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Do Not Let Your Primal World Beliefs Burn You Out: An Initial Unravelling of the Role of Primal World Beliefs and PsyCap in Core Burnout Symptoms Experience

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Despite the increasing research attention devoted to the role of psychological factors in the development of burnout in the last decades, little is known about the role of individuals' beliefs regarding the general character of the world. Based on the emerging line of research dedicated to primal world beliefs, the present study with *N* = 1,237 participants (*M* = 42.9 years, *SD* = 11.93) aims to examine the role of primary primal (i.e., seeing the world as a good place) and three secondary primal world beliefs (i.e., seeing the world as safe, enticing, and alive) in the burnout complaints. The results of CB-SEM showed that primary primal was negatively related to the severity of burnout complaints, and this relationship was partially mediated via psychological capital (PsyCap). The indirect role of PsyCap was also supported when secondary primals and core dimensions of burnout complaints were differentiated. Moreover, safe secondary primal negatively predicted exhaustion, and both safe and enticing secondary primals negatively predicted mental distancing. Enticing also predicted cognitive and emotional impairment. This study provides novel and promising findings and offers a starting point for future research on how general beliefs about the world shape people's experiences in the workplace domain.

Key words: primal world beliefs, primary primal, burnout, exhaustion, emotional impairment, cognitive impairment, mental distancing, psychological capital, PsyCap

Introduction

Burnout is one of the most frequently discussed topics regarding occupational well-being at personal, organizational, and societal levels. However, despite extensive research, little is known about the role of individuals' beliefs about the general character of the world. Imagine fictional characters such as

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Gollum seeing the world as treacherous and dangerous, young Willy Wonka seeing the opportunity in everything and everybody, or Master Yoda seeing life and meaning permeating everything. These pop-culture characters have something important in common: they do/do not see the world as a good (i.e., safe, enticing, and alive) place – an attribute having implications for mental health and well-being (see e.g., Clifton et al., 2019; Clifton & Yaden, 2021). However, does this also mean that their beliefs protect them/make them vulnerable to developing burnout?

Primal world beliefs have been empirically derived only recently (Clifton, 2020b; Clifton et al., 2019; Clifton & Yaden, 2021), and, to the best of our knowledge, their role in the workplace domain has not yet been explored. However, people in the workplace strive to fulfil various work-related demands while making sense of their work environment. Consequently, the workplace domain emerges as a significant area for research inquiry. More specifically, as primal world beliefs can serve as proverbial lenses that shape how people perceive and interpret the world, we hypothesize that they can be related to burnout complaints as recently (re)conceptualized by Desart and De Witte (2019) and Schaufeli et al. (2020). Furthermore, building on previous research dedicated to personal psychological resources shielding an individual from burnout development, we examine the possible indirect mechanisms in terms of a positive state of development characterized by shared commonalities between four related positive psychological constructs – hope, self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience, known as Psychological Capital (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). In the following section, we will begin with an overview of beliefs, then delve into primal world beliefs, burnout, psychological capital, and the conceptual connections between these constructs.

Beliefs

The notion that beliefs shape and influence our decisions, social relationships, and subjective well-being is well-established in psychological research and practical psychology (Ludwig et al., 2023). For example, religious beliefs can lead to various forms of moral behavior (Doces et al., 2022), and beliefs about the environment and climate change can influence ecological behavior (Huang, 2016).

In fact, research dedicated to beliefs has a long history in psychology. For instance, according to Beck (1967), beliefs play a crucial role in understanding the cognitive underpinnings of depressive symptoms. More specifically, according to this influential approach to depression, people suffering from depression hold negative beliefs in three areas – self, future, and world. This is known as the cognitive triad. Negative schemas, understood generally as relatively stable cognitive patterns, shape the interpretation of experiences and can be identified and modified through therapy.

However, in Beck's approach, the world is understood mainly as an immediate social environment (Clifton & Yaden, 2021). Relatedly, beliefs about the world were also neglected in other lines of research (Chen et al., 2016). Although various beliefs were identified and even have a strong research tradition (e.g., belief in a just world in social psychology, a negative worldview in developmental psychology, or belief in a dangerous and competitive social world in political psychology), this research was rather sparse and unsystematic (Clifton, 2025). As further stressed by Clifton (2025), despite the precedence of the question 'Where am I?' in pondering the nature of the world (i.e., the inception of religion and Western philosophy), psychological research focused more on other and more proximal

topics. Additionally, although some specific beliefs about the world occurred and were studied relatively extensively, the systematic mapping and consequent categorization of these beliefs were neglected. This status quo changed with Clifton et al.'s (2019) research into 'primals.'

Primal World Beliefs

Primal beliefs about the world (referred to as *Primals*) are stable sets of beliefs about the environment that relate to the overall nature of the world. More specifically, the terms *primal* refer to simple, goal-oriented beliefs about the general character of the world. They are formulated using adjectives such as 'the world is dangerous' (Clifton, 2023). Such primals reflect a person's perceptual abilities, are not dependent on language, and manifest below the level of consciousness. They are of great evolutionary importance because they enable humans to respond appropriately to challenging events, organisms, objects, and social interactions with other individuals (Seitz et al., 2023).

