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## Thinking About You: Perspective Taking, Perceived Restraint, and Performance

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# Thinking About You: Perspective Taking, Perceived Restraint, and Performance

## Abstract

Conflict often arises when incompatible ideas, values or interests lead to actions that harm others. Increasing people's willingness to refrain from harming others can play a critical role in preventing conflict and fostering performance. We examine perspective taking as a relational micro-process related to such restraint. We argue that attending to how others appraise events supports restraint in two ways. It motivates people to act with concern and enables them to understand what others view as harmful versus beneficial. Using a matched sample of 147 knowledge workers and 147 of their leaders, we evaluate the impact of appraisal-related perspective taking on leaders' perceptions of knowledge workers' restraint and performance.

## Keywords

perspective taking, restraint, opportunism, conflict, leaders, subordinates, consultants, clients, relational

## Disciplines

Industrial and Organizational Psychology | Labor Relations | Organizational Behavior and Theory | Organization Development | Work, Economy and Organizations

## Comments

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**Thinking About You: Perspective Taking, Perceived Restraint, and Performance**

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**Thinking About You: Perspective Taking, Perceived Restraint, and Performance**

ABSTRACT

Conflict often arises when incompatible ideas, values or interests lead to actions that harm others. Increasing people's willingness to refrain from harming others can play a critical role in preventing conflict and fostering performance. We examine perspective taking as a relational micro-process related to such restraint. We argue that attending to how others appraise events supports restraint in two ways. It motivates people to act with concern and enables them to understand what others view as harmful versus beneficial. Using a matched sample of 147 knowledge workers and 147 of their leaders, we evaluate the impact of appraisal-related perspective taking on leaders' perceptions of knowledge workers' restraint and performance.

Word count: 108 words

Key words: Perspective Taking, Restraint, Opportunism, Conflict, Leaders, Subordinates, Consultants, Clients, Relational

**Thinking About You: Perspective Taking, Perceived Restraint, and Performance**

Conflict often arises when incompatible ideas, values or interests lead to actions that harm others (Opatow, 2015, this volume). From rudeness to aggressive bullying, organization members routinely experience or witness acts of harm that can induce emotional pain, psychological distress, feelings of disconnection and a sense of violation (Aquino & Douglas, 2003; Fraser, 2010; Kanov et al., 2004; Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2007; Pearson & Porath, 2009; Porath & Erez, 2009). Betrayals by other individuals, for example, can be extremely emotionally painful and also provoke vengeful thoughts and actions (Molden & Finkel, 2010; Pearson and Porath, 2009). Because all interpersonal relationships carry with them the risk of disrespectful behavior, broken promises and self-interested behavior, the harm experienced by organizational members may not reflect isolated incidents perpetrated by a few “bad apples,” but rather a pervasive aspect of organizational life (Lilius, Kanov, Dutton, Worline & Maitlis, 2011) that generates and is generated by conflict.

In work organizations, experiencing and witnessing these negative interpersonal events can undermine task performance (Porath & Erez, 2007; 2009) as well as organization members’ willingness to cooperate with the individuals responsible for causing pain (Pearson & Porath, 2009; Turillo, Folger, Lavelle, Umphress, and Gee, 2002). In addition, these negative interactions not only reduce job satisfaction, job involvement, and employee’s intentions to stay but also affect health outcomes (e.g., depression, psychosomatic symptoms, and insomnia, Crossley, 2009; Duffy et al., 2006; Greenberg, 2010).

Restraint from self-interested, opportunistic, harmful behavior can reduce these negative outcomes. Restraint is central to norms for maintaining relationships in many settings (Schwartz, 1994)

and critical for reducing sources of conflict (Tripp & Bies, 2009). In this chapter, we use interviews with 25 management consultants to inductively examine the use of perspective taking in an organizational setting. Then, we use survey data to examine the relationship between perspective taking and, restraint.

