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G. J. Greguras
Singapore Management University, garygreguras@smu.edu.sg

John M. Ford
CWH Management Solutions

Citation

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Gary J. Greguras
Singapore Management University
John M. Ford
CWH Management Solutions

Despite favorable attitudes being critical to the viability of multirater systems, little is known about the factors that impact rater attitudes. Results from a field study demonstrated that perceptions of organizational politics negatively relate to rater acceptance and cost-benefit evaluations and that these relationships were not moderated by one's understanding, control, or rater perspective. Results indicated that supervisors held the most favorable attitudes and that experienced raters held more favorable attitudes than those without experience.

The use of multisource feedback systems (MSFS) has increased dramatically over the past several years (Church & Bracken, 1997). Proponents suggest several advantages of multisource ratings over single-source ratings including higher quality feedback (Wexley & Klomoski, 1984), improved performance (Tornow, 1993), reduced biases (Bernardin & Beatty, 1984), and greater employee empowerment (Cotton, 1993; London & Beatty, 1993; Moravec, Gyr, & Friedman, 1993). Although there are several potential benefits associated with MSFS, a prerequisite to the successful implementation of MSFS and to achieving these benefits is user acceptance (Bernardin, Dahmus, & Redmon, 1993; Bettenhausen & Fedor, 1997; Carroll & Schneier, 1982). Past research has attempted to understand factors that influence user acceptance of MSFS by focusing on ratees (e.g., Antonioni, 1994; Bernardin et al., 1993), with relatively little research focusing on *rater* attitudes towards MSFS.

Rater attitudes likely impact the effectiveness of MSFS because raters who hold negative attitudes may refuse to participate, provide inaccurate ratings, or attempt to manipulate the system to secure their own self-interests (Fedor, Bettenhausen, & Davis, 1999). As Antonioni and Woehr (2001) note: "…rater perceptions have to be considered and addressed in order to have an MSF process that is valid, reliable, and acceptable" (p. 116). As such, it is important to identify factors that influence rater attitudes regarding MSFS (Funderburg & Levy, 1997). One such factor may be organizational politics (cf. Bernardin & Beatty, 1984; Fedor et al., 1999). To date, however, little research has investigated the influence of organizational politics on traditional performance appraisals (Murphy & Cleveland, 1995), and research has not examined its effects on rater attitudes toward MSFS. With respect to MSFS, the current study investigates whether raters perceive organizational politics as an opportunity or as a threat. This research also explores whether understanding of organizational processes, control over organizational events, or rater perspective (i.e., supervisor, peer, or subordinate) moderates the relationships between organizational politics perceptions and rater attitudes toward MSFS.

Organizational Politics

After reviewing the organizational politics literature, Kacmar and Baron (1999) offered the following definition: "organizational politics involves actions by individuals, which are directed toward the goal of furthering their own self-interests without regard for the well-being of others or their organization" (p. 4). There is a growing acknowledgment that politics play a prominent role in organizational policies and processes and likely influence several important work-related attitudes and behaviors. Ferris, Russ, and Fandt (1989) note two features of organizational politics that should be considered when investigating its relationships with employee attitudes and behaviors. First, perceptions of organizational politics are more important than reality (Ferris et al., 1989). As Lewin (1936) noted many years ago, people respond to their perceptions of a situation, which may be different from the situation itself. As such, perceptions of organizational politics should be the focus of politics research, even if these perceptions represent inaccurate depictions of the actual organizational environment (Gandz & Murray, 1980). Second, organizational politics may be interpreted as either beneficial or detrimental to an individual's well-being (Ferris et al., 1989). Organizational policies and practices that are viewed as highly political can create situations of potential gain (i.e., opportunity) as well as potential loss (i.e., threats) (Ferris et al., 1996b). Thus, organizational politics perceptions may result in differing responses to organizational policies and practices depending on whether politics are viewed as an opportunity or as a threat.