While retrospective theories suggest that past experiences lead to the adoption of primals, interpretive theories hold that primals function primarily as lenses on experiences, remaining largely unaffected by these experiences (Clifton, 2020b). More precisely, although further research is needed, it has been suggested that such world beliefs are more akin to Piagetian schemas than Bayesian priors, acting more as prisms for interpreting the world rather than mirrors perfectly reflecting reality (Clifton, 2025).

As alluded, research on world beliefs has so far been concerned with particular beliefs, such as the Belief in a Just World (Lerner & Miller, 1978; Furnham, 2003), which has a research tradition of over 50 years and is considered a healthy coping mechanism that includes a protective function against stress and that improves performance, subjective well-being, and mental health (see, e.g., Bartholomaeus et al., 2023). For example, Otto and Schmidt (2007) showed that belief in a just world was negatively related to the components of burnout and could be seen as an adaptive factor that compensates for stresses in the workplace. However, the conception of primary beliefs about the world – as Clifton et al. (2019) put forward – integrated more than twenty beliefs about the general character of the world, providing the first systematic attempt to derive and describe all the significant primal world beliefs empirically and systematically on a various level of granularity.

More specifically, inspired by the Big Five approach, Clifton et al. (2019) analyzed descriptions of the world from various sources, such as social media, novels, religious and historical texts, speeches, and movies. They identified conceptually distinct Primals and organized them hierarchically, with seven primals being incorporated into the superordinate belief that "the world is *safe*" (vs. dangerous), seven into the category of "the world is *exciting*" (vs. dull), and three into the category of "the world is *alive*" (vs. mechanistic). The central overarching primary belief, i.e., *primary primal*, concerns whether the world is a good place (Clifton et al., 2019; Clifton, 2023). There were also five unrelated tertiary primals (e.g., hierarchical primal) (Clifton et al., 2019).

Accordingly, in a brief measure of the four highest-order primal world beliefs, three first-order factors (i.e., safe, exciting, and alive secondary primals) and one higher-order factor (i.e., good primary primal) can be differentiated (Clifton & Yaden, 2021). Importantly, it was shown that primals predict various variables beyond and above Big Five personality traits (Clifton et al., 2019).

The primary primal is the core belief capturing the perception that the world is a good vs. bad place. Similarly to lenses, it is supposed to serve as a foundational cognitive schema for interpreting experience in terms of beauty, safety, opportunity, abundance, improvability and meaning (versus threat, ugliness, futility, and scarcity). It is, for example, related to life satisfaction and well-being and negatively to depression (Clifton & Yaden, 2021; Clifton et al., 2019; Stahlmann & Ruch, 2023).

Secondary-world beliefs are more specific. 1) *Safe vs. dangerous beliefs* capture the perception of the world as typically safe, trustworthy, cooperative, regenerative, fair, relatively stable, benign and non-threatening (versus vigilant, hostile, chaotic, and impossible to predict). It correlates negatively with neuroticism and positively with trust in institutions (Clifton & Yaden, 2021; Clifton et al., 2019). 2) *Enticing vs. dull* beliefs encompass the perception that the world provides beauty, meaning, and abundance, is full of humor and fascination, and, thus, it is worth exploring it further (rather than seeing it as uninteresting, barren, boring, or dull). It is related to openness to experience, curiosity and engagement (Clifton, 2020a; Clifton & Yaden, 2021; Clifton et al., 2019; Stahlmann & Ruch, 2023). 3) *Alive vs. mechanistic* beliefs capture the perception that the world is full of life and purpose, intentional and interactive, and needs us for important tasks (versus indifferent, mechanistic and impersonal). It is associated with spirituality, connection to others and meaning (Clifton & Yaden, 2021; Stahlmann & Ruch, 2023).

Integrating recent developments in beliefs research with previous research dedicated to the role of more specific beliefs in occupational stress (Desrumaux et al., 2018; Otto & Schmidt, 2007; Varela & Correia, 2023), we focus on burnout in the next section.

Burnout

Burnout is a phenomenon that has gained significant attention in recent decades due to its practical implications. For example, an extensive body of research literature emphasizes the practical importance of addressing burnout, which is associated with adverse outcomes such as decreased job performance, increased absenteeism, and adverse health consequences (Alarcon, 2011; Demerouti et al., 2021; Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

Arguably the most popular measure, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI; Maslach & Jackson, 1981), conceptualized burnout as a syndrome characterized by 1) emotional exhaustion, 2) depersonalization and 3) reduced personal accomplishment arising from prolonged exposure to job-related stress in occupations involving intensive interaction with people. Later, this definition was reformulated. The three original dimensions were replaced by 1) exhaustion, 2) cynicism and 3) reduced professional efficacy (Maslach et al., 1996).

