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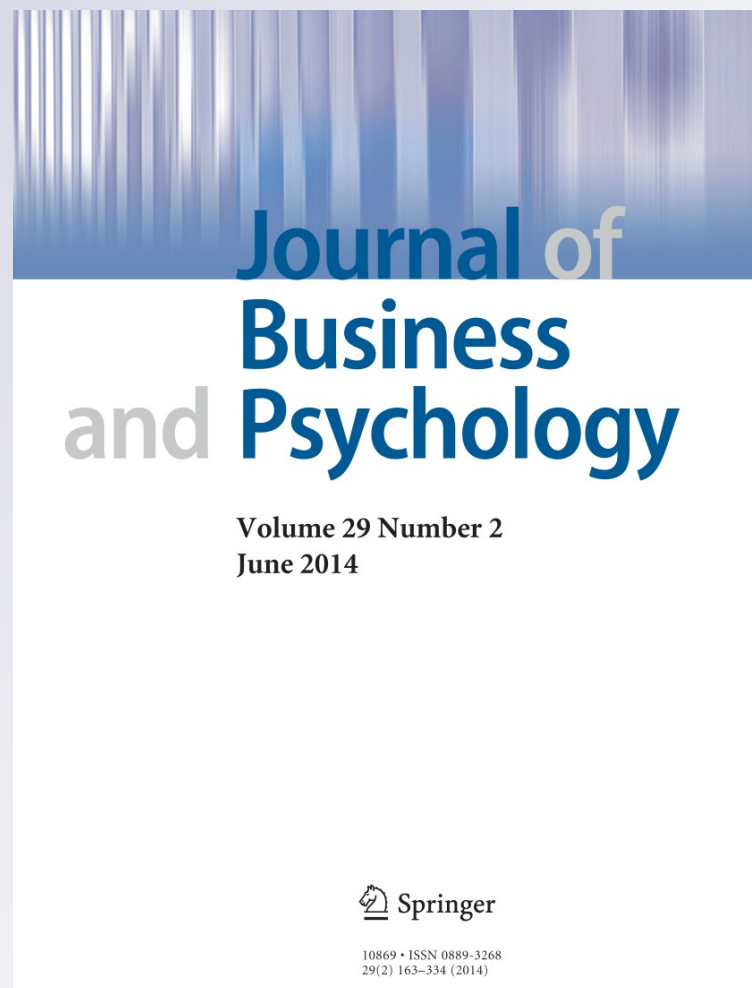
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Constraints for Some, Opportunities for Others? Interactive and Indirect Effects of Machiavellianism and Organizational Constraints on Task Performance Ratings

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Abstract

Purpose The purpose of this study was to examine how the indirect relationship between Machiavellianism and task performance ratings is qualified by organizational constraints (e.g., inadequate resources). Contrary to past research, we suggest that constraints can actually facilitate performance ratings among highly Machiavellian employees because they seek to attain high ratings through self-interested behaviors and social influence processes rather than legitimate task performance. Thus, constraints that inhibit legitimate performers should actually create more opportunities for highly Machiavellian employees.

Design/Methodology/Approach Data were collected from 110 subordinate–supervisor dyads that were recruited from Psychology courses at a small liberal arts college.

Findings The results elaborate on past research focused on organizational constraints to reveal that the indirect relationship between Machiavellianism and task performance is positive and significant under conditions of high organizational constraints. This relationship is not significant and trends in a negative direction when constraints are low.

Implications This study highlights the importance of considering how resource constraints impact different types of performers in organizations. When resources are abundant, legitimate performance is possible and Machiavellians are hampered in their ability to rely on careerist strategies to succeed. In contrast, high constraints create situations that enable Machiavellian behaviors to pay off.

Originality/Value This study's originality lies in its counterintuitive finding that organizational constraints might actually be beneficial for some employees who adopt Machiavellian, careerist strategies. This is the first study to demonstrate that constraints do not have consistent, negative effects on task performance and to elaborate on how constraints impact the performance of Machiavellian employees.

