Organizational features as situational strength: Engaging the low-conscientious employee

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One of the most robust findings in work psychology is the role that conscientiousness plays in performance; more recently, research indicates that conscientious employees are also the most engaged in their work. The present study examines whether the organization has any role in this relation, and if it is possible for individuals who are low in conscientiousness to also feel high levels of engagement. One hundred forty-one full-time Romanian workers and their peers, representing a variety of industries, were surveyed, revealing that features of the organization can actually attenuate the relation between conscientiousness and engagement. Specifically, when employees perceive that the organization is relatively formalized (i.e., where following rules is important), and in organizations where there is a perception that effort is rewarded, conscientiousness is not as strongly associated with engagement. These organizational features represent situational strength, and when situations are strong, scripts and rules tend to predict behavior, rather than personality. As such, it may be possible for low-conscientiousness individuals to actually become more engaged through organizational change. For those who are low in conscientiousness, for example, a formal work environment likely provides structure and decreases ambiguity, which aids in lower conscientious employees becoming more engaged. Similarly, when it is perceived that the organization rewards effort, those who are low in conscientiousness receive this reinforcement, and likely benefit the most, as their levels of engagement tend to approach those who are higher in conscientiousness.

Introduction

One of the most consistent findings in organizational psychology is that conscientiousness is an extremely desired trait for employees to possess. Conscientiousness is related to myriad positive work-related outcomes, such as organization-oriented citizenship behavior (Ilies, Fulmer, Spitzmuller, & Johnson, 2009), both affective and continuance forms of organizational commitment (Kumar & Bakhshi, 2010), job satisfaction (Bruk-Lee, Khowry, Nixon, Goh, & Spector, 2009), and low turnover (Zimmerman, 2008), in addition to performance (Barrick, Mount, & Judge, 2001b; Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002; Whetzel, McCloy, Hooper, Russell, & Waters, 2009).

Recently, researchers have also identified a consistent relation between conscientiousness and fulfillment, or engagement (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011; Kahn, 1990; Kim, Shin, & Swanger, 2008; Mostert & Rothman, 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roam, & Bakker, 2002; Virga, Zaborila, Sulea, & Maricutoiu, 2009) that the employee feels toward his or her work. Work engagement is an affective-motivational state of fulfillment, tapping into employees' experience of

work, characterized by vigor (the desire to devote time and effort in one's work, and the extent to which one is stimulated and energetic due to his or her work), dedication (referring to a significant and meaningful pursuit); and absorption (whereby one is engulfed and fully concentrating on one's work; Bakker, Albrecht, & Leiter, 2011; Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008; Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006). Engagement is related to several positive work outcomes, such as low turnover, increased organizational commitment, and even better health (Halbesleben, 2010).

Although many organizations often assess and reward high levels of conscientiousness in a selection context, it is interesting to wonder how individuals who happen to possess lower levels of conscientiousness fare, especially, with respect to engagement. Are those who have lower levels of conscientiousness not able to experience a sense of fulfillment in their jobs, or are there organizational interventions or features that could facilitate engagement for these individuals that would made engagement more likely? The present paper aims to explore this relation further, to examine the extent to which an organization may be able to influence engagement levels among low-conscientious employees by enacting certain interventions or features, such as fostering a more formal environment and by rewarding effort.

Conscientiousness is a stable personality trait that refers to the extent to which an individual is responsible, dependable, persistent, and achievement-oriented (Barrick & Mount, 1991; McCrae & Costa, 1987). Conscientious employees are characterized by their organizational skills, self-discipline, steadiness, and strong sense of professional efficacy, which enables them to drive their energy into their work (Kim et al., 2008). On the other end of the spectrum, Barrick and Mount report that those who possess low levels of conscientiousness tend to be a bit lazy and disorganized. Those who are high in conscientiousness tend to create their own order when faced with obstacles, through perseverance and discipline (Hochwarter, Witt, & Kacmar, 2000).