However, although prevalent, this approach poses several limitations. For example, it has been found to lack a necessary theoretical and empirical basis, is not exhaustive enough to explain the features observed in the context of this phenomenon, has limited applicability (e.g., a general burnout score cannot be derived and used as a screening tool), and problematic psychometric properties. Also, MBI is monetized (see e.g., Desart & De Witte, 2019 and Schaufeli et al., 2020 for further discussion). Therefore, a revised conceptualization (Desart & De Witte, 2019) and operationalization (Schaufeli et al., 2020) of burnout have recently been provided.

More specifically, the revised conceptualization of burnout (*Burnout 2.0*) emphasizes a multifaceted perspective that includes additional symptoms and highlights burnout's

complex and multidimensional nature. Furthermore, the related measure (*Burnout assessment tool*) is designed with improved psychometric properties in mind, ensuring better reliability and validity across diverse occupational groups and cultural contexts (Schaufeli et al., 2019; Schaufeli et al., 2020).

At the heart of this conceptualization are the so-called *core symptoms*, which are the elements that represent the first-order factors of burnout and can be analyzed separately or integrated as a higher-order construct. The BAT model stipulates that these core dimensions refer to *the inability* and *unwillingness* to exert effort in the workplace resulting from chronic work stress. Specifically, the core dimensions of burnout are as follows: 1) *exhaustion* (i.e., severe fatigue and drained energy), 2) *mental distancing* (i.e., psychological detachment and withdrawal), 3) *emotional impairment* (i.e., irregularities in emotion controlling), and 4) *cognitive impairment* (i.e., memory and attention issues)[1] (Desart & De Witte, 2019; Schaufeli et al., 2020).

Although high job demands are suggested to play a role in burnout development (see e.g., Bakker et al., 2023), previous studies also supported the role of individual factors and specific beliefs about the world. It was suggested that various cognitive biases, including worldviews, could aggravate the workload (Moss et al., 2016). Previous studies also showed the protective role of specific beliefs about the world – in terms of Belief in a Just World – in occupational stress and burnout (Desrumaux et al., 2018; Otto & Schmidt, 2007; Varela & Correia, 2023). Nevertheless, Belief in a Just World is only one of the lower-level beliefs in a recently suggested comprehensive multi-level conceptualization of primal world beliefs (Clifton, 2020b; Clifton et al., 2019; Clifton & Yaden, 2021).

[1] Although secondary symptoms can also be differentiated, these are not of interest in the present study as they are not specific to burnout.

Since primals could be understood as stable lenses through which reality is interpreted, we hypothesize that burnout symptoms severity complaints[2] are predicted by the beliefs about the general character of the world in terms of primary primal (H_1). More specifically, the more the world is seen as a bad place, the higher the risk of burnout complaints in terms of shared variance between exhaustion, mental distancing, and cognitive and affective problems. The more the world is seen as a good place, the more people are protected from developing it.

We further expected that secondary primals, especially seeing the world as safe and enticing, would negatively predict four core burnout symptoms. However, due to the novelty of the research topic, we include the role of three primal world beliefs in specific core burnout symptoms as a research question (Q_1 to Q_3). Furthermore, based on a theoretical foundation established by the JD-R model (Bakker et al., 2023) and related approaches, such as the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018), several personal resources, potentially related to primal world beliefs (see Clifton, 2020a), have been suggested as a protective mechanism in the development of burnout development. Amongst them, PsyCap provides a promising mechanism in the present context, as discussed in the following section.

Psychological Capital

Psychological capital (hereafter referred to as *PsyCap*) integrates four positive psychological resources: 1) *hope*, 2) *self-efficacy*, 3) *resilience*, and 4) *optimism* (thus, the acronym HERO). According to Luthans and Youssef-Morgan (2017), PsyCap can be described as 'a higher-order core construct based on the shared commonalities

[2] We distinguish between burnout as a clinical diagnosis and burnout complaints, with the latter being the focus of the present study.

of the four first-order constructs' (p. 343). Due to commonalities in terms of agentic goal-pursuit, intentionality, and sense of control (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017), the common theme amongst the four first-order constructs is understood as 'positive evaluation of circumstances and probability of success based on motivated effort and perseverance' (Luthans et al., 2007; p. 550).

In line with the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018), PsyCap has been shown to be associated with various work-related outcomes, such as performance, turnover intentions, job satisfaction, and work engagement (see e.g., meta-analysis by Loghman et al., 2023). Although its precise mechanism is still under investigation, various studies have documented the protective role of PsyCap in burnout (e.g., Ferradás et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2019) – a finding also supported by a recent meta-analysis conducted by Loghman et al. (2023). However, in addition to the widely used Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ-24 and PCQ-12), alternative measurements have been suggested to remedy some of these scales' shortcomings. For example, a revised version of the Compound Psychological Capital scale (CPC-12R; Dudasova et al., 2021) provides improved psychometric properties and the possibility of using the scale in various job contexts, making it suitable in the present context.

