

## Core Self-Evaluations and Job Performance: The Role of the Perceived Work Environment

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Using trait activation theory as a framework, the authors examined the moderating role of two situational variables—perceptions of organizational politics and perceptions of leader effectiveness—on the relationship between core self-evaluations and job performance. Results from two samples ( $N = 137$  and  $N = 226$ ) indicate that employee perceptions of their work environment moderated the relationship between their core self-evaluations and supervisor ratings of their performance. In particular, those with higher core self-evaluations received higher performance ratings in environments perceived as favorable than in environments perceived as unfavorable.

*Keywords:* core self-evaluation, job performance, perceptions of organizational politics, perceived leader effectiveness

Organizational scholars have long studied personality traits that influence employee behavior in the workplace (Funder, 2001; Schneider, 1987; Staw & Cohen-Charash, 2005). A critique of the dispositional approach to studying organizational behavior is that situational strength may override individual personality differences between employees (Davis-Blake & Pfeffer, 1989). However, even advocates of the environmental approach to behavior acknowledge that “there are some stable individual attributes that affect individual experiences in and reactions to the workplace” (Davis-Blake & Pfeffer, 1989, p. 386). Scholarly interest has begun to emphasize the interaction between personality traits and situational factors that influence behavior within organizations (Gerhart, 2005; Gordon, 1996; House, Shane, & Herold, 1996; Kacmar, Carlson, & Bratton, 2004; Kammrath, Mendoza-Denton, & Mischel, 2005; Mowday & Sutton, 1993). This paper contributes to the interactional discussion by evaluating how core self-evaluations combine with perceptions of organizational politics and perceptions of leader effectiveness to influence supervisor ratings of subordinate performance.

Organizational research is replete with studies relating individual personality trait differences to specific outcomes (for a review, see Ones, Dilchert, Viswesvaran, & Judge, 2007). Although the Big Five personality traits capture a large portion of variance in personality traits, they fail to capture chronic differences in how

individuals evaluate themselves. In response, Judge and his colleagues (Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997; Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1998; Judge & Bono, 2001) developed a dispositional profile termed *core self-evaluations* (CSE). Defined as fundamental assessments that individuals make about their worth, competence, and capability (Judge, Bono, Erez, & Locke, 2005), CSE are the aggregation of self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, neuroticism, and locus of control. This self-assessment is a higher order factor reflecting who the individual is and how the individual perceives herself or himself (Judge et al., 1997).

CSE can impact performance (Erez & Judge, 2001; Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003), but environmental factors also influence workplace behavior (Mischel, 1977). Trait activation theory (TAT; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Tett & Burnett, 2003) explains the interaction of individual personality differences and environmental dynamics. In essence, TAT holds that individual propensities are enacted only when they fall within a range of acceptable behaviors, as dictated by the situation. Trait differences must be situationally relevant if their effects are to be identified and the enactment of these distinguishing characteristics is to be limited or motivated (Tett & Guterman, 2000). In the current study, TAT is proposed to explain why the situational factors of perceptions of politics and perceived leader effectiveness are conducive and relevant environments in which to explore the influence of CSE on performance.

Our first situational factor is perceptions of organizational politics, which is the perception that the behavior of individuals is intended to maximize their self-interest and may be consistent with, or at the expense of, the interests of others (Ferris, Fedor, Chachere, & Pandy, 1989). The impact that perceptions of politics have on organizational life has received a great deal of scholarly attention (for reviews, see Chang, Rosen, & Levy, 2009; Ferris, Adams, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, & Ammeter, 2002; Kacmar & Baron, 1999). Appreciating how political employees perceive their

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workplace can explain differences between individual behavior (Jones & Davis, 1965; Lewin, 1936), because perceptions of organizational politics represent the subjective reality upon which individual behavior is based (Treadway et al., 2005). The second situational factor of interest is perceived leader effectiveness, which is subordinates' perceptions of the supervisor's ability to influence and motivate subordinates (Judge, Ilies, Bono, & Gerhardt, 2002). Interpretations of leader behavior will vary among followers. Those who view their leader as effective may perform well because they identify with and are more committed to their leader (Meyer, Becker, & Vandenberghe, 2004).