Keywords Machiavellianism · Careerism · Careerist orientation · Organizational constraints · Situational constraints · Task performance · Social influence

Introduction

Many people can commiserate with the frustration of lacking the necessary resources, equipment, or cooperation to perform a job correctly. Research on these types of situational constraints at work has factored heavily in the development of seminal theories of task performance and workplace stress over the last 60 years (Campbell et al. 1970; Kahn et al. 1964; Peters and O'Connor 1980; Sonnentag and Frese 2002; Trist and Bamforth 1951). Situationally grounded theories of performance, such as Trist and Bamforth's sociotechnical systems theory, state that human motivation and abilities cannot be fully expressed to

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yield optimal performance unless the work context is structured in such a way to support these efforts. Consistent with this notion, many studies have clearly demonstrated that organizational constraints have both direct and moderating effects that attenuate legitimate task performance (e.g., Adkins and Naumann 2001; Klein and Kim 1998; Villanova 1996; Villanova and Roman 1993).

However, research on situational constraints has not considered the possibility that these constraints may create opportunities for some types of employees. The intended contribution of this study is to demonstrate that constraints can actually *facilitate* high performance ratings provided that employees seek to differentiate themselves through careerist, self-interested behaviors rather than legitimate performance of tasks. To this end, we focus on Machiavellianism, an individual difference associated with a distrust of others, an amoral orientation, and a desire to secure status and control over others (Christie and Geis 1970; Dahling et al. 2009). Machiavellian employees typically seek to secure rewards and recognition through manipulative tactics, political self-interest, and social influence (Jones and Paulhus 2009), which suggests that organizational constraints on legitimate performance should not negatively impact them. On the contrary, these constraints may present opportunities by hindering the efforts of legitimate performers who would otherwise advance through successful work on job duties. In the following sections, we draw on sociotechnical systems theory and social influence theory (Levy et al. 1998) to develop and test a model demonstrating that situational “constraints” may actually offer opportunities for Machiavellian, self-interested employees.

Literature Review

Conceptualizations of Performance in Organizations

Performance researchers have long held the view that performance is a function of individual qualities complemented by situational variables. With respect to individual qualities, Campbell et al. (1993) notably argued that performance is determined by three factors, namely declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge and skill, and motivation. These three factors, when working in tandem, yield a high quality performer: one who has the knowledge and skills relevant to a task, and who willfully exerts effort and persistence to perform it. Consequently, Campbell et al.'s (1993) framework reflects a legitimate model of performance, as employees are assumed to draw on task-relevant skills and motivation to complete their duties.

However, researchers have also considered that certain individuals' performance is not based primarily on

competence, skill, and motivation, but more so on political tactics that can secure career advancement through a careerist orientation. Careerism is defined as a “propensity to pursue career advancement through non-performance-based means” (Feldman and Weitz 1991, p. 238). Individuals who espouse this orientation believe that merit and competence alone are insufficient for career advancements, and that social networking, a successful appearance, and deceptive behavior yield career success. Careerism research is largely grounded in social influence theory (Levy et al. 1998), which describes how these types of social influence and impression management tactics can shape the impressions that people develop about each other.

Given a careerist orientation's emphasis on the self, it is clear why careerism can have negative organizational implications. Indeed, Feldman and Weitz (1991) found that a careerist orientation is negatively related to job attitudes such as satisfaction, motivation, involvement, and commitment, and is positively related to a disposition to change jobs. Relatedly, careerists are less likely to display organizational commitment and are more likely to have intentions to quit (Chay and Aryee 1999). These negative outcomes occur because the self-centered goals of careerists are typically incongruent with the collective goals of the organization (Feldman 1988; Feldman and Weitz 1991).

Machiavellianism

Research that considers the personality correlates of careerism is rare, but Machiavellianism is likely an important predictor (Bratton and Kacmar 2004; Feldman and Weitz 1991). Machiavellianism belongs to a broader network of deviant personality traits known as the “Dark Triad”, which also includes narcissism and psychopathy. While there is considerable conceptual and empirical overlap between these traits, researchers have noted that they each have distinct, defining qualities (O'Boyle et al. 2012; Wu and LeBreton 2011). For example, whereas the hallmark of narcissism is self-aggrandizing behavior, psychopaths are defined by their callousness and lack of empathy. In contrast, the distinctive feature of Machiavellians is their engagement in manipulative behavior. Given that Machiavellianism is especially associated with manipulation and social influence behaviors, we focused only on Machiavellianism rather than the full Dark Triad in this study.