Restraint is likely to directly influence conflict because unrestrained harmful, opportunistic and disrespectful behaviors often generate relationship conflict (Bies & Tripp, 1996; Pearson & Porath, 2009). Moreover such behavior is likely to undermine cooperation by eliciting avoidance or revenge (Bies, Tripp & Kramer, 1997; Bies & Tripp, 1996; Tripp & Bies, 2009). Despite the importance of restraint for reducing conflict, we know little about how individuals actively signal their willingness to engage in restraint (e.g., Child & Möllering, 2003; Whitener et al, 1998; Williams, 2007) and less about the cognitive processes that individuals might use to facilitate this type of signaling.

Moral restraint can be viewed both as a societal value (Schwartz, 2007) and as a character-based trait (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). The trust literature has traditionally suggested that people passively reveal their character-traits over time during repeated interactions (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Ring & Van de Ven, 1994; Shapiro, Sheppard, & Cheraskin, 1992). In contrast, we argue that individuals use intersubjective processes to actively demonstrate their restraint to others. They try to understand others' perspectives in order to avoid behaviors that others will view as harmful. Thus, restraint—people's willingness to refrain from behaviors that will harm others—is not an immutable part of one's character that is revealed passively without regard to social context. Rather, individuals demonstrate their restraint at least in part through relational micro-processes such as perspective taking.

Perspective taking refers to the intrapsychic and intersubjective process of imagining other people's thoughts or feelings from their point of view (Davis, 1996; Mead, 1934). Perspective taking has been linked to better communication, increased cooperation, more flexible responses to others' needs, greater valuing of others' welfare, and the ability to avoid cognitive biases such as anchoring (Blumer, 1969; Batson et al., 1995; Boland and Tenkasi, 1995; Galinsky & Mussweiler, 2001; Mead, 1934; Krauss & Fussell, 1991; Parker and Axtell, 2001). Perspective taking also has the potential to provide perspective takers with an anticipatory understanding of what others are likely to find harmful, and it is this

understanding may allow perspective takers to proactively influence the elements of a situation that others perceive as injurious (Williams, 2007; Belkin & Williams, 2013).

Building on work that emphasizes the role of perspective taking in interpersonal emotion management (e.g., Williams, 2007), we argue that perspective taking enables restraint. It does so through cognitive and motivational mechanisms. It not only motivates people to act with concern, but also enables them to understand which actions others are likely to find harmful from their point of view. We know little about the processes that people proactively use to establish restraint in the eyes of others (Schoorman, Mayer and Davis, 2007).

In this chapter, we not only show that perspective taking is related to others' perceptions of one's restraint, but also that perceived restraint has an effect on perceptions of one's performance. We test our hypotheses using matched data collected from two sources—147 mid-level professionals and 147 of their supervising managers.

### **PERSPECTIVE TAKING AND ITS CONSEQUENCES**

Perspective taking involves the cognitive process of imagining a situation from another person's point of view (Davis, 1996; Mead, 1934). This chapter starts with the assumption that perspective taking occurs in business settings. Although our main study examines hierarchical leader-subordinate dyads, we use quotes from interviews with 25 management consultants from a top international consulting firm to provide qualitative support for the assumption that perspective taking occurs in business settings and also to illustrate how our hypotheses might operate in real organizations. The population of consultants from which this sample is drawn is described in Williams and Polman (2014). We view these consultants as relational leaders of their projects (Uhl-bien, 2006) and thus, relevant for a study of hierarchical leader-subordinate dyads.

When reflecting on the role of perspective taking in consulting relationships, those interviewed mentioned engaging in perspective taking and also advised others to do so:

- I... try and spend a bit explicit time just trying to understand, um, where they're coming from and what they're ... what their motivations actually are... [C01, p. 17]
- Well, I guess the ... the advice I'd give them [less experienced consultants] is first, try to understand where this person is coming from. [C17, p. 18]
- ... But I think one of the key things is... the ability to listen effectively and understand ... kind of put yourself in their shoes. [C06, p. 13]
- "You always ask [yourself and your team] ...
  - What would you be worried about if you were the client?' What is the client worried about?" [C04, p. 16-17]
  - Do they like seeing content, or do they like... talking about the process? [C02, p. 21-22]
  - ... what are their particular goals and challenges and aspirations? [C08, p. 20]

