The role of age in the perceptions of politics-job performance relationship: A three-study constructive replication
The Role of Age in the Perceptions of Politics – Job Performance Relationship: A Three-Study Constructive Replication

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This research examined the interaction of organizational politics perceptions and employee age on job performance in 3 studies. On the basis of conservation of resources theory, the authors predicted that perceptions of politics would demonstrate their most detrimental effects on job performance for older workers. Results across the 3 studies provided strong support for the hypothesis that increases in politics perceptions are associated with decreases in job performance for older employees and that perceptions of politics do not affect younger employees’ performance. Implications of these results, strengths and limitations, and directions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: politics, age, performance, resources, stress

Organizational politics represents a phenomenon that has been either directly discussed or implicitly referenced in characterizations of organizations for decades. Scholars in the late 1970s and early 1980s initiated theory and empirical research that witnessed the progression of thought from organizational politics as objective reality to subjective perception (e.g., Gandz & Murray, 1980; Madison, Allen, Porter, Renwick, & Mayes, 1980; Porter, 1976). Perceptions of politics consist of an individual’s observation of others’ self-interested behaviors, such as the selective manipulation of organizational policies (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992).

Ferris, Russ, and Fundt (1989) introduced the first theoretical model of the antecedents and consequences of politics perceptions, which has stimulated considerable research activity over subsequent years to the present. Perceptions of organizational politics have been conceptualized as environmental stressors (e.g., Ferris, Frink, Galang, et al., 1996) that relate to a number of important work outcomes. However, little evidence exists regarding the relationship between perceptions of organizational politics and job performance.

In their comprehensive review of the reported research since publication of Ferris et al.’s (1989) original model, Ferris, Adams, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, and Anmeter (2002) reconfigured the original model to better reflect reported results to date and issued appeals for more work in a number of areas. Two of their recommendations concern the role of age in the model and the largely ignored work outcome variable of job performance. Ferris et al.’s (1989) original model positioned age as an antecedent of politics perceptions. However, both Ferris, Adams, et al.’s (2002) comprehensive review and a meta-analysis by Stepanski, Kershaw, and Arkakelian (2000) reported inconsistent and problematic findings with age as a predictor and recommended age be reconsidered as a potential moderator of the politics perceptions – work outcomes relationships in future work. However, neither Ferris, Adams, et al. (2002) nor Stepanski et al. (2000) provided a theoretical justification for this moderating effect. The current study extends the politics perceptions literature by offering conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) as a theoretical basis for this relationship.

The purpose of the present research is to examine the influence of age as a moderator of the politics perceptions – job performance relationship. To establish a pattern of results, we undertook a constructive replication (Lykken, 1968) by conducting three separate studies. In doing so, we sought to strengthen confidence in the validity of the relationships depicted by the empirical results. Conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001) is examined as the theoretical foundation to formulate the hypothesis concerning the form and magnitude of the Politics Perceptions × Age interaction on job performance.

Perceptions of Organizational Politics

Predicated on the belief that organizational politics represent a subjective rather than an objective reality, Gandz and Murray (1980) argued that politics perceptions are the product of several individual and organizational characteristics. Expanding on these early notions, Ferris et al. (1989) developed the seminal model of organizational politics perceptions, which positioned politics per-
ceptions as a product of the organization (e.g., centralization, formalization, hierarchical level, span of control), the job (e.g., autonomy, skill variety, feedback, advancement opportunity), and individual influences (e.g., age, sex, Machiavellianism, self-monitoring). Of more importance, this model was the first to provide a conceptual understanding of the potential outcomes of politics perceptions in organizations.

Recently, Ferris, Adams, et al. (2002) conducted an extensive review of the empirical evaluations of the initial perceptions of politics model. This review indicated that several of the linkages specified in Ferris et al.’s (1989) original model had been unsupported by subsequent empirical testing. These authors refined and expanded the model of politics perceptions in organizations, and within this revised model was an appeal to provide evidence of the relationship between politics perceptions and job performance. Furthermore, consistent with a general lack of knowledge about the role of demographic factors in social influence processes (Ferris, Hochwarter, et al., 2002), these authors called for a greater understanding of the impact of individual difference variables on the politics perceptions process.

