O. J., & ENGLAND, J. T. (1994). Teacher burnout: A relationship with Holland and Adlerian typologies, *Individual Psychology: Journal of Adlerian Theory, Research and Practice*, 50, 3–117.
- FRIEDLANDER, M. L. (1993). Does complementarity promote or hinder client change in brief therapy? *Counseling Psychologist*, 21, 457–497.
- FRIEDMAN, R. A., TIDD, S. T., CURRALL, S. C., & TSAI, J. C. (2000). What goes around comes around: The impact of personal conflict style on work group conflict and stress. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 11, 32–55.
- GLASER, B. G. & STRAUSS, A. L. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago: Aldine.
- GLASS, D. C. & MCKNIGHT, J. D. (1996). Perceived control, depressive symptomatology, and professional burnout: A review of evidence. *Psychology and Health*, 11, 23–48.
- HOFSTEDE, G. (2001). *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations across Nations* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- HOYLE, R. H. (1995). The structural equation modeling approach: Basic concepts and fundamental issues. In R. H. Hoyle (Ed.), *Structural Equation Modeling, Concepts, Issues, and Applications* (pp. 1–15). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- KIESLER, D. J. (1983). The 1982 interpersonal circle: A taxonomy for complementarity in human transaction. *Psychological Review*, 90, 185–214.
- KOP, N. (1999). *Blauw licht in het donker*. [Blue light in the dark]. A study of burnout and conflict management by police officers. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Utrecht University, The Netherlands.
- KOP, N. & EUWEMA, M. C. (2001). Occupational stress and violence in Dutch policing. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 28, 631–652.
- KOP, N., EUWEMA, M. C., & SCHAUFELI, W. (1999). Burnout, job stress and violent behaviour. *Work and Stress*, 13, 326–340.
- LAWSON, D. A. & O'BRIEN, R. M. (1994). Behavioral and self-report measures of staff burnout in developmental disabilities. *Journal of Organizational Behavioral Management*, 14, 37–54.
- LEE, R. T. & ASHFORTH, B. E. (1996). A meta-analytic examination of the correlates of the three dimensions of job burnout. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 81, 123–133.
- LEITER, M. P. & MASLACH, C. (1988). The impact of interpersonal environment of burnout and organizational commitment. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 9, 297–308.
- MASLACH, C. (1993). Burnout: A multidimensional perspective. In W. B. Schaufeli, C. Maslach, & T. Marek (Eds.), *Professional Burnout: Recent Developments in Theory and Research* (pp. 19–32). Washington, DC: Taylor & Francis.
- MASLACH, C. & LEITER, M. P. (1997). *The Truth about Burnout: How Organizations Cause Personal Stress and What to do About it*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- MASLACH, C. & SCHAUFELI, W. B. (1993). Historical and conceptual development of burnout. In W. B. Schaufeli, C. Maslach, & T. Marek (Eds.), *Professional Burnout: Recent Developments in Theory and Research* (pp. 1–16). Washington, DC: Taylor & Francis.
- MILLS, E. B. & HUEBNER, L. S. (1998). A prospective study of personality characteristics, occupational stressors, and burnout among school psychology practitioners. *Journal of School Psychology*, 36, 103–120.
- MOTOWIDLO, S. J., PACKARD, J. S., & MANNING, M. R. (1986). Occupational stress: Its causes and consequences for job performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 71, 618–629.
- NAUTA, A. (1996). *Oog om oog en baas boven baas*. [Battle and bossiness in business: Interaction patterns in interpersonal conflict within bureaucratic and organic organization departments]. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Groningen University.
- NOWOROL, C., ZARCZYNSKI, Z., FAFROWICZ, M., & MAREK, T. (1993). Impact of professional burnout on creativity and innovation. In W. B. Schaufeli, C. Maslach, & T. Marek (Eds.), *Professional Burnout: Recent Developments in Theory and Research* (pp. 163–175). Washington, DC: Taylor & Francis.
- PETER, R., ALFREDSSON, L., HAMMAR, N., SIEGRIST, J., THEORELL, T., & WESTERHOLM, P. (1998). High effort, low reward and cardiovascular risk factors in employed Swedish men and women: Baseline results from the WOLF Study. *Journal of Epidemiological and Community Health*, 52, 540–547.
- ROTER, D. L. & HALL, J. A. (1992). *Doctors Talking to Patients/Patients Talking to Doctors: Improving Communication in Medical Visits*. Westport, CT: Auburn House.

- SCHAUFELI, W. B. & ENZMANN, D. (1998). *The Burnout Companion to Study and Practice: A Critical Analysis*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- SCHAUFELI, W. B. & VAN DIERENDONCK, D. (2000). *De UBOS, Utrechtse Burnout Schaal. Handleiding* [UBOS: Utrecht Burnout Scale. Manual]. Lisse, The Netherlands: Swets Test Services.
- SCHAUFELI, W. B., VAN DIERENDONCK, D., & VAN GORP, K. (1996). Burnout and reciprocity: Towards a dual-level social exchange model. *Work and Stress*, 10, 225–237.
- SCHEIN, E. H. (1999). *Process Consultation Revisited*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- SHUSTA, R. M., LEVINE, D. R., HARRIS, P. R., & WONG, H. Z. (1995). *Multicultural Law Enforcement. Strategies for Peacekeeping in a Diverse Society*. Engelwood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- SIEGRIST, J. (1996). Adverse health effects on high-effort/low-reward conditions. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 1, 27–41.
- SIEGRIST, J., PETER, R., JUNGE, A., CREMER, P., & SEIDEL, D. (1990). Low status control, high effort at work and heart disease: Prospective evidence from blue-collar men. *Social Science and Medicine*, 31, 1129–1136.
- STANSFELD, S. A., BOSMA, H., HEMINGWAY, H., & MARMOT, M. G. (1998). Psychosocial work characteristics and social support as predictors of SF-36 health functioning: The Whitehall II Study. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 60, 247–255.
- VAN DE VLIERT, E. (1997). *Complex Interpersonal Conflict Behaviour: Theoretical Frontiers*. Hove: Psychology Press.
- VAN DE VLIERT, E., EUWEMA, M. C., & HUISMANS, S. E. (1995). Managing conflict with a subordinate or a superior: Effectiveness of conglomerated behavior. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 80, 271–281.
- VAN DE VLIERT, E., NAUTA, A., EUWEMA, M. C., & JANSSEN, O. (1997). Problem solving and forcing: Effectiveness of conglomerated behavior. In C. K. W. de Dreu & E. van de Vliert (Eds.), *Optimizing Performance by Stimulating Conflict* (pp. 38–52). London: Sage.
- VAN HORN, J. (2002). *Teacher Burnout: A Flickering Flame*. Delft: Eburon Publications.
- VERSTEGEN, R. & LODEWIJKS, H. P. B. (1993). *Interactiewijzer, analyse en aanpak van interactieproblemen in professionele opvoedingssituaties* [Analysis and treatment of interactional problems in professional education]. Assen: Dekker/Van der Vegt.
- WALTON, R. E. (1987). *Managing Conflict: Interpersonal Dialogue and Third Party Roles*. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley.
- WRIGHT, T. A. & BONETT, D. G. (1997). The contribution of burnout to work performance. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 18, 491–499.

Copyright of *Work & Stress* is the property of Taylor & Francis Ltd and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.