Politics as a Threat. Kacmar and Baron's (1999) review of the organizational politics literature concluded that organizational politics perceptions generally appear to be detrimental to organizations, both for individuals within the organization and for the organization as a whole. Raters who perceive their organizational environment to be highly political may likewise perceive MSFS as a threat. Employees in highly political situations may see MSFS as potentially jeopardizing working relationships, making employees feel vulnerable to retribution,

creating a popularity contest, making coworkers overly concerned about pleasing each other, or creating a situation where the most productive workers are downgraded because of jealousy (Bettenhausen & Fedor, 1997). Fedor et al. (1999) suggest that perceptions of organizational politics within performance appraisal systems likely undermine user acceptance because individuals who are asked to participate in MSFS in highly political organizations are likely to expect negative outcomes.

Politics as an Opportunity. Although the research reviewed above highlights the potential detrimental effects of organizational politic perceptions on employee attitudes, some researchers have suggested that organizational politic perceptions are not always negative for the employee. With respect to performance appraisals, Longenecker, Gioia, & Sims (1987) found that supervisors often provide political ratings to achieve their own personal goals within an organization. When using performance ratings to achieve personal goals, raters may desire to project a positive image, secure organizational resources for oneself, and avoid confrontations with, or disapproval from, others (Murphy & Cleveland, 1995). Similarly, raters may see MSFS as an opportunity to influence pay raises and to improve interpersonal relationships (Longenecker & Gioia, 2000). In these situations, organizational politics perceptions may be perceived as an opportunity, rather than as a threat.

The first purpose of the current study is to assess whether perceptions of organizational politics negatively (threat) or positively (opportunity) relate to rater attitudes toward MSFS. The majority of research in this area has observed that organizational politics perceptions are detrimental to both organizations and individuals (Kacmar & Baron, 1999) and that perceptions of organizational politics are perceived as a threat to one's well-being (Baum, 1989). As such, the current study hypothesizes:

H1: Perceptions of organizational politics will negatively relate to rater attitudes toward MSFS.

Potential Moderators

Understanding. Understanding may be one mechanism by which individuals define organizational practices as either opportunities or threats (Ferris et al., 1989; Sutton & Kahn, 1986). Understanding refers to knowledge concerning how and why things happen in the organizational environment (Kacmar, Bozeman, Carlson, & Anthony, 1999; Sutton & Kahn). When understanding is low, organizational politics are likely to be perceived as a threat because employees will not be able to insulate themselves from negative consequences (Ferris et al., 1989). However, employees who understand the politics of their organizations may be able to position themselves to take advantage of potential opportunities, resulting in less negative affective reactions (cf. McGrath, 1976). With respect to MSFS, understanding is expected to influence the interpretation of organizational politics as either opportunities or threats. Thus, the current study hypothesizes:

H2: Understanding will moderate the relationship between perceptions of organizational politics and rater attitudes of multisource feedback systems, such that under conditions of lower understanding, increases in perceptions of organizational politics will be associated with less favorable attitudes than under conditions of higher understanding.

Control. A second factor that may influence whether individuals interpret organizational politics as opportunities or threats is control (Ferris et al., 1989). Control is defined as the extent to which individuals have the ability to exercise influence over their organizational environment (Ferris et al., 1996b). Individuals who feel high levels of control within their organization likely expect less aversive outcomes than those who feel that they have little control (Sutton & Kahn, 1986). Similarly, Ferris et al. (1989) argued that when employees perceive high levels of organizational politics and feel that they have little control over these organizational processes, organizational politics likely will be perceived as a threat. However, if employees feel that they have control over organizational processes, organizational politics will be perceived as an opportunity to promote their self-interests (Ferris et al., 1989). With respect to MSFS, raters who perceive having control over organizational processes are likely to feel less threatened by the potential costs of providing ratings and have less negative reactions to MSFS than those who perceive having less control. In contrast, those who perceive their organizations as being highly political and feel little control over organizational events are likely to focus on the costs (as opposed to the benefits) of MSFS and are likely less accepting of these systems than those perceiving more control. Thus, the current study hypothesizes:

H3: Control will moderate the relationship between perceptions of organizational politics and rater attitudes of multisource feedback systems, such that under conditions of lower control, increases in perceptions of organizational politics will be associated with less favorable rater attitudes of MSFS than under conditions of higher control.

