

Organizational Politics and Stress: Perceived Accountability as a Coping Mechanism

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This paper investigates the interaction of perceived accountability on the politics perceptions-job stress relationship. From a sample of working adults, findings indicate that (1) individuals perceiving organizational politics and high levels of accountability reported more quality concern stress and job vs. non-job conflict, and (2) individuals perceiving organizational politics and low levels of accountability reported less quality concern stress and job vs. non-job conflict. Analysis failed to support two of the four interactive hypotheses. Theoretical implications and future research directions are discussed.

Keywords: Organizational Politics, Accountability, Stress

JEL Classification: M14

I. Introduction

A large body of research continues to develop the seemingly divergent constructs of accountability and organizational politics. Recent research (e.g. Slaughter, Bagger, and Li, 2006; Eby, Lockwood, and Butts, 2006; Rosen, Levy, and Hall, 2006; Harris, James, and Boonthanom, 2005) describes the separate impact of accountability and organizational politics on important organizational outcomes and variables. Limited attention (Ferris, Adams, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, and Ammeter, 2002) has been granted to ways in which accountability and organizational politics may work together to impact organizational and or individual outcomes and variables.

A surface examination of the constructs of accountability and organizational politics may explain the lack of research on their interactive effects. Generally, it is expected that ambiguity in the work environment contributes to organizational politics (Ferris, Russ, and Fandt, 1989); while on the other hand, accountability is expected to clarify behavioral expectations (Schlenker, Britt, Pennington, Murphy, and Doherty, 1994). Whereas organizational politics may lead to individual stress, accountability is intended to remove and/or reduce anxieties.

However, accountability is not a panacea as it interplays with both situational and individual characteristics (Lerner and Tetlock, 1999). The mere presence of accountability may not mean other seemingly negative organizational attributes such as politics are minimized. For instance, Wood and Winston (2005) note that managers may develop compartmentalized accountability; accepting certain behaviors in one instance while in other instances displaying markedly different actions.

We therefore investigate the possibility of employees simultaneously perceiving accountability and organizational politics. The purpose of the current paper is to contribute to the politics

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perceptions literature by investigating the interactive effect of perceptions of accountability with perceptions of organizational politics on four dimensions of job stress: (1) quality concerns, (2) responsibility pressures, (3) role conflict, and (4) job vs. non-job conflict. Ferris, et al. (2002) suggest that accountability is an antecedent to politics perceptions. The current paper proposes that accountability is a dynamic phenomenon and may in fact function as either an antecedent or moderator.

II. Perceptions of Politics

Organizational politics has been defined as “actions that (a) are inconsistent with accepted organizational norms, (b) are designed to promote self-interest, and (c) are taken without regard for, and even at the expense of organizational goals” (Valle and Witt, 2001: 380). Gandz and Murray (1980) stated that politics perceptions are the product of several individual and organizational characteristics. They argue that organizational politics represent a subjective, rather than an objective reality. Thus, politics perceptions can have an effect upon employee attitudes, behaviors, and/or anxiety.

Ferris et al. (1989) provided the theoretical model which much of the empirical literature rests. The model positions politics perceptions as a product of the organization (e.g., centralization, formalization, hierarchical level, span of control), the job/environment (e.g., autonomy, skill variety, feedback, advancement opportunity), and individual influences (e.g., age, sex, Machiavellianism, self-monitoring). This model was the first to provide a conceptual understanding of the potential outcomes of politics perceptions in organizations. Politics perceptions have been found to have detrimental effects on individual outcomes (e.g. higher levels of absenteeism, turnover intentions, anxiety, and stress) and lower levels of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job performance, and organizational citizenship behaviours (Kacmar and Baron, 1999; Ferris, Adams, et al., 2002).

In a recent review of the existing literature concerning the original politics perceptions model (Ferris et al., 1989), Ferris, Adams, and associates (2002) reconfigured the model to more accurately reflect empirical findings. Added to the new configuration is the job/environmental influence, accountability. Ferris, Adams, and associates suggest that accountability mechanisms trigger employee politicking in order to maintain a good standing and to simultaneously be viewed as competent. Politicking may position the employee favorably with important decision makers. Although this suggests that accountability is a direct antecedent to organizational politics, the current paper argues that it is plausible for one’s perceptions of accountability to interact with perceptions of organizational politics, which enhance and/or reduce the effects of politics perceptions.