The Politics Perceptions – Job Performance Relationship

Job performance is a multidimensional concept. Traditionally, researchers have viewed job performance as the aspects of the job that contribute to creating the products of the organization (Campbell, McClay, Oppler, & Sager, 1993). However, in the current service economy, performance criteria often are ambiguous and difficult to define. In response to this reality, scholars have offered a second perspective on the nature of work performance. This view of job performance, labeled “contextual performance,” is conceptualized as contributing to organizational effectiveness through improvements in the cohesion of the work group, climate of the organization, and the general organizational experience for others (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993). Contextual performance in organizational roles involves working with enthusiasm, cooperating with others, following organizational rules, and supporting organizational objectives.

The ambiguity inherent in the new realities of job performance provides ample opportunity for individuality and advantage seeking. Indeed, performance assessment repeatedly has been cited as an area in which political activity is pervasive (e.g., Longenecker, Sims, & Gioia, 1987; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, Blauuw, & Vermunt, 1999; Wayne, Liden, Graf, & Ferris, 1997). However, little is known regarding the effects of perceptions of politics on objective or contextual job performance. To our knowledge, only three studies have evaluated the politics perceptions – job performance linkage hypothesized in Ferris et al.’s (1989) model, and the results of these studies have been inconsistent.

In agreement with Ferris et al.’s (1989) original model, Randall, Cropanzano, Bormann, and Birjulin (1999) suggested that politics perceptions would be inversely related to in-role job performance and organizational citizenship behavior. These researchers conceptualized political environments as risky investments for employees, and, as such, they argued that employees would be likely to invest little time and energy in these work arrangements. Despite the merits of this argument, the results of the study did not support this relationship at conventional levels of statistical significance.

From a different perspective, Vigoda (2000) suggested that the relationship between person-organization fit and in-role job performance and organizational citizenship behavior would be fully mediated by perceptions of organizational politics. The author argued that increased fit between the values of the employee and the values of the organization would reduce perceptions of politics, thereby increasing job performance. Vigoda’s hypotheses were supported, and the results of this study demonstrated that politics perceptions are inversely related to in-role and extra-role job performance.

The inconsistent nature of the direct relationship between politics perceptions and job performance suggests a more complex relationship, which might be dependent on environmental and individual considerations. For example, Witt (1998) argued that the relationship between perceptions of politics and job performance was contingent on the context of the work environment. He viewed the congruence between subordinate and supervisor goals as being a key factor in the assessment of politics perceptions’ impact on job performance. To the degree that these goals are congruent, Witt argued that employees would have greater control over, and understanding of, their work environment. Analyses of a pooled sample of five organizations supported Witt’s hypothesis, thus demonstrating that these feelings serve to buffer employees from the stress-inducing effects of politics perceptions.

Individual differences also might serve to accentuate or ameliorate the politics perceptions – job performance relationship. Indeed, some research has shown that the personality characteristics of agreeableness, extraversion, and conscientiousness serve to buffer the detrimental impact of politics perceptions on the interpersonal facilitation dimension of contextual performance (Witt, Kacmar, Carlson, & Zivnuska, 2002). These findings lend support to the positioning of several individual difference variables as moderators of the politics perceptions – outcomes relationships in the revised politics perceptions model (Ferris, Adams, et al., 2002). Consistent with this model, the present research argues that age is an important moderator variable in the relationship between perceptions of politics and job performance, and we provide an integrative conceptualization of COR theory to serve as the conceptual foundation driving this research.

