

# **EXAMINING THE ROLE OF CYNICISM IN THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN BURNOUT AND EMPLOYEE BEHAVIOR**

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# INTRODUCTION

## *Burnout*

- **A state of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion caused by a combination of very high expectation and persistent situational stress (Freudenberger, 1974)**
  - Emotional exhaustion
  - Cynicism
  - Diminished professional efficacy



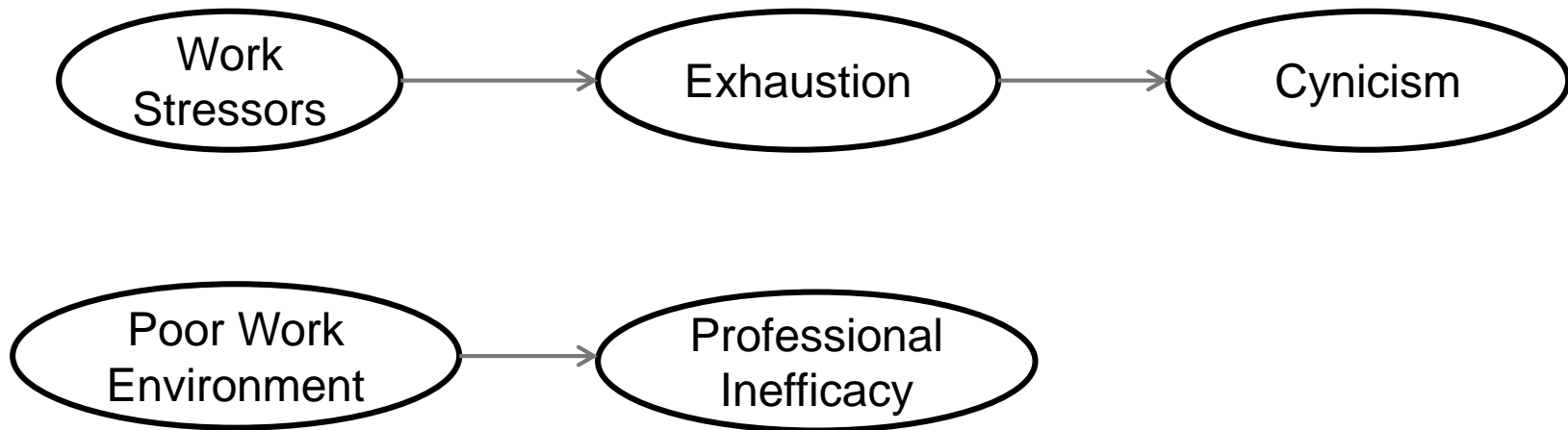
- **Negative influence of burnout on workplace well-being and productivity**
- **Antecedents of burnout**
  - Job demand, lack of job resources
- **Consequences of burnout**
  - Demotivation, decreased job satisfaction and organizational commitment, absenteeism, high turnover intention, etc.



- **Cynicism is the most powerful predictor of turnover intention (Leiter & Maslach, 2009).**
- **But, cynicism can be a coping strategy in the process of burnout (Brandes & Das, 2006).**
- **The inconsistent and mixed findings suggest a lack of conceptual and empirical clarity.**
- **The purpose of the study:**
  - a) To examine the relation of each burnout component with employees' job performance and prosocial behavior
  - b) To test a conceptual model that incorporates the direct and indirect influences of the three burnout components on job performance and prosocial behavior