III. Accountability

Accountability refers to the “implicit or explicit expectation that one may be called upon to justify one’s beliefs, feelings, and actions to others” (Lerner and Tetlock, 1999, p. 255). Frink and Klimoski (1998) added that accountability is the perceived need to justify one’s actions to an audience that may have reward or sanction power. Accountability, thus, is an individual perception based on one’s interpretation of the social system in which one is embedded. One can attribute his or her accountability audience to a system (e.g. organization), a social group, a dyad, or the self (Frink and Klimoski, 1998; Schlenker, 1986). Accountability implies that an

individual is being monitored and will attempt to protect his or her self-image and/or maximize economic gains by scanning the environment for behavioral norms, cues, and/or expectations (Tetlock, 1983).

Tetlock (1983; 1992) suggests that individuals establish perceived appropriate norms via three methods: (1) availability heuristics, (2) preemptive self-criticism, or (3) retrospective rationalization. Availability heuristics imply that prior to acting, individuals are aware of audience preferences. For example, employees will set goals when goal-setting is the norm mandated by management but may not actually strive to achieve the goal (Frink and Ferris, 1998). Whereas availability heuristics operate when the individual is aware of audience preferences, preemptive self-criticism occurs when individuals perceive accountability but are uninformed of expectations. In this circumstance, individuals expend an increased amount of effort and search for reasons to justify their actions and avoid appearing foolish. The self-critical method is effective when individuals attune to the correct audience preferences; however, this method is ineffective when one cannot forgo irrelevant information (Tetlock and Boettger, 1989; Tetlock, Lerner, and Boettger, 1996). Finally, retrospective rationalization occurs post behavior and serves as a method of shifting the accountability. Essentially, individuals expound that they "didn't know" which excuses them from accountability.

Research suggests that accountability prompts individuals to make decisions more carefully (Ford and Weldon, 1981), view information in a less biased way (Rozelle and Baxter, 1981), explore more relevant information (Schlenker, 1986), and use more complex cognitive processes (Tetlock, 1992; Schlenker, 1986). However, the influence of accountability is not always positive. Some studies have found that holding decision-makers accountable lowered judgment quality (Tetlock, Skitka, and Boettger, 1989), caused individuals to rely on irrelevant information (Gordon, Rozelle, and Baxter, 1988) and resulted in more job tension (Hall, Frink, Ferris, Hochwarter, Kacmar, and Bowen, 2003; Hochwarter, Perrewé, Hall, and Ferris, 2004). Breaux, Munyon, Hochwarter, and Ferris (2009) found a moderating effect between politics perceptions and felt accountability on job satisfaction. Given these findings, it is plausible that being held accountable or perceiving accountability influences stressor-stress relationships.

IV. Interactive Effects of Politics Perception and Perceived Accountability on Stress

Stress, in the current study, is assumed to be a transactional event in which the employee appraises a work environment as threatening and possible of taxing or exceeding the individual's resources (Lazarus, 1991). Negative emotions result when individuals perceive incongruence with the transaction and perceive that the interaction will thwart personal goals (Perrewé and Zellars, 1999). Occupational stress is a multidimensional construct and can be conceptualized as possessing (1) quality concerns—"having concern about not being able to do as good of work as one could or should accomplish," (2) responsibility pressures—"having too much responsibility for people, process, or products and insufficient human or material assistance," (3) role conflict—"receiving ambiguous and/or conflicting expectations from others at work," and (4) job vs. non-job conflict—"feeling that the job interferes with non-work life" (e.g., family or leisure time) (House, Wells, Landerman, McMichael, and Kaplan, 1979, p. 141).