COR Theory

The COR framework encompasses several stress theories and provides important insights to the study of stressor and strain relationships (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999; Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfall & Freedy, 1993; Ito & Brotheridge, 2003; T. A. Wright & Hobfoll, 2004). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined stress as “a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being” (p. 19). Implicit in this definition is that experienced stress is not the result of an imbalance between objective demands and response capabilities but of the perception of these factors. In a similar vein, the COR theory proposes that experienced stress is most likely to occur when there is an actual resource loss, a perceived threat of resource loss, a situation in which one’s resources are perceived to be inadequate to meet work demands, or when the anticipated returns are not obtained on an investment of resources (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001).
COR theory posits four principal resource categories—(a) object resources (e.g., home, vehicles), (b) condition resources (e.g., socioeconomic status, valued work role), (c) personal resources (e.g., self-esteem, mastery), and (d) energy resources (e.g., money, time, credit)—that are valued by the individual, and they serve as a means for the attainment of goals (Freund & Riediger, 2001). Thus, events are stressful to the extent that they threaten or result in loss of critical individual resources.

More directly, COR theory states that stress occurs with resource loss, that events are stressful to the extent they make demands that outstrip resources, and that resources are those things that are used to meet demands. Environmental conditions in the workplace (e.g., perceptions of organizational politics) may threaten or cause a depletion of employees’ resources, such as status, position, or self-esteem. During a stressful situation, an individual has to offset one resource loss with other resources (Hobfoll, 1989). It is commonly held that the loss of resources can be cumulative as stressors pile up. After initial losses, fewer resources are available for stress resistance; hence, the individual is less resilient and more vulnerable to stressors.

Hobfoll and Shirom (2000) offered four corollaries of the COR theory: (a) Individuals must bring in resources to prevent the loss of resources, (b) individuals with a greater pool of resources are less susceptible to resource loss and are more capable of resource gain, (c) those individuals who do not have access to strong resource pools are more likely to experience increased resource loss (i.e., initial losses lead to further losses), and (d) strong resource pools lead to the greater likelihood that individuals will seek opportunities to risk resources for increased resource gains. Hobfoll (2001) related these corollaries to workplace stress research and noted factors such as optimism–pessimism, self-efficacy (mastery), and self-esteem as resources in reducing stress. For example, Hobfoll and Shirom (2000) argued that personality traits that made individuals more inclined toward a sense of resiliency and control over their environment appeared to partially protect individuals from experienced stress.

Previous research has used the COR framework as an explanation for a stressor–job performance link. For example, T. A. Wright and Cropanzano (1998) argued that emotional exhaustion represented a condition in which an employee was drained of resources. As such, they argued that these individuals would be unable to rally the resources necessary to overcome the organizational stressors and maintain adequate levels of performance. Consistent with this line of reasoning, we assert that perceived politics is an organizational stressor and that older individuals possess fewer resources to respond to these challenges.

Perceptions of Politics as a Threat to Depletion of Resources

Work-related demands or stressors continue to receive research attention, and several studies have indicated that stress-related conditions are among the most important health problems for people at work. Environmental circumstances, such as perceptions of organizational politics, can be thought of as work demands, which are potential sources of stress (Cummings & Cooper, 1979; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), as they threaten or cause a depletion of the resources individuals possess. Furthermore, research indicates that workplace politics are a significant concern (Landrum, 2000) and source of stress (Austin, 1994) for workers in midlife and beyond.

Individual differences variables are included as a component of the COR model. According to COR theory, individual differences can be treated as resources enabling people to cope more effectively with stressful events. Investigations of various general resistance resources suggest that personal characteristics, such as self-esteem and optimistic action, are valuable psychological resources long believed to aid stress resistance (Antonovsky, 1979; Hobfoll, 1989) or help overcome stressful circumstances (Pearlin, Lieberman, Menaghan, & Mullan, 1981). COR theory stipulates that once a stressor has been identified, individuals, as active agents, will strive to restore equilibrium within their lives. The success of these efforts depends on the individuals’ psychological resources. The COR model proposes that with more personal resources, individuals might be able to offset the loss of other resources in their jobs. Furthermore, COR theory predicts that people with greater initial psychological resources will be able to mobilize them in a time of stress to affect a lesser net loss than those with fewer resources (Hobfoll, 2001; see also Aldwin, 1994).

