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Positive Group Context, Work Attitudes, and Organizational Misbehavior: The Case of Withholding Job Effort

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ABSTRACT. Considering the organization's ethical context as a framework to investigate workplace phenomena, this field study of military reserve personnel examines the relationships among perceptions of psychosocial group variables, such as cohesiveness, helping behavior and peer leadership, employee job attitudes, and the likelihood of individuals' withholding on-the-job effort, a form of organizational misbehavior. Hypotheses were tested with a sample of 290 individuals using structural equation modeling, and support for negative relationships between perceptions of positive group context and withholding effort by individual employees was found. In addition, individual effort-performance expectancy and individual job satisfaction were negatively related to withholding effort. The findings provide evidence that individual perceptions of positive group context play a key role in the presence of misbehavior at work. The results indicate that positive group context might be an important element of ethical climate that should be managed to temper occurrence of such adverse work behavior.

KEY WORDS: workplace deviance, social influence, withholding effort, attitudes, group context, anti-social behavior

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The relationship between group influences and individual attitudes, intended behavior and actual behavior are documented extensively in organizational research (e.g., Burton et al., 2005; Gladstein, 1984; Hackman, 1992; Homans, 1950; Ng and Van Dyne, 2005; Tziner and Vardi, 1982), but less attention has been given to potential linkages between perceptions of ethical group climate and the likelihood that employees engage in deviant and dysfunctional misbehavior in organizations (Kidwell and Martin, 2005; Vardi and Weitz, 2004). This field study considers how perceptions of positive work group context, which we identify as an important element of ethical group climate (Victor and Cullen, 1988), can act in concert with job attitudes to influence employee's beliefs that effort will lead to successful job performance, as well as to an individual's decision to engage in organizational misbehavior, e.g., withholding effort in job-related tasks.

Group influences have been linked to positive organizational outcomes such as helping behavior among employees (e.g., Ng and Van Dyne, 2005), as well as the prevalence of negative (or anti-social) behavior in work groups (Robinson and O'Leary-Kelly, 1998), interpersonal aggression (Glomb and Liao, 2003) and aggressive reactions to interactional injustice (Burton et al., 2005). In addition, research indicates that different normative systems develop

within organizations and result in group and organizational climates that affect the prevalence of employee unethical behavior (Victor and Cullen, 1987, 1988). When organizational climates are perceived as more supportive socially and emotionally, they generally tend to lower the level of organizational misbehavior (Vardi and Weitz, 2004).

We extend this line of research to a specific type of misbehavior – "withholding effort" in job-related tasks (Bennett and Naumann, 2005; Kidwell and Bennett, 1993; Kidwell and Robie, 2003) and consider how elements of group climate as well as effort-performance expectancies and job satisfaction affect employee effort levels. Withholding effort in the work group is an important ethical issue because intentional actions to lower effort can adversely affect co-workers' perceptions of equity and justice (Bennett and Naumann, 2005).

Our study is organized around the proposition that key components of the work group environment are derived from a collective ethical context, thus improved development of a firm's approach to ethics can result in more positive group interactions and fewer instances of misbehavior such as withholding effort on the job. Withholding job effort may be better mitigated by managing perceptions of group-level work phenomenon and effort-to-performance linkages, which should enhance both organizational and individual performance. More specifically, developing a positive group context that enhances optimistic attitudes about the workplace can have a positive impact on reducing employee misbehavior A positive group context is defined as a situation in which group members perceive the presence of encouraging work conditions that enhance their attitudes about the workplace; these can include helping behavior, group cohesiveness, peer leadership, and cooperation in completing work requirements (cf., Vardi and Weitz, 2004). The presence of positive contextual elements such as these has been linked to beneficial impacts on ethical climate and ethical conduct in organizations (Treviño and Weaver, 2001; Treviño et al., 1998). A key contribution of this study is an effort to conceptualize positive group context, to identify its key elements, to develop a measure of positive group context and to test its relationship with a form of organizational misbehavior.

Management research tends to report strong relationships between an employee's provision of high effort, i.e., the amount of resources expended on the job (Yeo and Neal, 2004) and successful job performance (Blau, 1993; Byrne et al., 2005; Gardner et al., 1989). When that effort is intentionally withheld or otherwise diminished, it is implied that individual performance suffers. The propensity of an employee to withhold effort has been defined as "the likelihood that an individual will give less than full effort on a job related task" (Kidwell and Bennett, 1993, pp. 429–430). Variants of this phenomenon include shirking (holding back full effort on the job), social loafing (reducing effort levels when others are around to do the work) and job neglect (withdrawal from job-related duties) (Albanese and Van Fleet, 1985; Kidwell and Robie, 2003; Latané et al., 1979; Leck and Saunders, 1992).