Rater Perspective. The current study also investigates whether rater perspective moderates the relationship between organizational politics perceptions and rater attitudes. Whereas few studies compare multiple rater sources within a single study (Bettenhausen & Fedor, 1997), the current study investigates supervisor, peer, and subordinate raters. While research suggests that supervisors use performance ratings for political purposes (Longenecker et al., 1987), for several reasons peer and subordinate raters may be even more influenced by organizational politics. First, research suggests that many employees feel uncomfortable and unqualified when it

comes to providing performance ratings for their supervisors (i.e., subordinate raters) and peers (Bettenhausen & Fedor, 1997). Unfortunately, these are exactly the types of situations (i.e., uncertain, ambiguous) in which political behavior is most likely to occur (Ferris et al., 1989). Second, providing feedback is likely a riskier proposition for peers and subordinates than for supervisors. That is, peers and subordinates may fear retribution or other negative outcomes as a result of their ratings. Accordingly, the political implications of providing performance ratings are likely more salient for coworkers and subordinates than for supervisors. Third, peers and subordinates may be more susceptible to ratee political behavior (e.g., ingratiation, impression management) than supervisors because they likely have less experience and training in evaluating the performance of their coworkers or supervisors, respectively. Taken together, there are various reasons to expect that the relationships between organizational politics perceptions and rater attitudes will be more negative for peers and subordinates than for supervisors. In combination with the rationale presented above regarding the relation between organizational politics perceptions and rater attitudes, the current study hypothesizes:

> H4: Rater perspective will moderate the relationship between perceptions of organizational politics and rater attitudes of multisource feedback systems, such that for peers and subordinates, increases in perceptions of organizational politics will be associated with less favorable rater attitudes of MSFS than for supervisors.

Method

Participants

Participants in this study were 602 full-time working adults. Three samples were used in this research. The first sample consisted of 147 participants and assessed rater attitudes concerning evaluating one's subordinates (i.e., supervisor rater sample). The majority of participants in the first sample were male (62%) and worked in middle-level managerial positions (50%). The second sample included 202 participants and assessed rater attitudes about evaluating one's peers (i.e., peer rater sample). The majority of participants in this sample were male (52%) and worked in non-managerial positions (50%). Finally, the third sample (n = 253) assessed rater attitudes concerning evaluating one's supervisor (i.e., subordinate rater sample). The majority of participants in the third sample were female (53%) and worked in non-managerial positions (43%).

Measures

Perceived Organizational Politics. Perceptions of organizational politics were measured using Ferris and Kacmar's (1992) 31-item Perceptions of Organizational Politics Scale (POPS). The POPS is designed to measure respondents' perceptions regarding the level of political behavior in their organizations.

Understanding. Understanding of organizational events was measured using Tetrick and LaRocco's (1987) three-item Understanding of Events Scale (UES) and three items written for the current research. The UES assesses the extent to which respondents understand the events within their work environment.

Control. Control over organizational processes was measured using Tetrick and LaRocco's (1987) six-item Control Over One's Work Environment Scale. This scale was designed to measure the level of control respondents feel that they have over their work environment.

Rater Acceptance of MSFS. Rater acceptance of MSFS was measured using nine items developed specifically for this study. As indicated in the appendix, three scales with parallel wording and structure were created to assess rater acceptance of the use of supervisor, peer, and subordinate ratings.