Furthermore, such resources appear to be important in moderating the effects of resource losses on strains. Indeed, some research indicates that improved functioning over the course of a stressful experience is predicted by one’s initial level of resources (Holahan & Moos, 1990). When people feel they can modify or reduce some aspects of a stressful situation, they cope more successfully (see Thompson, 1981). Conversely, those who believe they cannot manage threats experience high levels of stress. Consistent with this line of reasoning, the current article argues that age represents an important individual characteristic in the COR framework.

COR, Age, and Perceived Politics

Resources are not distributed equally, and those with fewer resources are the most vulnerable to additional losses (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). Whereas research does not indicate that older employees have fewer personal resources (i.e., skills) to respond to stress than their younger counterparts, we argue that the demands on individual resources are greater later in life because of the increases in stressful life events (e.g., death of loved ones, midlife transition). If “[w]e cannot combat stress without incurring the costs of arming our defense” (Hobfoll & Wells, 1998, p. 124), then the resources of older employees are more likely depleted and therefore more susceptible to additional reduction from the increased demands imposed by midlife and beyond. Congruently, Hobfoll and Wells (1998) suggested that as people age, there is an increase in cognitive and emotional demands, which alters response strategies to threats involving valued resources.

From this perspective, there appear to be three potential explanations for the moderating effect of age on the politics perceptions – job performance relationship. First, it is possible that older employees who perceive politics experience stress because their resources have been depleted in the process of trying to deal with organizational politics over time. Indeed, older employees often experience differential treatment in the work environment because of their age (Lawrence, 1988; Shore, Cleveland, & Goldberg, 2003). Furthermore, this treatment is often implicitly political in
nature (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992). Resource depletion as a result of coping with political activity can lead to a negative “state of being,” which may include lower performance (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996).

A second implication of the COR framework involves the manner in which employees interpret their environment. One way individuals conserve their resources is by reinterpreting threats as challenges (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). Employees might perceive organizational politics as an opportunity or challenge if they believe they possess adequate resources to effectively manage the political environment. Because their resources are not overstretched, it is possible that younger workers will interpret political environments as a challenge rather than a threat.

A final explanation for the moderating effect of age on the politics perceptions – job performance relationship may be that as individuals grow older, their reactivity to stressors (e.g., organizational politics) may increase because of the repeated exposure to these stressors (Mroczek & Almeida, 2004). This heightened sensitivity is similar to “kindling effects” in which repeated exposure to a stimulus causes sensitization; hence, an individual in a kindled state is more sensitive to that stimulus. Mroczek and Almeida (2004) found older adults to have a stronger relationship between daily stress and negative affect than younger adults.

Furthermore, they argued that younger adults are, in general, less reactive to daily stress. These findings suggest that older employees have lower levels of personal resources that allow them to frame organizational events in a positive light (Hobfoll & Wells, 1998). Indeed, if older workers are more reactive to, and possess fewer personal resources to cope with, organizational stressors than younger workers, this may be another reason why older workers experience more resource loss. Thus, older workers may be less resilient to perceptions of organizational politics.

Plan of the Present Research

Hypothesis Testing

The present research sought to establish the moderating effect of age on the perceptions of politics – job performance relationship in a way that satisfies the components of a constructive replication (Lykken, 1968), which should maximize confidence in the validity of the obtained results. Study 1 attempted to establish age as a moderator of the politics perceptions – job performance relationship, whereas Studies 2 and 3 sought to replicate the form and magnitude of the interaction using different construct measures (i.e., constructive replications). Age plays a central role in moderating the relationship between perceptions of organizational politics and job performance. Toward providing a theoretical explanation for this relationship, perceptions of organizational politics were positioned as a stressor or demand within the COR paradigm. Hence, we posited the following hypothesis: Age will moderate the relationship between perceptions of organizational politics and job performance such that politics perceptions will more adversely impact the job performance of older employees.

Control Variables

Previous research involving perceptions of politics and job performance has indicated the need to control for other sources of variance. Specifically, the current research identified gender and position tenure as variables that may affect the relationship between politics perceptions and job performance as moderated by age, and thus these variables were used as controls.