While acknowledging that effort can be withheld due to a lack of training, direction, coordination or other deficiencies of organizational support, all of the variations of withholding effort just discussed are deliberate individual actions to lower contribution and result in reduced organizational, group, and individual performance (Bennett and Naumann, 2005). Calculated withholding of effort can negatively impact employees' perceptions of situational ethics. For instance, "coworkers who observe an individual withholding effort without facing adverse consequences will quickly determine that they are being treated inequitably" (Bennett and Naumann, 2005, p. 114). It can also be argued that employees are obligated to work diligently for the organization as part of the employment contract, and when individuals do not fulfill this contract, coworkers might become disgruntled with the employee, as well as with the organization for allowing such conduct. Consequently, it is crucial to examine why employees withholding effort and how work arrangements can combat the problem. This study's objectives are to identify the relative contribution perceived positive group context and individual attitudes play in an employee's decision to withholding effort and the role an employee's belief that his or her efforts connect to job performance play in the choice to reduce effort levels on the job. Hypotheses are developed by considering different theoretical frameworks relevant to group context and individual behavior. A proposed model of withholding effort, which contains key contextual and group characteristics that should be related to withholding effort at work, is then tested.

Conceptual background

Although our overarching perspective focuses on ethical context, one difficulty in researching withholding effort and its related elements has been identifying a single theoretical approach that entirely depicts the concept's intricacy (Liden et al., 2004). In developing hypotheses for the current study, we therefore reviewed four overarching conceptual frameworks that have dominated behavioral research in the last two decades. In light of these theoretical approaches, we discuss the importance of group context (Cappelli and Sherer, 1991; Ng and Van Dyne, 2005) – including perceived group cohesiveness and individual perceptions of other group members – in combining with individual attitudes and cognitive processes to influence behavior. These theoretical perspectives provided background for our development of a model incorporating positive group context and individual influences.

Theoretical frameworks

The theory of reasoned action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980) proposes that subjective norms, i.e., perceived social pressure to perform a behavior (Armitage and Christian, 2003), and the individual's attitudes, general feeling of favorableness or unfavorableness toward a behavior, combine to form intentions about the behavior, which ultimately result in action. The theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) builds on this approach by adding perceived behavioral control as a determinant of intentions toward a behavior and then the performance of that behavior. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) argues that individuals working with others observe their behavior and may adopt co-workers as role models and engage in similar behavior. Finally, social impact theory (Latané, 1981) proposes that many behaviors are a function of social impact, defined as various changes in emotions, cognitions, values and behavior "that occur in an individual … as a result of the real, implied, or imagined presence or actions of other individuals" (Latané, 1981, p. 343).

In the last two decades, the theories of reasoned action and planned behavior have been applied to various phenomena across academic disciplines including business ethics (Chang, 1998; Dunn and Schweitzer, 2005), nursing, information technology and social policy (Armitage and Christian, 2003). Social learning theory has been employed to explain anti-social behavior (O'Leary-Kelly et al., 1996), ethical leadership (Treviño and Brown, 2005), and workplace aggression (Martinko and Zellars, 1998). Social impact theory has been applied to such behaviors as helping others, conforming to social pressure and social inhibition (Witte, 1990).

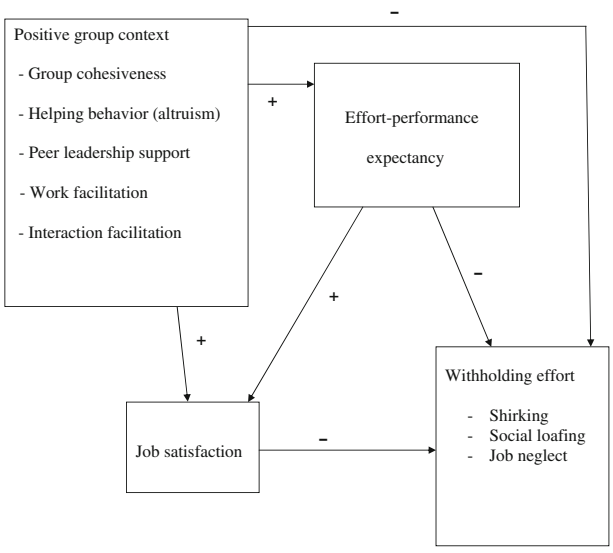

Figure 1. Proposed relationships in the model.