Machiavellians' use of interpersonal manipulation creates threats to the well being of an organization and its members, a contention that has received considerable empirical support (Dahling et al. 2012b). For example, Machiavellianism is predictive of job dissatisfaction (e.g., Corzine et al. 1999), turnover intentions (e.g., Becker and O'Hair 2007), and unethical workplace behavior

(e.g., Dahling et al. 2012b; Sakalaki et al. 2007). Like careerists, Machiavellians tend to be disloyal and to put their own interests ahead of others (Zettler et al. 2011). Consequently, Becker and O'Hair (2007) concluded that Machiavellians are not driven by prosocial values or organizational concern, even when they work to complete job responsibilities. Machiavellians also seek to accumulate extrinsic markers of success, such as wealth, power, and rank (Dahling et al. 2009). This is parallel to careerists' desire for mobility within an organization, which Feldman and Weitz (1991, p. 242) describe as a "motivation to move on and move up". Given Machiavellians' self-interested nature and their propensity to engage in illegitimate means to achieve desired ends, it seems plausible that Machiavellians would strongly espouse a careerist orientation.

Hypothesis 1 Machiavellianism is positively related to a careerist orientation.

Enabling situational conditions are critical to understanding when and why Machiavellians are likely to succeed in organizations. To date, the structural contexts examined in Machiavellianism research concern autonomy and supervision; no research prior to this study has considered how resource constraints might act as moderating variables. For example, in a field study of male, retail store managers, Machiavellians were higher performers than non-Machiavellians only when their supervisors initiated a loose work structure that afforded autonomy and low supervision (Gable et al. 1992). In contrast, under highly structured work environments, Machiavellianism was unrelated to job performance. In a similar study, Machiavellians earned more money from sales commissions and maintained more clients than non-Machiavellians only under conditions of loose organizational structure (Shultz 1993). These findings demonstrate that loose structures allow Machiavellians to improvise and manipulate events or others, which leads to more clients and higher sales. Sparks (1994) found that high latitude for improvisation did not lead to success for high Machiavellians, but that low latitude for improvisation *prevented* success for some. He reasoned that highly structured environments may prevent the success of Machiavellian marketers' ability to manipulate others, leading to lower performance appraisals, and ultimately lower pay and status.

Thus, high Machiavellians can be perceived as strong performers provided that they are enabled by structural contexts that facilitate their behaviors. Similarly, research suggests that a careerist orientation does not invariably lead to higher performance; the relationship between careerism and performance is likely contingent on many situational moderators (Feldman 1988). We build on previous research

focused on the organizational context to examine the role that organizational constraints play in this relationship.

Organizational Constraints and Performance

Organizational constraints refer to situations in which employees do not have the resources necessary in order to perform their job adequately. In their seminal article, Peters et al. (1980) identified eight categories of situational constraints, including job related information, tools and equipment, materials and supplies, budgetary support, required services and help from others, task preparation, time availability, and work environment. When these resources are unavailable, insufficient, or of poor quality, employees are likely to suffer negative attitudes and their performance is likely to decline. The impact of situational constraints on performance can be explained by Trist and Bamforth's (1951) sociotechnical systems theory (STST). STST describes work performance as a function of human behavior and organizational processes, and it states that performance suffers when work processes are not aligned to support employee behaviors (Sonnetag and Frese 2002).

Put simply, constraints tend to frustrate legitimate performance efforts, and this finding has been demonstrated empirically in both lab and field settings (Peters et al. 1980, 1982; O'Connor et al. 1982, 1984; Villanova and Roman 1993). While research has consistently illustrated a weak, negative relationship between constraints and performance, a common assumption of these studies is that employees are trying to *legitimately* perform their jobs (i.e., employees genuinely need these resources in order to perform work tasks). However, as discussed earlier, workplaces are also populated by careerists, who are self-serving and aim to surpass their colleagues through social influence rather than legitimate performance. Given their motives to get ahead and their propensity to advance through means of social influence (Levy et al. 1998), careerists may be immune to the debilitating effects of constraints posited by STST. We further submit that organizational constraints can actually facilitate the efforts of careerists, as a lack of resources creates an environment in which co-workers find themselves vying for the same limited resources. In these contexts, legitimate performers, who require resources to perform well, struggle to meet expectations (e.g., Harris et al. 2007; Chang et al. 2009). In contrast, careerists are not dependent on limited resources to influence others, and their social influence behaviors can enable them to appear more successful than their peers. Thus, it can be expected that a lack of resources simultaneously hampers the performance of legitimate employees while also improving the relative standing of careerist employees.