Although previous studies have documented a negative relationship between PsyCap and burnout complaints (Loghman et al., 2023), replication with new and improved measures is lacking. For example, Maslach's conceptualization incorporates personal efficacy, blurring the difference between the constructs. Furthermore, examining the role of PsyCap in the context of primal world beliefs is of theoretical importance, as Clifton (2020a; Clifton & Kim, 2020) suggested that primal world beliefs might contribute to the development of positive psychological characteristics and, consequently, to well-being. Accordingly, seeing the world as a good (vs. bad) place can facilitate the cultivation of PsyCap and positive evaluation of circumstances and probability of success embedded in the sense of control, intentionality, and agentic goal-pursuit can protect against exhaustion, depersonalization, and cognitive and affective impairment. Therefore, we also hypothesize that PsyCap would play an indirect role in the relationship between primal world beliefs and burnout complaints as reflected in shared variance across core burnout dimensions (H_2). To provide a more nuanced picture, we also formulated the following research question: Are three secondary world beliefs (i.e., seeing the world as safe, enticing, and alive) *differentially* related to the four core burnout symptom complaints (i.e., exhaustion, emotional impairment, cognitive impairment, and mental distancing) directly and indirectly – via PsyCap?

There are several possibilities for how PsyCap can exert impact. For example, Schaufeli and Taris (2014) suggested that personal resources could directly impact well-being, shape individuals' perceptions of job-related demands and resources, or serve as a moderator in determining the impact of job demands and resources on these outcomes. We reserve more complex patterns for future research and focus here on a simple mediation model where PsyCap accounts for the variance between primal world beliefs and the severity of burnout symptoms. However, as a form of sensitivity analysis, we also examined whether these relationships are robust when selected job demands are accounted for, since the relationship between demands and burnout is well-established in the research literature as captured in the Job Demands-Resource model (Bakker et al., 2023). This was done to ensure that our findings work above and beyond selected well-established predictors of burnout. Moreover, as a second form of sensitivity analysis,

we examined and attempted to reduce acquiescence bias. This bias speaks about the general tendency to agree with the items regardless of the content. It is caused by decreased cognitive processing and increased conformity and can be a serious problem, potentially distorting the results (Havan et al., 2024).

Methods

Sample

The sample consisted of 1237 participants; 590 were male (47.7%), and 647 were female (52.3%). Their ages ranged from 19 to 77, with a mean age of 42.9 years (*SD* = 11.93) and a median age of 43. Data collection was part of a bigger research project dedicated to (post) pandemic mental health. Data were collected in December 2023 by a research agency via an online panel based on basic demographic quotas for gender, age, education, and region. However, burnout and other work-related variables were assessed only in people who worked during the last seven days[3]. The local ethics committee supported the study.

Measures

Burnout complaints were measured using the *Short version* of the *Burnout Assessment Tool* (BAT 12; Schaufeli et al., 2019; Kohútová & Fričová, 2024). The scale consisted of 12 items (three items per core dimension) rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = never to 5 = always). *Primal world beliefs* were measured by *A Brief Version of Primal World Beliefs,* capturing primary primal and three secondary primals (PI-18; Clifton & Yaden, 2021). The scale consisted of 18 items rated on a six-point Likert scale (1 = agree to 6 = disagree). *Psychological capital* was measured by the *Revised Compound Psychological Capital Scale* (CPC-12R) (Dudasova et al., 2021; Kačmár et al., 2022). The scale consists of 12 items, three items per dimension, and a six-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree) was used. Selected work demands used for a sensitivity analysis were measured by two scales of *the Job Demands-Resources Questionnaire* (Schaufeli, 2015), the *role conflict* and *work-life conflict,* using a five-point Likert scale (1 = never to 5 = always). Internal consistency in terms of McDonald's omega and examples of items are provided in the Appendix at the end of the manuscript.

Analysis

Structural Equation Modelling (CB-SEM) was chosen as the analytic tool because it aligned with the study's goal and dominant conceptualization of the constructs of interest, allowing the examination of complex relationships among unobserved latent variables while accounting for a measurement error. Lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012) ver. 0.6.16 in R was used for the analysis. A reflective measurement model with higher-order factors was used for the main analysis, as this approach is dominant in research dedicated to selected variables. Also, a model with correlated second-order factors was used as an exploratory extension of research questions to provide a more nuanced picture. In sensitivity analysis, acquiescence bias and the role of two demands – role conflict and work-life conflict – were controlled to examine the robustness of results beyond and above acquiescence bias and the already-established role of job demands in burnout[4]. Planned missingness was used to reduce the burden on participants.

[3] As (A) work status or sector was not included in the main quota characteristic and (B) only people who work were selected for analysis, some divergence from representative quotas is expected.

[4] We regressed the demands on the criterion variable and the mediator and correlated them with the predictor, as there was no consensus on directional information for the role of primal world beliefs and work demands.

