



Examining trait entitlement using the self-other knowledge asymmetry model



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 16 August 2015

Received in revised form 17 December 2015

Accepted 18 December 2015

Available online 29 December 2015

Keywords:

Entitlement

Self-other knowledge asymmetry

Personality

Dyads

Contextual performance

ABSTRACT

Entitlement can be a particularly insidious personality trait that manifests itself as an expectation of getting more than one gives or deserves. Entitled persons tend to be dissatisfied with rewards regardless of level and tend to be less-than-helpful unless comparatively over-rewarded. In this study, the self-other knowledge asymmetry model (Vazire, 2010) is applied to data collected from 126 dyads of employees and their immediate supervisors. Supervisors and subordinates assessed the subordinate's level of entitlement. Subordinates also self-reported their job satisfaction and supervisors assessed subordinate's contextual performance or extra-role behaviors. Consistent with the hypotheses, self-reported employee entitlement measured with an equity (Adams, 1963) theory-based instrument was a stronger predictor than was other-reported entitlement of self-reported job satisfaction. Further, other-reported entitlement was a stronger predictor than was self-reported entitlement of two forms of contextual performance (interpersonal facilitation and job dedication).

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1. Introduction

1.1. Entitlement

Entitlement is a maladaptive personality trait that has been studied as part of the equity preference spectrum (Huseman, Hatfield, & Miles, 1985, 1987; Sauley & Bedeian, 2000), as a component of narcissism (Raskin & Hall, 1979, 1981; Raskin & Terry, 1988) and as a stand-alone psychological variable (i.e. psychological entitlement: Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, & Bushman, 2004). Regardless of its conceptual and theoretical origins, entitlement entails the belief that one is truly special and deserves more of the proverbial pie than others regardless of one's contribution or performance (Miller, 2009). The causes of entitlement have been proposed (Miller, 2013) to arise from overly permissive child-rearing practices (Mosak, 1959) and the much maligned (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2005; Stout, 2000; Twenge, 2006) self-esteem movement of the 1980s (Mecca, Smelser, & Vasconcellos, 1989). Both primary research and cross-temporal meta-analyses of narcissism, to which entitlement is sometimes interchangeably referred to as (e.g. Twenge, 2006), have shown a significant increase with each subsequent generation (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010; Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008a,b). With the relatively modern

advent of social media, entitled persons are now able to broadcast their own deeply held entitlement beliefs to others in a sort of never-ending cascade of self-promotion which reinforces the perception by other people about the entitled individual's self-importance. This display is often rather unappealing to observers but heretofore no study has explored whether there is any agreement between the self and specific individual others on entitlement and how the observation of it by others affects those others' perceptions of the entitled persons' attitudes and behaviors. In response to Harvey and Dasborough's (2015) recent call for greater research on entitlement, this study is conducted for the purpose of examining the impact, if any, of both subordinates' and supervisors' perceptions of subordinates' entitlement on subordinates' ratings of job satisfaction and on supervisors' ratings of contextual performance (i.e. discretionary behaviors not explicitly required of subordinates) at work.

Harvey and Dasborough (2015) draw a distinction between psychological entitlement, economic entitlement, and equity entitlement, which has the longest history of theoretical underpinnings beginning with Adams (1963) and refined by Huseman et al. (1985, 1987) as equity sensitivity. Adams (1963) equity theory borrowed from Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory with the tenet that people (employees) compare their outcomes (e.g. pay, benefits) to their inputs (e.g. effort, education) in the workplace to form a ratio. That ratio is then compared to some referent other's ratio of outcomes-to-inputs. When the ratios are perceived to be inequivalent, cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) arises and must be reduced. Methods of reducing dissonance in order to bring the perception of ratios between the self and a referent other into equivalency include, but are not limited to, reducing effort, asking for

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more pay and privileges, engaging in sabotage of others' efforts, and even quitting the job. However, not all persons demand equivalency. Some workers consistently demand that they be comparatively over-rewarded and are considered entitled, while others are quite comfortable being under-rewarded and are considered to be benevolent, but most simply desire equivalency and are therefore equity sensitive (Huseman et al., 1985, 1987). In fact, these preferences for states of (in)equivalency have a dispositional foundation because they are time and context independent (King, Miles, & Day, 1993).

This dispositional tendency toward dissatisfaction has been supported by Byrne, Miller, and Pitts (2009), who found an inverse relationship between entitlement and job satisfaction regardless of perceptions of human resource management practices by their employers. Graham and Welbourne (1999) found that employees with high levels of pay entitlement, were more likely than those with low pay entitlement to experience pay dissatisfaction because of inflated expectations regarding compensation. This is likely because persons with high levels of entitlement place more emphasis on pay while benevolent persons put more emphasis on the work itself when assessing job satisfaction (King et al., 1993).