Research has consistently demonstrated a relationship with politics perceptions and employee stress (Ferris, Adams, et al., 2002). Stress is believed to result from the uncertainty associated with politics perceptions and second, the perception of politics is likely to be perceived as a threat and/or opportunity (Ferris, Frink, Galang, Zhou, Kacmar, and Howard,

1996). Research has also found the politics perception-stress relationship to have moderating variables. This occurs as individuals oftentimes uniquely process and experience information from their work environments. Findings show that reactive political behaviors moderated the politics perceptions-stress relationship such that individuals experienced more stress (Valle and Perrewé, 2000) and also that understanding and perceived control moderated the politics perceptions-stress relationship such that individual stress was reduced under conditions of high understanding (Ferris, Frink, et al., 1996). Furthermore, individuals with lower perceived control report more job related stress (Ferris, Brand, Brand, Rowland, Glimore, King, Kacmar, and Burton, 1993).

Perceived accountability is an additional factor in the politics perceptions-stress relationship. Organizational politics flourish in ambiguous conditions (Ferris, et al., 1989). However, individual accountability is an essential aspect of social systems; without which organizational viability is threatened (Frink and Klimonski, 1998). Employees thus understand that at some point they are likely to be required to account for their actions. Under the pre-emptive self-criticism condition of accountability, employees know to some extent that an accounting will occur. The employee, therefore, will actively seek to tailor his/her behavior or cognitive processes to maximize defensibility. Organizational politics produce a moving target, so to say, that results in employees processing relevant and irrelevant information of expected behaviors. In order for an employee to prepare for all possible conditions, he/she may experience increased stress. Conversely, individuals who choose to disregard accountability mechanisms may be purposefully (or inadvertently) relying upon retrospective rationalization to excuse behaviors, thus initially experiencing less stress. In other words, a perceived lack of accountability permits one to cope with potential workplace politics by denying or distancing oneself from the situation; thus, interpreting co-workers politicking as irrelevant.

Lazarus (1993) defines coping as highly contextual and our efforts to interpret and potentially alter our situation(s) to make them a more favorable circumstance. Two forms of coping with stress are offered: (1) problem-focused coping, where one changes his or her relationship with the stressful environment; and (2) emotion-focused coping, where one, "changes only the way he or she attends to or interpret what is happening" (p. 8). Based on the theoretical and empirical literature, it is proposed that accountability will interact with politics perceptions and suggest the following hypotheses:

- Hypothesis 1. Perceived accountability and politics perceptions will interact such that quality concerns stress will be highest for employees who perceive higher levels of accountability and politics perceptions.*
- Hypothesis 2. Perceived accountability and politics perceptions will interact such that responsibility pressure stress will be highest for employees who perceive higher levels of accountability and politics perceptions.*
- Hypothesis 3. Perceived accountability and politics perceptions will interact such that responsibility pressure stress will be highest for employees who perceive higher levels of accountability and politics perceptions.*
- Hypothesis 4. Perceived accountability and politics perceptions will interact such that job vs. non-job conflict stress will be highest for employees who perceive higher levels of accountability and politics perceptions.*

V. Method

A. Procedure and Participants

Surveys were distributed to students (e.g. Hochwarter and Treadway, 2003) enrolled in upper level (junior/senior level) undergraduate management courses at a large Southeastern University. Students were asked to solicit an individual with a minimum of five years of work experience to complete the survey. Students returning surveys within the prescribe timeframe received nominal extra credit. Survey respondents were asked to provide their name and telephone number in order to verify their participation in the study; otherwise, the respondents remained confidential. This method yielded a useable response rate ($N=100$; 66.5%) and represented a wide range of occupations. Participants averaged 17.6 years ($s.d.=10.7$) in one's current profession and supervised an average of 10 employees ($s.d.=21.4$); providing evidence of participants having managerial duties. Approximately 48 percent identified themselves as female, 48 percent indicated male, and 3 percent did not respond to the gender question. Of the participants 14 percent were African-American, 2 percent Asian, and the remaining indicated that they were Caucasian. Approximately 14 percent of the participants indicated that they possessed a high school diploma, 27 percent had some college education, 14 percent had an associate's degree, 29 percent had a bachelor's degree, and 16 percent reported a master's degree or higher. The average age and salary for the participants was 43.8 years ($s.d.=11.7$) and \$64,077 ($s.d.=58,574$).