Based on previous theoretical development regarding work group context (Cappelli and Sherer, 1991; Cohen and Bailey, 1997; George and Jones, 1997; Ng and Van Dyne, 2005), and predictions that flow from the related theories just discussed, the model shown in Figure 1 is proposed. In summary, positive group context (previously defined as a situation in which group members perceive the presence of encouraging work conditions that enhance their attitudes about the workplace, including the perceived degree of cohesiveness, helping behavior and peer leadership) should be positively related to an individual's job satisfaction (defined as contentedness related to a job). In addition, positive group context should be associated with increased effort-performance expectancy (i.e., the degree to

which an individual employee believes effort relates to successful performance) and decreased withholding effort on job-related tasks. Finally, effort-performance expectancy should be positively related to job satisfaction, and job satisfaction should be negatively related to withholding effort. We propose that these relationships exist at a point in time and thus pursue this study with a cross-sectional design, acknowledging that the relationships have the potential to evolve over time and at some point would warrant longitudinal examination.

Rationale for proposed relationships

Internal processes within groups and group psychosocial variables such as cohesiveness play a strong role in the productivity and performance of groups (Cohen and Bailey, 1997). Such relationships are relevant when examining aggregate group performance as well as individual contributions to group performance (Gully et al., 1995).

As noted, positive group context is defined as a situation in which group members perceive the presence of encouraging work conditions that enhance their attitudes about the workplace. Several variables of long-term research interest relate conceptually to an employee's positive perceptions about group context: group cohesiveness, helping behavior, and peer leadership, which includes the concepts of peer support, work facilitation, and interaction facilitation in the group. Peer leadership is a group psychosocial variable that refers to the extent to which co-workers are perceived as being helpful and supportive in getting work accomplished (cf., Cohen and Bailey, 1997; Kellett et al., 2006; Taylor and Bowers, 1972). Peer leadership dimensions include supporting other group members, helping others improve performance (work facilitation) and working together within the group (interaction facilitation). From the group member's perspective, higher levels of peer leadership contribute to positive group context. Previous research indicates a positive relationship between group cohesiveness – at the individual and group levels of analysis – and performance (Cohen and Bailey, 1997; Gully et al., 1995). In addition, higher levels of organizational citizenship behavior, particularly helping behavior, are associated with higher levels of unit and individual performance (see Piercy et al., 2006; Podsakoff et al., 2000).

Perceptions regarding the quality of relationships and interactions within the group can grow into subjective norms and thus have a strong impact on the attitudes and behaviors of the individual employees. The theory of reasoned action posits positive relationships between the subjective norms of the individual and that person's attitudes about a behavior (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). It is likely that constructive interactions within the group have a positive impact on group context and thus on the individual attitudes of the group members toward their jobs. Indeed, previous research indicates that cohesiveness, helping behavior (e.g., altruism), peer leadership support, work facilitation, and interaction facilitation are appropriate elements of positive group context that relate to an individual employee's attitudes, in particular job satisfaction (Kidwell et al., 1997; Ng and Van Dyne, 2005; Organ and Ryan, 1995). These elements of group context are important because they shape the signals that group members receive (Hackman, 1992) for better or for worse.

Hypothesis 1: Individual perceptions of positive group context are positively related to individual job satisfaction.

Employing elements of the theory of reasoned action and previous research findings, we propose that the linkage between subjective norms regarding the work group and individual job cognitions can be demonstrated by the relationship of positive group context to an employee's belief that effort will prompt enhanced performance, i.e., effort-performance expectancy (Sims et al., 1976). Sense of identity with the work group and the presence of co-workers who are helpful and supportive in getting work accomplished can play a role in an individual's ability to connect effort provided with performance realized. For example, previous research indicates that the presence of organizational citizenship behavior in the form of altruism, or helping others, was positively related to an employee's effort-performance expectancy linkage (e.g., Kemery et al., 1996). We do not argue that positive work context is the sole, or even the best, explanation for an individual's ability to discern an

effort-performance connection, but that it does play a role in the employee's ability to connect effort provided to the performance outcome.

Hypothesis 2: Individual perceptions of positive group context are positively related to effort-performance expectancy.

In addition, elements of positive group context can be linked to a behavioral dimension, an employee's decision to withholding effort on job-related tasks. Applications of social learning theory to work group functioning indicate that role models in the group who demonstrate negative behavior can adversely affect other employees and lead them to engage in various forms of anti-social behavior (O'Leary-Kelly et al., 1996). In one study that used a social learning framework, a global measure of anti-social behavior within the group explained negative behavior engaged in by individuals (Robinson and O'Leary-Kelly, 1998). Recent research has also extended the social learning model to interpersonal aggression (Glomb and Liao, 2003). Following the proposition that work groups positively influence individual work behavior by reinforcing normative performance and attitudes (Vardi and Weitz, 2004), similar relationships are expected when group context is applied to an employee's decision to withhold job-related effort Specific factors, such as group cohesiveness and work group performance norms are among the elements of positive group context that can contribute to the decision to withhold effort (Kidwell and Bennett, 1993).