Both model testing and model indexing are reported. However, approximate fit indices, namely CFI, RMSEA, and SRMR, were used for the model-data compatibility evaluation, as even small and practically inconsequential deviations could lead to statistically significant χ^2 test statistics in large samples. The model was considered acceptable based on the two-index presentation strategy by Hu and Bentler (1999) (i.e., RMSEA of 0.06 or lower and an SRMR of 0.09 or lower) and consequently evaluated by a more nuanced evaluation of the fit indices understood as an effect size by comparison with (A) more stringent and (B) more relaxed benchmarks: RMSEA (A) optimally < .05 or (B) at most .08; CFI (B) > .90 or preferably (A) > .95; SRMR < .08 (Gana & Broc, 2019). The structural equation model was estimated using the full information maximum likelihood (FIML) method with robust standard errors (MLR).

Results

Appendix 1 contains a descriptive table with means (*SD*), min, median, and max.

Main Analysis with Higher-Order Factors

When the main model with the second-order factor structure is analyzed, the scaled chi-square test of model fit was statistically significant (χ^2 (805) = 2704.571, $p < .001$). However, continuous approximate fit indices suggested acceptable model-data correspondence according to the two-index presentation strategy and evaluating the approximate fit indices as effect size. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was 0.049 (90% CI [0.047, 0.051]). The robust RMSEA was slightly worse at 0.059 (90% CI [0.056, 0.062]), but still acceptable. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) was .069[5]. Thus, RMSEA and SRMR were within the acceptable range. Also, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was still in an acceptable range of 0.916, although the robust fit indices suggested a less optimal fit of 0.892.

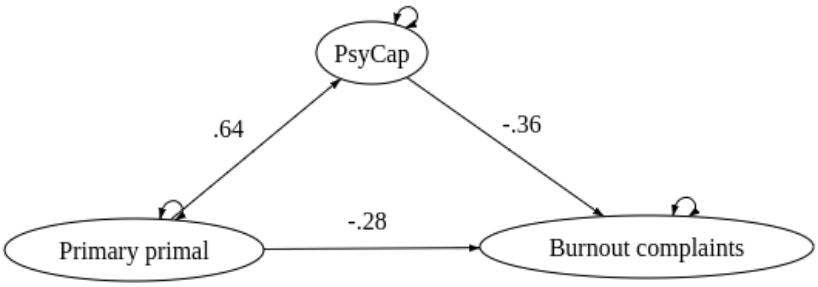
Given reasonable global model-data correspondence, we proceeded to the measurement and structural part of the model. In the measurement part of the model, each item loaded significantly onto its first-order factor (all $p < .001$), as did every first-order factor when loaded onto the higher-order factor (all $p < .001$).

Consistent with our first hypothesis, the structural part of the model revealed that primary primal significantly and negatively predicted burnout complaints ($\beta = -0.28$, $p < .001$). Additionally, primary primal positively predicted PsyCap ($\beta = 0.64$, $p < .001$), while PsyCap negatively predicted burnout complaints ($\beta = -0.36$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, providing support also for the second hypothesis, the indirect effect of primary primal on burnout through PsyCap was also significant ($\beta = -0.23$, $p < .001$), suggesting a potential indirect effect. The total effect of primary primal beliefs on burnout was significant ($\beta = -0.51$, $p < .001$), demonstrating that both direct and indirect pathways are present.

These findings are visually depicted in Figure 1 and further detailed in the online appendix at OSF, where sensitivity analysis can also be found. Note that the sensitivity analyses 1 (with selected confounders) and 2 (accounting for acquiescence bias) provided convergent results, but the size of the effect differed from the main model (i.e., there was a decrease in the size of the effect when confounders were accounted for and increase when acquiescence bias was accounted for)[6].

[5] Please note that although the model-data fit was in a reasonable range, residuals indicated some local misfits in all models primarily related to primals as further discussed later.

[6] For example, in first sensitivity analysis accounting for selected demands (scaled χ^2 (969) = 3020.904, $p < .001$, robust CFI = .897, robust RMSEA = 0.055 (90% CI [0.053, 0.058], SRMR = .066), burnout symptoms complaints were predicted by PsyCap ($\beta = -0.19$, $p < .001$) and primary primal ($\beta = -0.13$, $p = .002$) as well as work-life conflict



Note. For simplicity, only second-order factors and their inter-relations are depicted.

Figure 1 Visual depiction of the structural part of the main model.

Exploratory Analysis Differentiating Three Secondary Primal World Beliefs and Four Core Burnout Dimensions

In the next part, four core dimensions of burnout complaints and three secondary world beliefs were differentiated (instead of using higher-order factors) to provide a more nuanced picture for future research. The scaled chi-square test of model fit was significant ($\chi^2(787) = 2557.749$, $p < .001$). Nonetheless, given the oversensitivity of χ^2, we focused on approximate fit indices. The two-index strategy and selected fit indices indicated an acceptable fit to the data, with RMSEA = 0.048 (90% CI [0.046, 0.050]) and SRMR = 0.067. CFI was 0.922. The robust fit indices suggested a less optimal fit, with Robust CFI = 0.897 and Robust RMSEA = 0.058 (90% CI [0.056, 0.061]), but still generally acceptable.