B. Measures

Politics Perceptions. Politics perceptions ($\alpha=.87$) was measured with the 15-item scale developed by Kacmar and Ferris (1991). "Favoritism, not merit, gets people ahead" is a sample item. Items were scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). Higher scores reflect more perceptions of organization politics.

Accountability. Perceived accountability ($\alpha=.77$) was measured with an eight-item scale developed by Hochwarter, Kacmar, and Ferris (2003). Sample items include the following: "I am held very accountable at work," and "The jobs of many people at work depend on my success or failures." Items were scored on a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from 1= not at all to 5= nearly all the time.

Stress. Responsibility pressures ($\alpha=.52$), quality concerns ($\alpha=.70$), role conflict ($\alpha=.73$), and job vs. non-job conflict ($\alpha=.73$) were measured by the subscales of the occupational stress scale developed by House and associates (1979). Sample items include the following: "having to do or decide things where mistakes could be quite costly" for responsibility pressure; "feeling that you have to do things that are against your better judgment" for quality concerns; "having to deal with or satisfy too many people" for role conflict; and "feeling that your job tends to interfere with your family life" for job vs. non-job conflict. Each facet was measured by three items and scored on a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from 0 = never to 4 = nearly all the time.

Affective Disposition. Affect was modeled as control variables given that research has consistently shown that affective disposition predicts job stress (George, 1992). Positive ($\alpha=.94$) and negative ($\alpha=.87$) affect were measured using the PANAS scale (Watson, Clark, and Tellegen, 1988). Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they experienced 10 positive (e.g., interested and determined) and 10 negative (e.g., distressed and hostile) emotions. Responses ranged from 1=very little or not at all to 5=extremely.

C. Data Analysis

Four separate moderated multiple regression analyses were conducted to test the interaction of politics perceptions and perceived accountability on quality concerns stress, responsibility pressures, role conflict, and job vs. non-job conflict (c.f., Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken, 2003). In the first step, age, gender, negative affect, and positive affect were entered as control variables. In the second step, the main effects of perceived accountability and politics perceptions were regressed on the dependent variables. The final step included the cross-product term representing the interaction of politics perceptions and perceived accountability.

VI. Results

Table 1 reports the means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlation coefficients for each of the variables in this study. Politics perceptions was positively correlated with quality concerns stress ($r = .46$; $p < .01$), responsibility pressures ($r = .20$; $p < .05$), and job vs. non-job conflict ($r = .49$; $p < .01$). Perceived accountability was positively correlated with responsibility pressures ($r = .27$; $p < .01$).

Table 1: Intercorrelation Matrix (N=100)

		Mean	Standard Deviation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Stress Quality Concerns	1.54	.81	(.70)								
2	Responsibility Pressure	1.97	.81	.38**	(.52)							
3	Role Conflict	1.45	.82	.64**	.45**	(.73)						
4	Job Conflict	1.26	.93	.65**	.34**	.48**	(.73)					
5	Negative Affect	1.60	.53	.27**	.13	.08	.31**	(.87)				
6	Positive Affectivity	3.84	.64	-.25**	-.02	-.26**	-.30**	-.21*	(.94)			
7	Accountability Perceptions	3.70	.66	.12	.27**	.14	.10	-.10	.30**	(.77)		
8	Politics Perceptions	2.62	.64	.46**	.20*	.32**	.49**	.21*	-.39**	-.16	(.87)	
9	Age	43.77	11.66	-.09	.18	-.08	-.10	-.13	.12	.15	-.12	(n/a)
10	Gender	n/a	n/a	-.08	-.18	-.05	-.03	.04	-.02	-.04	-.04	-.14

Note: Reliability Estimates are on the diagonal.
Significance Level ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$
For Gender Female was coded as 1, Male was coded as 2

Table 2 shows the regression results for the four dependent variables. Negative affect was positively correlated ($\beta = .35$, $p < .01$) and positive affect was negatively correlated ($\beta = -.38$, $p < .01$) with quality concerns stress in Step 1. The main effects of perceived accountability and politics perceptions entered in the second step accounted for a significant amount of variance beyond the control variables ($F(6, 94) = 8.26$, $p < .01$, $\Delta R^2 = .17$). Within this block perceived accountability and politics perceptions demonstrated a positive relationship with quality concerns stress. The perceived accountability x politics perceptions interaction was significant ($\beta = .27$, $p < .05$).

and explained incremental quality concerns stress variance ($\Delta R^2 = .02$, $p < .05$) in the final step. Thus, support was found for Hypothesis 1.