Hypothesis 3: Individual perceptions of positive group context are negatively related to withholding effort.

Relationships among individual attitudes, job cognitions, and eventual behaviors are also considered in this investigation. The theory of planned behavior proposes that attitudes and cognitions help form behavioral intentions and eventually demonstrated behavior. This connection – from cognition and attitude to behavior – can be considered by examining the relationship of an employee's effort-performance expectancy to his or her job satisfaction and his or her performance expectancy to an actual anti-social behavior (withholding effort). The expectancy-value model posits that job satisfaction is in part determined by the degree to which an individual believes his or her effort is related to job performance (Porter and Lawler, 1968). The cumulative evidence of modest positive relationships between expectancies and job satisfaction and job satisfaction and performance (e.g., Iaffaldano and Muchinsky, 1985; Petty et al., 1984) imply the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4: Individual effort-performance expectancy is positively related to an individual's job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 5: Individual job satisfaction is negatively related to withholding effort.

Finally, effort-performance expectancy should be negatively related to withholding effort. Individual employees tend to be rewarded for their performance. If they believe their efforts are connected to performance or if higher effort levels can be linked to higher performance, they would tend to provide effort and not withhold it. However, if their effort and performance are not connected, i.e., they can attain high performance with less effort, it would be rational to assume they would lower effort levels. Evidence to support this hypothesis was found in a social loafing experiment in which participants increased effort levels when they perceived a significant relationship between their individual performance and the group's performance (Shepperd and Taylor, 1999).

Hypothesis 6: Individual effort-performance expectancy is negatively related to withholding effort.

Method

Sample and procedure

Data were first collected from a convenience sample of 724 employees representing varied job classifications and working for one of nine organizations operating in the northeastern United States. These companies included an automotive components manufacturer (n = 113), a chemical company (n = 72), a military reserve center (n = 290), three hospitals (n = 165), an accounting firm (n = 51), a bakery (n = 10), and an investment company

(n = 23). One of the authors contacted firm representatives and asked for permission to collect data at the work site.

About 75% of participants completed an anonymous, self-report survey outside of their work areas and away from company officials, and the questionnaire contained various employment-based items that were to be used in this study, as well as other items that were to be used in future investigations of management and organization. One of the authors supervised data collection sessions, and individuals required about 30 min to complete the survey. The other 25% of the study participants could not attend data collection sessions and submitted surveys using a self-addressed stamped envelope, which resulted in an approximate response rate of 67% for the mail-back portion of the study. A multivariate analysis of variance of the entire dataset indicated that many work perceptions varied by industry/occupational classification, so we focused our analysis on those responses submitted by the military reservists, which represented the largest subset of the overall sample. All of the military respondents answered the survey on site at the reserve base; none of the mail-back replies came from the focal subset of this study.

Men comprised about 85.1% of the military sample, and a majority of the respondents were white (93.1%). Individual ages ranged from 19 to 57 years with an average age of 37.4 years. Although the self-reported mean work group size was 27.6 people, slightly more than 74% of respondents reported their work groups ranged from 2 to 29 members. As evidenced by some of the larger numbers reported, it is likely that some respondents perceived their organizational units to be their immediate work groups, which inflated the overall mean value for group size. With regard to educational background, 11.1% of individuals had finished high school, 38.9% had attended college (but had not graduated), 20.7% had earned an associate's degree, 16.4% had earned a bachelor's degree, 6.1% had attended graduate school (but had not graduated), and 6.4% had earned a graduate degree. Individuals' military rank ranged from enlisted personnel (e.g., sergeant) to officers (e.g., colonel), and individuals worked in well over 75 different job titles/classifications (e.g., aircraft commander, avionics, communications tech, JAG, maintenance, and supply).

Measures

Previously developed scales were used to measure the study's focal variables. In particular, several of the variables required that multiple composite constructs be combined so that overall indicators were obtained in the analysis. All of the items were rated with a 5-point scale anchored by either "1" (Strongly disagree) and "5" (Strongly agree) or "1" (To a very little extent) and "5" (To a very great extent) depending on the nature of the statements, and higher scores indicated greater variable magnitude.

Positive group context

Several composite measures (average overall scores) were used to obtain a measure of generalized positive group interaction, which included "group cohesion," "altruism" (an element of organizational citizenship behavior), "peer leadership support," "work facilitation," and "interaction facilitation." Composite measures were created for each of these constructs by summing the relevant item scores and dividing by the number of items. Group cohesion was measured with an 8-item scale developed by Dobbins and Zaccaro (1986), and sample items included "The members of my work group get along well together" and "I look forward to being with the members of my work group each day." The scale had a coefficient alpha of 0.84. Altruism was measured with five items taken from an organizational citizenship scale developed by Smith et al. (1983). Sample items included "Members of my work group help others who have been absent" and "Members of my work group help co-workers who have heavy work loads," and the coefficient alpha of the scale was 0.85.