Rater Perceptions of the Cost and Benefits of MSFS. Rater perceptions of the costs and benefits of MSFS were assessed by Bettenhausen and Fedor's (1997) seven-item Positive Appraisal Outcomes Scale (PAOS) and their 10-item Negative Appraisal Outcomes Scale (NAOS). This scale was designed to measure the extent to which users perceive that positive or negative outcomes will result from the use of multisource ratings. Bettenhausen and Fedor created two parallel versions of this scale: one targeting peer feedback and the other targeting subordinate ratings. An additional version of the scale was developed for this research designed to assess rater perceptions of supervisor ratings (i.e., by replacing the words "peer" with "supervisor" and "coworkers" with "subordinates").

Procedure

Three versions of the questionnaire were developed. Each questionnaire included measures assessing participant demographics, perceptions of organizational politics (POPS), understanding, and control. Questionnaires differed, however, in the rater source to which rater attitudes were directed. Specifically, one questionnaire assessed rater attitudes toward providing supervisor ratings, another assessed rater attitudes toward providing peer ratings, and a final questionnaire assessed rater attitudes toward providing subordinate ratings. So that participants would be representative of individuals who work for organizations in which a MSFS might

realistically be implemented, questionnaires were not distributed to individuals who work for colleges or universities, individuals who work for organizations with less than two managerial levels, and individuals who work for family businesses. Consistent with Bettenhausen and Fedor (1997), we chose to conduct this study across organizations because the majority of studies on MSFS have been conducted using a single organization thereby making it difficult to determine if the results are because of contextual factors specific to that organization, or whether the results would generalize to other settings.

The questionnaires began by defining MSFS and asking participants to imagine that their current organization was going to implement a MSFS for developmental purposes. A detailed description of MSFS was provided. Participants were then informed of the perspective (i.e., supervisor, peer, and subordinate) that they should take when responding to this part of the questionnaire and each perspective was defined (e.g., subordinates were defined as individuals who directly report to you). Completed questionnaires were returned directly to the researchers via a self-addressed, postage paid envelope. Note that our sample was comprised of working individuals who were asked to consider that their company would be implementing a MSFS. We chose this frame of reference because, for successful implementation of MSFS, it is essential that system users believe that MSFS will result in positive outcomes (Bettenhausen & Fedor, 1997; Ewen & Edwards, 2001). As Bettenhausen and Fedor (1997) note, these user preconceptions are a critical piece of information for practitioners deciding how and when to implement a MSFS.

Results

Development of Scales

Each of the scales in the present research demonstrated acceptable levels of estimated reliability (range: $\alpha = .82$ to $\alpha = .96$). For all samples, POPS was negatively related to understanding and control. Past research investigating these variables have observed correlations of similar magnitude (e.g., Ferris, Gilmore, & Kacmar, 1996b; Ferris et al., 1994; Kacmar et al., 1999). It is also interesting to note that while organizational tenure (Ferris et al., 1994) and tenure with supervisor (Gilmore, Dulebohn, & Harrell-Cook, 1996) were used as proxies of understanding in previous research, job tenure was unrelated to understanding in the supervisor, subordinate, and combined samples (i.e., treating all raters equally) and was negatively related to understanding in the peer sample.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1. To test Hypothesis 1, hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. Control variables (e.g., gender) were entered on the first step, and POPS was entered on the second step. Results indicated that POPS was a significant predictor of rater acceptance of MSFS in the peer sample ($\Delta R^2 = .04$, $\Delta F(1, 183) = 8.44$, $p < .05$), the subordinate sample ($\Delta R^2 = .02$, $\Delta F(1, 236) = 5.21$, $p < .05$), and the combined sample ($\Delta R^2 = .04$, $\Delta F(1, 535) = 23.98$, $p < .05$) but not in the supervisor sample ($\Delta R^2 = .01$, $\Delta F(1, 137) = 2.03$, $p > .05$). POPS significantly predicted cost-benefit evaluations in all of the samples (supervisors, $\Delta R^2 = .08$, $\Delta F(1, 137) = 12.36$, $p < .05$; peers, $\Delta R^2 = .10$, $\Delta F(1, 183) = 21.42$, $p < .05$; subordinates, $\Delta R^2 = .04$, $\Delta F(1, 236) = 9.81$, $p < .05$; and combined sample $\Delta R^2 = .08$, $\Delta F(1, 535) = 51.05$, $p < .05$). Based on these results, Hypothesis 1 is largely supported.