# THE SEQUENCE OF BURNOUT COMPONENTS

Leiter's (1993) process model of burnout



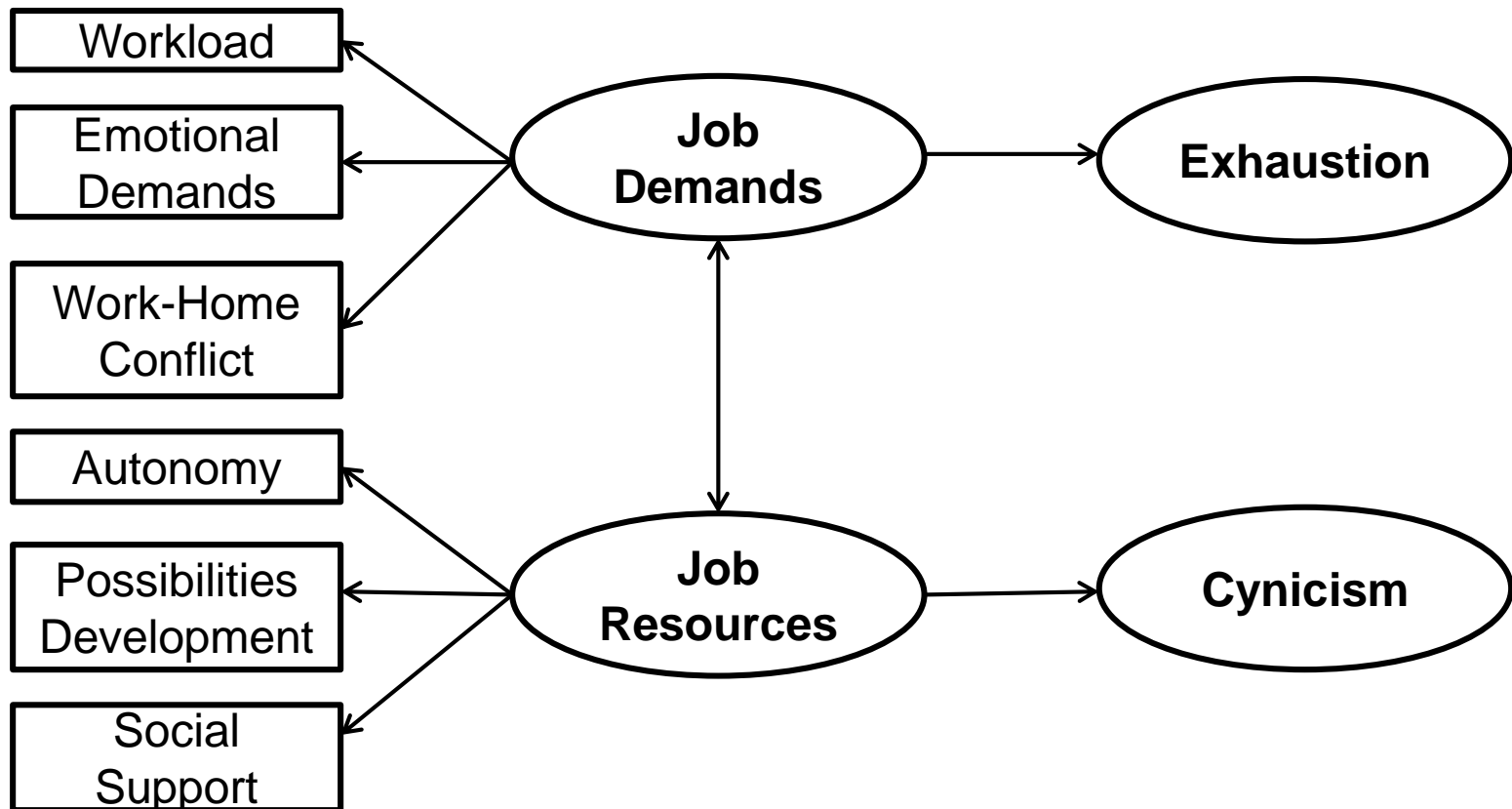
- **Employees develop a cynical attitude toward the job as a coping strategy**

# BEHAVIORAL OUTCOMES

- **Task performance (also known as in-role performance)**
- **Contextual performance (also known as extra-role performance)**
- **Prosocial behavior**

# JOB DEMANDS-RESOURCES MODEL

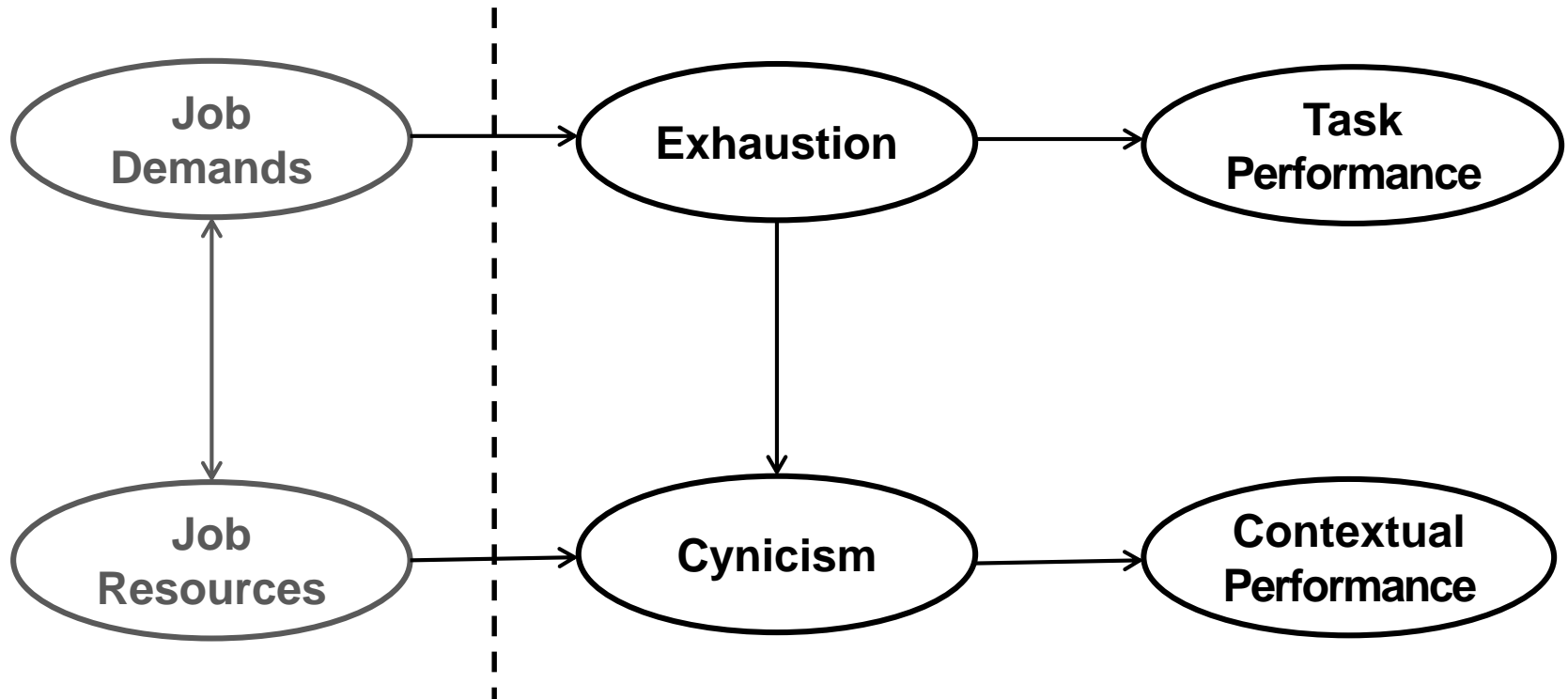
(JD-R; BAKKER ET AL., 2004; BAKKER & DEMEROUTI, 2007)