According to Bakker and Schaufeli (2008), one of the hallmarks of engaged individuals is that they are able to create their own resources, similar to the way conscientious employees create order, as discussed above. Moreover, the Christian et al. (2011) meta-analysis has emphasized the role of conscientiousness, positive affect and proactive personality in predicting work engagement. Therefore, the relation between conscientiousness and work engagement is notable in its reciprocity; not only do organizations benefit from employing conscientious employees, but conscientious employees also receive something of value, in that they are also typically fulfilled by their work. I aim to further examine this relation between conscientiousness and engagement, and also investigate the degree to which organizations may be able to influence engagement for the low-conscientious employee.

Although conscientiousness is a stable trait (Barrick & Mount, 2005), engagement can also be influenced by more dynamic organizational factors, such as working conditions, job demands, and job resources (Prieto, Salanova, Martínez, & Schaufeli, 2008; Salanova, Agut, & Peiro, 2005). I posit that organizations can indeed affect individual employee engagement levels by the contextual cues that they provide.

One such way that organizations offer such contextual cues is through situational strength (Mischel, 1977). In their comprehensive review of the situational strength literature, Meyer, Dalal, and Hermida (2010) define situational strength as "implicit or explicit cues provided by external entities regarding the desirability of potential behaviors" (p. 122). Strong situations, such as rules and regulations, social cues, and policies and procedures also tend to limit the expression that personality has on a given situation by providing cues as to how the individual should behave (e.g., Schneider & Hough, 1995; Tett & Burnett, 2003). In contrast, weak situations amplify the influence of personality in a given situation. Meyer et al. (2010) describe four facets of situational strength: clarity, consistency, constraints, and consequences. Clarity refers to the extent that cues in the workplace are apparent, such as specific rules, or a strong organizational climate. A clear statement that the organization has a "zero-tolerance" policy on employee drug usage, for example, serves as such a clear message. Consistency is the extent to which all of the cues within an organization are compatible with one another. If an organization simply has many policies and rules and procedures, but many of them conflict with one another, confusion is likely to set in, and the situation is weakened. This inconsistency may occur, for example, in a decentralized organization where there are local and global human resources departments, each with its own handbook and policies. Constraints are forces from within the environment that are outside an individual's control that limit his or her freedom of decision or action. For example, micromanaging an employee has this effect, which results in a strong situation for the employee. Finally, consequences refer to features of the situation where the implications of individuals' decisions or actions have high stakes, such as rewards and punishments. Incentive programs and performance improvement plans function in this capacity as consequences that are manifested as strong situations.

Taken together, I posit that organizational features that contain one or more of these four situational strength facets decrease the impact of employee personality in organizational outcomes. Situational strength is often marked by job formality and other characteristics or features of the job that include policies, procedures, and close supervision (Meyer, Dalal, & Bonaccio, 2009). In a meta-analysis using O*Net coding, for example, Meyer et al. found that the conscientious-performance relation is attenuated in occupations where conscientious behavior is encouraged and rewarded, due to either job-related constraints (e.g., for medical transcriptionists) or job-related consequences (e.g., for commercial airline pilots). In reducing the ambiguity in the work by providing contextual cues, direction, and focus as to what is expected and how employees are to behave, the organization should be less susceptible to inefficiency and low productivity, due to low levels of careful and deliberate (i.e., conscientious) behavior among its employees.

Two features of the organization on which I would like to focus in the present paper are formality and effort perception. These two features best exemplify situational strength in the workplace, best illustrated by the Patterson et al. (2005) research on organizational climate. Job formality (referred to as "formalization" in the Patterson et al. paper) describes an organization that is marked by its

rules and procedures. By definition, formality represents the clarity, consistency, and constraint facets of situational strength (Meyer et al., 2010). Specifically, organizations that rely heavily on rules and procedures provide clear direction (clarity), they telegraph what is expected of employees at all times (consistency), and in doing so, these rules also limit the number of possible actions that an employee may take in a given circumstance (constraint). In quite literally expressing to its employees what to do and how to behave, the organization marked by formality leaves little room for ambiguity. As these rules and procedures become more clear, more consistent, and more restrictive, the situation strengthens; according to Meyer et al., research is unclear on whether additional facets function in an additive or multiplicative fashion, but it is certain that the more facets that are present, the stronger the situation. Moreover, Meyer et al. advise that as rules and procedures become more closely aligned, the situation becomes stronger.