For the dependent variable responsibility pressures stress, age was positively related ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$) and gender was negatively correlated ($\beta = -.17$, $p < .05$) with responsibility pressure in Step 1. The main effects of perceived accountability and politics perceptions entered in Step 2 accounted for a significant amount of variance beyond the control variables ($F(6, 94) = 4.93$, $p < .01$, $\Delta R^2 = .14$). Within this block, perceived accountability and politics perceptions demonstrated a positive relationship with responsibility pressures. The perceived accountability \times politics perceptions interaction was not significant ($\beta = .05$, $p = .93$). Thus Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Hypothesis 3 concerning role conflict was tested. Positive affect was negatively correlated ($\beta = -.31$, $p < .01$) with role conflict in Step 1. The main effects of perceived accountability and politics perceptions entered in Step 2 accounted for a significant amount of variance beyond the control variables ($F(6, 94) = 4.28$, $p < .01$, $\Delta R^2 = .12$). However, the interaction was not significant in the final step; therefore Hypothesis 3 was not supported. For job vs. non-job conflict stress, negative affect was positively correlated ($\beta = .26$, $p < .01$) and positive affect was negatively correlated ($\beta = -.32$, $p < .01$) with job vs. non-job conflict in Step 1. The main effects of perceived accountability and politics perceptions entered in Step 2 demonstrated a significant positive relationship beyond the control variables ($F(6, 94) = 10.52$, $p < .01$, $\Delta R^2 = .20$). The perceived accountability \times politics perceptions interaction was significant ($\beta = 1.00$, $p < .05$) and explained incremental job vs. non-job conflict stress variance ($\Delta R^2 = .03$, $p < .05$) in the final step. Thus, support was found for Hypothesis 4.

Table 2: Regression

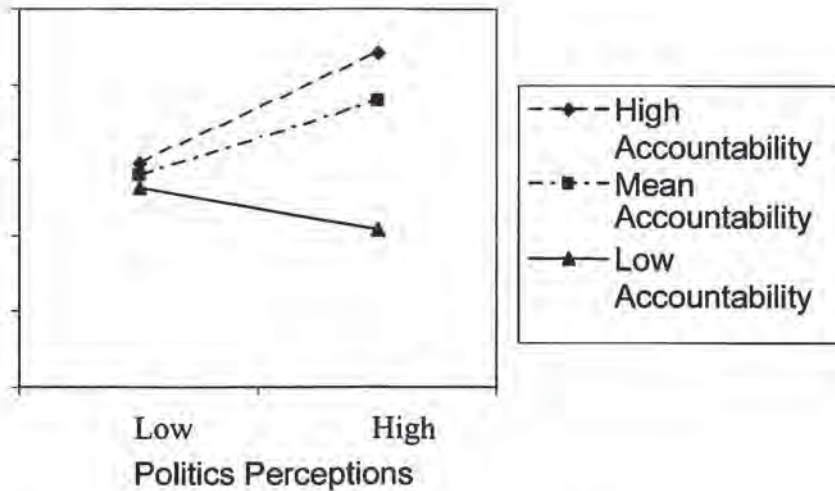
Variables	Quality Concerns Stress			Responsibility Pressures			Role Conflict			Job vs. Non-job Conflict		
	Step 1 β	Step 2 β	Step 3 β	Step 1 β	Step 2 β	Step 3 β	Step 1 β	Step 2 β	Step 3 β	Step 1 β	Step 2 β	Step 3 β
Age	.00	.00	.00	.17*	.13	.13	-.00	-.03	-.01	-.02	-.03	-.01
Gender	-.04	-.03	-.03	-.17*	-.16†	-.16†	-.05	-.04	-.03	-.05	-.02	-.02
Negative Affect	.35**	.31**	.31**	.15	.13	.13	.03	.01	.01	.26**	.22**	.23**
Positive Affect	-.38**	-.34**	-.35**	-.11	-.19*	-.19*	-.31**	-.34**	-.34**	-.32**	-.28**	-.28**
Accountability Perceptions (A)		.33**	-.42		.38**	.34		.31**	-.28		.29**	-.36
Politics Perceptions (B)		.43**	-.62		.16*	.11		.20*	-.58		.40**	-.47
A \times B			.27*			.05			.92			1.00*
R ²	.18**	.35**	.37*	.10*	.24**	.24	.10*	.22**	.24	.20**	.40**	.43*
ΔR^2		.17	.02		.14	.00		.12	.02		.20	.03
F	5.10**	8.26**	7.80**	2.57*	4.93**	4.18**	2.60*	4.28**	4.09**	6.00**	10.52**	9.89**
d.f.	(4,96)	(6,94)	(7,93)	(4,96)	(6,94)	(7,93)	(4,96)	(6,94)	(7,93)	(4,96)	(6,94)	(7,93)