- **Job demands are the most important antecedents of emotional exhaustion, which in turn predict task performance (Bakker et al., 2004; Hockey, 1993)**
- **Job resources are the most powerful predictors of contextual performance through cynicism (Bakker et al., 2004)**
- **Combination of Bakker et al.'s (2004) Job Demands-Resources and Leiter's (1993) process models**
- **Propose that burnout starts with emotional exhaustion, developing cynical attitude as a coping strategy**
- **Emotional exhaustion fostered by job demands negatively influences both task performance and contextual performance.**



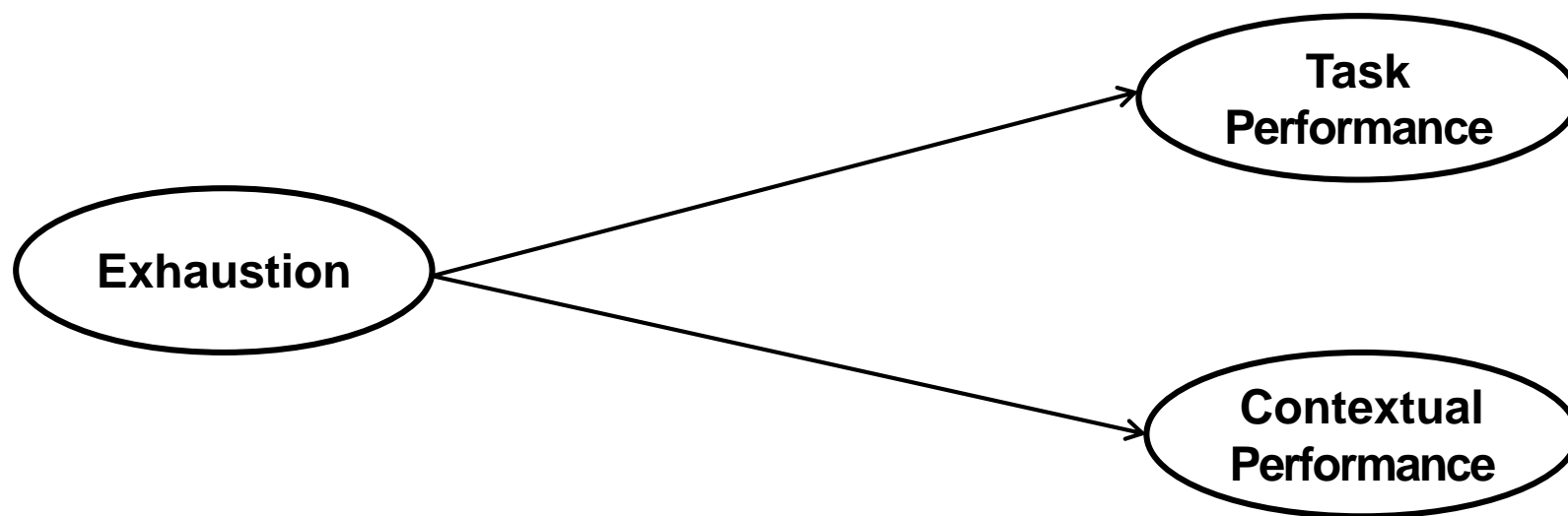




***Hypothesis 1: Emotional exhaustion negatively affects task performance, contextual performance, and prosocial behavior.***

***Hypothesis 2: Cynicism negatively affects task performance, contextual performance, and prosocial behavior.***

- **Employees with low levels of professional efficacy have a deflated view of their progress, being disappointed with tasks, projects, and relationships (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993)**



***Hypothesis 3: Diminished professional efficacy negatively affects task performance, contextual performance, and prosocial behavior.***

- **This study posits the negative effect of the burnout components on prosocial behavior**
- **Stressful working conditions may wear down employees, leading to burnout, which progressively decreases the employees' prosocial behavior.**
- **Employees' sense of emotional and mental resource depletion avert them from putting extra effort in activities that exceed job requirements (Van Emmerick, Jawahar, and Stone, 2005).**
- **Resource depletion decreases the likelihood of prosocial behavior (DeWall et al., 2008; Xu et al., 2012)**