Effort perception refers to the Patterson et al. (2005) conception of the degree to which employees believe that their organizational peers work toward achieving goals. This construct is a more of a consequence-oriented type of situational strength than formality, because in organizations where effort perception is high, a lack of effort may lead to negative outcomes, such as disciplinary actions or termination. Nonetheless, effort perception is a form of situational strength, because when an organization demonstrates that it values effort, it likely serves as a signal to the employee as to the amount of effort that is required or expected of someone in a given job. If individuals perceive that their coworkers are working very hard, the perception should serve as a cue that they themselves also need to work hard, which fulfills the situational strength definition of providing a contextual behavioral cue.

Therefore, it is likely that, as features of the organization that provide situational strength, formality and effort perception serve to reduce, or even attenuate the importance that personality may play in the workplace. In an environment marked by formality, rules are present to ensure that the "correct" behavior occurs. Similarly, in an environment where effort is rewarded, the cues are present for all employees to remind them that effort is rewarded, and what levels of effort are expected. These cues would likely result in more conscientious behavior from most employees, and perhaps, an ensuing increase in performance. This increase in performance could be slight, or it could even be transitory. However, as performance tends to be related to engagement (Dalal, Baysinger, Brummel, & LeBreton, 2012; Demerouti & Cropanzano, 2010), enacting these organizational features will create a stronger sense of engagement among lower-conscientiousness people; in essence, their organization is scaffolding their conscientious behavior to make up for their trait-based shortcomings. Taken together, in organizations that offer environments that are characterized by formality, and where there is the perception that effort is rewarded, it is likely that the organization provides situational strength, which in turn creates an environment for employee engagement among workers who are low in conscientiousness, but not for those who are high in conscientiousness.

H1: Conscientiousness and organizational formality interact such that in organizations with high degrees of formality, the relation between conscientiousness and work engagement is weakened.

H2: Conscientiousness and effort perception interact such that in organizations where employees are perceived to expend a considerable amount of effort, the relation between conscientiousness and work engagement is weakened.

Method

Participants

I surveyed 141 full-time employees in Romania from a variety of organizations and occupations, in a variety of industries, such as education, finance, and healthcare. The most commonly represented industries were education (n = 21), retail (n = 15), sales (n =5), and healthcare (n = 5). The surveys did ask participants to identify the organizations at which they were employed, but given the variety of industries sampled, it is unlikely that there were large numbers of participants representing the same organization. The sample was 68% female, and the age of participants ranged from 20 to 58, with a mean and median age of 28 years. Participants had worked for their respective organizations for an average of 3.14 years.

Hogan, Hogan, and Roberts (1996) propose that personality can be experienced from the observer's perspective (of behavioral manifestations of the trait) and the self-perspective (i.e., cognitive processes that drive behavior). Therefore, I collected personality from both the primary participants and coworkers of the primary participants. The primary participants were instructed to complete the survey and to give a second survey packet to one of their coworkers. The coworker sent the completed packet back to the researcher. Only cases that contained a primary participant and a corresponding coworker survey were eligible for analysis. The characteristics of the coworker sample were remarkably similar to those of the primary participants, with 69% of the sample female, ranging in age from 18 to 59, with a mean of 29.1 and a median of 27. Coworker participants had been with their respective organizations for an average of four years.

Measures

All instruments in the present study were authored in English, so all scales were translated from English into Romanian, and back-translated into English, to ensure that not only word meanings, but that the actual content and context of the language were properly conveyed.

Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness was measured using a 10-item scale from the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP; Goldberg et al., 2006). The IPIP makes available personality scales from the bipolar NEO domains (Costa & McCrae, 1992), with similar internal consistency and criterion-related validity (Goldberg, 1999; Goldberg et al., 1991; Johnson, 2005). The measure employs a Likert-type response format asking participants to report level of agreement, with options ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). All items provided to the coworker were identical to the self-report items, but with the primary participant as the referent. The internal

consistency of the scale was α = .81 for the self-report measure, and α = .85 for the coworker report in the present study. Sample items include "I am always prepared" and "I pay attention to details".

Work engagement.