The implications of perspective taking for interpersonal interactions and relationships have been examined by scholars in psychology, communications, and sociology (Blumer, 1969; Davis, 1996; Galinsky et al., 2008; Gilin et al., 2013; Krauss, 2001; Mead, 1934). Integrating the research from these disciplines provides insight into why, when, and how perspective taking facilitates interpersonal understanding, restraint, and thereby, performance. In sociology, symbolic interactionists assert that perspective taking allows people to better predict how others will respond to their actions (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969). This information, in turn, enables people to fit their actions to their understanding of others (Blumer, 1969). Symbolic interactionists view perspective taking as an active cognitive process that people use consciously and strategically to improve the quality of their interactions (Blumer, 1969; Collins, 1990; Goffman, 1967).

Scholars in the field of communications investigate perspective taking in speaker-listener dyads (Fussell & Krauss, 1992). From the standpoint of communication, a very basic amount of perspective taking is necessary for any interpersonal conversation (Krauss, 2001). It is widely accepted that perspective taking is necessary for effective communication because speakers must take into account what a listener knows when deciding how to formulate a message (Fussell & Krauss, 1992). Perspective



taking may not only improve communication, but reduce misunderstandings surrounding the speaker's intentions to harm or help the listener.

In psychology, perspective taking has been primarily examined in the context of empathy and helping behavior (Batson, 1998; Batson, Turk, Shaw & Klein, 1995; Eisenberg & Miller, 1987; Parker and Axtell, 2001). Social psychologists suggest that perspective taking can also evoke positive behaviors during interactions through non-strategic, empathy-related processes (Batson et al., 1995). For example, in non-competitive experimental studies, perspective taking consistently elicits considerate (Batson, 1998; Eisenberg & Miller, 1987), higher joint gains (Gilin et al., 2013) and cooperative behavior (Parker and Axtell, 2001). Perspective taking can also lead people to value others' welfare and feel compassion for them (Batson et al., 1995). We draw on each of these three approaches to perspective taking in order to build our hypotheses linking perspective taking to restraint and performance.

In organizational settings restraint from harm includes refraining both from actions that would put others at material disadvantage and from actions that would damage the self-esteem of others (e.g., insults, unnecessarily harsh criticism). Some of the consultants' interviewed mentioned how perspective taking allowed them to refrain from unnecessarily harsh criticism, whereas another refrained from pushing strategies that were materially risky to their clients:

- *It's something I have to watch out for myself, to make sure I don't condemn or judge an idea without making sure I understand the perspective of the person that may be delivering that message or taking a different position than I thought they would or wanted them to. [C05, p. 26]*
- *[Because] in some ways you can think of it in terms of ...What's driving them? What rewards do they get out of it? ... how was their job success measured. ...It's understanding... why they are ...doing what they're doing. ...You can look at something and say, "Well, that's a stupid way of doing things," and then when you discover why it's being done that way, you say, "Hm, okay. There's a bit more sense there than I thought there was." [C18, p. 20-21]*
- *...I can say...[to the client], it's in the interest of the shareholders...because it's diversifiable risk and this and that. But here's a guy about to retire, you know. Can you really ask him to take that leap? [C24, p. 31]*

Perspective taking generates benefits that influence restraint through cognitive and motivational mechanisms. Psychologists' suggest that perspective taking can generate compassion, which "amplifies or intensifies motivation to relieve another person's need," leads people to value others' welfare (Batson et al., 1995, p. 300) and increases self-other overlap (Galinsky, Ku, & Wang, 2005). Consequently, perspective taking may motivate individuals to prioritize the interests of others. It, thereby, can trigger restraint from harm such as taking credit for another's idea or broadcasting another's error even when that behavior would be advantageous to the individual showing restraint.