Ferris et al. (1989) postulated that because women traditionally have not occupied high-power positions in organizations, they often have been the targets of political behavior. These authors suggested that female employees were more likely to perceive politics than their male counterparts. Women were believed to be “outsiders” to the predominantly male organizational structure. Although this hypothesized relationship has yielded mixed findings (Ferris, Frink, Bhawuk, Zhou, & Gilmore, 1996; Ferris, Frink, Galang, et al., 1996; Parker, Dipboye, & Jackson, 1995), gender has been found to influence politics perceptions (Ferris, Adams, et al., 2002). In addition, a recent meta-analysis (Stepanski et al., 2000) found gender to be a significant moderator of politics perceptions – outcome relationships. Therefore, the current research included gender as a control variable.

Because most of the contextual cues that individuals receive at work originate from their proximal work setting, position tenure was controlled for as well. We contend that time spent in the organization represents a distal information source because individuals do not have the cognitive capacities or temporal resources to formulate opinions regarding political behavior across all organizational boundaries. Conversely, prior research (Brim, 1966) has suggested that position tenure has the potential to predict individuals’ relationships with work. In support of this notion, Katz (1978) reported that task dimension – job satisfaction relationships were affected by position tenure even when the influence of age and growth needs strength was considered.

Study 1

Method

Participants and Procedures

Surveys were distributed to 1,234 technical and clerical employees of a large university in the southeastern United States. A total of 411 completed surveys were returned for a response rate of 33.3%. Most respondents were female (approximately 85%); age and position tenure averaged 41.63 years (SD = 10.13) and 3.83 years (SD = 3.83), respectively. Archival data provided by the university suggest that the sample did not differ significantly from the overall population with respect to age and gender.

Measures

Perceptions of politics. Kacmar and Carlson’s (1997) 15-item Perceptions of Politics Scale was used to measure politics perceptions (α = .88). “People in this organization attempt to build themselves up by tearing others down” is a representative item. A 5-point response format (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) was used.

Job performance. The organization’s performance appraisal form was included in the survey. Respondents were asked to report the scores from their most recent review. Actual forms were made available from the Human Resource Department. The 15-item form (α = .95) used a 5-point response format (i.e., 1 = unsatisfactory to 5 = outstanding). Specific dimensions of work included quality of work, quantity of work, job knowledge, and use of work time. The average for the 411 respondents (M = 4.35, SD = 0.59) was similar to the population average provided by the Human Resource Department (M = 4.33, SD = 0.56).
Individual characteristics. Respondents were asked to provide their gender, age (in years), and position tenure (in years) on the survey in each study.

Data Analysis

Moderated multiple regression (MMR) analyses were conducted to test the interaction of Politics Perceptions × Age on job performance (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003) in all three studies. Variables were centered prior to their inclusion in the regression analysis. In the first step, gender and position tenure were included, followed by age and politics perceptions in the second step. The Politics Perceptions × Age cross-product term was included in the third step. MMR analysis tests for the significance of the increment in criterion variance explained by the interaction term beyond that attributed to the main effects.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among study variables are shown in Table 1, and Table 2 presents results of the MMR. Gender (β = .31, p < .01) and position tenure (β = .01, p < .01) predicted performance in Step 1. Age (β = .01, p < .05) was related to performance, whereas politics perceptions were not (β = −.07, ns). Finally, the Age × Politics Perceptions cross-product term was significant (β = −.02, p < .01) and explained incremental job performance variance (ΔR² = .03, p < .01).