Work engagement was measured using the nine-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES; Schaufeli et al., 2006; α = .88), which includes such items as "At my work, I feel that I am bursting with energy" and "When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work". The format for this scale is a Likert-type response format asking participants to report frequency and prevalence of various feelings, with options ranging from 0 (Never) to 6 (Always). Although engagement can be an observable characteristic, the measure would be useless for us to interpret, as it would ask the coworker participant to "get inside the head" of the primary participant, and assess his or her cognitive and affective processes, we only obtained self-reports of work engagement.

Organizational features.

Organizational formality and effort perception were measured using the formalization and effort factors of the Organizational Climate Measure (OCM; Patterson et al., 2005), which measures the organizational and psychological climate of various features of an organization. There are three formalization items (α = .76 for self-report, α = .73 for coworker report) in the Patterson et al. measure: "Everything here has to be done by the book"; "It is considered extremely important here to follow the rules"; and "It is not necessary to follow procedures to the letter around here" (reverse-coded). The Patterson et al. scale also contains three effort perception items (α = .72 for self-report, α = .60 for coworker report): "People here are enthusiastic about their work"; "People here are prepared to make a special effort to do a good job"; and "People here don't put more effort in their work than they have to" (reverse-coded). The measure employs a Likert-type response format asking participants to report level of agreement, with options ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Results

Correlations, means, and standard deviations of the variables are displayed in Table 1.

It was important to obtain self- and coworker-reports of our independent variables, for the purposes of minimizing common method bias, and also because the self- and coworker-reports measure different perspectives of the same construct (Hogan et al, 1996). In order to ensure that self- and coworker-reports of personality are indeed conceptually similar, but unique, I first analyzed the relation between self-reports and coworker-reports of conscientiousness (r = .32, p<.01). Next, I examined the correlation between self- and coworker-reports of the organizational features in the present study (r = .55, p<.01 for formality; r = .39, p<.01 for effort perceptions

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Conscientiousness (self-report)	-							
2. Coworker report of conscientiousness	.32**	-						
3. Engagement	.36**	.09	-					
4. Formality (self-report)	.25**	.19*	.12	-				
5. Coworker report of formality	.16	.36**	.01	.55**	-			
6. Perception of effort (self-report)	.33**	.22**	.40**	.23**	.06	-		
7. Coworker perception of effort	.26**	.30**	.18*	.15	.20*	.39**	-	
8. Gender	.01	.08	.13	.05	.01	-.02	.00	-
M	3.75	3.79	3.59	3.87	3.81	3.32	3.18	-
SD	0.57	0.60	1.31	0.77	0.80	0.78	0.72	

Note: N = 141. *p<.05. **p<.01

Although I do not hypothesize main effects for any of the independent variables on engagement, there is a significant relation between self-reports of conscientiousness and engagement (r = .36, p<.01), but not for coworker reports of conscientiousness and engagement (r = .09, n.s.). As for the organizational features, there is no significant relation between formality and engagement (r = .12, n.s. for self-reports of formality; r = .01, n.s. for coworker reports); there is a significant relation between perceptions of effort and engagement (r = .40, p<.01 for self-reports of effort perception; r = .18, p<.05 for coworker-reports of effort perception).

The chief concern in the present paper is the moderating influence of organizational features (formality and perceptions of effort) on the relation between conscientiousness and work engagement. I conducted moderated regression analyses; for each analysis, centered forms of both conscientiousness and one of the

organizational features were entered into the equation. In Step 2, the interaction term between conscientiousness and the respective organizational feature was entered. I conducted these analyses for both self- and coworker-reports of conscientiousness and organizational features, and across sources (i.e., self-reports of conscientiousness with coworker reports of organizational features, as well as coworker reports of the primary participant's level of conscientiousness with self –reports of organizational features. Finally, I used a program called Fast Interaction to graph any significant interactions, looking at conscientiousness as a continuous variable.

Table 2
Formality as a Moderator of the Conscientiousness–Engagement Relation (Self-Reports)

	B	SEB	β
Step 1:			
Conscientiousness	.80**	.19	.35**
Formality	.06	.14	.04
R^2	.13		
Step 2:			
Conscientiousness	3.10**	.95	1.35**
Formality	2.35	.93	1.38*
Conscientiousness x formality	-.60*	.24	-1.88*
R^2	.17*		

Note: *p< .05. **p< .01.