The outcome variable in this study is supervisor ratings of job performance, which can be divided into task performance (i.e., in-role behavior) and contextual performance (i.e., extra-role behavior; Borman & Motowidlo, 1993, 1997; Gellatly & Irving, 2001). Task performance is the effective execution of activities that contribute to the organization's technical core (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993). Contextual performance helps shape the organizational, social, and psychological conditions that support task activities (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997). We combined these forms of job performance to provide a comprehensive picture of subordinate workplace behavior.

Our purpose in this research was to examine the interaction between CSE and perceptions of one's work environment through the lens of TAT. We tested the notion, supported by this theory, that performance ratings of individuals with higher CSE will be more adversely affected by perceptions of an unfavorable work environment and more positively affected by perceptions of a favorable work environment than will those with lower CSE.

## Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development

### TAT

TAT has been proposed to explain how personality and environmental factors combine to predict behavior (Kamdar & Van Dyne, 2007; Lievens, Chasteen, Day, & Christiansen, 2006). The theory suggests that individuals possess unique dispositional profiles but demonstrate certain traits only when situational cues signal that it is appropriate to do so (Tett & Guterman, 2000). The situational strength should be weak to moderate (Tett & Guterman, 2000) in order to differentiate the intensity of trait activation, because strong situations will likely evoke similar responses from most individuals in that environment (Bem & Allen, 1974; Mischel, 1977; Monson, Hesley, & Chernick, 1982). TAT also suggests that the trait must be relevant to the situation and that "trait relevance supersedes strength in understanding the interaction between traits and situations" (Tett & Burnett, 2003, p. 503).

We contend that the situational variables in this study, perceptions of organizational politics and perceptions of leader effectiveness, are relevant to identifying different core self-evaluation reactions among employees. In terms of situational favorableness, relevance refers to how motivating the individual perceives the situation to be. As TAT suggests, under the right environmental conditions, individuals will enact different behaviors as their specific trait propensities dictate. These differences may manifest as variations in workplace performance. In this case, favorable situations are quite relevant to high core self-evaluators because they are predisposed to select such situations and, according to Judge

and Hurst (2007), thrive in these environments. However, political environments may signal that actual performance will not be rewarded, which would prompt high core self-evaluators to reduce their contribution.

Perceptions play an important role in the unique relationship between supervisor and subordinate (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007; Liden & Maslyn, 1998). How effective employees perceive their supervisor to be may also have a motivational impact on the subordinate. High core self-evaluators gravitate toward favorable situations (Judge & Hurst, 2007), and they may view an effective leader as being a key component of a motivational environment. We recognize that our selected moderators do not represent an exhaustive list. However, we do believe that extant research establishes these two variables as possessing the ability to create a work environment capable of activating individual personality traits.

### *Interactive Effects of CSE and Perceptions of Situations*

We believe that high CSE is likely to trigger self-regulatory processes in favorable situations, which we define as low perceptions of politics and high perceptions of supervisor effectiveness. As TAT suggests, high CSE individuals are drawn to and respond most positively to situations that are likely to maintain positive cognitions and affects, especially those that are self-relevant. Applied to the world of work, this means that high CSE individuals are more motivated by work goals they see as consistent with their values (Judge et al., 2005), are more likely to persist in achieving extrinsically important work goals (Erez & Judge, 2001), and are better able to capitalize on fortuitous life situations (Judge & Hurst, 2007). Drawing from TAT, individual trait propensity differences will be most visible in motivating (i.e., relevant) environments. Thus, favorable work environments—those free of politics and under the direction of leaders seen as effective—are most likely to activate the self-regulatory tendencies of individuals that are essential to effective work performance, but unfavorable situations will not motivate high core self-evaluators. Finally, these arguments suggest that the performances of low core self-evaluators are less likely to be situationally influenced.