The significant Age × Politics Perceptions interaction term was plotted across three levels of age (Stone & Hollenbeck, 1989): at 1 standard deviation above the mean, at the mean, and at 1 standard deviation below the mean. As shown in Figure 1, increased politics perceptions had little effect on younger employees (β = .09, ns). Conversely, the relationship between politics perceptions and job performance for older employees was significant and inverse, as hypothesized (β = −.22, p < .01).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tr>
<td>Study 1 (N = 411)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Gendera</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>0.34</td>
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<td>2. Position tenure (years)</td>
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<td>3.83</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Age (years)</td>
<td>41.63</td>
<td>10.13</td>
<td>.11*</td>
<td>.40**</td>
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<td>4. Politics perceptions</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>−.05</td>
<td>.10*</td>
<td>.11*</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Performance</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>.16**</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>−.07</td>
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<td>1. Gendera</td>
<td>0.54</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Position tenure (years)</td>
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<td>2.70</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Age (years)</td>
<td>44.25</td>
<td>8.31</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.25**</td>
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<td>4. Politics perceptions</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.08</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Performance</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>−.02</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>−.15†</td>
<td>−.09</td>
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<td>Study 3 (N = 263)</td>
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<td>1. Gendera</td>
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<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Position tenure (years)</td>
<td>6.60</td>
<td>7.22</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Age (years)</td>
<td>41.12</td>
<td>10.69</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.51**</td>
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<td>4. Politics perceptions</td>
<td>3.65</td>
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<td>.02</td>
<td>−.07</td>
<td>−.08</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Performance</td>
<td>6.11</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>−.02</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>−.12*</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

*a Gender was coded as 1 for men and 2 for women. b Gender was coded as 0 for men and 1 for women. † p < .10. * p < .05. ** p < .01.
Results

Tables 1 and 2 contain Study 2 results. Politics perceptions were related to job performance \( (\beta = -.01, p < .01) \), and the Politics Perceptions \( \times \) Age cross-product term \( (\beta = -.01, p < .01) \) explained incremental variance \( (\Delta R^2 = .03, p < .01) \). The significant interaction is plotted in Figure 2. Consistent with the previous study, job performance levels remained largely unchanged across levels of politics perceptions for those classified as “average age.” From a practical perspective, job performance was slightly higher for younger employees as politics perceptions increased, although the slope was not significantly different from zero \( (\beta = .02, ns) \). Furthermore, perceptions of politics had its most harmful effects on older employees \( (\beta = -.17, p < .05) \).

Study 3
Method

Participants and Procedures

Students at a large university in the southeastern United States were given three surveys to be completed by individuals currently holding full-time jobs. A total of 263 surveys contained completed measures of both independent and dependent variables. A wide range of occupations was represented in this sample, including bank vice president, director of purchasing, and pipe fitter. The sample consisted of 137 women (52%) and 126 men (48%); the average age was approximately 41 years \( (M = 41.12, SD = 10.69) \), and position tenure was roughly 7 years \( (M = 6.60, SD = 7.32) \).

Measures

Perceptions of politics. Kacmar and Carlson’s (1997) Perceptions of Politics Scale was used to measure politics perceptions \( (\alpha = .81) \).

Job performance. Self-report performance \( (\alpha = .80) \) was measured using a 10-item scale developed by P. Wright, Kacmar, McMahan, and Deleeuw (1995). “My boss is never disappointed in the quality of work that I provide” is a representative item. Responses were scored on a continuum that ranged from 1 (0% of the time) to 8 (100% of the time).

Results

Table 1 contains descriptive statistics for Study 3, and Table 2 reports MMR results. Politics perceptions predicted job performance in Step 2 \( (\beta = .01, p < .01) \). The Age \( \times \) Politics Perceptions cross-product term explained incremental performance variance \( (\beta = -.02, \Delta R^2 = .02, p < .05) \). Results for the Politics

### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step and variable</th>
<th>Study 1 ( (N = 411) )</th>
<th>Study 2 ( (N = 103) )</th>
<th>Study 3 ( (N = 263) )</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( \beta )</td>
<td>( \Delta R^2 )</td>
<td>( \beta )</td>
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<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>- .05</td>
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<td>Position tenure</td>
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<td>Step 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>.02*</td>
<td>-.01*</td>
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<td>Politics perceptions</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3</td>
<td>-.02**</td>
<td>.03**</td>
<td>-.01**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* \( p < .05 \). ** \( p < .01 \).
Perceptions × Age interaction on employee performance are shown in Table 1. For younger employees, job performance increased minimally with increases in politics perceptions ($\beta = .02, n.s.$). As evident in Figure 3, the hypothesis that politics perceptions reflected the most deleterious effect on job performance for older individuals ($\beta = -.19, p < .05$) was confirmed.