Hypothesis 1 was supported, in that perceived formality in an organization moderates the relation between conscientiousness and work engagement (β = -1.88, p <.01; please see Table 2 for more detail). It is important to note, however, that this interaction only exists when analyzing self-reports of conscientiousness and formality (β = -.39, n.s. for coworker reports, as shown in Table 3). When the employee perceives there to be high levels of formality, the relation between conscientiousness and engagement that has been demonstrated in prior literature (Kim et al., 2008; Mostert & Rothman, 2006; Virga et al., 2009) is attenuated. An analysis of simple slope differences reveals that the two slopes are significantly different (t=3.89, p<.01), and this interaction is depicted in Figure 1. When analyzing across sources, although the results are not significant, the p-values may be of interest to the reader; specifically, they may indicate that the power of the sample may be weaker than originally anticipated, perhaps resulting in a Type II error. This is the case for both self-reported conscientiousness interacting with coworker perceptions of formality (β = -1.29, p = .08) and for coworker-reported conscientiousness interacting with self-reports of formality (β = -1.31, p = .058).

Table 3.
Formality as a Moderator of the Conscientiousness–Engagement Relation (Coworker-reports)

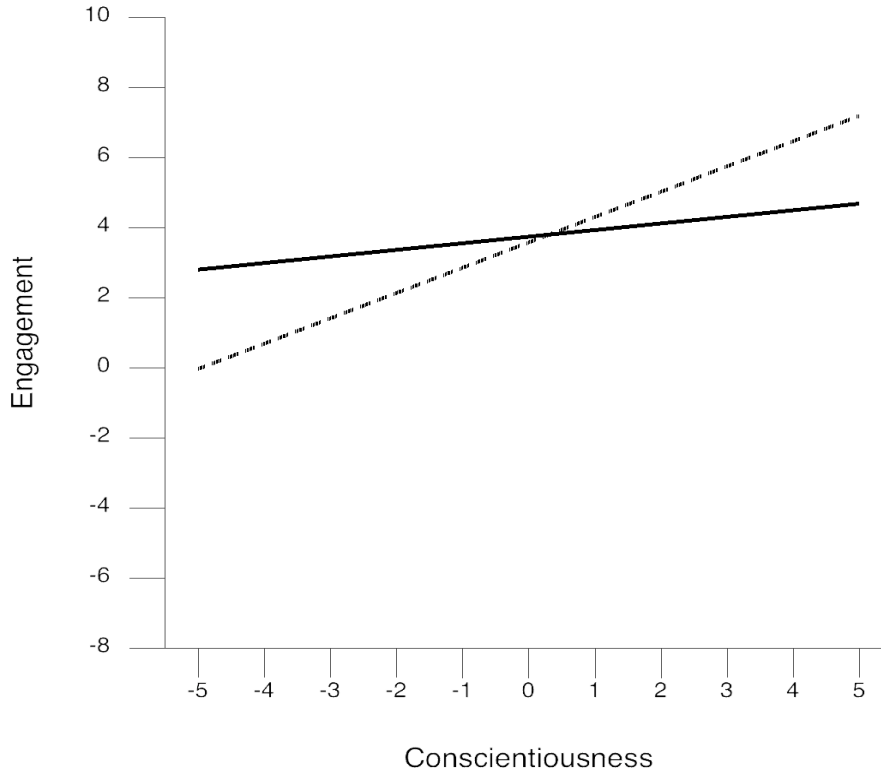|	B	SEB	β
Step 1:			
Conscientiousness	.25	.21	.11
Formality	-.04	.15	-.02
R^2	.01		
Step 2:			
Conscientiousness	.49	.56	.21
Formality	.21	.56	.13
Conscientiousness x formality	-.07	.14	-.22
R^2	.01		

Note. *p< .05. **p< .01.

Figure 1. Engagement as a Function of Conscientiousness and Formality. The solid black line indicates +1 SD Formality whereas the dashed black line indicates -1 SD Formality.