Thus, while legitimate performers are bound by organizational constraints, careerists are likely to be immune to the inhibiting effects of constraints. In fact, the scarce or nonexistent resources may prompt such individuals to choose from a repertoire of illegitimate tools in order to advance their social standing, effectively outperforming their peers whose output is constrained by limited resources. As an example, consider a hypothetical situation in which an organization faces a deficiency in financial resources. While legitimate performers would spread these resources evenly to facilitate performance, careerists would respond competitively, aiming to secure as much financial support for themselves as possible. Indeed, careerists would view the lack of budgetary support as an opportunity to engage in manipulative tactics with the intent of reaping the resources for themselves and leaving little for others. With these resources in hand, careerists could outperform those legitimate performers who do not engage in manipulative tactics and are consequently stifled by the resource deficiency. Consistent with this illustration, we expect that careerists will receive lower performance ratings under conditions of low situational constraints, but higher performance ratings under conditions of high situational constraints.

Hypothesis 2 Organizational constraints moderate the relationship between career self-interest and task performance ratings. Specifically, career self-interest will be positively related to performance only when constraints are high.

As summarized in Fig. 1, we expect that Machiavellianism will have indirect effects on task performance via career self-interest, an expectation based in numerous studies of careerism, Machiavellian personality, and social influence processes (e.g., Bratton and Kacmar 2004; Dahling et al. 2009; Levy et al. 1998). However, consistent with STST (Trist and Bamforth 1951), this indirect effect should be moderated by organizational constraints. When constraints are low, employees are fully capable of leveraging their motivation, skills, and abilities to legitimately complete assigned tasks (Campbell et al. 1970; Peters and O'Connor 1980; Villanova and Roman 1993).

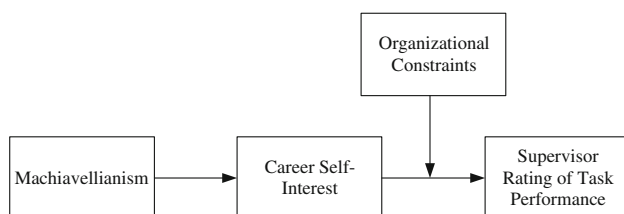


Fig. 1 Hypothesized model of indirect and interactive effects of Machiavellianism on performance

Consequently, Machiavellian behaviors should be less effective and result in lower performance ratings when constraints are low. However, when constraints are high, legitimate performance becomes difficult and success is more likely to be attained through social influence (Levy et al. 1998) and careerist self-interest (Feldman and Weitz 1991). In this context, Machiavellianism should result in higher performance ratings.

Hypothesis 3 The indirect relationship between Machiavellianism and task performance ratings via career self-interest is moderated by organizational constraints. Specifically, Machiavellianism will only have a positive, indirect effect on performance ratings when organizational constraints are high.

Method

Sample and Procedure

Participants were 121 employees who were recruited from Psychology courses at a small liberal arts college in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Eligible participants had to work off-campus at least 15 h per week and be willing to recruit a response from their immediate supervisor. Sample job titles reported by participants include customer service representative or salesperson, assistant or shift manager, and pharmacy technician. Participants completed measures of Machiavellianism, career self-interest, and perceived organizational constraints in small groups under supervised conditions; the presentation order of these measures was randomized. We reasoned that participants should provide self-reported ratings of these variables given that (a) Machiavellianism is an individual difference characterized by a tendency to withhold information and distrust others (Dahling et al. 2009; Liu 2008), making other-ratings of this trait suspect; (b) career self-interest is a private motivation that may not be evident to others (Chan 2009); and (c) colleagues working in different roles may not be able to accurately evaluate the organizational constraints experienced by the focal participant.