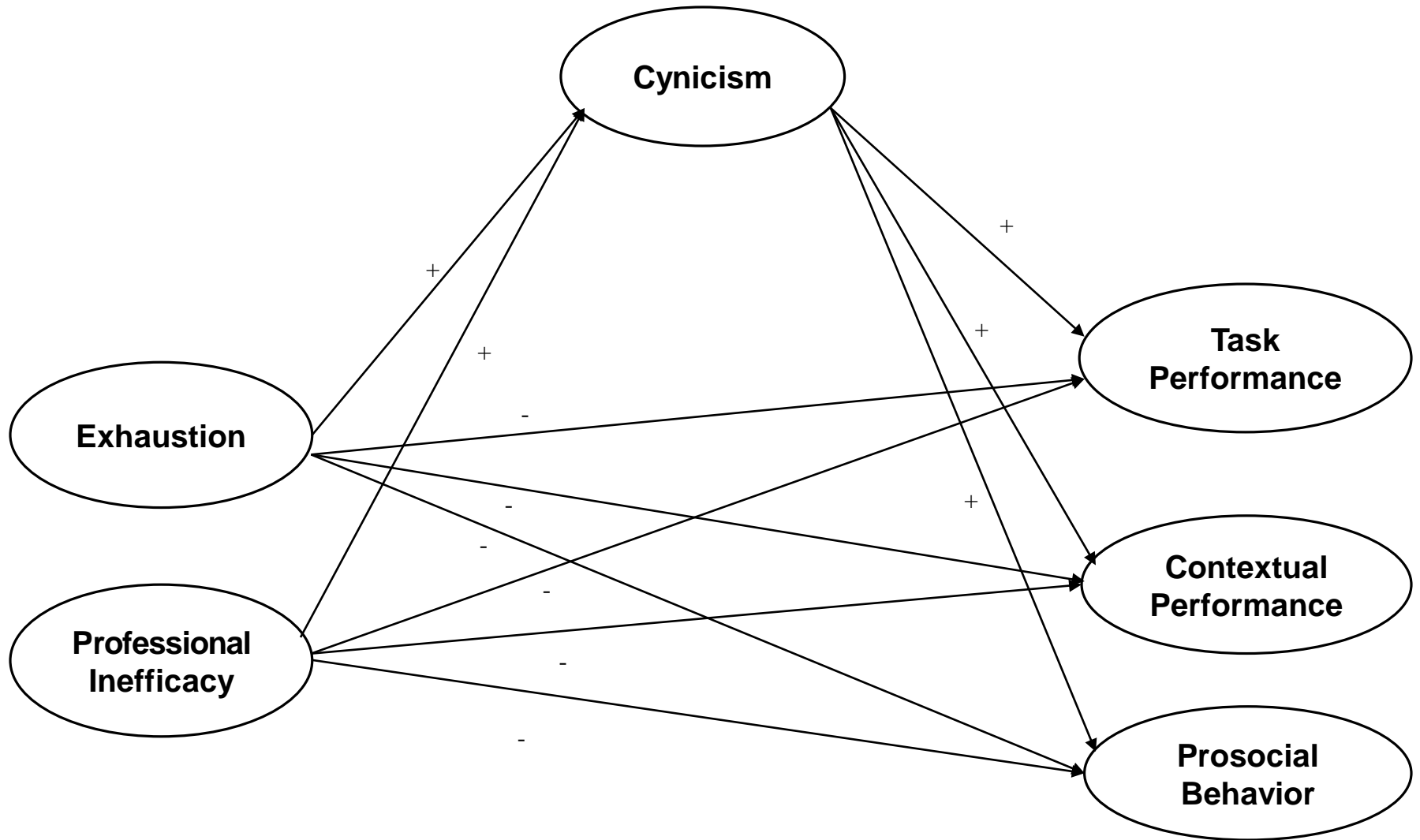


# POSITIVE ROLE OF CYNICISM

- **Cynicism can be**
  - A strategy that individuals can employ to cope with an unfriendly, unstable, and insecure world (Mirvis & Kanter, 1989, 1991)
  - A defensive, cognitive method of creating a protective distance (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006).
- **Brandes and Das (2006) proposed a non-linear relationship between the different aspects of cynical behavior and performance.**
- **Cynical employees:**
  - Do not necessarily convert their displeasure into action (Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003)
  - Have an experienced, critical eye, which could be a positive force for change (Brandes & Das, 2006).