Hypothesis 2, which examines perceptions of effort in the organization as a moderator of the conscientiousness-engagement relation, was also supported. As with Hypothesis 1, however, the interaction is significant for self-reports (β = -1.46, p <.05, as illustrated in Table 4), but not for coworker reports (β = -.40, n.s, please see Table 5 for more detail.). Specifically, when the employee believes that there is a high degree of effort expended by those in the organization, the established relation between conscientiousness and engagement is also attenuated. An analysis of simple slope differences reveals that the two slopes are significantly different (t=3.54, p<.01). This interaction is displayed in Figure 2. When analyzing this finding across sources, results are mixed. For self-reported conscientiousness interacting with coworker perceptions of effort, results indicate a possible Type II error (β = -1.21, p = .11), but there is no support when looking at coworker reports of conscientiousness interacting with self-reports of effort (β = -0.01, n.s.)

Table 4
Effort Perceptions as a Moderator of the Conscientiousness–Engagement Relation (Self-Reports)

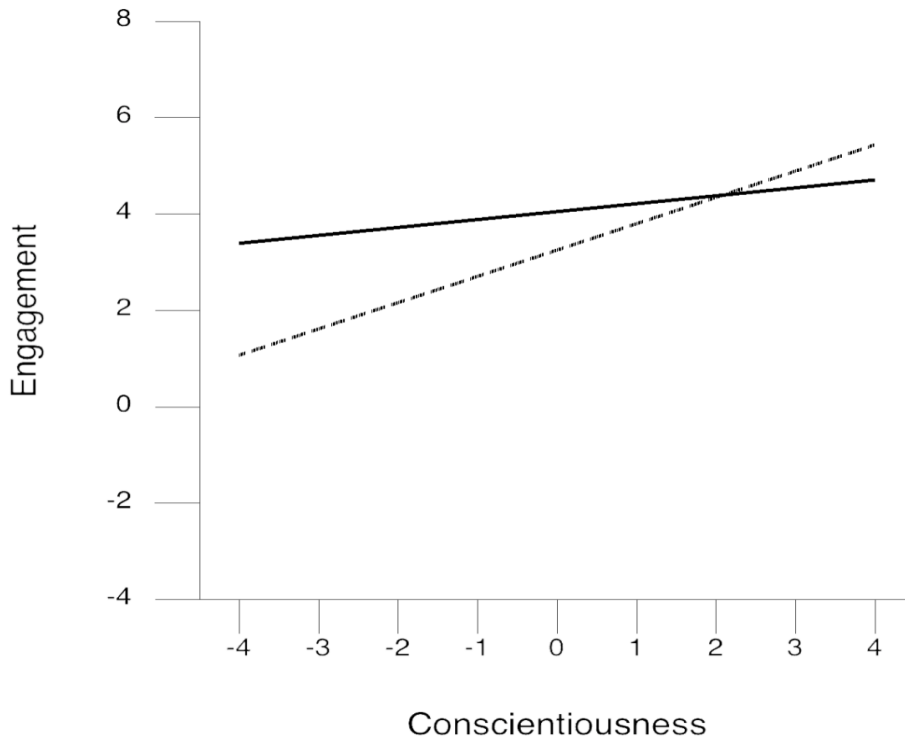|	B	SEB	β
Step 1:			
Conscientiousness	.58**	.18	.25**
Effort	.54**	.14	.32**
R^2	.22		
Step 2:			
Conscientiousness	2.14**	.79	.94**
Effort	2.35*	.90	1.40*
Conscientiousness x effort	-.49*	.24	-1.46*
R^2	.24*		

Note. *p< .05; **p< .01.

Figure 2. Engagement as a Function of Conscientiousness and Effort. The solid black line indicates +1 SD Effort whereas the dashed black line indicates -1 SD Effort.

Table 5.
Effort Perceptions as a Moderator of the Conscientiousness–Engagement Relation (Coworker Reports)

	B	SEB	β
Step 1:			
Conscientiousness	.13	20	.06
Effort	.29	.16	.16
R^2	.03		
Step 2:			
Conscientiousness	.56	.59	.24
Effort	.81	.71	.45
Conscientiousness x effort	-.13	.17	-.39
R^2	.04		

Note: [*]$p < .05$; [**]$p < .01$.