After completing the self-report survey, participants were then instructed to provide a letter to their supervisor that included instructions to complete an appraisal of task performance online. On average, supervisor responses arrived approximately 2 weeks later. To prevent any instances of fraudulent responses, we took several precautionary measures. Specifically, we precluded students who held on-campus jobs from participating in the study, and we made sure that no two participants had the same supervisor. After careful inspection of all IP addresses from the supervisor surveys, we removed four suspicious

responses (i.e., duplicate IP addresses or IP addresses originating from campus). Participants received separate course credit for recruiting the supervisor survey response beyond the credit earned for their own responses, which created an additional incentive to the participant to solicit participation from his or her supervisor. While there was no direct incentive provided to the supervisor, the survey they were asked to complete was short and did not require much time, and so they had little reason not to comply with the request. Ultimately, we received usable responses for 110 dyads for hypothesis testing (90.1 % of the original sample). The final sample had a mean age of 19.12 years ($SD = 0.96$) and was 77.3 % female. With respect to ethnicity, the sample was 10 % Hispanic; with respect to race, the sample was 69.1 % Caucasian, 17.3 % African American, and 13.6 % Asian American.

Measures

Machiavellianism

We used Dahling et al.'s (2009) Machiavellian personality scale (MPS), which measures four dimensions of Machiavellianism: amoral behavior, desire for control over others, desire for status, and distrust of others. Responses were made on a 5-point scale where 1 = "strongly disagree" and 5 = "strongly agree". Sample items include "People are only motivated by personal gain" and "I am willing to sabotage the efforts of other people if they threaten my own goals". In this study, we used the full 16-item scale ($\alpha = 0.85$) to examine aggregate Machiavellianism, as has been past practice (e.g., Zagenczyk et al. 2013). Past research shows that the MPS is positively related to supervisor ratings of destructive deviance and peer intimidation, and negatively related to ratings of civic virtue (Dahling et al. 2009; Whitaker and Dahling in press; Zagenczyk et al. 2013).

Career Self-Interest

Career self-interest was measured with a six-item measure ($\alpha = 0.91$) developed by Collins (2006) that assesses how strongly people are motivated to enhance their job security, reputation, promotability, and pay. Responses were made on a 5-point scale where 1 = "strongly disagree" and 5 = "strongly agree". Sample items include, "I will do whatever it takes to enhance my pay raises" and "I will do whatever it takes to enhance my promotion potential". Collins found that the measure was predictive of the endorsement of self-interested options in response to a variety of decision scenarios describing behaviors such as tax evasion.

Organizational Constraints

Constraints were measured using Spector and Jex's (1998) 11-item Organizational Constraints Scale (OCS; $\alpha = 0.85$). A sample item reads, "How often do you find it difficult or impossible to do your job because of lack of equipment or supplies?" Responses were made on a 5-point scale where 1 = "less than once per month or never" and 5 = "several times per day". The OCS has been included in dozens of previous studies, typically as a measure of stressors in stress research, and is predictive of outcomes such as anxiety, frustration, job satisfaction, role ambiguity and conflict, physical health complaints, and perceptions of workload demands (e.g., Spector et al. 2000).

Task Performance

Supervisors provided ratings of task performance using an 8-item measure ($\alpha = 0.92$) adapted from Alper et al. (2000) and Dahling et al. (2012a). Sample items include "The level of initiative displayed by this employee is..." and "The quantity of work output created by this employee is..." Responses were on a 5-point scale with anchors ranging from 1 = "poor" to 5 = "excellent".

Results

Confirmatory Factor Analyses

Table 1 reports correlations and descriptive statistics for all study variables. Given that our self-report data were measured in a cross-sectional manner, we began by running a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA; Thompson 2004) on the measures completed by the focal participants to provide additional evidence of construct validity (Conway and Lance 2010). For the hypothesized model, we specified the individual items of the career self-interest and organizational constraints measures to serve as indicators of their respective constructs; for Machiavellianism, we created four indicator parcels (Hall et al. 1999) reflecting the established subscales within the measure (Dahling et al. 2009). We compared the fit of this hypothesized model to an alternative model in which the Machiavellianism parcels and career self-interest items were set as indicators of the same construct. This alternative model seemed plausible given the strong correlation observed between the Machiavellianism and career self-interest scales in Table 1 and the potential conceptual overlap between the measures.