***Hypothesis 4: Cynicism positively mediates the relationships between the two burnout components: emotional exhaustion and diminished professional efficacy, and the three outcome variables: task performance, contextual performance, and prosocial behavior while emotional exhaustion and diminished professional efficacy have direct negative influences on the three outcomes.***

# ***PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL MODEL***



# **METHODS**

## *Sample*

- **262 working adults attending a large southeastern university in U.S.A**

## *Procedures*

- **Participants completed two 20-minute paper-based surveys.**
- **Data were gathered at two times separated by four weeks to help control for common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).**
- **At Time 1, participants responded to the survey including job performance and demographic items.**
- **At Time 2, they completed burnout and prosocial behavior instruments.**

# **SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS**

## **Sex**

- **Male 44.4%**
- **Female 55.6%**

## **Age**

- **Average age = 25.54 years;  $SD = 7.32$**

## ***Ethnicity***

- **Hispanics: 37.7%**
- **African American: 30.6%**
- **Caucasian: 23.8%**

## ***Marital status***

- **Single: 77.5%**
- **Married: 15.3%**
- **Partnered: 7.2%**



# MEASURES

- **Burnout: Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI; Maslach et al., 1996)**
- **Job Performance: job performance scale developed by Motowidlo and Van Scotter (1994)**
- **Prosocial behavior : a 10-item scale developed by Caprara and Pastorelli (1993)**
- **Demographic questions: sex, age, ethnicity, and marital status**

# DATA ANALYSES

- **Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using the LISREL 8.72 program**
- **Internal consistency estimates calculated with Cronbach's alpha to examine the reliability of the data**
- **Structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the research hypotheses**

# RESULTS

## *Measurement Model*

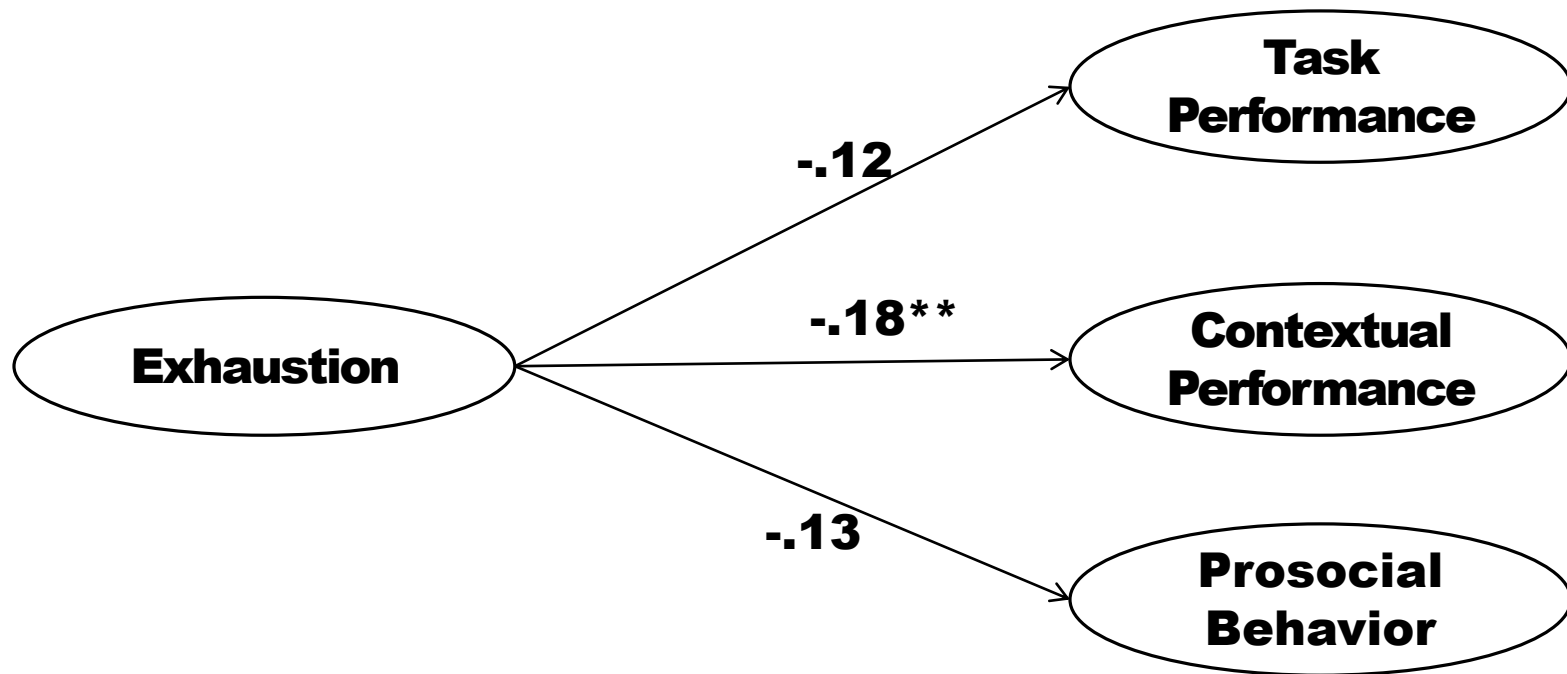
- Included 37 items of three burnout components, two constructs of job performance, and prosocial behavior
- Factor loadings above .4 for the respective manifest variables
- $\chi^2 = 1482.88$ ,  $df = 614$ ,  $p < .01$ , RMSEA = .071, CFI = .92, NNFI = .91, IFI = .92 and RMR = .069.
- The model had a reasonable fit to the data:

## *Reliabilities for Six Factors*

- Ranged from .74 to .92 (>.70 recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994)