Discussion

As expected, I found that the conscientiousness–formality interaction is significant, but notably only when looking at self-reported measures. In organizations perceived to not have many rules (low formality), the relation between conscientiousness and engagement is clear and strong. Individuals who are highly conscientious know how to behave in the absence of rules, because they are naturally dependable and responsible (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Barrick et al., 2001a) and likely stand out because of it (Sackett, Gruys, & Ellingson, 1998). These highly-conscientious individuals in turn become engaged in the organization, and because they are more likely to know where to direct their efforts, how to monitor their

progress, and persist until they reach their goals, they are likely to be the top performers (Perry, Hunter, Witt, & Harris, 2010). In instances of high formality, however, this relation is attenuated; that is, those with lower levels of conscientiousness become more engaged. For those who are low in conscientiousness, a formal work environment likely provides structure and decreases ambiguity, which aids in lower conscientious employees becoming more engaged.

In organizations where employees perceive that their coworkers typically exert a lot of effort, which is in turn rewarded, this effort perception appears to represent a consequentially-based strong situation. To illustrate, let us first consider the organization where effort perceptions are low. In organizations where obvious signs of effort are not

the norm, conscientious people, who typically exert more effort (Fong & Tosi, 2007), likely distinguish themselves, and the relation between conscientiousness and engagement is clear and strong. In this scenario, individuals who are highly conscientious understand that even if not obvious, organizations generally value effort, and as a result, conscientious individuals distinguish themselves as star performers. In turn, these conscientious individuals develop feelings of engagement toward the organization, because their hard work is rewarded. In environments where there is an obvious perception that exerting effort is the norm, however, this relation is reduced. In such environments, one's level of conscientiousness does not appear to make any difference, with respect to engagement. The data from the present study indicate that when effort is perceived to be the prevailing norm, (i.e., when it is perceived that everyone in the organization exerts effort) those who are low in conscientiousness benefit the most, as their levels of engagement tend to approach those who are high in conscientiousness.

It is not terribly surprising that coworker reports do not yield significant results. First, as Hogan et al. (1996) assert, the coworker's (i.e., the observer's) report of one's personality is a reputational version of one's behavior, as opposed to the cognitive version that is assessed via self-reports. Similarly, coworker reports of organizational features only capture the coworker's perspective of such features, and not the primary participant's perspective. The phenomena represented in both hypotheses functions as follows: a cognitive version of a personality trait (i.e., conscientiousness) interacts with a perception of organizational features (i.e., formality and effort perception) to yield an attitude (i.e., engagement). It appears that the cognition version that forms one's personality is necessary, as is the cognitive perception of the workplace, in order to form these attitudes, and any outsider's perception is irrelevant and unnecessary in predicting workplace engagement. I obtained this coworker data for the purpose of getting the full picture, and to attempt to guard against common method variance.

It is possible, however, that common method variance is, nevertheless, at work. That is, it may be that the support for the hypotheses may not be due to any actual phenomenon of personality and features of the environment interacting to yield an attitude, but rather, due to the measurement of the data. Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003) concluded that analyzing data from common sources, as I did in the present study, can produce spurious results (i.e., self-report bias). Podsakoff et al. report that this bias may occur due to the fact that individuals aim to present a consistent presentation of themselves (i.e., consistency motif), that they aim to hold assumptions about relations between established constructs (i.e., implicit theories), the social desirability of items, positive and negative affectivity, or one's mood. Although I recognize that our data only demonstrate support for our hypotheses when examining common sources, I fail to see any of the aforementioned Podsakoff et al. explanations as possibilities here. It is unlikely that respondents were able to somehow "connect the dots" and present common reports of their conscientiousness that would somehow match their levels of formality and effort perceptions, as well as engagement levels. Furthermore, Evans (1985)

found that common method variance tends to attenuate interactions, and does not reveal interactions that are not present. The most likely explanation for the analyses in the present study that were mixed, in addition to the theoretical argument concerning the Hogan et al. (1996) views of personality, is that there were simply too few respondents to be able to demonstrate cross-source uniformity of results. This is indicated by the fact that three of our four cross-source analyses (i.e., all but coworker reports of primary participants' levels of conscientiousness interacting with self-reports of effort perception) had p-values under .11, and in the case of coworker-reported conscientiousness interacting with self-reports of formality, a p-value of .058.