Hypothesis 2. Results indicated that the interaction between organizational politics perceptions and understanding failed to account for significant incremental variance in rater cost-benefit evaluations in each of the independent samples (supervisor ratings sample, $\Delta R^2 = .00$, $\Delta F(1, 135) = 0.59$, $p = .44$; peer ratings sample, $\Delta R^2 = .01$, $\Delta F(1, 181) = 1.48$, $p = .23$; subordinate ratings sample, $\Delta R^2 = .00$, $\Delta F(1, 234) = 0.26$, $p = .61$) or in the combined sample ($\Delta R^2 = .00$, $\Delta F(1, 531) = 2.54$, $p = .11$). Similarly, results indicated that the interaction term did not predict rater acceptance in each of the independent samples (supervisor ratings sample, $\Delta R^2 = .00$, $\Delta F(1, 136) = 0.02$, $p = .97$; peer ratings sample, $\Delta R^2 = .01$, $\Delta F(1, 183) = 2.27$, $p = .13$; subordinate ratings sample, $\Delta R^2 = .00$, $\Delta F(1, 236) = 0.77$, $p = .38$). However, in the combined sample, results indicate that the two-way interaction term was a significant predictor ($\Delta R^2 = .01$, $\Delta F(1, 541) = 8.44$, $p < .05$). Results indicated that the nature of the interaction was as hypothesized (i.e., when understanding is low, POPS is associated with lower acceptance of MSFS than when understanding is high). However, given the small amount of variance for which it accounted (1%), and the failure to find a significant interaction in all other analyses, Hypothesis 2 fails to be supported. Note that POPS had a main effect whereas understanding did not.

Hypothesis 3. Results indicated that the control x organizational politics perceptions interaction did not account for significant variance in rater acceptance in any of the independent samples (supervisor ratings sample, $\Delta R^2 = .01$, $\Delta F(1, 135) = 0.70$, $p = .40$; peer ratings sample, $\Delta R^2 = .01$, $\Delta F(1, 181) = 2.35$, $p = .13$; subordinate ratings sample, $\Delta R^2 = .00$, $\Delta F(1, 234) = 0.76$, $p = .39$) or the combined sample ($\Delta R^2 = .00$, $\Delta F(1, 531) = 2.15$, $p = .14$). Similar to the above results, this interaction did not account for significant variance in the prediction of rater cost-benefit evaluations in any of the independent samples (supervisor ratings sample, $\Delta R^2 = .00$, $\Delta F(1, 135) = 0.04$, $p = .84$; peer ratings sample, $\Delta R^2 = .00$, $\Delta F(1, 181) = 0.81$, $p = .37$; subordinate ratings sample, $\Delta R^2 = .01$,

$\Delta\underline{F}(1, 234) = 3.16$, $\underline{p} = .08$) or in the combined sample, ($\Delta R^2 = .00$, $\Delta\underline{F}(1, 531) = 0.03$, $\underline{p} = .87$) (see Tables 9-12). Hypothesis 3 fails to be supported. Note that POPS emerged as having a main effect whereas control did not.

Hypothesis 4. Results indicated that rater perspective did not moderate the relationships between POPS and rater attitudes (for acceptance, $\Delta F = 1.46$, $\underline{p} > .05$; for cost-benefit evaluations, $\Delta F = 2.36$, $\underline{p} > .05$). As such, Hypothesis 4 fails to be supported. Rather, results indicated that rater perspective had a main effect on both rater acceptance and cost-benefit evaluations of MSFS. Follow-up tests demonstrated that rater attitudes were significantly more favorable for supervisors (acceptance, $\underline{M} = 4.28$, $\underline{SD} = 0.46$; cost-benefit evaluations, $\underline{M} = 3.89$, $\underline{SD} = 0.46$), than for subordinates (acceptance, $\underline{M} = 3.81$, $\underline{SD} = 0.77$; cost-benefit evaluations, $\underline{M} = 3.43$, $\underline{SD} = 0.66$), which were significantly more favorable than peer rater attitudes (acceptance, $\underline{M} = 3.26$, $\underline{SD} = 0.99$; cost-benefit evaluations, $\underline{M} = 3.04$, $\underline{SD} = 0.83$).