General Discussion

The current research advanced the argument that the relationship between perceptions of politics and job performance is contingent on the individual characteristics of employees. COR theory was offered as conceptual grounding for Ferris, Adams, et al.’s (2002) conclusion that age is best conceptualized as a moderator of the politics perceptions – work outcomes relationships. Specifically, this research argued that the relationship between politics perceptions and job performance was moderated by age, such that elevated levels of politics perceptions would adversely affect the performance of older employees. Study 1 established the form and magnitude of the proposed Politics Perceptions × Age interaction effect, and these results were constructively replicated (Lykken, 1968) in Studies 2 and 3. These results provide some important directions for future research, as well as implications for human resource professionals.

Contribution

The current research offers two important contributions. First, COR theory provides a theoretical explanation for age-related decrements in work performance due to organizational stressors. Specifically, on the basis of COR theory, we argue that older workers are more vulnerable than younger workers to organizational politics because, over time, their resources have been depleted due to repeated exposure to workplace stressors.

These findings have important implications for managers. Employees may become more vulnerable to workplace stressors as they age, but it may not be due to age per se. The heightened strain responses may be due to a depletion of resources that has taken place over time. Thus, a younger employee may exhibit the same depletion of cognitive and/or emotional resources if forced to endure stressful circumstances for a prolonged period of time. Reducing the magnitude and frequency of employees’ exposure to job stressors likely will play a large role in enhancing job performance. Moreover, COR-based practical implications recently have emerged, stressing the need to diagnose and “augment and replenish workers’ resources” (Shirom & Ezrachi, 2003, p. 93).

Second, this research extends the age and performance literature as well as the perceptions of politics literature by considering age as a moderator. Previous research has relied too heavily on bivariate examinations of the relationship between age and job performance and between perceptions of politics and job performance. The results of these studies have important implications for previous research regarding age and job performance.

Whereas job performance is widely investigated in the organizational sciences as an outcome of the aging process, research has failed to provide definitive answers regarding the nature of the relationship. A meta-analysis conducted by Waldman and Avolio (1986) suggested that performance might increase with age. In contrast, a more extensive meta-analysis conducted by McEvoy and Cascio (1989) indicated that age and job performance, in general, are unrelated. Other research has shown that the relationship between age and job performance often is affected by contextual considerations (e.g., Ferris, Judge, Chachere, & Liden, 1991; Lawrence, 1988, 1996). The current research suggests that the political context within which individuals operate may have an effect on work performance for older employees.

Strengths and Limitations

The present set of studies has several strengths that are worth noting. Foremost, this research provided a constructive replication of the hypothesized relationships. Lykken (1968) suggested that using this technique provides more confidence in the magnitude and form of the hypothesized relationship. Specifically, this technique provides evidence that the interaction more likely represents the “true” relationship between the variables rather than an artifact of the sample or measurement technique. In addition, the occupational diversity of the respondents in our samples offers evidence that the phenomenon may be generalizable across organizations and occupations. Finally, we were able to use second-source performance data to represent the dependent variable in one of our three studies.

This research has limitations that must be considered when assessing the contribution of the current set of studies. First, we did not measure exposure to stressors directly. On the basis of COR theory, we proposed that older workers’ resources are depleted, thus, perceptions of organizational politics affect their performance negatively. Future research is needed to examine stressor exposure to determine whether this is, in fact, the primary explanatory variable.

Second, the current research was unable to control for professional experience as suggested by Gordon and Johnson (1982). However, the findings and assertions of Schwab and Heneman (1978) and Gordon and Johnson related specifically to objective and quantifiable performance. The current research is predominantly interested in subjective or contextual performance ratings. As recommended, we statistically controlled for position tenure because our investigation was within the subjective performance evaluation context (e.g., Shore & Bleicken, 1991). It is plausible,
though, that the subjective nature of performance ratings, for service type employees, includes task-relevant behaviors (Bommer, Johnson, Rich, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 1991). Future research would benefit from a more rigorous evaluation of the relationship between objective and subjective performance appraisals.