Note: Significance Level ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; † $p < .10$

The significant perceived accountability x politics perceptions interaction terms were plotted across three levels of accountability. Following past research (Stone and Hollenbeck, 1989), three levels of perceived accountability scores were plotted at one standard deviation above the mean, at the mean, and at one standard deviation below the mean (See Figures 1 and 2). Each graph depicts interactions found to be significant.

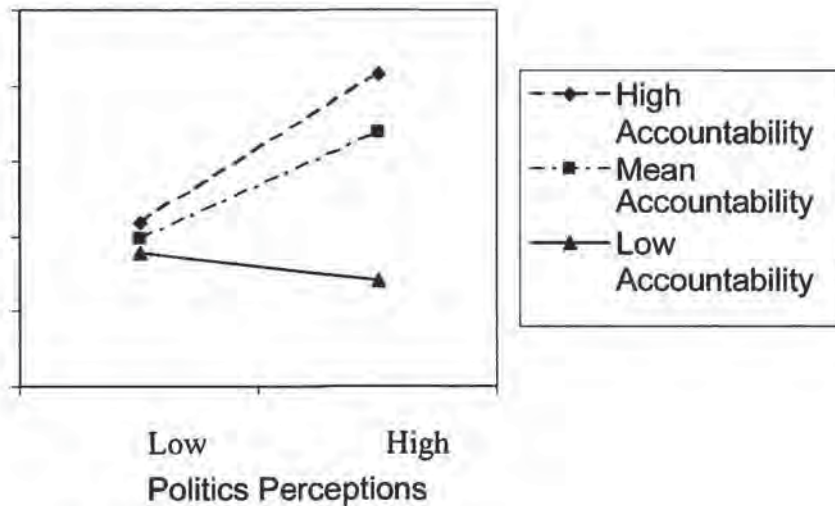
**Figure 1: Politics Perceptions x Perceived Accountability
Interaction with Quality Concerns Stress**

Quality Concerns Stress



**Figure 2: Politics Perceptions x Perceived Accountability
Interaction with Job vs. Non-job Conflict**

Job vs. Non-job Conflict



VII. Discussion

The objective of the current study was to provide theoretical and empirical support for the interactive effect of perceived accountability on the politics perceptions-stress relationship. To that end, support was found for two of the four hypothesized relationships. The findings suggest that individuals perceiving both high levels of politics and accountability report more quality concerns and report more job vs. non-job conflict. Furthermore, the findings also suggest that reports for quality concerns and job vs. non-job conflict are lower for individuals in high politics perceptions-low accountability conditions than for individuals in low politics perceptions-low accountability conditions. Finally, the current study failed to demonstrate an interaction effect for responsibility pressures and role conflict. The results of the current study provide several conceptual and practical implications, as well as, avenues for future research.