Further, perspective taking can provide information about how others are likely to view one's actions and thus, allow one to better refrain from behaviors that specific others will find harmful regardless of whether or not they are universally construed as harmful behaviors. In contrast to Williams' (2007) theory of threat regulation, we do not examine the role of perspective taking in regulating the emotional reactions of others who feel threatened. Rather, we examine how perspective taking prevents harmful behavior irrespective of whether others anticipate or fear the possibility of such behavior. We propose that perspective taking motivates and enables behavior that others are likely to view as involving restraint from self-interested and opportunistic behavior.

**Hypothesis 1:** A subordinate's perspective taking will be positively related to his or her leader's perceptions of the subordinate's restraint from harmful behavior.

Perspective taking is likely to influence performance through several mechanisms. Drawing on the communications approach to perspective taking (e.g., Fussell & Krauss, 1992), we argue that perspective taking is likely to enhance communication by allowing the perspective taker to better tailor his/ her message to the knowledge, goals and concerns of others. In turn, attending to the concerns of others may not only enable perspective takers to transfer knowledge in a non-threatening manner

(Williams, 2007), but also motivate their colleagues to respond with flexibility and extra-role behaviors that can increase efficiency (Hoffman et al., 2007 for review of extra-role behavior).

**Hypothesis 2:** Perspective taking will be positively related to performance.

When interviewed, consultants described ways in which they believed perspective taking helped their performance:

- *But if the “why’s” are different, your response is entirely different, you know. If they don’t believe that you’ve got the right analysis, that would cause you to go out and do, you know, more analysis. If ... the reservation is more born of a fear that you’re driving them into an insular position in the organization, if you came in with a bunch of analysis to show you’re right, all you’re going to do is heighten their fears ... So they’re going to ... they’re going to ... react with greater...entrenchment.. [C17, p. 18]*
- *[I] followed him to...the parking lot one day ... and he got into his Chevette. I said [to myself], “Uh-oh ... The strategy changes here.” He said, “It still runs.” Well, again, that tells me, says, “Okay, this is where his mind is at. This thing is still functional, why do I need something newer?” Okay. So we ought to look at upgrading a little bit, and keeping his current functionality revved.... [C19, p. 11]*

Restraint may also have a direct effect on performance because it influences how people relate to one another. Fear and defensive behaviors, for example, can inhibit help seeking, learning, and cooperation (Edmondson, 1999; Lee, 1997; Williams, 2007). The perception that someone will engage in restraint, i.e., refrain from harming and taking advantage of others, is likely to enable others to seek out help from, admit their lack of knowledge to, cooperate with and learn from that restrained individual (Levin & Cross, 2004). These more candid behaviors may increase the opportunities other have to benefit from the restrained individual’s expertise and witness his or her performance.

Further, because restraint is the opposite of opportunistic Machiavellian behavior (i.e., self-interest with guile, Jones, this volume, Williamson, 1997; 1993), it should decrease the need for others to monitor one’s behavior (Currall & Judge, 1995; Powell & Smith-Doerr, 1994; Ring & Van de Ven, 1994; Uzzi, 1997). When dealing with an individual who refrains from taking advantage of others,

counterparts can respond with flexibility to the large number of contingencies and noncontractible issues that are part of many projects (Peronne, Zaheer, & McEvily, 2003; Spier, 1992). Similarly, dealing with individuals high in restraint provides the freedom to adjust to unanticipated contingencies in ways that are jointly optimal—without the time and effort associated with formally renegotiating a contract or project specifications with opportunistic individuals (Lorenz, 1988; Uzzi, 1997).

Although much of the research on unanticipated contingencies during projects has been performed on interorganizational boundary spanners, contracts between organizations are analogous to job descriptions and employment contracts within organizations such that perceptions of a subordinate's restraint may prompt leaders within an organization to respond to the subordinate's requests with the flexibility and extra-role behavior required to enhance the subordinates' task performance (Organ, 1988; see Hoffman, Blair, Meriac, & Woehr, 2007 for review).