Results of the CFAs indicated that the hypothesized model exhibited better fit to the data. Specifically, the hypothesized model exhibited acceptable fit to the data (Kline 2011; $\chi^2_{(183)} = 307.47$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.89;

Table 1 Correlations and descriptive statistics for study variables

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Gender	–	–	–					
2. Age	19.12	0.96	–0.16	–				
3. Machiavellianism	2.54	0.56	–0.10	0.03	(0.85)			
4. Career self-interest	3.71	0.85	–0.12	0.05	0.49**	(0.91)		
5. Organizational constraints	1.80	0.64	–0.04	–0.02	–0.02	–0.14	(0.85)	
6. Task performance	4.36	0.60	0.04	0.03	–0.03	0.07	0.07	(0.92)

Gender is coded such that 1 male and 2 female. Alpha coefficients are reported in parentheses along the diagonal

** $p < 0.01$

RMSEA = 0.07; SRMR = 0.09). The fit of the alternative model to the data ($\chi^2_{(185)} = 343.11, p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.85; RMSEA = 0.09; SRMR = 0.09) was significantly worse than the alternative model as evaluated by a χ^2 difference test ($\Delta\chi^2_{(2)} = 35.64, p < 0.001$). Thus, given evidence that all three self-report measures were assessing distinct constructs, we proceeded to hypothesis testing.

Tests of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 predicted that Machiavellianism would be positively related to career self-interest. In support of Hypothesis 1, Machiavellianism has a strong, positive relationship with career self-interest ($r = 0.49, p < 0.001$) as shown in Table 1.

Hypothesis 2 stated that constraints would moderate the relationship between career self-interest and supervisor task performance ratings. Following procedures recommended by Aiken and West (1991), we regressed performance ratings on the centered main effects of career self-interest and organizational constraints, and on centered Machiavellianism as a covariate, in step 1. We then entered the interaction term as a predictor in step 2. Results of this analysis are shown in Table 2. As expected, the interaction term had a significant effect on performance ratings ($\beta = 0.26, p < 0.05, \Delta R^2 = 0.04$). Figure 2 shows the shape of the interaction; following convention from Aiken and West (1991), “high” and “low” levels of career self-interest and organizational constraints are +1 and –1 SD around their means, respectively. In support of Hypothesis 2, career self-interest is positively related to performance ratings when constraints are high (2.44; simple slopes $t = 2.28, p < 0.05$), but not when constraints are low (1.16; $t = -0.75, p = 0.45$).

Hypothesis 3 predicted that the indirect effect from Machiavellianism to task performance ratings via career self-interest would be contingent on organizational constraints. Specifically, we expected that the indirect effect would only be significant when organizational constraints were high. We tested this hypothesis with the aid of a SPSS

Table 2 Interactive effects of career self-interest and organizational constraints on task performance ratings (Hypothesis 2)

Step	Predictor variable	β	<i>t</i>	Step ΔR^2
1	1. Career self-interest	0.13	1.17	0.02
	2. Organizational constraints	0.09	0.92	
	3. Machiavellianism (control)	–0.10	–0.87	
2	1. Career self-interest	0.09	0.81	0.04*
	2. Organizational constraints	0.16	1.59	
	3. Machiavellianism (control)	–0.16	–1.41	
	4. Interaction (career self-interest x constraints)	0.26*	2.44*	

* $p < 0.05$

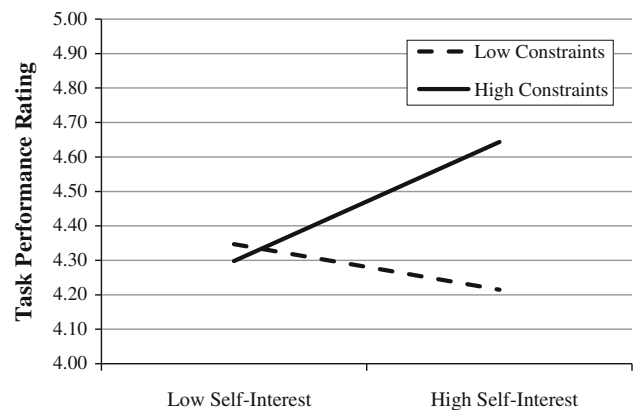


Fig. 2 Interaction of career self-interest and organizational constraints on task performance ratings

macro developed by Preacher et al. (2007) that tests the significance of the indirect effect at different levels of the moderator variable. In support of Hypothesis 3, Machiavellianism had a positive, indirect effect on task performance ratings when constraints were high ($z = 2.09, p < 0.05$), but not when constraints were at their mean ($z = 0.79, p = 0.43$) or when constraints were low ($z = -0.74, p = 0.46$). We evaluated the effect size of the

significant indirect effect when constraints were high using the completely standardized indirect effect metric (ab_{cs}) described by Preacher and Kelley (2011). Results indicated that $ab_{cs} = 0.14$, which is a moderate indirect effect size (Shrout and Bolger 2002) that implies that every 1 SD increase in Machiavellianism indirectly corresponds to a 0.14 SD increase in performance via career self-interest when constraints are high.