A. Theoretical Implications

The first theoretical contribution of the study concerns the role of accountability in the politics perceptions model. Prior to the study, accountability was proposed to be a direct antecedent to organizational politics (Ferris, Adams, et al., 2002). However, the findings indicate that accountability and organizational politics can interact, thus modifying outcome relationships. It is suggested that accountability is a dynamic phenomenon that may operate as both antecedent and moderator. As evidenced in the lower reported stress levels for the high politics perception-low accountability perceptions respondents, individuals appear to be using accountability or lack thereof as a coping mechanism in the stressor reappraisal processes (Lazarus, 1993). Future research will benefit by investigating accountability effects in a causal design.

Second, individuals may engage in several strategies in order to understand audience preferences. The current study supported the notion that individuals perceiving both high politics perceptions and perceived accountability are most likely engaging in increased information gathering strategies to discern expectations, and ultimately experiencing more stress. Unsure as to the relevant information, participants perceiving more politics appear to have difficulty discerning (1) what constitutes sufficient quality and (2) how to balance work and personal demands. Future research concerning the impact of politics perceptions and accountability perceptions is needed in the areas of task outcomes and work-family conflict.

Finally, the findings indicate that individuals who perceive lower accountability report less stress; these individuals also report lower stress in conditions of higher perceptions of politics. Carnevale (1985) suggests that individuals possess dual accountabilities and often are concerned with evaluations from multiple entities. Differential perceptions regarding accountability to coworkers, supervisors, or the organization may produce varied outcomes. Furthermore, the data failed to support an interaction between politics perceptions and accountability for responsibility pressure stress and role conflict stress. One can attribute measurement error to the responsibility pressure construct, as the scale reliability was outside acceptable ranges. Role conflict, on the other hand, was within acceptable ranges; yet, it merely had direct politics perception and accountability relationships. Data results do not suggest multicollinearity. Additionally, accountability items were not specific as to who does one account. Accountability perceptions are phenomenological in nature (Frink and Klimoski, 1999) and shifting perceptions may impact

the interaction effect. Future research will benefit by understanding to what specific parties these individuals attribute accountability.

B. Practical Implications

Accountability is an integral part of all social systems, including organizations. Moreover, accountability is generally considered a positive influence for eliciting adherence to company policies and fostering more thoughtful behavior employees. The findings indicate that the generally positive outcomes associated with accountability may not however produce the desired effect on employees. When employees perceive themselves as being highly accountable yet the work context is simultaneously perceived as highly politically, stress is also reported to be high. In particular, employees in this dual context experience high levels of quality concerns stress. Organizational politics is generally regarded as detrimental to organizational functioning as it lowers efficiency and effectiveness (Kacmar, Bozeman, Carlson, and Anthony, 1999). The results illustrate that accountability appears to amplify this negative effect of organizational politics as employees feel less confident in their ability to produce quality work and they feel compelled to engage in behaviors against their better judgment. A lack of formalization, for example, contributes to perceptions of politics and employees often believe favoritism or personal agendas determine outcomes such as performance appraisals and resource allocations, which distracts from producing quality work. Job performance quality may ultimately suffer because employees engage in "satisficing" – meeting all minimal expectations of the audience yet not performing to their fullest potential (Simon, 1945).

The findings also revealed that higher perceptions of politics combined with higher perceptions of organizational politics are associated with increased levels of job vs. non-job conflict stress. Hence, as politics reduces the perceived objectivity of decision making, employees appear to feel compelled to devote more time to the office at the expense of family time. Ultimately, this tension impacts employees and organizations. Work-family conflict is related to increased levels of employee stress, turnover intentions, and absenteeism (Anderson et al., 2000). Individuals suffer psychological and physiological strain; whereas organizations incur costs associated with missed work or replacing employees. Although the exact costs are particular to an organization and the positions involved, estimates of turnover costs range from an average of 25 percent of salary (Potter, 2004) to over 100 percent of salary as the level and complexity of the specific position increases (Joinson, 2000).