Third, the current study was unable to capture some variables that have been shown to affect politics perceptions – outcome relationships, specifically goal and value congruence. For example, Witt (1998) found that high goal congruence between supervisors and employees reduced the detrimental effects of politics perceptions. Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey, and Toth (1997) further suggested that when individuals’ goals match those of the organization, these individuals are likely to make positive evaluations of the organization. Furthermore, such positive evaluations may produce a greater person–environment fit and result in lower levels of perceived politics (Vigoda, 2000). Because an individual’s goals and values may change as he or she ages (Giacomino & Eaton, 2003), the results of the current study must be interpreted in light of the omission of these variables.

A final limitation is that two of the studies used self-reported measures of job performance that may be more susceptible to inflation than other ratings of performance. However, some research has shown a moderate correlation between self and supervisor ratings of performance (Harris & Schaubroeck, 1988). Notably, the results across the three studies were very similar. Given Lykken’s (1968) perspective on constructive replication, we believe that similar findings across diverse samples and operationalizations of the constructs strengthen our argument for the relationship between the variables of interest.

Directions for Future Research

Despite a voluminous amount of research on organizational politics, little is known about the dynamics of age in the organizational politics process. For example, engaging in political behaviors in response to politics perceptions may mediate the perceptions-of-politics/job-performance relationship. Within the broader context of research on organizational politics, only a handful of studies have assessed the role of age in the enactment of political behavior (e.g., Delery & Kacmar, 1998; Hochwarter, 2003). In these cases, the relationship between age and political behavior has been inconsistent.

It may be that one of the reasons older workers’ performance declines under conditions of organizational politics perceptions is because their resources are depleted because of demonstration of political behavior. Over time, older workers may tire of the political process and disengage from the organization by lowering their performance. Alternatively, it might be the case that job-performance decreases for older individuals might be a function of the heightened strain reactions that are due to a simultaneous depletion of resources that has taken place over time and the selection of control tactics that offset the adverse effects of workplace politics (Wrenn & Maurer, 2004).

In contrast to this approach, it could be argued that older employees are often in a position that provides them the opportunity to control the distribution of organizational resources and/or policies. In these situations, usually coincident with the higher levels of the organizational hierarchy, older employees could use political means to enrich their own resource base, thereby making them less vulnerable to workplace politics. Whereas the number of individuals who are afforded these privileges may be significantly less than the number of employees who are not, it is possible that the formal and/or informal power structure within an organization affects the relationships described in the current study. Clearly, future research would benefit from a more dynamic evaluation of resource constraints, organizational structure, and bases of power.

Toward developing a more informed understanding of the relationships reported in the current research, future research would profit from a more systematic examination of the motivation patterns of younger and older employees. For example, younger employees may be prone to employ active control tactics in an effort to acquire resources yet to be attained. Alternatively, older employees may opt for reactive tactics because the goal is simply to protect what already has been secured.

Furthermore, the choice of control behaviors at work may have little to do with work per se. According to socioemotional selectivity theory, goals that individuals pursue are not temporally consistent (Carstensen, 1992). Because age is inversely associated with future time, socioemotional selectivity theory argues that as individuals age they become more interested in emotionally meaningful objectives, such as developing and maintaining close social relationships (Fredrickson & Carstensen, 1990). Younger individuals perceive time as comparatively open-ended and focus more directly on acquisition activities, such as seeking information or expanding their skill base (Carstensen, 1992; Fung & Carstensen, 2004). On the basis of this discussion, determining why older individuals are adversely affected in political environments will likely require a commitment to multidisciplinary research (e.g., aging, family, sociology).

Conclusion

By the year 2010, the number of American workers 45 to 64 years of age will comprise 40.4% of the adult workforce, an increase of 29.3% from 2000 (Day, 1996). However, the organizational sciences still reflect little knowledge of older workers that can inform practice of how to effectively manage this changing workforce. The current research provides evidence from three studies that the effect of perceived politics on job performance is moderated by age. Extending COR theory, it appears that older employees may possess less work-related resources than do their younger counterparts. Whereas the current research informs our understanding of age in the workplace, there is much to be gained from further exploring the effect of politics, stress, and resource conservation on the experience of older workers.

References


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