We submit that performance levels for high core self-evaluators will be low in political environments where guidelines of appropriate conduct are fluid. Identification of political behavior may signal that hard work may not be recognized or rewarded (Ferris et al., 1996). Uncertain that their efforts will be appreciated, employees, particularly high core self-evaluators, may respond with decreased task performance (Kamdar, McAllister, & Turban, 2006). However, in relatively apolitical environments those activities that are valued and rewarded are clear, and this allows high core self-evaluators to focus their energy on activities that will be recognized. Therefore, we posit that performance ratings for individuals with high CSE will be highest when perceptions of politics are low. Although a drop in performance is expected for low core self-evaluators, their less determined approach may not generate the same performance dip shown by high core self-evaluators. Therefore, we suggest that

*Hypothesis 1:* Perceptions of organizational politics will moderate the relationship between CSE and supervisor ratings of performance such that the CSE–performance relationship will

be positive and stronger when perceptions are lower than when perceptions are higher.

As TAT suggests (Tett & Guterman, 2000), individual differences, such as CSE, will impact how subordinates perceive and react to their leaders' effectiveness. High core self-evaluators believe they are competent and capable actors (Judge et al., 1997) and might expect their leaders to perform well also. For example, preparation is related to perceptions of leadership effectiveness (Morgeson, 2005), and high core self-evaluators will respect their supervisors' readiness, reciprocating with strong performance. Conversely, working for an ineffective leader may undermine the performance of a high core self-evaluator. High CSE individuals working for a leader they perceive to be ineffective may be unable to respect their leader, and this disappointment may be reflected in their performance. Whereas we suspect that the performance of those with positive CSE will be directly impacted by perceptions of leader effectiveness, the same will most likely not hold for those with low CSE. Individuals with low CSE doubt their abilities, tend to see themselves as powerless, and blame themselves for perceived failures (Judge et al., 1997), all of which translates into lackluster performance. Thus, regardless of whether individuals with low CSE view their leader as effective or ineffective, they will not demonstrate strong performance. Thus, we suggest that

*Hypothesis 2:* Perceptions of leader effectiveness will moderate the relationship between CSE and supervisor ratings of performance such that the CSE–performance relationship will be positive and stronger when perceptions are higher than when perceptions are lower.

In summary, the current study was designed to test the moderating impact of the perceived work environment on the CSE–performance relationship. To accomplish this we collected data from two different samples, and this provided us the opportunity to obtain data on two different moderators and to provide a constructive replication of our findings (Lykken, 1968).

## Method

### *Participants and Procedure*

Data for Sample 1 were collected from employees and their immediate supervisors at a state agency that focused on health issues. Data collection began when an introductory e-mail was sent by the division director to all employees. Following the initial e-mail, each employee received a personalized e-mail from the researchers containing a hot link to our electronic survey. Supervisors were asked to complete performance ratings for each of their direct reports. Eliminating surveys with missing data, as well as those that could not be matched to a supervisor, produced a sample of 137 (65% response rate). The subordinate sample was 84% female with an average age of 45.13 years ( $SD = 9.05$ ) and an average organizational tenure of 9.96 years ( $SD = 6.96$ ). Thirty-five supervisors rated the 137 subordinates, resulting in an average of 3.91 ratings per supervisor. The supervisors were 74% female with an average age of 47.66 years ( $SD = 6.22$ ) and an average organizational tenure of 15.41 years ( $SD = 8.99$ ).

Participants for Sample 2 were employees in a medium-sized commercial food distributor in the northern United States. Surveys

were distributed to employees in small groups during a specially scheduled period. Upon completion of the employee surveys, performance rating forms were distributed to each employee's supervisor. Supervisors completed ratings on only one subordinate. All told, 226 of the 365 (62% response rate) eligible employees completed employee and matching supervisor surveys. Demographic data are not available for Sample 2 because the Human Subjects Committee requested the removal of these items.