Discussion

The objective of this study was to demonstrate that organizational constraints can facilitate the performance ratings of Machiavellian employees due to their careerist orientations. Consistent with our arguments, the results suggest that high Machiavellians are likely to espouse a careerist orientation, and that these individuals receive higher performance ratings under conditions of high situational constraints. We also found that high Machiavellians' tendency to be career self-interested is ultimately responsible for these higher performance ratings when resources are scarce or nonexistent.

These findings run counter to a long line of literature suggesting that organizational constraints invariably hamper performance. This relationship has been verified in the lab (e.g., Peters et al. 1980; Peters et al. 1982), in field settings (O'Connor et al. 1982, 1984), as well as meta-analytically (Villanova and Roman 1993). However, these studies assume that employees operate legitimately; that is, they perform their jobs relying on authentic skills and abilities. In contrast, our study incorporates more recent thinking about careerism (Bratton and Kacmar 2004; Feldman and Weitz 1991) and social influence processes (Levy et al. 1998) to account for non-legitimate performance models. Our findings imply that Machiavellian careerists can receive strong performance ratings when organizational constraints are high, which is a novel finding in the constraints literature.

However, our results are very consistent with the literature on Machiavellianism, which suggests that certain organizational contexts enable Machiavellian behaviors to a greater extent than others. Past researchers have considered moderators of the relationships between Machiavellianism and job performance, identifying autonomous work settings (Gable et al. 1992; Shultz 1993; Sparks 1994) as well as job involvement (Gable and Dangelo 1994) as contributors to the success of Machiavellian employees. Our study expands this literature by suggesting that insufficient resources can also facilitate the performance ratings of Machiavellian employees, presumably by undermining the efforts of other employees.

This finding also fits into a broader pattern of research dealing with the interaction of traits and situations. More specifically, our results are consistent with trait activation theory, which states that “the behavioral expression of a trait requires arousal of that trait by trait-relevant situational cues,” (Tett and Gutterman 2000, p. 398). This perspective suggests that organizational constraints can provoke a Machiavellian's competitive and manipulative nature. Consistent with past empirical support for this theory, the present study highlights that situational strength is a major determinant of the manifestation of personality-relevant behaviors.

An interesting, unexpected finding that emerged is the non-significant relationship between constraints and task performance ratings for legitimate performers. This finding runs counter to past literature suggesting that constraints have a small, negative effect on performance (e.g., a meta-analytic correlation of -0.14 found by Villanova and Roman 1993). The effect in our study is trending in a negative direction, which suggests that we may have lacked sufficient power to detect significance. Alternatively, this null finding can be explained by Peters et al. (1985)'s reasoning that under certain conditions, constraints are unrelated to task performance ratings. For example, if managers do not enforce high standards of performance, then constraints may not actually affect performance ratings (Villanova and Roman 1993). Additional research on the effects of constraints among both legitimate and non-legitimate performers is clearly needed.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Our theory and results imply that Machiavellian careerists receive higher performance ratings under situations of high constraints when compared to their non-careerist peers. What is less certain is if Machiavellian careerists are objectively performing better or if they merely seem to be performing subjectively better than non-careerists in these contexts. On one hand, the manipulative abilities of Machiavellian employees may allow them to objectively thrive in competitive conditions of resource scarcity, consistent with trait activation theory (Tett and Gutterman 2000). On the other hand, Machiavellian employees may simply be better at presenting the appearance of success when resources are scarce, whereas non-Machiavellian employees are not, consistent with social influence theory (Levy et al. 1998). We cannot ascertain for certain if the positive, indirect effect from Machiavellianism to supervisor performance ratings under contexts of high constraints is attributable to competitiveness that gives rise to objective performance gains, or social influence that gives rise to subjective impressions of good performance. Future

research is needed to explore this distinction in greater detail using different measures of performance criteria.