Peer leadership support was evaluated with five items developed by Taylor and Bowers (1972) to assess generalized group support and goal satisfaction, and sample items included "How friendly or easy to approach are the persons in your work group?" and "How much do persons in your work group encourage each other to give their best effort?" The coefficient alpha of the scale was 0.84. Work facilitation was measured with three additional items developed by Taylor and Bowers (1972), and a sample item was "To what extent do members of your work group help you find ways to do a better job?" The coefficient alpha for this measure was 0.84. Finally,

interaction facilitation was evaluated with three items (Taylor and Bowers, 1972), one of which was "How much do persons in your work group emphasize a team goal?" The scale had a coefficient alpha of 85.

Job satisfaction

Individuals' generalized satisfaction with their jobs was assessed with seven items taken from a scale based on the work of Chalykoff and Kochan (1989). Sample items included "I am satisfied with my job" and "I am satisfied with my job security." Two of the scale items were omitted because the military respondents were prohibited from answering the job satisfaction statements pertaining to compensation. The coefficient alpha for the resulting five-item measure was acceptable at 0.77. These items, unrelated to compensation, addressed important general and specific elements of job satisfaction.

Effort-performance expectancy

Beliefs about the linkage between effort and performance were evaluated with nine items (Sims et al., 1976). In particular, these statements explored the degree to which individuals believed that their effort at work would produce desired job performance. Several sample items included "Doing things as well as I am capable results in completing my job on time" and "Working as hard as I can leads to completing my work on time." The scale had a coefficient alpha value of 0.90.

Withholding effort

Withholding effort on the job was assessed with statements that evaluate "social loafing" (3 items), "job neglect" (5 items), and "shirking" (2 items) (Kidwell and Robie, 2003). Example items from these dimensions included "I give less effort than other members of the work group," "I take more and longer breaks than I should" and "I give less than 100 percent effort on my job." Once again, composite measures were created for each of these constructs by adding the item scores and dividing by the number of items. The coefficient alphas for these three separate measures were 0.79, 0.79, and 0.68, respectively.

Analysis

An initial confirmatory factor analysis was specified using AMOS to determine the measurement properties of the scales and composite measures, as well as to determine whether any adjustments were needed to enhance model parsimony (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988; Hair et al., 1998). Missing item information was assessed with maximum likelihood estimation, and one parameter estimate for each latent construct was fixed to a score of "1" (Arbuckle and Wothke, 1999). Both of these operations are necessary default specifications in AMOS to identify a model, as well as to account for missing data, and these procedures ultimately enabled us to better evaluate the information collected from the military personnel. The confirmatory analysis involved an evaluation of the relevant factor loadings, correlations, and composite reliability and variance extracted scores for the focal variables. Overall average scores for the variables of interest were then calculated by summing the item/composite scores and dividing by the number of items or composite variables (for the "positive group context" and "withholding effort" variables, the overall scores represented grand means), and a correlation analysis was conducted in SPSS. A structural model

TABLE I

Model fit statistics

Model	χ^2	df	*p*	χ^2/df	RMSEA	NFI	IFI	CFI
Initial measurement model	643.437	203	0.000	3.170	0.087	0.969	0.978	0.978
Revised measurement model	569.893	164	0.000	3.475	0.093	0.969	0.978	0.978
Full structural model	569.893	164	0.000	3.475	0.093	0.969	0.978	0.978

χ^2/df = Relative chi-square, RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation, NFI = normed fit index, IFI = incremental fit index, CFI = comparative fit index.

was then specified in AMOS to test the hypothesized variable relationships.

Results

Measurement model

The initial confirmatory factor analysis revealed that the model fit the data reasonably well (see Arbuckle and Wothke, 1999; Hair et al., 1998; Hu and Bentler, 1999), as indicated by the generally acceptable fit statistics (see Table I). All path coefficients between observed items/composite scores and latent constructs were significant at the 0.001 level, and correlations between the constructs ranged from −0.37 to 0.61. However, examination of the standardized path coefficients indicated that 2 items (the ''security'' item from the job satisfaction measure and the ''accomplishment'' item from the effort-performance expectancy scale) had factor loadings below a value of 0.50, which suggested that these items could be deleted from the model (Steenkamp and Trijp, 1991). In our opinion, removing these items from the scales did not affect content validity or the subjective interpretation of the constructs because the remaining items captured important facets of both job satisfaction and effort-performance expectancy.