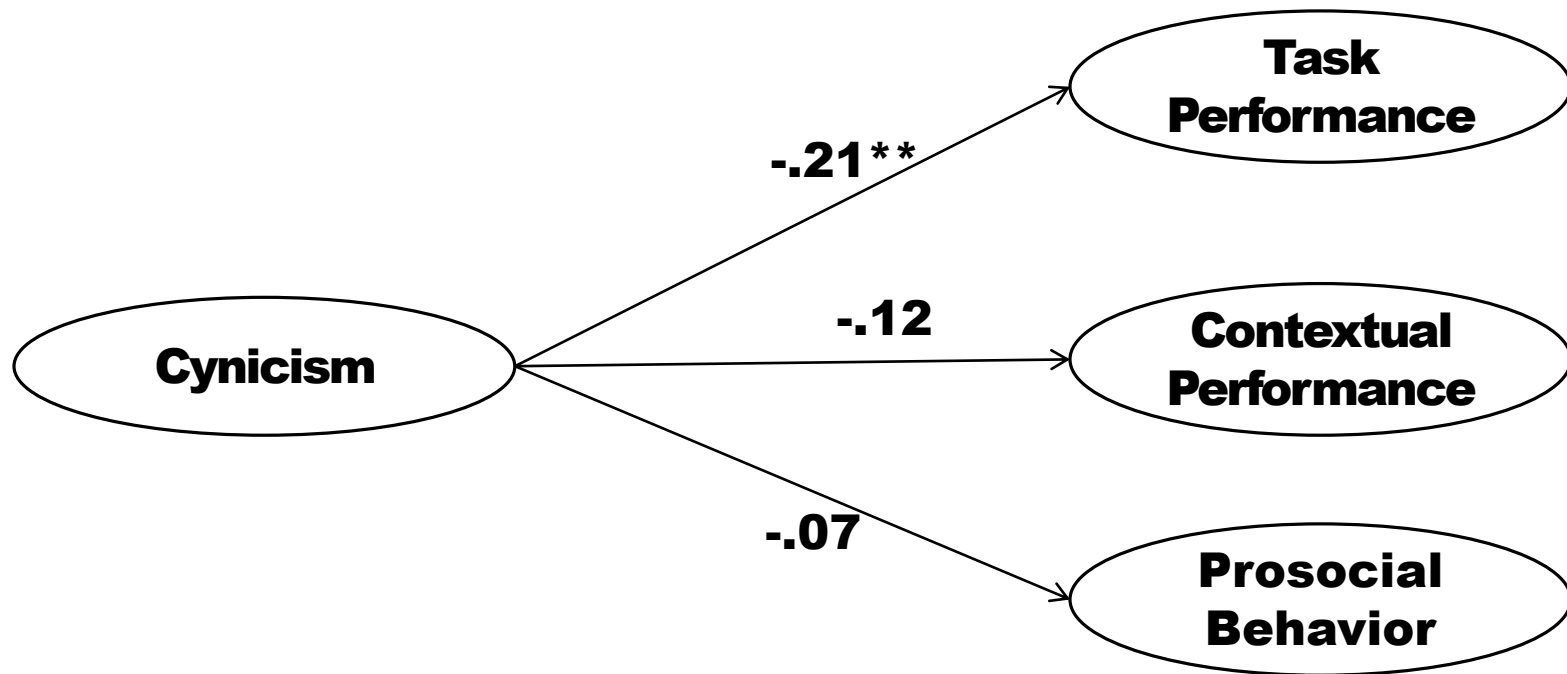
# **HYPOTHESIS 1: EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION NEGATIVELY AFFECTS TASK PERFORMANCE, CONTEXTUAL PERFORMANCE, AND PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR.**

( $\chi^2 = 811.95$ ,  $df = 293$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , RMSEA = .080, CFI = 0.93, NNFI = 0.92, IFI = 0.93, RMR = .069)