Additional Exploratory Analyses

Understanding $\times$ Control Interaction. Although past research in this area generally has not investigated an understanding x control interaction, this interaction in rater attitudes toward MSFS was explored in the current study. Although the understanding x control interaction did not account for significant variance in the supervisor rater (acceptance, $\Delta R^2 = .00$, $\Delta\underline{F}(1, 135) = 0.22$, $\underline{p} = .64$; cost-benefit evaluations, $\Delta R^2 = .01$, $\Delta\underline{F}(1, 135) = 0.85$, $\underline{p} = .36$) and subordinate rater samples (rater acceptance, $\Delta R^2 = .00$, $\Delta\underline{F}(1, 234) = 0.77$, $\underline{p} = .38$; rater cost-benefit evaluations, $\Delta R^2 = .00$, $\Delta\underline{F}(1, 234) = 0.51$, $\underline{p} = .48$), it did explain unique variance in rater acceptance of peer feedback ($\Delta R^2 = .06$, $\Delta\underline{F}(1, 181) = 11.45$, $\underline{p} = .001$) and rater cost-benefit evaluations of peer feedback ($\Delta R^2 = .10$, $\Delta\underline{F}(1, 181) = 21.14$, $\underline{p} < .001$). As illustrated in Figure 1, the nature of the interaction revealed that when participants' perceptions of control were low, higher levels of understanding were associated with higher reported acceptance of peer feedback. However, when reported control was high, there was a negative relationship between understanding and acceptance of peer feedback. The nature of the interaction was the same for peer cost-benefit evaluations.

Rater Experience. One-way ANOVAs also were conducted to investigate whether rater attitudes toward MSFS differed based on participants' prior experience with providing performance feedback ratings. To determine whether participants had prior experience with MSFS, participants in each sample were asked to indicate whether they had ever been asked to evaluate the performance of a supervisor, peer, or subordinate. For the supervisor feedback sample, prior experience with rating one's subordinates did not significantly influence rater acceptance ($\underline{F}(1, 142) = 0.85$, $\underline{p} = .36$, $\eta^2 = .01$) or rater cost-benefit evaluations ($\underline{F}(1, 142) = 0.12$, $\underline{p} = .73$, $\eta^2 = .00$) of supervisor feedback. Note, as expected, the vast majority of supervisors reported having experience evaluating their subordinates (129 out of 144 reported having experience with subordinate ratings). However, prior experience giving peer feedback did significantly impact rater acceptance of peer feedback ($\underline{F}(1, 190) = 8.31$, $\underline{p} = .004$, $\eta^2 = .04$) and rater cost-benefit evaluations of peer feedback ($\underline{F}(1, 190) = 7.13$, $\underline{p} = .01$, $\eta^2 = .04$). Participants who had previous experience with peer feedback reported higher levels of acceptance ($\underline{M} = 3.51$, $\underline{SD} = 0.92$) and more positive cost-benefit evaluations of peer feedback ($\underline{M} = 3.24$, $\underline{SD} = 0.80$) than participants without previous rater experience (acceptance, $\underline{M} = 3.10$, $\underline{SD} = 1.00$; cost-benefit evaluations, $\underline{M} = 2.92$, $\underline{SD} = 0.83$). Similarly, prior experience with rating one's supervisor was significantly related to rater acceptance of subordinate feedback ($\underline{F}(1, 245) = 3.98$, $\underline{p} = .047$, $\eta^2 = .02$) and rater cost-benefit evaluations of subordinate feedback ($\underline{F}(1, 245) = 6.92$, $\underline{p} < .01$, $\eta^2 = .03$). Participants who had previously been asked to evaluate the performance of their supervisors reported higher levels of acceptance ($\underline{M} = 3.94$, $\underline{SD} = 0.73$) and more positive evaluations of subordinate feedback ($\underline{M} = 3.59$, $\underline{SD} = 0.62$) than did those without previous experience (acceptance, $\underline{M} = 3.74$, $\underline{SD} = 0.80$, cost-benefit evaluations, $\underline{M} = 3.36$, $\underline{SD} = 0.68$). Thus, rater attitudes concerning the use of non-traditional rater sources (i.e., peer ratings, subordinate ratings) were more positive for individuals who had previously participated in such systems.