After dropping these items, a second revised confirmatory factor analysis was specified, and the results are summarized in Figure 2. Once again, many of the fit indexes indicated adequate model parsimony, and when viewed as a group, suggested adequate model fit (see Table I). All of the path coefficients were significant at the 0.001 level, and all of the standardized estimates were above 0.50. The correlations among the latent constructs also indicated relatively moderate variable relationships (effort-performance expectancy ↔ positive group context = 0.142; effort-performance expectancy ↔ withholding effort = −0.221; job satisfaction ↔ effort-performance expectancy = 0.081; job satisfaction ↔ positive group context = 0.617; job satisfaction ↔ withholding effort = −0.339; positive group context ↔ withholding effort = −0.372). Using the standardized parameter estimates for the observed items, composite reliability and variance extracted scores were calculated for the latent variables (Hair et al., 1998). Results indicated that the composite reliability scores for positive group context, job satisfaction, effort-performance expectancy, and withholding effort were 0.90, 0.78, 0.91, and 0.77 respectively, and that the variance extracted values were 0.63, 0.48, 0.56, and 0.53. Consequently, the model was acceptable from a measurement perspective (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988; Hair et al., 1998). In addition, variance extracted scores were higher than the ''squared'' correlations among the focal variables, indicating that the constructs exhibited acceptable discriminant validity (Faircloth et al., 2001; Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

In order to ascertain whether common method bias was an issue in this study, all of the observed items in the final confirmatory factor analysis were loaded on one latent factor, a procedure known as Harman's single-factor test see (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The goal of this approach is to determine whether one specified factor can provide an adequate understanding of the items utilized, and if the items do indeed collapse on this single factor, then it can be surmised that common method bias might be a research limitation (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Although the analysis showed that the observed variables were significantly related to this single latent factor, the relationships between the observed items and the latent variable varied between positive and negative and the fit indices indicated poor model parsimony (χ^2/df = 12.147, NFI = 0.889, IFI = 0.897, CFI = 0.897, RMSEA = 0.196). We therefore concluded that common method bias was not a serious concern with this data.

Descriptive statistics and correlations

The variable descriptive and results of the correlation analysis are presented in Table II. The mean score associated with positive group context suggested that individuals believed that the environment in their work groups was a relatively favorable, and the mean score for job satisfaction indicated that individuals were moderately satisfied with their work. The mean value for effort-performance expectancy showed that respondents believed strongly that their effort on the job lead to increased work performance. Finally, the score for withholding effort indicated that individuals did not believe that they personally withheld much effort at