The measurement part of the model indicated that each item loaded significantly onto its respective factor (all $p < .001$).

In the structural part of the model, the differentiated factors of the secondary primal world beliefs showed distinct predictive relationships with several dimensions of burnout complaints. Specifically, the belief that the world is safe significantly and negatively predicted exhaustion ($\beta = -0.24$, $p < .001$) and mental distancing ($\beta = -0.15$, $p = .003$), indicating that individuals who perceive the world as safe are less likely to experience these two core burnout symptoms (and vice versa). The belief that the world is an enticing place negatively predicted emotional impairment ($\beta = -0.19$, $p < .001$) and potentially also cognitive impairment ($\beta = -0.13$, $p = .007$) and distancing ($\beta = -0.14$, $p = .005$). Interestingly, the belief that the world is alive predicted exhaustion ($\beta = 0.10$, $p = .002$) and emotional impairment ($\beta = 0.10$, $p = .004$) positively, although this can be a statistical artefact as discussed below.

All three secondary primal world beliefs were positively linked to PsyCap. More specifically, PsyCap was predicted mainly by enticing secondary world belief ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < .001$), followed by safe belief ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < .001$). Alive secondary world belief predict-

(β = 0.21, $p < .001$) and role conflict (β = -0.51, $p < .001$) and PsyCap partially accounted for the variance between Primals and burnout symptoms (β = -0.11, $p < .001$). Similarly, in the second sensitivity analysis accounting for acquiescence bias in the main model (scaled χ^2 (804) = 2377.524, $p < .001$, robust CFI = .915, robust RMSEA = 0.052 (90% CI [0.050, 0.055], SRMR = .068), burnout symptoms complaints were predicted by both PsyCap (β = -0.38, $p < .001$) and primary primal (β = -0.36, $p < .001$) and PsyCap partially accounted for the variance between Primals and burnout symptoms (β = -0.24, $p < .001$).

ed PsyCap, but the size of the effect was very small (β = 0.09, p = .008). PsyCap negatively predicted all four core dimensions of burnout complaints (β = -0.31 to -.39, p < .001). The analysis also revealed statistically significant indirect effects of primary world beliefs on burnout dimensions through PsyCap. Specifically, the results indicated that the shared variance could be explained by enticing belief (β = -0.10 to -0.12 all p < .001), safe belief (β = -0.09 to -0.11 all p < .001), and to a much lower degree also by alive belief (β = -0.03 to -0.04, p = ~.010). The results are summarized in Appendix 2.

Moreover, as previously, we also examined 1) the alternative model with demands as confounders and 2) the model controlling for acquiescence bias as two forms of sensitivity analysis. As further detailed in the online appendix, sensitivity analysis shows consistent significant effects for several key paths (e.g., PsyCap systematically mediated the relationship between primals and burnout and enticing belief consistently reduced cognitive impairment, distancing behavior, and emotional impairment). However, there were also some discrepancies (e.g., the effect of safe belief on distancing and exhaustion and the effect of alive belief on exhaustion and emotional impairment were not fully consistent), indicating a more complex pattern of relationships and a need for future research[7].

Discussion

Building on the emerging research dedicated to beliefs about the general character of the world by Clifton and colleagues (Clifton & Kim, 2019; Clifton et al., 2019; Clifton & Yaden, 2021; Clifton, 2023), we investigated the extent to which burnout complaints are associated with primary world beliefs (i.e., the primary primal reflecting the belief that the world is an inherently good place and three secondary primals reflecting that the world is safe, exciting, and alive).

In accordance with our first hypothesis, the primary primal was negatively linked to shared variance across core dimensions of burnout symptoms (in terms of the second-order factor), meaning that the more positive beliefs about the general character of the world individuals have, the lower the level of burnout complaints they experienced (and vice versa). Since the primal world beliefs are conceptualized as relatively stable lenses through which the world is understood and interpreted, they seem to be important not only in general well-being (see, e.g., Clifton et al., 2019) but also in the workplace. As such, present results extend the nomological network of primal world beliefs (Clifton et al., 2019; Clifton, 2023; Clifton & Kim, 2019) and advance studies focused on the role of inter-individual differences in burnout development.

More specifically, the present findings build on and extend the line of research dedicated to the role of beliefs in work-related cognitions and behavior. For example, Otto and Schmidt (2007) found that people with a stronger belief in a just world exhibit more organizational commitment and self-efficacy but also fewer turnover intentions and burnout symptoms in terms of exhaustion and depersonalization. As such, believing in a just world could be understood as adaptive, as it compensates for the adverse effects of various stressors and fosters mental health by shifting the interpretation of events and bolstering trust in the environment and one's efficacy.