### *Measures From Subordinates*

*CSE.* In both samples, CSE were measured using Judge et al.'s (2003) 12-item ( $\alpha = .82$  and  $.80$ ) scale. An example item is "When I try, I generally succeed." The anchors for the scale were 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

*Perceptions of organizational politics.* Perceptions of organizational politics were measured in Sample 1 with Hochwarter, Kacmar, Perrewé, and Johnson's (2003) 6-item ( $\alpha = .95$ ) scale. An example item is "People do what's best for them, not what's best for the organization." To ensure that the respondents focused on the workers in their organization when completing their surveys, we stated in the instructions that they were to think of their immediate work group, defined as all individuals who report to their supervisor, when responding to the survey items. The scale anchors ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

*Perceived leader effectiveness.* Employee perceptions of the effectiveness of their leader were measured in Sample 2 with seven items ( $\alpha = .89$ ) from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1995). Employees indicated how often their supervisor engaged in certain behaviors or produced certain outcomes using a 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*frequently, if not always*) response scale.

### *Measures From Supervisors*

*Job performance.* In Sample 1, supervisors rated the task performance of their subordinates using items adapted from Wayne and Liden's (1995) task performance scale ( $\alpha = .94$ ). We reworded the items so a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*) could be used. An example item is "This subordinate's performance would be rated as highly effective overall." In Sample 2, supervisors rated employees' task performance using four items ( $\alpha = .91$ ) from Motowidlo and Van Scotter (1994). The items (e.g., "On the specific tasks required by his/her job") were evaluated using a scale with anchors of 1 (*much below average*) to 5 (*much above average*).

In Sample 1, subordinate contextual performance was measured by having supervisors respond to Wayne, Shore, and Liden's (1997) 3-item ( $\alpha = .84$ ) contextual performance scale. Items (e.g., "This subordinate helps orient new employees even though it is not required as part of his or her job") were responded to on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*). In Sample 2, the four items ( $\alpha = .83$ ) used to measure contextual performance were based on the work of Motowidlo and Van Scotter (1994). Supervisors responded to items such as "In supporting and encouraging a co-worker with a problem" using a scale with anchors of 1 (*much below average*) to 5 (*much above average*).

Strong correlations between the two performance scales ( $r = .68$  for Sample 1 and  $r = .62$  for Sample 2) suggested overlap was

sufficient for creating a global performance measure ( $\alpha = .92$  for both samples) by averaging the two scales. Results for each form of performance were highly consistent with the overall measure and are available from K. Michele Kacmar.

*Control variables.* On the basis of a review of the literature, we identified three variables—subordinate gender (female = 1, male = 2), job tenure, and organizational tenure—that we expected to covary with our independent and dependent variables (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993; Narayanan, Menon, & Spector, 1999; Quinones, Ford, & Teachout, 1995; Tesluk & Jacobs, 1998; Weekley & Ployhart, 2005). These variables were controlled in analyses that used data from Sample 1. In Sample 2, demographic data were not collected due to institutional review board restrictions. Instead, we created dummy variables for position (i.e., sales, warehouse, and transportation) to control for any differences in the jobs performed.

### Data Analyses

In Sample 1, each supervisor provided multiple ratings of subordinate performance; this created the possibility of dependency in the responses. To address this possibility, we analyzed the data from Sample 1 using hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) techniques (Raudenbush, Bryk, Cheong, Congdon, & du Toit, 2004). Our HLM analyses were composed of multiple steps using grand mean centered variables. We used Snijders and Bosker's (1999) pseudo  $R^2$  formula for calculating the  $R^2$  values we report. In Sample 2, each supervisor rated only one subordinate, so we used hierarchical moderated regression analysis to test our hypotheses. In computing the interaction terms, consistent with Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2003), we centered the components. Our analyses mirrored those in which HLM was used.