Our findings should also be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, as noted above, performance ratings were assessed subjectively by supervisors, which raises concerns about whether the scores reflect true performance or biased perceptions of the supervisor. Despite this concern, there are few jobs that have true objective measures of performance, and thus, job performance is typically measured via subjective supervisor ratings (Murphy 2008). Similarly, situational constraints were determined via a self-report measure. While we reasoned that self-reports were desirable in this study because others may not be able to accurately report on the constraints experienced by the focal employee, valid other-reports would be ideal to minimize the likelihood of percept–percept bias (Crampton and Wagner 1994).

Second, our sample is not necessarily representative of broader populations; it is a small sample of working students that is primarily made of Caucasian females. While student employees are capable of experiencing and accurately reporting on all of the constructs that we measured with self-reports [i.e., their Machiavellian personality, careerist motivations, and perceived constraints; Dobbins et al. (1988)], our findings should be replicated in the future with a more experienced and diverse sample of employees. Third, the cross-sectional nature of our data impedes our ability to infer causality, threatening the internal validity of our study. These limitations should encourage future researchers to replicate our findings with other-report measures of constraints, a time-lagged design, and a more diversified sample, both in terms of experience and gender. Despite these limitations, our hypotheses were supported, suggesting the robustness of our findings.

Future researchers can also expand our model by considering other moderators of the Machiavellianism–job performance relationship. Factors other than autonomy, job involvement and constraints are likely to facilitate a Machiavellian's performance, and researchers should try to identify what these are in order to better control the expression of high Machiavellian behaviors in the workplace. Wilson et al. (1996) offered a similar recommendation by calling for more research that identifies the characteristics of social environments that contribute to the success of Machiavellians. For example, certain organizational climates, such as ethical climate (Deshpande 1996), may promote or inhibit Machiavellian behaviors.

Practical Implications and Conclusions

These findings have several practical implications. Primarily, our research adds to the long list of consequences associated with organizational constraints. Managers

should be aware that constraints both frustrate the performance of legitimate workers (e.g., Peters and O'Connor 1980) and afford self-interested individuals the opportunity to “get ahead” via careerist orientations. Stated differently, constraints undermine the efforts of legitimate performers while simultaneously promoting the efforts of careerists. This may result in the discouragement, and perhaps attrition, of valuable, legitimate employees. Furthermore, the seemingly high performance of careerists may lead to the illusion of a productive workforce, when in reality the observed performance is not substantive.

The ideal solution to these problems is insuring that resources of adequate quality and quantity are available to all employees. Abundant resources will allow legitimate performers to implement their skills and motivation, while restricting careerists to their superficial tactics. Restricting careerist behaviors will hopefully discourage this orientation, resulting in a more productive workforce. Unfortunately, this solution is not always feasible, particularly during a weak economy.

Perhaps a more realistic solution is for managers to discourage a careerist mindset altogether. Discouraging a careerist mindset is particularly important, as managers espousing this mindset are increasing in population (Aryee and Chen 2004). One identified means of lowering careerist orientations is to uphold high standards of organizational justice, such as being transparent with the allocation of resources, especially when they are scarce (Crawshaw and Brodbeck 2011). When employees perceive that rewards are being administered fairly and the procedures used to determine them are just, then employees are likely to instill more trust in their employer and become less self-interested (Aryee and Chen 2004; Chay and Aryee 1999).

In addition, managers should be conscious that conditions of scarce resources may invite the occurrence of political behaviors to the workplace, primarily by Machiavellian careerists. Knowing this can prime managers to monitor the performance behaviors of their workforce, and to attempt to discern between substantive performance behaviors and unsanctioned performance tactics. When managers are more sensitive to the occurrence of Machiavellian behaviors, they can avoid reinforcing them by awarding high performance ratings (Dahling et al. 2012a).

Conclusion

In sum, organizational constraints have a facilitating effect on performance for Machiavellian employees due to their tendency to be career self-interested. These findings elaborate on both the organizational constraints and Machiavellianism literatures to identify a counter-intuitive circumstance when constraints can actually improve performance ratings for

non-legitimate performers. Managers should be cautious of this effect by providing abundant resources when available and allocating resources in a just manner, as well as monitoring the behaviors of their workforce to insure that all members are contributing substantively.

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