Finally, subordinates' restraint from harming their leaders (e.g., by revealing leaders mistakes or weaknesses) is likely to build trust and high quality leader-member exchange (LMX) because these restraint-based interactions represent interpersonal exchanges in which leaders and followers build a reciprocal cycle of mutual obligation (e.g., Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer & Ferris, 2012; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). High quality LMX, in turn, should have a positive effect on perceptions of the subordinate's performance because high quality LMX impacts on performance-related and attitudinal variables (see Dulebohn et al., 2012; and Gerstner & Day, 1997 for reviews).

**Hypothesis 3:** Perceptions of a subordinate's restraint will be positively related to leaders' ratings of that subordinate's performance.

## Methods

### Participants

We examine perspective taking in the context of professionals working in management and technical areas within business organizations. Consistent with the changing nature of work, these workers

are engaged in interdependent and uncertain tasks that require knowledge sharing and learning (Griffin, Neal, Parker, 2007). We selected this context because restraint is particularly valuable when individuals need to respond in a flexible manner to unexpected events (Peronne et al., 2003) and learn without the fear of self-esteem damage (Levin and Cross, 2004). We investigated workers who were primarily mid-career executives in their organizations and therefore, likely to be engaged in interdependent work and encounter non-routine events. Mid-career executives over the age of thirty comprised almost 70% of our sample.

All of the subordinates in our study were professional knowledge workers who participated as part of their “Top 10” MBA program or executive education program at a university in the Northeastern United States. We collected matched data from one hundred and seventy-three professionals and one hundred and seventy-three of their current or most recent supervising managers. Sixty-eight percent of these professionals were mid-career executives. Three-quarters of these mid-career executives were participating in a one year on-site specialized MBA program and one-fourth were participating in short on-site executive education training. Nineteen percent of all of the professionals were in a specialized MBA program which included multiple, extended internships. Many of these individuals were sponsored by their companies. The remaining professionals were in a joint MS-MBA program.

Twenty-two percent of the respondents were between 20 and 29 years old, fifty-one percent of the respondents were between 30 and 39 years old, and twenty-seven percent of the respondents were older than forty. Sixty-six percent of the professional were male and thirty-four percent were female. Respondents came from seven areas including Africa, Asia, Central/South American/Mexico/The Caribbean, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, Middle East and United States/Canada. The largest group was from United States/Canada (forty-three percent) and the second largest group was from Asia (twenty-eight percent).

The data for this study were collected as part of a larger research project. All of the professionals in the aforementioned programs were invited to participate in *The Four Capabilities Leadership Assessment* (Ancona & Williams, 2005) and received both an individualized report and professional

coaching. Our sample of one hundred and seventy-three consists of seventy-five percent of the professionals in the programs—those who requested feedback from their managers. These professionals supplied the names and email addresses of their managers through a secure website and their managers were then sent an individualized secure link to an online survey. The professionals who requested managerial feedback did not differ from those who did not do so in gender or in their average self-ratings of perspective-taking or restraint. However, professionals who received managerial feedback (i.e., those in our sample) were older on average than those who did not receive this feedback because the mid-career executives, who were older on average than other participants, requested feedback from their managing leaders at a higher rate than others.

Corresponding online survey items were completed by the professionals and their supervising managers. After eliminating managers and professionals with missing data on the relevant variables, our final sample was comprised of matched pairs of 131 professionals and 131 of their leaders (i.e., their supervisors). The non-significant control variable age group contained the most missing data. We excluded age group and conducted analyses on a larger sample of 147 knowledge workers and 147 of their supervising managers. The results of analyses using the sample of 131 and that of 147 were indistinguishable. In this paper, we present the results for the larger sample of 147. In addition, univariate analyses found no significant differences between the means of participants with missing data and those with full data on gender, self-ratings of restraint and perspective taking or managerial ratings of restraint and performance.

## Measurement

**Perspective taking.** We measured knowledge workers' general propensity to engage in perspective taking when interacting with others at work using the longer 4-item version of Williams' (2011) 3-item measure of appraisal-related perspective taking. Respondents were asked to use a five-point Likert scale (with "1" corresponding to "almost never" and "5" corresponding to "almost always"). A sample item is, "I imagine how my actions will affect things that are important to others." (See Appendix

A for all of the items on this scale, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .83$ , see Williams, 2011 for additional information on scale validity).