## Results

Descriptive statistics for and correlations among the variables of interest are presented in Table 1 for Sample 1 and Table 2 for Sample 2. Turning our attention first to Table 1, we find that our independent variables were moderately correlated with one another. The results were similar for Sample 2. The noted correlations call into question the discriminant validity of our scales. To address this issue, we conducted a series of confirmatory factor analyses using LISREL 8.80. Results for both samples showed that our hypothesized measurement models produced fit superior to that of any alternative model that combined our scales: Sample 1, comparative fit index (CFI) = .94, root mean square error of

approximation (RMSEA) = .07,  $\chi^2(269) = 417$ ,  $p > .05$ ; Sample 2, CFI = .94, RMSEA = .089,  $\chi^2(217) = 81.01$ ,  $p < .05$ . Specific confirmatory factor analysis results are available from K. Michele Kacmar.

Prior to testing our hypotheses in Sample 1, we ran a null model equation in HLM to determine the degree of nonindependence in supervisor ratings of performance. This test, which is equivalent to a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) of supervisory effects on performance ratings, was significant,  $\chi^2(34, N = 137) = 83.58$ ,  $p < .001$ ; this indicated systematic between-supervisors variance in performance ratings. The intraclass correlation coefficients (Hofmann, Griffin, & Gavin, 2000) showed that the percentage of variance in performance ratings residing between supervisors was .33. This supported our decision to use HLM to conduct our analyses.

The Sample 1 HLM results for the final step are shown in Table 3. Our results show that none of the control variables were significant predictors of performance. Similarly, CSE were not a significant predictor of performance. There was a significant negative association between perceptions of organizational politics and performance. Finally, the two-way interaction predicted in Hypothesis 1 explained an additional 1% of the variance in performance. However, to determine whether the significant interaction supported our hypothesis, we graphed the results. In particular, we plotted a slope at one standard deviation below and above the mean (Stone & Hollenbeck, 1989). A plot of the significant two-way interaction is provided in Figure 1. To further probe the interactions, we conducted simple slope tests using software designed for HLM provided by Preacher, Curran, and Bauer (2006). Results indicated that the slope of the low perceptions of politics line,  $t(34, 130) = 2.11$ ,  $p < .05$ , was significant, but the slope for the high perceptions of politics line was not,  $t(34, 130) = -1.06$ ,  $p = .58$ .

We present the regression results for perceptions of leadership effectiveness in Table 4. Results in Table 4 illustrate that the control variables for job position did not relate to performance. However, there was a main effect for CSE as well as a main effect for perceived leader effectiveness. The interaction term was significant and explained an incremental 4% in performance. Graphs of this interaction can be found in Figure 2. To verify the statistical significance of the interaction, we conducted simple slope analyses using the approach of Aiken and West (1991). For perceived leader effectiveness and performance, the CSE slope for individuals one standard deviation below the mean of perceived leader effectiveness was  $\beta = .03$  ( $p = .56$ ), whereas the CSE slope for those one

Table 1  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Sample 1

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. Gender	1.16	0.37	—				
2. Job tenure	4.69	2.99	.13	—			
3. Organizational tenure	9.96	6.96	.23**	.36**	—		
4. CSE	3.83	0.51	-.10	-.03	-.03	—	
5. Perceptions of organizational politics	2.30	0.96	.20*	-.03	.03	-.33**	—
6. Performance	4.20	0.70	-.09	-.06	.06	.11	-.37**

Note.  $N = 137$ . CSE = core self-evaluations.  
\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 2  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Sample 2

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Warehouse position (1 = yes, 0 = no)	0.28	0.45					
2. Sales position (1 = yes, 0 = no)	0.33	0.47	-.44**				
3. Transportation position (1 = yes, 0 = no)	0.26	0.44	-.37**	-.42**			
4. CSE	3.96	0.47	-.10	.09	-.03		
5. Perceived leader effectiveness	3.38	0.90	-.20**	.17**	-.04	.21**	
6. Performance	3.67	0.77	-.15*	.16*	-.02	.23**	.25**

Note. N = 226. CSE = core self-evaluations.  
\* p < .05. \*\* p < .01.

standard deviation above the mean on perceived leader effectiveness was  $\beta = .37$  ( $p < .01$ ). The 95% confidence intervals did not overlap, meaning that the CSE–performance relationship differed significantly for those who perceived their leader as effective versus ineffective.