With respect to the collection of coworker data, although it is relatively easy to modify personality-based items to a referent other (e.g., "My coworker is always prepared"), it is much more difficult to do so with measures of organizational features (e.g., "My coworker thinks that everything here has to be done by the book"), and even less helpful in measures of engagement (e.g., "When my coworker gets up in the morning, he or she is bursting with energy"). Therefore, I decided to only measure conscientiousness with the coworker as a referent. With respect to organizational features, it is possible that coworkers would report different levels of formality and effort perception from their own if asked specifically about their coworkers' perceptions of such features. It is important to note that the correlation between self- and coworker-reports of formality (r = .55) and effort (r = .39) indicate that although significant, these "features" are not measures organizational climate, but rather psychological climate (James & Jones, 1974), or simply individual perceptions of workplace features. However, there is a greater possibility that coworker participants would have had difficulty responding to the items, which would have compromised the analyses. There is also value in including other perceptions of organizational features, when analyzing person-environmental interactions, as I have done in the present study.

As for the measure of work engagement, I did not believe that the coworker participants would be able to accurately assess the primary participants' engagement attitudes, and further, I did not think that it would have been helpful, nor relevant to assess the coworkers' own feelings of engagement; therefore, the surveys did not ask coworker participants any questions about work engagement.

The present study is not without other limitations as well. Apart from possible common method variance, addressed above, there are other issues related to the sample that I would like to address. First, the sample consisted of working Romanians, and it is possible that this population is somewhat exceptional, and would not generalize to a larger population. It is always a limitation when one collects data in only one country. However, it is unlikely that there is any cultural reason for the findings; there are, of course social and economic issues unique to Romania, but these issues are not conceptually related to the variables of interest in the present paper. Future studies may nevertheless aim to study the generalizability of these results towards representative or occupation-specific samples, potentially also in other western and non-western societies. Second, the sample size (n = 141), may not

provide the power to detect support for the hypotheses. However, the sample is strong in other areas as well; it is an older population (median of 28 years) than a more traditional university sample, and includes participants from a variety of organizations.

It is also somewhat expected that there is the absence of a main effect between formality and engagement. It is likely that the modest variability in conscientiousness is enough to mask any significant relation that formality has with engagement. The findings of the present study indicate that although individuals who are high in conscientiousness tend have generally higher levels of engagement than those who are low in conscientiousness, low-conscientiousness employees are much more sensitive to levels of formality in inducing any engagement.

The present paper illustrates the importance of situational strength as an important factor in organizational interventions, such as influencing engagement. Although conscientious employees tend to be the ones who are typically the most engaged, organizations may actually be able to increase levels of engagement among employees who are lower on conscientiousness, by enacting rules and rewarding effort. From the organizational perspective, this may be beneficial; if poor selection efforts yield employees who are low on conscientiousness, enacting rules and exemplifying role models may be the most effective way to engage the low-conscientious employee. Performance may be a mechanism that acts to facilitate this engagement in the case of effort perception, but research has not addressed this question. Future research should examine performance as a mediator in the effort-engagement relation. Regardless, because engagement leads to critical positive work outcomes, such as low turnover and increased commitment, engagement is an important attitude for organizations to foster, independent of performance. Furthermore, due to its positive health benefits, it is in an employee's best interests to develop a feeling of engagement toward his or her organization.

This finding is also valuable as a practical contribution to organizations, as it highlights how various motivational and operational strategies are viewed by employees, and that organizations may actually aim to maximize engagement levels throughout the organization, providing vigor and dedication to employees that typically do not experience this level of fulfillment at work. Moreover, the present study should be a starting point in investigating the person-situation interaction on engagement. Organizations probably have less control over employee engagement than they believe, but more control over engagement than much of the personality literature might indicate. It would be interesting to see if other personality variables, such as neuroticism, agreeableness, and extraversion have interactions with other features of organizations, such as autonomy, civility, perceptions of fairness of policies and even pay.

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