**Restraint (from taking advantage of others).** The five items used to measure managers' perceptions of the respondents' restraint were adapted from the Organizational Trust Inventory (OTI) developed by Cummings and Bromiley (1996). We chose four items from the OTI's "avoids excessive advantage" sub-scale and included one new item about demeaning behavior. All items covered the intention to do harm and/or the failure to protect the welfare of others. Because the items described negative actions, they were reverse coded.<sup>1</sup> A sample OTI-based item from our measure is "He/she manipulates information for personal gain (reverse coded)." (See Appendix A for all of the items on this scale, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .80$ ).

**Performance.** Managers rated knowledge workers' performance on the six items from *The Four Capabilities Leadership Assessment* (Ancona & Williams, 2005). A sample item is, "He/she produces end results that frequently exceed the original expectation" (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .84$ ). Similar to Greenhaus, Parasuraman, and Wormley (1990)'s performance measure, our six items were designed to comprise two dimensions—a task and a relationship dimension. The three task performance items on our scale were similar to those used by other researchers in that they focused on meeting and exceeding performance targets (e.g., Greenhaus, et al. 1990; Tsui, Pearce, Porter & Tripoli 1997; Wang, Law, Hackett, Wang & Chen, 2005). However, the three relationship items differed from those used by Greenhaus et al. (1990) in that they focused on motivating others rather than on one's relationship with other employees and the organization. Our single performance factor suggests that leaders view motivating others as a core component of professional workers' performance (i.e., a required task).

**Control variables.** The control variables in this study included age, gender and nationality. We control for gender and nationality because both female gender and collectivist cultures have been associated with greater other-orientation (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Two of our variables of interest, perspective taking and restraint, are other-oriented in nature. We controlled for age because of its

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<sup>1</sup> Positively worded items on the OTI were adapted to reflect negative behavior.

correlation with tenure and power. Fiske (1993) suggests that higher power individuals may engage in less perspective taking than lower power individuals. Age was not significant in any of our analyses and did not influence the magnitude or significance of the other parameters in the model. It was excluded from the analyses presented here.

**Common Method Bias.** Although this study uses survey methodology, it avoids the common-method bias associated with single source surveys (i.e., common source bias). This study includes dependent and independent variables that were provided by different individuals from different respondent categories: professionals (self-ratings) and their supervising managers (other-ratings). In this study, each respondent group (self, manager) represents a different data collection method. Thus, common source bias does not affect Hypotheses 1 and 2. Although the two dependent did come from the same source (i.e., the leader), they were comprised of ratings of subordinates' behavior not self-report data. To assess the impact of common-source, common method bias, we preformed Harmon's one-factor test, following Podsakoff and Organ (1986). We also assessed SEM models constraining these variables to load onto a single "method" factor. Finally, we implemented Lindell and Whitney's (2001) partial correlation adjustment for common method variance contamination. We used a marker variable from the same survey that was not theoretically or empirically related to restraint to calculate the uncontaminated correlation between restraint and performance. The marker variable was a 3-item scale of learning-through-experimentation (Cronbach's alpha=.70). The corrected correlation between perspective taking and perceived restraint,  $r=.20$ , was significant ( $p=.03$ ) and very similar in magnitude to the uncorrected Pearson correlation ( $r=.18$ ,  $p<.05$ ). The results from these tests suggest that the two dependent variables in our model were not related solely because of a common-method and that the reported relationship between restraint and performance has not been upwardly biased by the use of a common method.

### **Descriptive statistics**



Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliability estimates (Cronbach's alphas) for all variables in the analyses. The reliabilities all exceeded the .70 criterion suggested by Nunnally (1978). They ranged from .80 to .84.

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis

We used structural equation modeling (SEM) to perform a confirmatory factor analysis on our scales and to test our hypotheses. We conducted the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using a partially disaggregated approach and LISREL 8.80 software (Jöreskog & Sorbom, 1997). Partial disaggregation refers to testing a model using two or more composite indicators (or parcels) (Bagozzi & Edwards, 1998; Kline, 2005).