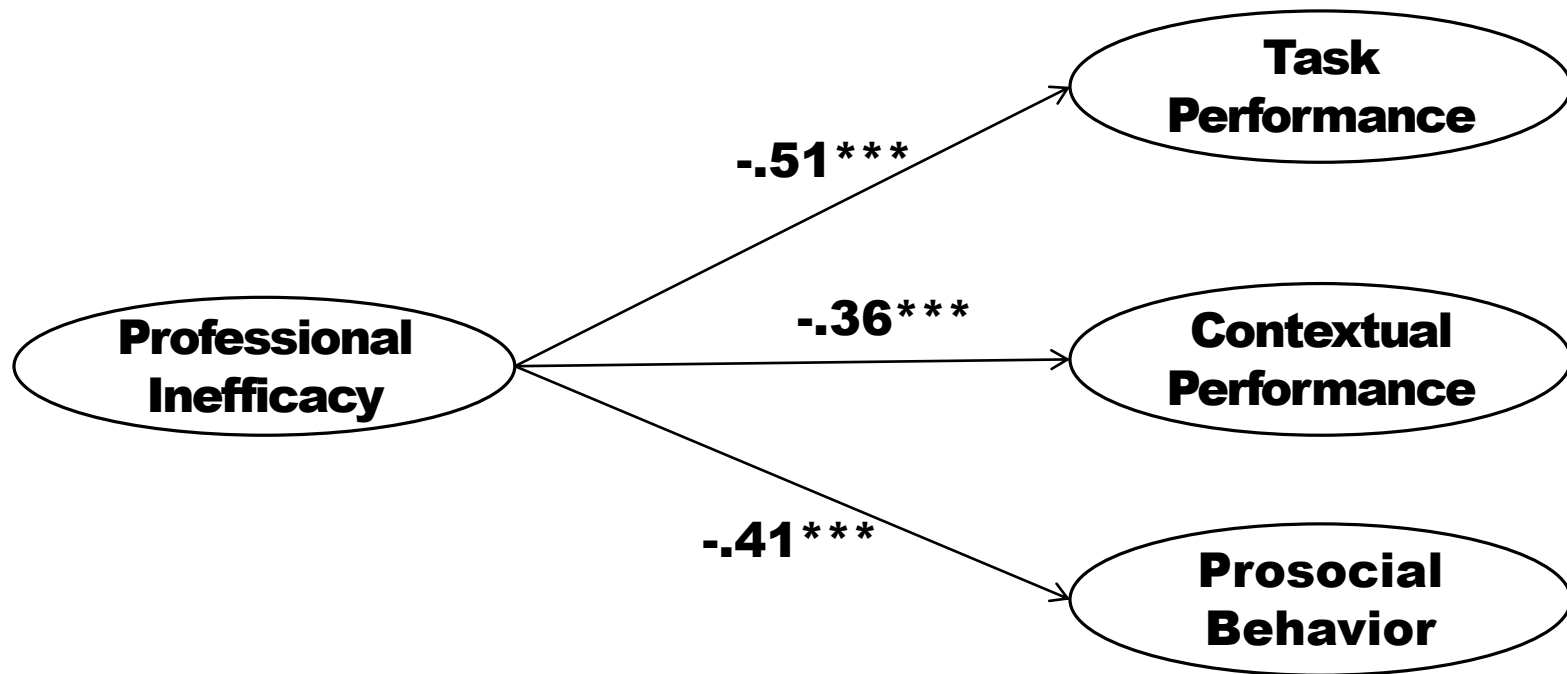
# **HYPOTHESIS 2: CYNICISM NEGATIVELY AFFECTS TASK PERFORMANCE, CONTEXTUAL PERFORMANCE, AND PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR.**

( $\chi^2 = 837.20$ ,  $df = 293$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $RMSEA = .082$ ,  $CFI = 0.91$ ,  $NNFI = 0.90$ ,  $IFI = 0.91$ ,  $RMR = .074$ )



# **HYPOTHESIS 3: DIMINISHED PROFESSIONAL EFFICACY NEGATIVELY AFFECTS TASK PERFORMANCE, CONTEXTUAL PERFORMANCE, AND PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR.**

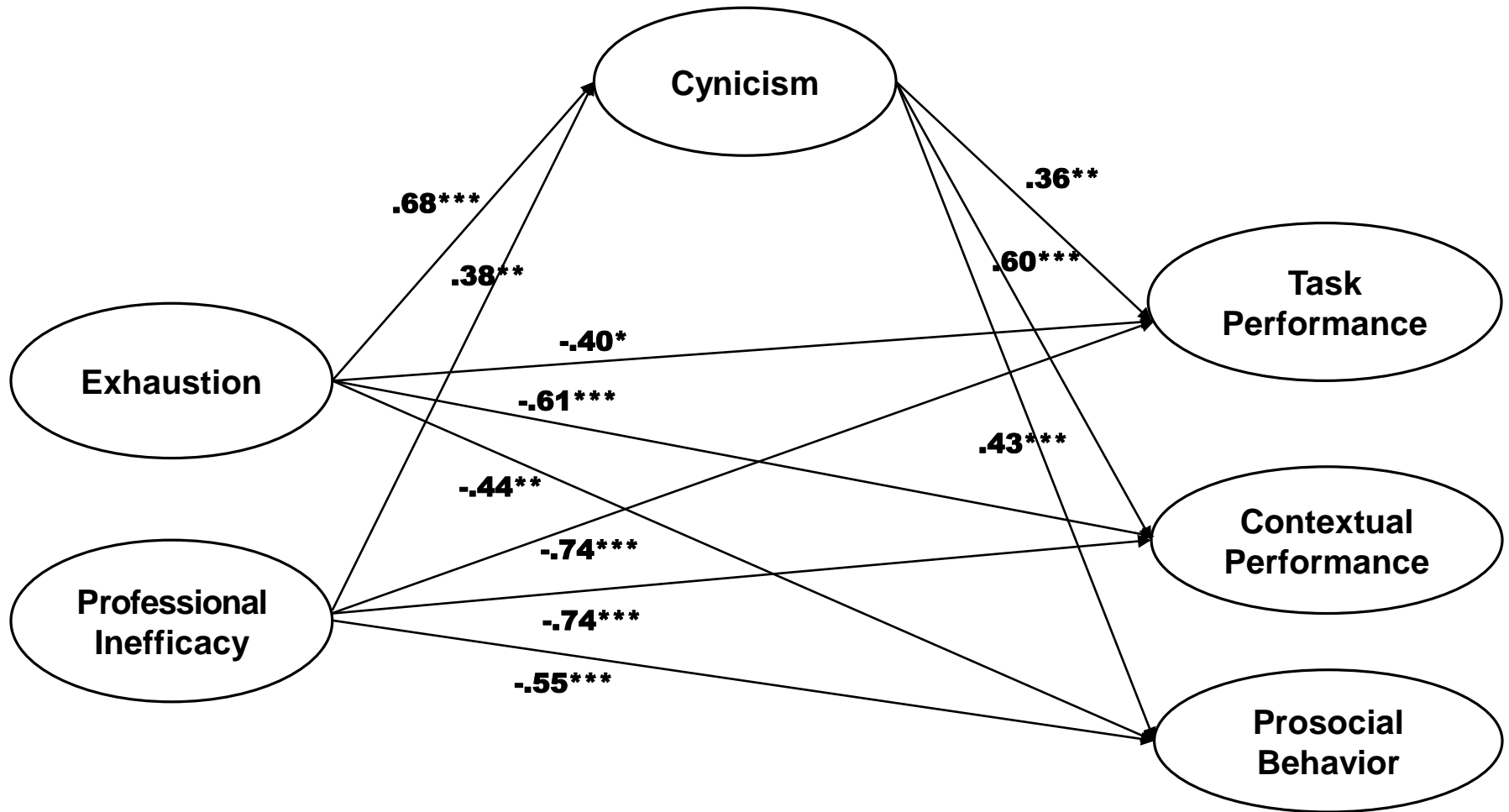
$(\chi^2 = 879.97, df = 318, p < 0.01, RMSEA = .080, CFI = 0.92, NNFI = 0.91, IFI = 0.92, RMR = .068)$