The present findings add that belief about the general character of the world – in terms

[7] Adding confounders seemed to decrease the effect size while accounting for acquiescence bias seemed to boost the role of enticing but reduced the effect of alive world belief, supporting the notion that the role of alive beliefs could be statistical artefacts.

of seeing the world as a good place (primary primal) – is also a potentially important factor, serving similar functions. When secondary primals and four core burnout dimensions are further differentiated, it was found that the alive secondary primal does not appear to have strong or consistent impact on dimensions of burnout complaints, but the secondary belief that the world is safe was linked to decreased exhaustion and distancing. Also, enticing secondary primal was negatively associated with mental distancing as well as cognitive and emotional impairment. The finding that beliefs that the world is safe and enticing function differently than alive secondary primal may be related to the different trajectories of belief acquisition or the trajectory of burnout symptoms development. For example, the idea of a safe world may be more conditioned by security in early relationships (Mascolo, 2024).

In the present study, we also hypothesized that the shared commonalities of the four positive psychological constructs – hope, optimism, self-efficacy, and resilience – in terms of agentic goal-pursuit, intentionality, and sense of control (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017) could – at least partially – explain the relationship between primals and burnout complaints. The indirect role of PsyCap was supported.

Our findings align with previous findings documenting the role of PsyCap in burnout complaints (see e.g., Loghman et al., 2023, for meta-analytic evidence). Also, the present findings are in line with the assertion that PsyCap serves as a potentially important personal resource in the workplace context. For example, as noted by Grover et al. (2018), PsyCap could represent not only the degree to which individuals believe they can influence their jobs but also the degree to which their work environment can negatively shape their ill-being.

Present findings also align with the assertion of Clifton (2020a), who theorized that various positive psychological traits could develop as a reaction to positive primal world beliefs and are crucial in shaping well-being. Paraphrasing Clifton (2020a), developing hope, self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience is easier when individuals believe the world is good (i.e., safe and enticing). We can add that this could be indirectly related to the decreased experience of burnout symptoms. However, longitudinal studies are needed as causality can be assumed but not tested in SEM cross-sectional studies.

In the following section, we will briefly ponder practical implications. What can be done alongside working with extensive demands in the workplace? First, it has been suggested in the literature that primal world beliefs could be cultivable through focused interventions (Clifton et al., 2019; Clifton, 2020a). Therefore, interventions, coaching, or therapy focused on primal world beliefs can, at least hypothetically, cultivate the evaluation of the workplace and serve some protective role in the development of burnout among other important factors.

Second, our study indicates that the relationship between primals and burnout could be indirectly related to psychological resources. PsyCap is considered relatively malleable and prone to cultivation. Thus, focusing also on primals during the cultivation of psychological resources can, at least hypothetically, bolster the effectiveness of PsyCap interventions. The rationale is that people who believe the world is good and interesting can more easily cultivate their positive psychological resources (Clifton, 2020a). Thus, primal world beliefs workshops or seminars or incorporating primal world beliefs into PsyCap development could be of interest in training programs. Additionally, leaders can be trained to support the development of both (positive) primals

and PsyCap, and mentorship programs can be established to provide support and share experiences, especially for those who see the world as a dangerous and dull place.

Finally, professional psychological help could be provided for those at high risk of burnout (e.g., as indicated by screening burnout complaints via BAT and assessing potential risk factors). As such, the present results can inform policy development and sustainable practices.

However, although theoretically plausible, these implications are based on several assumptions that future studies need to corroborate. Furthermore, future research should integrate the role primals into more complex models, such as the Job Demands-Resource model (Bakker et al., 2023).

Limitations and Future Research

First and foremost, the present study was cross-sectional. Thus, although theoretically plausible, the examined pattern of relations is based solely on covariance in a one-time point. Causality is assumed and not tested, and the temporal patterns of relations could be nuanced. For instance, it is possible that not a low degree of primal world beliefs per se, but the collapse of initial positive world beliefs could be the real issue here. Also, although primal world beliefs are considered relatively stable, negative situations, such as toxic relationships in the workplace, may change the primal world beliefs of individuals. We are aware of trauma's impact on the cognitive triad (views of self, of the world, and the future; Etherington, 2005; Zhou et al., 2015). Regardless, the present study did not allow for including traumatic stress, vicarious trauma, and trauma in personal history in the research, nor a more nuanced examination of temporal precedence.

Also, common method bias could be a problem in cross-sectional self-report studies. Thus, more exhaustive common method bias remedies and a more comprehensive selection of potential confounders/mediators are essential for future research. For example, Schaufeli and Taris (2014) suggested that there are three ways in which personal resources, such as PsyCap, exert an influence: they directly impact individuals' perceptions of job-related demands and resources, they serve as moderators in determining the impact of job demands and resources on these outcomes or they affect outcomes such as well-being and engagement more directly. Thus, future studies could examine more complex patterns of relations (e.g., similar to Grover et al., 2018). Moreover, although the model-data correspondence was in a reasonable range, further analysis of local fit indicated some potential challenges as manifested by residuals related to primals. Thus, ongoing psychometric evaluation of primals inventory should focus on this issue. Also, by zooming in further, the level of granularity can be increased, examining the role of 22 tertiary primals via PI-99.