The graphs in Figures 1 and 2 coupled with the simple slope results indicate support for Hypotheses 1 and 2. The relationship between CSE and performance was positive and stronger when the perceived work environment was favorable (low perceptions of organizational politics and high perceptions of leader effectiveness) rather than unfavorable.

Discussion

Applying TAT (Tett & Guterman, 2000) to explain how one’s self-concept will affect individual reactions to the work environment, we found that the relationship between CSE and performance was negative when the work environment was perceived as highly political and positive when the work environment was not perceived as political. These results suggest that in a less political climate, high core self-evaluators’ work activities are viewed as

more productive by supervisors. To align these results with TAT (Tett & Guterman, 2000), we found that low perceptions of politics appear to be a situation conducive and relevant to activating the productive activities of individuals with high CSE.

We found a similar result for perceptions of leader effectiveness. The positive slope of the CSE line for high leader effectiveness demonstrates that those with high CSE received significantly higher performance ratings when perceptions of leader effectiveness were high rather than low. Once again these results are consistent with TAT and suggest that favorable situations trigger core self-evaluation characteristics that allow those individuals to perform well. From a theoretical perspective, the results show that the “right” situations are often required to elicit a trait’s effect. From a practical perspective, as shown in Figure 1, the performance difference between high and low CSE individuals was nearly nonexistent when employees’ leaders were perceived as ineffective but grew to more than one half of a standard deviation when the leaders were perceived as effective. In practical terms these results suggest that organizations might profit from matching positive employees to favorable situations (e.g., working for effective leaders).

Table 3  
HLM Results for Perceptions of Organizational Politics From Sample 1

Variable	Overall performance	
	$\gamma$	$SE_{\gamma}$
Controls		
Organizational tenure	.00	.00
Job tenure	.00	.00
Gender	.03	.14
Main effects		
CSE	.04	.11
Perceptions of organizational politics	-.24**	.07
Interaction		
CSE $\times$ Perceptions of organizational politics	-.21**	.07
$R^2$	.16*	
$\Delta R^2$	.01*	

Note. N = 137.  $R^2$  values calculated with Snijders and Bosker (1999) formula. HLM = hierarchical linear modeling;  $\gamma$  = coefficient provided from the last step in the analyses;  $SE_{\gamma}$  = standard error of  $\gamma$ ; CSE = core self-evaluations.  
\* p < .05. \*\* p < .01.

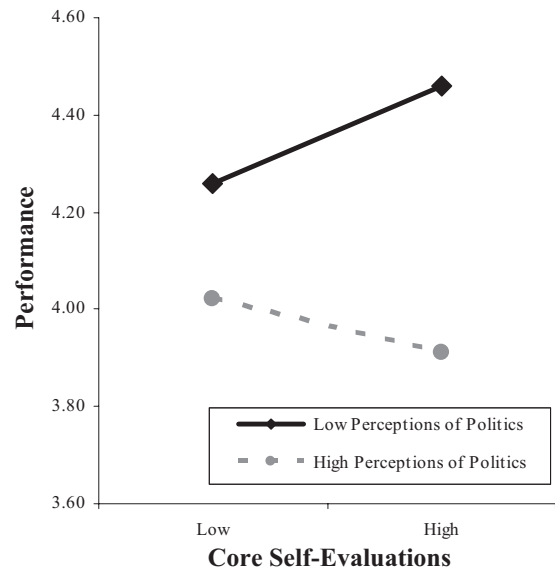


Figure 1. Graph of the interactive effect of perceptions of organizational politics on the relationship between core self-evaluations and performance.