A saturated measurement model reflects a confirmatory factor analysis that specifies the expected relationships between the observed variables and the underlying construct they reflect (i.e., the factor) (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Our measurement model, which included indicators for perspective taking, restraint, performance and control variables fit well. It generated a reproduced covariance matrix that did not significantly differ from the observed covariance matrix (i.e., from the data) as indicated by the non-significant  $\chi^2$  statistic [ $\chi^2 (19) = 23.84, p = .20$ ]. The model also fit well according to other fit criteria. The RMSEA fit index was .04, the RMR value was .04, and the CFI index was .99, all exceeding the customary cut off criteria for good model fit.

We also checked the discriminant validity of manager rated "perceived restraint" and "performance" ( $r = .18, p < .05$ ). To test discriminant validity, a nested model was tested that constrained the correlation between the two leader-rated constructs to 1, where a correlation of one would indicate the factors were not distinct from one another. A sequential chi-squared difference test [SCDT] (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988) comparing the constrained model [ $\phi_{\text{restraint, performance}} = 1$ ] and unconstrained model [ $\phi_{\text{restraint, performance}} = \text{estimated}$ ] indicated that the constrained model (estimating non-distinct factors) fit significantly

worse than the unconstrained model [SCDT  $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 55.04, p < .01$ ], supporting the discriminant validity of manager-rated “perceived restraint” and “performance.”

### Structural Results

Next, a structural equation model was run to test the nomological validity of the specified theoretical model. The chi-square value for the structural equation model was non-significant,  $\chi^2(22) = 27.66, p = .19$ . The other fit indicators also showed good model fit. The CFI of .99 was well above the conventional value of .90. The RMSEA value was .04 and RMR value was .05.

Figure 2 summarizes our results. The first hypothesis (H1) proposed that an individual’s perspective taking would be positively related to others’ perceptions of his/her restraint. It was supported,  $\gamma = .26, t = 2.28, p < .05$ . Hypothesis 2 proposed that perspective taking would be positively related to performance. It was not supported. The direct relationship between perspective taking and performance was non-significant in our SEM analysis. However, the Pearson correlation between perspective taking and performance was significant ( $r = .18, p < .05$ , two-tailed test), and in our regression analysis with control variables, the relationship between perspective taking and performance was marginally significant ( $b = .10, t = 1.64, p = .10$ ), suggesting that future research with a larger sample may reveal a direct relationship.

Our next hypothesis (H3), which proposed that evaluations of a subordinate’s restraint would be positively related to ratings of that worker’s performance, was supported,  $\beta = .30, t = 3.10, p < .05$ .

Gender, our substantive control variable was significantly correlated with perspective taking ( $r = .25, p < .01$ ) and this relationship remained equally significant in our structural model.

### Discussion

We identify perspective taking as a proactive strategy people can use to establish their restraint (i.e., willingness to refrain from taking advantage of others) and enhance their performance. Our focus on

perspective taking makes several contributions and suggests directions for future research. First, with few exceptions (e.g., Boland and Tenkasi, 1995; Parker & Axtell, 2001), perspective taking by organization members has received little empirical attention (Parker, Atkins & Axtell, 2008). It may, however, reflect a powerful mechanism for understanding how people proactively navigate their interactions with others and avoid unnecessary conflict. We proposed that perspective taking increases perceived restraint, i.e., one's willingness to refrain from harming or taking advantage of others. We found that subordinates' perspective taking was positively related to leaders' perceptions of the restraint of those individuals. Moreover, restraint had a direct influence on leaders' perceptions of subordinates' performance.

Our finding that perspective taking was positively related to perceived restraint contributes to the research on conflict by suggesting that intrapsychic processes may be important not only for limiting opportunism (i.e., actions that are beneficial to oneself but harmful to others), but also for how others come to understand one's willingness to refrain from self-interested behavior. Because perspective taking is associated with avoiding harm to others, it may be a specific intrapsychic process that not only increases helpful acts that do not conflict with one's own self-interest (Parker & Axtell, 2001) but also those that do conflict with one's self-interest, thereby, decreasing opportunism.