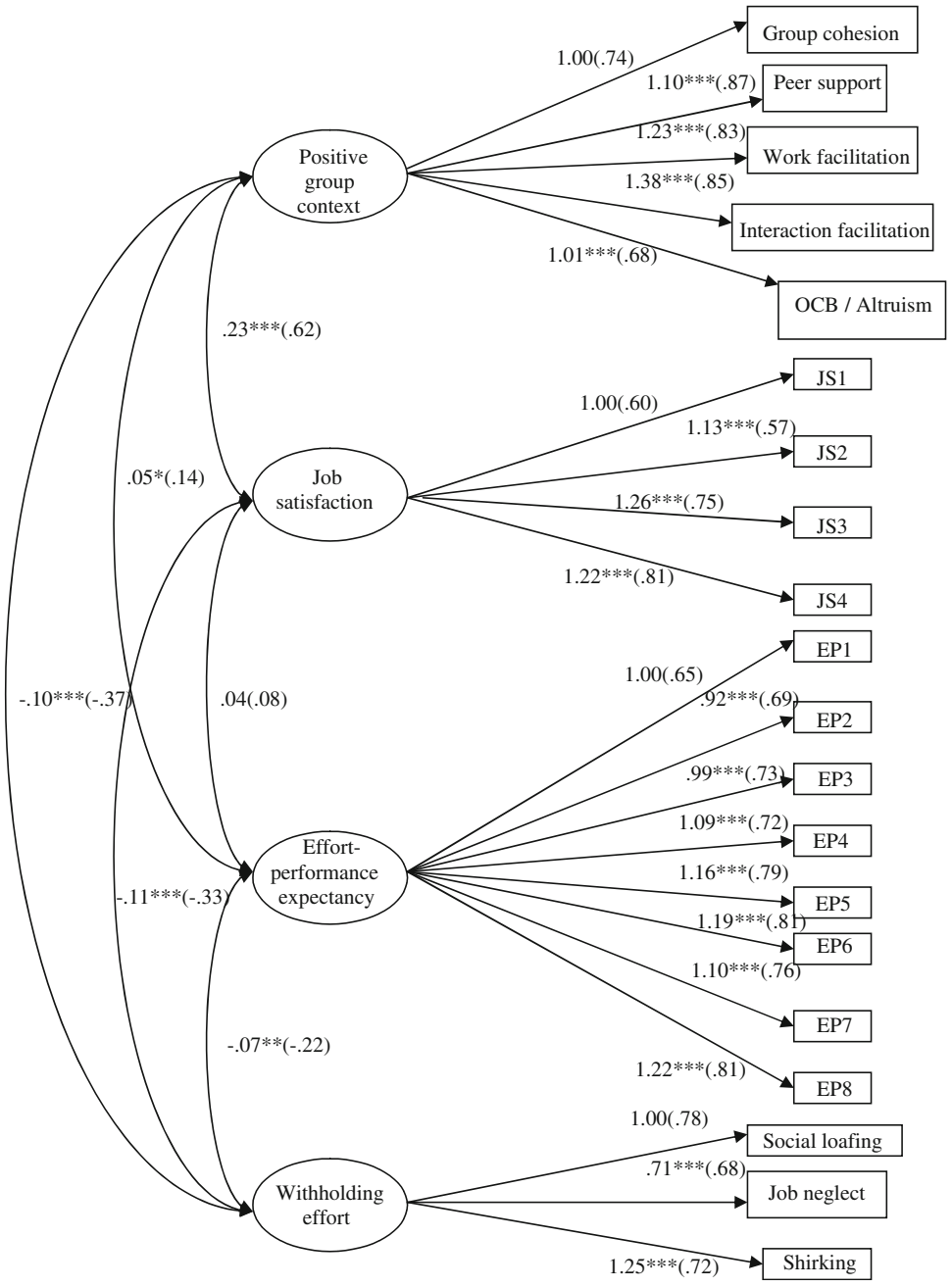

Figure 2. Results of revised measurement model (confirmatory factor analysis). $\star p < 0.05$, $\star\star p < 0.01$, $\star\star\star p < 0.001$; $n = 290$; standardized estimates presented in parentheses.

work. The correlation analysis indicated that positive group context was positively related to job satisfaction and effort-performance expectancy and negatively related to withholding effort, while job satisfaction was associated with decreased withholding effort. Finally, effort-performance expectancy was negatively related to withholding effort. Taken as a whole, these findings imply that the group context influences various employee responses to the work environment, including generalized attitudes, beliefs about work performance, and actual job performance.

TABLE II

Descriptive statistics and correlations (n = 265)[a]

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Positive group context	3.62	0.65	–			
2. Job satisfaction	3.18	0.89	0.55★★★	–		
3. Effort-performance expectancy	4.03	0.70	0.15★	0.09	–	
4. Withholding effort	1.71	0.54	−0.37★★★	−0.27★★★	−0.21★★★	–

★$p < 0.05$, ★★★$p < 0.001$.

[a]Listwise deletion of missing data utilized in analysis.

TABLE III

Summary of structural relationships (n = 290)

Path	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	p-value	Std. estimate
Positive group context → Job satisfaction	0.781	0.109	7.192	0.000	0.618
Positive group context → Effort-performance expectancy	0.173	0.080	2.170	0.030	0.142
Positive group context → Withholding effort	−0.222	0.085	−2.596	0.009	−0.242
Effort-performance expectancy → Job satisfaction	−0.007	0.061	−0.115	0.908	−0.007
Job satisfaction → Withholding effort	−0.124	0.070	−1.758	0.079	−0.171
Effort-performance expectancy → Withholding effort	−0.129	0.051	−2.551	0.011	−0.173

Structural model

A summary of the findings associated with the full structural model (containing both measurement and structural models) and the hypothesized relationships are presented in Table III. The fit statistics were the same as reported for the revised measurement model because no changes to the framework were made, and these statistics once again suggested adequate model parsimony (see Table I). The path coefficients between the latent constructs and observed variables were significant at the 0.001 level and were in the direction expected (not shown). Most of parameter estimates between the latent variables were also significant and in the expected direction. Positive group context positively related to job satisfaction (supporting Hypothesis 1) and to effort-performance expectancy (supporting Hypothesis 2) whereas it was negatively related to withholding effort (supporting Hypothesis 3). No significant relationship was observed between job satisfaction and effort-performance expectancy, thus Hypothesis 4 was not supported, but job satisfaction was marginally associated with decreased withholding effort (supporting Hypothesis 5). Finally, effort-performance expectancy was negatively related to withholding effort (supporting Hypothesis 6). The results imply that withholding effort is influenced either directly or indirectly (or both) by positive group experiences, performance expectancies, and employee job satisfaction.