Table 4  
Regression Results for Perceived Leader Effectiveness From  
Sample 2

Variable	Overall performance	
	$\beta$	$SE_{\beta}$
Controls		
Warehouse position	-.02	.10
Sales position	.12	.10
Transportation position	.03	.09
Main effects		
CSE	.20**	.06
Perceived leader effectiveness	.18**	.07
Interaction		
CSE $\times$ Perceived leader effectiveness	.20**	.06
$R^2$	.15**	
$\Delta R^2$	.04**	

Note.  $N = 226$ .  $\beta$  = standardized regression coefficients from the last step in the analysis;  $SE_{\beta}$  = standard error of  $\beta$ ; CSE = core self-evaluations.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

### Limitations and Strengths

Our results should be interpreted with some limitations in mind. First, we included only two situational moderators. Although the moderators we selected were theoretically derived, we encourage researchers to extend our study by exploring others. There were also limitations associated with our dependent variable. Our measure of performance, obtained from supervisor ratings of subordinate performance, was used strictly for research purposes. This may have limited the motivation of the raters as well as the validity of the ratings. Another limitation of our performance ratings is that they measured only task and contextual performance and not adaptivity or proactivity (Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007). Future researchers should consider broadening the performance measures used. It is also possible that supervisor biases may have contributed to our findings (Grant, Parker, & Collins, 2009). In situations characterized by political activity or weak leadership, the self-directed style of high core self-evaluators may be perceived as threatening and be neither rewarded nor welcomed (Frese & Fay, 2001).

Despite these limitations, this project also has strengths. First, our study expands what is known about CSE by incorporating contextual moderators. Additionally, the fact that we found significant interactions using two different samples and two different moderators provides a constructive replication (Lykken, 1968). Using TAT to explain the interactional effect between person and situation brings richness to our understanding of employee responses to favorable and unfavorable work environments.

### Implications for Practice

Our findings have several practical implications. First, these results suggest that managers can create work environments that trigger the positive characteristics associated with high core self-evaluators to surface. For instance, controlling political activity and pairing high core self-evaluators with effective leadership may position them to capitalize on their strengths. Although providing

such an environment to low core self-evaluators will not produce the same positive results as those for high core self-evaluators, neither will it adversely impact their performance.

Our results also suggest that seeking applicants who are high in CSE would be advantageous, provided the work environment can be designed to activate these qualities. If managers are unable to create a work environment that is supportive of the needs of high core self-evaluators, recruiting such applicants may not be advisable, as high CSE individuals in negative environments fare no better than their low CSE counterparts. Moreover, where practical, CSE might be taken into account in placement decisions. If high CSE individuals thrive in favorable work environments, then in positions where many location placement decisions are made (e.g., retail stores, banks), CSE might be one factor to consider.

### Future Research

Additional empirical research examining the suitability of certain dispositional profiles to specific work environments promises to be valuable for both researchers and practitioners. Although our logic, which aligned with TAT, described a synergistic interactive effect whereby higher performance resulted when high core self-evaluators were placed in a favorable work environment, it is possible to conceive of a compensatory interaction as well. Under these conditions, those possessing high CSE may be able to buffer themselves against a negative (or unfavorable) work environment. The logic behind a compensatory model aligns with behavioral plasticity theory (Brockner, 1988). In essence, this theory suggests that those low in CSE would react more strongly to an unfavorable work environment than would those high in CSE. Although it is true that the results of the current study are not consistent with a compensatory model, it is possible to imagine situations in which such a model could be supported. For instance, we suspect a compensatory model would hold when the work environment is so