Moreover, the nature of the constructs of interest should be scrutinized. Although the reflective-reflective (higher-order) conceptualization aligns with research on examined constructs, it should be systematically re-evaluated in future studies (see Rhemtulla et al., 2020). Last but not least, automatic generalizations of the pattern of results to individuals are problematic due to ergodic fallacy (Speelman et al., 2024) and should be tested explicitly. Relatedly, the present study examined net causality via a variable-oriented approach. Still, other more person-centered approaches, such as fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) or qualitative approaches, could be beneficial due to different understanding of causality and focus on the phenomenological world of an individual, respectively.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the present pilot study provides initial support for A) the negative relationship between primary world beliefs and burnout complaints and B) the indirect role of PsyCap in this relationship. The present study extends the existing knowledge base and provides a starting point for future studies interested in how our beliefs about the world shape people's workplace experiences.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Descriptive table

	Construct	Variable	Mean (SD)	Median [Min, Max]	ω_{total}	Instrument	Item Example
Predictor	Primal World Beliefs	Primary Primal	3.57 (0.54)	3.56 [1.00, 6.00]	.89	PI-18	
		Enticing	3.71 (0.63)	3.86 [1.00, 6.00]	.90	PI-18	"The world is enticing."
		Safe	3.57 (0.56)	3.50 [1.00, 6.00]	.85	PI-18	"I feel safe in the world."
		Alive	3.42 (0.96)	3.40 [1.00, 6.00]	.81	PI-18	"The world is full of life."
Criterion variable	Burnout	BAT	1.95 (0.70)	1.83 [1.00, 4.75]	.95	BAT-12	
		Exhaustion	2.42 (0.92)	2.33 [1.00, 5.00]	.86	BAT-12	"I feel exhausted."
		Distancing	1.98 (0.90)	2.00 [1.00, 5.00]	.87	BAT-12	"I feel distant from my job."
		Cognitive Impairment	1.78 (0.77)	1.67 [1.00, 5.00]	.90	BAT-12	"I have difficulty concentrating."
		Emotional Impairment	1.62 (0.74)	1.33 [1.00, 5.00]	.89	BAT-12	"I feel emotionally impaired."
Mediator	Psychological Capital	PsyCap	4.44 (0.87)	4.42 [1.00, 6.00]	.96	CPC-12R	
		Optimism	4.54 (1.02)	4.67 [1.00, 6.00]	.89	CPC-12R	"If I should find myself in a jam, I could think of many ways to get out of it."
		Hope	4.28 (0.94)	4.33 [1.00, 6.00]	.85	CPC-12R	"I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events."
		Resilience	4.44 (0.95)	4.33 [1.00, 6.00]	.86	CPC-12R	"I tend to bounce back quickly after serious life difficulties."
Confounders	Demands	Role conflict	2.09 (0.88)	2.00 [1.00, 5.00]	.83	JD-R Q	„Do you have to perform work assignments without sufficient resources"
		Work-life conflict	1.92 (0.95)	2.00 [1.00, 5.00]	-	JD-R Q	„Do you have trouble balancing work and private life?"

Appendix 2: Summary of direct and indirect effects in the exploratory model

Direct Effects

Primal Belief	Exhaustion	Distancing	Cognitive Impairment	Emotional Impairment
Enticing	0.05	-0.14**	-0.13**	-0.19***
	95% CI [-0.04, 0.15]	95% CI [-0.23, -0.04]	95% CI [-0.23, -0.04]	95% CI [-0.29, -0.09]
Safe	-0.24***	-0.15**	-0.03	-0.07
	95% CI [-0.33, -0.14]	95% CI [-0.25, -0.05]	95% CI [-0.12, 0.06]	95% CI [-0.16, 0.03]
Alive	0.11**	0.05	0.02	0.10**
	95% CI [0.04, 0.17]	95% CI [-0.01, 0.11]	95% CI [-0.05, 0.09]	95% CI [0.03, 0.16]

Indirect Effects (PsyCap-Mediated)

Primal Belief	Exhaustion	Distancing	Cognitive Impairment	Emotional Impairment
Enticing	-0.12***	-0.11***	-0.12***	-0.10***
	95% CI [-0.16, -0.07]	95% CI [-0.15, -0.07]	95% CI [-0.16, -0.08]	95% CI [-0.13, -0.06]
Safe	-0.11***	-0.10***	-0.11***	-0.09***
	95% CI [-0.15, -0.06]	95% CI [-0.13, -0.06]	95% CI [-0.15, -0.06]	95% CI [-0.12, -0.05]
Alive	-0.04*	-0.03**	-0.04**	-0.03*
	95% CI [-0.06, -0.01]	95% CI [-0.06, -0.01]	95% CI [-0.06, -0.01]	95% CI [-0.05, -0.01]