Discussion

Favorable user attitudes are critical to the acceptance and viability of MSFS (Edwards, Ewen, & Vendantam, 2001). Little is known about rater attitudes toward MSFS or of the factors that impact these attitudes. The current study investigated the relationships between perceptions of organizational politics and rater attitudes toward MSFS, and whether these relationships are moderated by one's understanding, control, or rater perspective. Results consistently demonstrated that the perception of organizational politics negatively relates to rater acceptance and rater cost-benefit evaluations of MSFS. The relationships between perceptions of organizational politics and rater attitudes were not moderated by one's understanding of organizational processes, one's control over organizational events, or rater perspective. Interestingly, one's understanding and control did not predict rater attitudes, whereas, rater attitudes differed based on rater perspective such that supervisors held the most favorable attitudes, followed by subordinates, followed by peers. Exploratory analyses indicated that understanding and control interacted to predict peer rater attitudes, and that experienced raters had more favorable

MSFS attitudes than those without experience.

Politics as a Threat

A consistent finding was that organizational politics perceptions were negatively related to favorable rater attitudes, suggesting that raters view organizational politics as more of a threat than as an opportunity. These results raise a warning flag that, in highly political organizations, there may be potential negative effects associated with the less favorable attitudes. For example, raters might resist the implementation of MSFS, might refuse to participate, or might attempt to sabotage the system if they perceive their organizations to be political. Because favorable rater attitudes are important to the effectiveness and maintenance of MSFS (Edwards et al., 2001), interventions aimed at reducing perceptions of organizational politics (e.g., increasing organizational communication, formalizing organizational policies and procedures) and increasing acceptance of MSFS (e.g., rater training programs, MSFS orientation programs, reward systems that are consistent with MSFS, informational meetings with rater groups) might help facilitate the introduction and sustainability of MSFS. Bracken (1996) lists several factors (e.g., resources, management commitment) that likely influence an organization's readiness to implement MSFS. Our results suggest that measuring employees' perceptions of organizational politics may also be useful in assessing an organization's readiness to implement MSFS.

In contrast to previous research which has suggested that understanding and control moderate organizational politics perceptions-outcome relationships (e.g., Ferris et al., 1996b; Ferris et al., 1994), the current study found that organizational politics perceptions were negatively related to rater acceptance and cost-benefit evaluations of MSFS regardless of one's level of understanding or control. One potential explanation for these different findings is that, while understanding and control may influence the opportunity/threat status of organizational politics perceptions in regard to general job attitudes and behaviors (e.g., job anxiety, job satisfaction), organizational politics perceptions may be more likely to be interpreted as threatening in the context of organizational systems that are traditionally tied to rewards and punishments (e.g., performance appraisal, selection and promotional systems). Accordingly, understanding and control may not play as important a role in framing whether organizational politics are perceived as opportunities or threats in the context of performance appraisal because, in these situations, organizational politics are overwhelmingly viewed as a threat. Interestingly, understanding and control both failed to be significant predictors of rater attitudes.