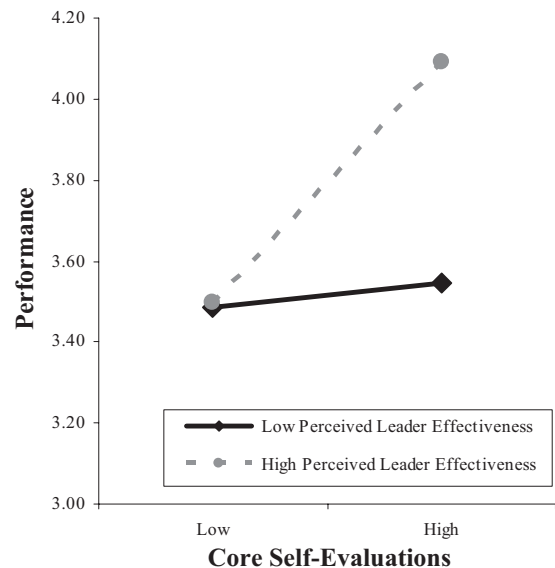


Figure 2. Graph of the interactive effect of perceptions of leader effectiveness on the relationship between core self-evaluations and performance.

challenging that only those with high CSE could succeed. That is, an environment that aligns with behavioral plasticity theory would be one in which *not* possessing high core self-evaluation characteristics would harm one's performance. Given that high core self-evaluators are goal-oriented planners, an environment that required workers to independently create and then implement their own work plans would be one in which low core self-evaluators might flounder but high core self-evaluators would not. We leave empirical confirmation of our contentions to future researchers.

Another avenue for future research could be to examine the relationships between CSE and political skill. Politically skilled individuals can properly assess situations and those in them to determine how to generate positive outcomes (Ferris et al., 2005). Combining this ability with CSE might produce interesting results. It is possible that politically skilled high core self-evaluators would produce the most positive outcomes because they could create a plan of attack and understand the best way to implement it. More interesting, however, might be the high/low combination. For example, would an individual with high political skill and low CSE outperform an individual with low political skill but high CSE?

The current study aligns with the long and prosperous research path set forth by Ferris and his colleagues. His original article that defined and developed a perceptions of politics model (Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989) suggests that politics is in the eye of the beholder. That is, two people working for the same organization, in the same department and for the same boss, may not view the same behaviors and actions as political. For example, the actions of a boss who withholds information to maintain power over his subordinates will appear political to those hungry for information and irrelevant to those who are not. However, it is possible to conceive of organizational politics as an environmental or climatic construct measured at the work group or team level. This approach would allow political activities in the workplace to be viewed as an environmental force as opposed to a personal force. From a measurement perspective this would require items that focused on a specific referent group rather than the more general referents used in currently validated scales. To accomplish this, researchers could apply the logic of others who have addressed the possibility of shifting the referent from an individual focus to a group (Chen, Mathieu, & Bliese, 2004; Klein, Conn, Smith, & Sorra, 2001). Viewing politics perceptions at a higher level could provide a significant contribution to this area.

A final potential avenue for future research is to explore the reasons behind the strong negative relationship we found between CSE and perceptions of organizational politics. Potential explanations can be found for both low and high core self-evaluators. Among their other personal characteristics, low core self-evaluators possess an external locus of control. Thus, these individuals do not view themselves in charge of their future. This perceived lack of autonomy may lead to viewing the environment as an obstacle to career success. Under such conditions, environmental pitfalls become more apparent and are not easily explained, resulting in the conclusion that the environment is highly political. Conversely, high core self-evaluators may take the initiative to create a positive future and put forth the effort to accomplish their goals. These contributions may also earn high CSE idiosyncratic credits that protect these individuals from politics and thus actually create a more favorable environment. Involving themselves deeply in their work leaves high core self-evaluators little time to worry

about the environment (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992). We are hopeful that future researchers will more fully explore the relationship between CSE and perceptions of politics.

In conclusion, this project shows the need to carefully consider the relationship that exists between dispositional and situational factors. In this case we explored the disposition of CSE and the situational factors of perceived political work environments and perceived leader effectiveness. Our findings have important implications for organizational practitioners who must employ their available resources effectively to compete in a global marketplace. Additionally, we hope that our results motivate organizational scholars to follow this work with new and more fully developed insights about the relationships between CSE and other key workplace variables.

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