**HYPOTHESIS 4: CYNICISM POSITIVELY MEDIATES THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE TWO BURNOUT COMPONENTS: EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION AND DIMINISHED PROFESSIONAL EFFICACY, AND THE THREE OUTCOME VARIABLES: TASK PERFORMANCE, CONTEXTUAL PERFORMANCE, AND PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR WHILE EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION AND DIMINISHED PROFESSIONAL EFFICACY HAVE DIRECT NEGATIVE INFLUENCES ON THE THREE OUTCOMES.**

# HYPOTHESIS 4

( $\chi^2 = 1528.28$ ,  $df = 617$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $RMSEA = .073$ ,  $CFI = 0.91$ ,  $NNFI = 0.91$ ,  $IFI = 0.91$ ,  $RMR = .079$ )





# DISCUSSION

- **The results of correlational and SEM analyses supported the negative, direct effect of emotional exhaustion and professional inefficacy on each of the dependent variables.**
  - Consistent with Bakker et al.'s (2004) JD-R model and the extant literature
- **Professional inefficacy demonstrated the strongest relations with the dependent variables.**
  - Efficaciousness beliefs related to one's reduced ability and sense of inadequacy on the job are powerful negative predictors of performance and prosocial behavior (Xu et al. (2012).
- **Cynicism was linked negatively to task and contextual performance, while emotional exhaustion was negatively linked to contextual performance (Bakker et al., 2004).**

- **This study tested the conceptual model including the direct and indirect effects of burnout on the dependent variables.**
  - Emotional exhaustion and professional inefficacy directly influenced both types of performance and prosocial behavior.
  - Emotional exhaustion and professional inefficacy indirectly influenced the dependent variables through the cynicism variable.
- **The mediating role of cynicism in the relation between emotional exhaustion and the dependent variables.**
  - Leiter's (1993) prediction that emotional exhaustion occurs first, which leads to cynical attitude as a coping strategy was supported.
  - Consistent with Leiter and Brandes and Das (2006), cynicism became a protective mechanism that supported increased, rather than reduced performance and prosocial behavior.

# PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

- **Introducing organizational practices to reduce unreasonable job demands and increase job resources**

## *Examples*

- Make the employee's workload more manageable
  - Clarify role-related expectations
  - Provide timely and appropriate performance feedback
  - Allow for increased autonomy
- **Implementing ways to reduce the scores on emotional exhaustion and professional inefficacy might logically yield vital, positive individual- and organizational-level outcomes.**
  - **Cynicism can be a way to alleviate employees' work frustrations and stress**
    - Squashing cynicism at work may be not only ineffective but harmful (Brandes & Das, 2006).
    - Train employees to use appropriate levels of cynicism, guided by organizational norms, as a coping strategy to manage daily stressors

# LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

- **Due to the sample being drawn from a single site, the results should not be generalized beyond this study.**
- **Future research with more proportionally representative samples needed**
- **Longitudinal study of the conceptual model needed for further confirmation of the strength found by this study**
- **Experimental or quasi-experimental research encouraged to test interventions on reducing emotional exhaustion and professional inefficacy and determining each variable's effect on the outcome variables.**
- **Additional significant outcome variables should be tested. (e.g., engagement, organizational commitment, turnover intent, and incivility)**