An inflated sense of entitlement can alter the norm of reciprocity such that having unrealistic outcome expectations also leads to comparatively poor job performance (Naumann, Minsky, & Sturman, 2002). These unrealistic expectations often result in frustration and lead to coworker abuse (Harvey & Harris, 2010), theft (Greenberg, 1990) and organizational deviance (Miller, 2015). These maladaptive behaviors are the opposite of highly desirable organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) and contextual performance. Sometimes used interchangeably (Organ, 1997), OCB and contextual performance encompass extra-role behaviors that are outside the requirements of the job. Contextual performance is going above and beyond the call of duty that takes one out of their normally prescribed organizational role (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993). These extra-role behaviors are of two types: interpersonal facilitation and job dedication. The former primarily involves helping others with their jobs when finished with one's own duties and the latter can involve behaviors such as speaking highly of the organization to outsiders and volunteering to serve on committees (often without pay). Consistent with this, Blakely, Andrews, and Moorman (2005) found that entitled persons engaged in significantly fewer extra-role behaviors than did benevolent or equity sensitive persons. All of the aforementioned studies relied on self-reported measures of entitlement perhaps due to the difficulty of obtaining accurate measures from observers, which depends upon the relevance and availability of behavioral clues (Funder, 1995).

1.2. Self-other knowledge asymmetry model

To address differences in the accuracy of personality judgments by one's self and by others, Vazire (2010) developed the self-other knowledge asymmetry (SOKA) model that provides a framework for understanding why and how one views their own personality differently than others do. The SOKA model expands upon Funder's (1995) realistic accuracy model by explaining the inaccuracies between self- and other-perceptions with a focus on trait observability and evaluativeness. Observability is a social perception-based consideration that suggests that the more visible and frequent a person's actions are, the more likely there will be agreement or congruence between the self and others' evaluation of the trait in question (e.g., extraversion, which often manifests itself as talkativeness, which is highly observable). Evaluativeness explains why certain personality traits are subject to a greater range of interpretations or assessments by others and reflects an element of motivational significance because an individual's ego may have relevance to his or her own assessment of the trait in question. For example, traits such as creativity and intelligence are high in terms of evaluativeness and as such evaluations of one's self may tend to be distorted by the motivational goal to protect or enhance one's own self-worth or self-image. Given that others (e.g., friends, co-workers, supervisors) are likely to be less

sensitive, to varying degrees, to the ego-based relevance of the personality judgment, further differences or asymmetry in the assessment of self-versus-other are expected with highly evaluative traits. Traits like entitlement, which tend to be high in evaluativeness, are likely to be interpreted differently by the subordinate than their supervisor. Ego defense mechanisms tend to reveal themselves when self-assessing entitlement such that subordinates can downplay the negativism associated with entitlement that is actually quite accurately evaluated by their supervisors. In an effort at protecting one's self-esteem and self-worth, entitled subordinates likely do not see themselves as unworthy of the rewards, praise, and admiration that they demand from their supervisors and will adjust their job attitudes and behaviors appropriately downward.

1.3. Criteria

1.3.1. Self-reported job satisfaction

There is a long-standing body of research on the relationship between entitlement and job satisfaction (e.g. Byrne et al., 2009; King et al., 1993). As noted, equity theory dictates that if a person is comparatively under-rewarded they will experience dissonance and dissatisfaction. The internal cognitions and affective experience of engaging in a comparison with someone else regarding outcomes-to-inputs are best known to the self and likely more strongly related to affective reactions resulting from such comparisons than when viewed from the perspective of someone else. In fact, Spain, Eaton, and Funder (2000) found that self-reports of traits were more accurate than other-reports in the daily experience of emotions and that "the relative accuracy of self- and other-reports of personality would seem to depend on the criterion employed; self-reports are clearly better for the prediction of emotional experience, while for behavior the picture is mixed" (pp. 837–838). Because job satisfaction is an affect-laden reaction to the various aspects of the job, such emotions are best measured from self-report. Therefore, it is suggested:

Hypothesis 1. : Self-reported entitlement is a stronger predictor than other-reported entitlement of self-reported job satisfaction.

1.3.2. Other-reported contextual performance

Consistent with Spain et al.'s (2000) findings and Vazire's (2010) SOKA model, highly evaluative traits like entitlement reported by others may strongly relate to other-reports of behavior, especially in the formal context of a performance appraisal by a supervisor. Borman and Motowidlo (1993) suggest that contextual performance can contaminate the measurement of task performance such that these two forms of job performance are not entirely separable. Equity theory states that one method of bringing the perception of one's ratio of outcomes-to-inputs back into equivalency with others is to withhold effort. Discretionary efforts like contextual performance might indeed be the first to cease as entitled persons consistently feel under-rewarded no matter the level of reward. There are at least two ways that subordinate entitlement can impact supervisor ratings of contextual performance. The first is related to the distasteful nature of entitlement (Harvey & Dasborough, 2015). There is likely some subtle bias against an entitled subordinate by a supervisor who finds the trait so aversive that regardless of actual performance level, scores on performance are downwardly biased. The second is related to an actual decrease in contextual (i.e. helpful) performance by the entitled subordinate. Entitled persons are less likely to engage in behaviors for which they are not comparatively overpaid. Their refusal to go beyond the call of duty is indeed warranted, in their mind, because they perceive that they are always underpaid. Regardless of the source of decreased ratings, it is suggested that:

Hypothesis 2. : Self-reported entitlement is a weaker predictor than other-reported entitlement of other-reported interpersonal facilitation.

Hypothesis 3. : Self-reported entitlement is a weaker predictor than other-reported entitlement of other-reported job dedication.

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