In sum, a principal implication of the current study is that organizations should carefully consider how employees fit with their work environments. Modern work environments are by and large considered to be less formalized than in the past, which increases perceptions of organizational politics. Also appeals are being made for increased or better accountability concerning decision making. Accountability is not however a cure-all (Lerner and Tetlock, 1999). Thus, to minimize the possibility of employees feeling stressed in such environments, organizations may carefully consider matching employees, whether newly hired or a currently employed, with the demands of a job. This can be accomplished by awareness of certain individual difference variables. For example, individuals with political skill interpret the demands of work less aversively and have higher confidence to cope with job demands (Perrewé, Ferris, Frink, and Anthony, 2000). Understanding, the degree to which one understands the cause-effect relationship of work related events, also reduces the stress of organizational politics (Ferris et al., 1996). Both traits equip individuals to be more adaptive to the demands of the workplace as potential threats are perceived as less aversive, or as opportunities to get ahead.

C. Strengths and Limitations

The present study has several strengths worth noting. First, the diversity of respondent occupations and education levels offers evidence that the findings generalize beyond a single organizational sample or job type. Second, a majority of the participants were employed in a supervisory capacity and therefore expected to be acutely attuned to both the accountability and political elements of their working environments. Last and perhaps most significantly, this study adds to the growing understanding of both organizational politics and accountability by conceptualizing and demonstrating the interactive role of perceived accountability. Although much has been learned regarding the topic of organizational politics much remains to be discovered (Ferris, Adams, et al., 2002). The research may thus serve as a springboard for studies into outcomes of perceived organizational politics, in work to family and family to work conflict.

The findings do have limitations. First, participants were selected via enrolled students from a university. The nature of this method limits some of the controls concerning the accuracy of the survey responses. However, this method is consistent with other studies (Hall et al., 2003; Treadway, Perrewé, Ferris, Hochwarter, Witt, and Goodman, 2005) and preliminary validation checks support participant accuracy. Second, this study relied upon a single method of self-report data gathering. Although self-reports may not produce completely objective data due to employee moods or other biases, this method is generally the proper choice for measuring perceptions and other internal states (Spector, 1994). Third, the study failed to control for individual difference variables that might impact; a) perceptions of accountability; b) politics perceptions; and c) specific reactions to occupational stress. It is, indeed, plausible that one's political astuteness might impact the relationship. Nevertheless, the current investigation sought to reposition accountability as much more than an antecedent to politics perceptions and provide a springboard for further analysis. Fourth, Ferris, Russ, and Fandt (1989) addressed job tension as the dependent variable. The current study addressed occupational stress. Thus, the data extends the nomological network; yet, follow up investigations should include job tension measures.

Additionally, a post-hoc power analysis was conducted to assess the probability of appropriately rejecting the null hypothesis. Using G*Power 3.0.10 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, and Buchner, 2007), power for the current study equaled .63 versus the conventional rule-of-thumb of .80. At least two possible considerations concerning power can be made. First, power may be increased with fewer predictor variables in what Cohen et al., (2003) identify as the "less in more principle". Sample size is of course also a factor in statistical power. A larger sample size, all other factors equal, is expected to increase statistical power (Cohen et al., 2003). That being said, McClelland and Judd (1993) note that hypothesized interactive effects in field studies are often difficult to detect and even if statistically significant, the additional variance accounted for is often nominal. Statistical power for interactive effects in field studies, as compared to controlled experiments, is negatively affected not only by "noise" affecting reliability and measurement error, but also by the nature of the distribution of the independent variables. These authors demonstrated that even if all other factors are equal (e.g., measurement error, sample size), that the degree of variance in field studies is less (based on a normal distributions) due to fewer extreme cases, which ultimately decreases the residual variance of the interactive term and the statistical power. Ultimately, a sample of prodigious size may be required to significantly increase power.

D. Conclusions

Both politics perceptions and accountability have predicted job stress in past research. The current study investigated the interactive effects of these two constructs upon quality concern stress, responsibility pressures, role conflict, and job vs. non-job conflict. Theory and data support an interactive effect; yet a clearer understanding would benefit from longitudinal examinations, a single organizational source, and a larger sample size. The findings also implicate, from an applied perspective, that the expected benefits of greater perceived accountability are tempered when employees also perceived their job environment as highly political.

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