Discussion

The results of this study link prominent psychosocial group variables (Cohen and Bailey, 1997) and employee job attitudes to an important form of organizational misbehavior: withholding job effort. Although theories employed in this study of withholding effort were not directly tested, the relationships among positive group context, individual-level attitudes and cognitions about the job, and various elements of deviant behavior suggest that these frameworks are efficacious. The theories of social learning, reasoned action, planned behavior and social impact are appropriate lenses to study withholding effort despite the difficulty in identifying one theoretical perspective that explains why employees do not provide full effort on the job, or

otherwise neglect job duties (Liden et al., 2004). These theories are useful because the ethics literature commonly turns to these frameworks to explore how ethical beliefs/behaviors can be better managed through attitudes/perceptions, social mores, and group context.

In providing evidence that positive group context has a constructive impact on effort-performance expectancies and effort-performance expectancies negatively relate to withholding effort, the results of this study have a number of implications for managers as well as employees organized into work groups and work teams. Managers who wish to impact employee job effort would do well to improve conditions that lead to positive group context and employee job satisfaction. For example, managers might encourage establishment of self-managed teams that would enhance positive group context through empowerment of team members and might include the establishment of peer mentoring within the team. Increased discussion and counseling on the linkages between job effort and job performance might be a beneficial strategy within the work group. Further, employees who are attempting to effectively manage their own performance should be aware that group influences, individual attitudes and their own perceptions about the relationship between effort and performance can have an impact on their actual effort levels and related job performance in current and future occupations.

The deviant nature of withholding effort also suggests a conceptual link with workplace ethics (see Bennett and Naumann, 2005), which implies that such behavior might be decreased by developing an ethical context strengthened with ethical values, codes of conduct, ethics training, and managerial role modeling (e.g., Treviño, 1986; Treviño and Nelson, 2004). While not directly measured in this study, it is also possible that ethical context reduces withholding effort by operating through individual ethical reasoning because ethically oriented employees should be less likely to shirk their job responsibilities, neglect their jobs, and otherwise hold back effort on various work assignments. This increased ethical reasoning could prompt more positive interactions within work groups by encouraging employees to focus on work facilitation, helping behaviors, and leadership support. Such experiences could also enhance job satisfaction and effort-performance expectancies due to decreased perceptions of inequity and injustice within the workplace, further reducing the likelihood that employees will withholding effort. Future research should address some of these important relationships so that the context-withholding effort linkage can be better described within the field of business ethics, providing a more unified understanding of how to better manage misbehavior in organizations through ethics programs and policies.

Whereas this study measured only employee perceptions of group influence, we did uncover both direct and indirect connections to employee job effort based on the employee's perceptions of the way the work group is functioning. Future work can expand on this research by testing these relationships through both cross-level analysis and multilevel analysis (cf., Ng and Van Dyne, 2005) within intact work groups and work teams so as to increase our knowledge of the role that group processes play in both positive and negative workplace phenomena.

Although the results were promising, a number of limitations should be discussed. Common method bias can adversely affect research that uses information compiled with one data collection approach; however, there is reason to believe that the moderate parameter estimates reported in this study indicated such bias was not a serious concern (Byrne et al., 2005; Tsui et al., 1995). In addition, results obtained by performing Harman's one factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003) on the data indicated that common method bias was not a significant problem.

Also, social desirability bias can confound studies that rely on self-report information and explore questionable human conduct (see Randall and Fernandes, 1991; Zerbe and Paulhus, 1987). This suggests that the study might have been affected by individuals' tendency to provide ''socially acceptable'' responses, particularly admitting to withholding effort on job tasks. Additionally, directions of the relationships examined were implied based on existing theory, so more investigation is needed to verify the causality specified in the path model. Finally, generalizing the results to the working populations outside of the military reservists included in the sample could be problematic. Military personnel may have different perspectives and experiences on withholding effort in the work group than private sector employees.

Future research can address these limitations by collecting information from more diverse groups and teams of working professionals using multiple data collection methods. Longitudinal or experimental data could also be used to test some of the specified causal relationships. A measure of social desirability could be included in future research to further measure and control for potential response bias.

With regard to further extensions of this study, researchers should consider exploring the role of other contextual factors in withholding job effort, including an organization's culture and/or climate. Other variables related to withholding effort such as organizational standards, incentives and benefits, type of team, extent of team interdependence, and perceptions of organizational justice are among those that might be examined in future research. Finally, new work should explore how different corporate ethics programs might be used to reduce the likelihood of withholding effort in the workplace. For instance, ethics codes and training might be utilized to enhance employee interactions to a point that group members are compelled to work responsibly.

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