One exception to the consistent finding that perceptions of organizational politics negatively relate to rater attitudes was that perceptions of organizational politics were not significantly related to rater acceptance of supervisor feedback. While rater cost-benefit evaluations concerning supervisor feedback were significantly less positive for individuals reporting heightened levels of organizational politics than for individuals reporting lower levels of organizational politics, rater acceptance of supervisor feedback was not negatively impacted by perceptions of organizational politics. A potential explanation for this finding is that because supervisor feedback is the most prevalent source of performance feedback (Murphy & Cleveland, 1995), supervisors may consider it to be part of their job duties regardless of whether they expect positive or negative outcomes. Consequently, although supervisors in highly political organizations might expect supervisor feedback to result in less positive outcomes than individuals in less political organizations, these perceptions may not influence their acceptance of supervisor feedback because they understand that providing feedback to their subordinates falls within their job responsibilities and that they have no other choice but to participate in such systems. As such, in highly political organizations they may accept the systems but not expect favorable outcomes.

Rater Perspective

The results of the current research indicate that, in general, participants reported rater acceptance and rater cost-benefit evaluations above the midpoint for each rater source. However, rater source (i.e., supervisor feedback, peer feedback, subordinate feedback) was found to account for significant differences in both rater acceptance and rater cost-benefit evaluations of MSFS. Rater acceptance and cost-benefit evaluations were most positive for supervisor feedback, followed by subordinate feedback, followed by peer feedback, respectively. Because supervisor feedback is the most common source of performance feedback (Murphy & Cleveland, 1995), it is not surprising that it is the most accepted form of feedback as well. One potential explanation for the finding that subordinate feedback is viewed more positively than peer feedback may stem from the fact that, while organizations often have policies in place to protect subordinates from supervisor retaliation, policies protecting employees from coworker retaliation are relatively rare (Fedor et al., 1999). Peer feedback may therefore carry more perceived risk. Peers may also be less accepting of MSFS because they may be in direct competition for organizational resources with their peers (e.g., promotions, salary raises). Alternatively, subordinates may be more accepting of MSFS (and have more positive expectations) because what a supervisor does directly impacts their jobs, while the performance of peers may have little personal relevance for the rater. Thus, the results of the current research indicate that individuals develop separate attitudes toward each type of rater source and that

attitudes toward one source may not necessarily generalize to other sources.

Understanding x Control Interaction

An interesting finding of the current study was that understanding and control interacted to predict rater acceptance and rater cost-benefit evaluations of peer feedback. These results indicate that for individuals who report high levels of control, understanding was negatively related to rater acceptance of peer feedback. Conversely, the relationship between understanding and rater acceptance of peer feedback was positive when control was low. Individuals with low perceptions of control and high understanding of organizational processes may have viewed providing peer feedback as an opportunity to gain some level of control within their organizations. On the other hand, those with high feelings of control and understanding may view MSFS as a threat to their power because these systems provide a voice to those who currently have little influence in organizational decisions. Interestingly, this interaction was found in the peer sample, but not in the supervisor or subordinate samples. Perhaps these issues are more salient in regard to peer ratings because the raters and ratees are in more direct competition for resources, rewards, and promotions than is the case with supervisor or subordinate feedback.

Rater Experience

Participants in the current study who reported having previous experience providing peer and subordinate feedback reported higher levels of acceptance and more positive cost-benefit evaluations for these feedback sources than participants without such experience. Thus, as the use of MSFS increases, differences among rater sources may likely diminish. It may be that "fear of the unknown" explains the differences between rater attitudes toward supervisor feedback and alternative feedback sources. Consequently, rater acceptance and cost-benefit evaluations of MSFS may become more positive as raters participate in MSFS and become more comfortable with their roles as raters. Accordingly, training programs designed to expose individuals to MSFS and provide experience making performance ratings may reduce the level of resistance among those with little familiarity with MSFS. Although our findings suggest that experience has a positive effect on rater attitudes, it is likely that the relationships between experience and rater attitudes are moderated by *type* of experience. However, this point again highlights the importance in assessing the readiness of the organization (Bracken, 1996) and for creating conducive organizational environments prior to implementing MSFS so that participants' experiences are positive and translate into favorable attitudes.

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