A second contribution of this study is our focus on the restraint. Restraint may be critical when work is interdependent and non-routine (Sheppard & Sherman, 1998) because this type of context provides the chance for unobserved opportunism. Further, restraint is not task specific. People who establish themselves as having restraint in one context will be assumed to be engage in restraint across tasks and contexts. Thus, proactive cognitive processes that enable people to act with restraint in the eyes of others yield benefits that should spill over to multiple situations. This study not only examined perspective taking as an antecedent that motivates restraint, but also investigated the positive relationship between perceived restraint and performance. Future research should focus on additional antecedents and outcomes of perceived restraint.

Third, although we do not directly examine trust, we believe that we contribute to research on active trust building (e.g., Child & Möllering, 2003; Whitener, Brodt, Korsgaard, & Werner, 1998;

Williams, 2007) by empirically examining perspective taking as a process for influencing other people's character-based assessments of one's restraint. Perceived restraint is closely aligned with the trust-related expectation that individuals will act in ways that are helpful or at least not harmful (Gambetta, 1988). Rather than view restraint as an unwavering component of a trustee's character that reveals itself independent of the social context, we argue that trustees actively engage in relational processes such as perspective taking that can influence trustors' character-based assessments of a trustee's restraint. Moreover, because of its position as a value-laden construct and its normative role in relationship maintenance (Schwartz, 1994), perceptions of restraint are likely to support expectations of trustworthy behavior. Our observed relationship between a subordinate's self-reported perspective taking and a leader's perceptions of the subordinate's restraint adds to our understanding of how relational approaches to trust building such as perspective taking are connected to "character-based" elements of trustworthiness (i.e., perceived restraint). This study is a first step in bridging the gap between what Dirks and Ferrin (2002) call the relational and character-based approaches to trust research.

### **Implications for Future Research**

There are at least two pressing directions for future research: 1) moderators of the effect of perspective taking on restraint and 2) examining the differential effects of various dimensions of perspective taking. First, we briefly discuss two possible moderators that have been investigated in the context of perspective taking and/or proactive processes, then turn to dimensions of perspective taking.

**Perspective taking accuracy as a moderator.** Because individuals vary in their accuracy as perspective takers (Ickes, 1997), future research would benefit from investigating the moderating role of perspective taking accuracy. Over time individuals do correct their perspective taking errors to the best of their ability. However, there will still be a gap between the efforts that some people put into perspective taking and the accuracy of the understanding they gain from perspective taking. There may also be a gap between the accuracy of the understanding they gain from perspective taking and their ability to translate that understanding into effective behavior. Thus, the relationship between one's propensity to engage in

perspective taking and positive outcomes should involve some level of slippage. As the accuracy and relational competence of perspective takers increases so should be the relationship between perspective taking and outcomes.

**Intentions as a moderator.** Perspective takers may have benevolent, self-interested or malevolent intentions. When benevolent intentions are strong, these motives may strengthen the relationship between one's propensity to engage in perspective taking and one's restraint. In contrast, a professional with malevolent intentions might use perspective taking to take advantage of others, thus decreasing the aforementioned relationship. However, the possible negative impact of initial self-interested and perhaps even malevolent motives may decrease over time because perspective taking can increase the degree to which individuals value the well-being and outcomes of others (Batson et al., 1995). Thus, perspective taking may inadvertently lead to restraint by perspective takers who initially have self-interested motives (Williams, 2007). Future research should investigate the moderating influence of perspective takers' values and intentions as well as the effect over time of their values and intentions on the impact of perspective taking on relational outcomes such as cooperation and conflict.

**Dimensions of perspective taking.** Perspective taking involves the cognitive process of imagining a situation from another person's point of view. However, the perspective taker may *think* about (1) how another person thinks in general (cognitive perspective taking), (2) how they view their strategic goals or self-interest (Epley et al., 2006), (3) how they feel (affective perspective taking, Davis, 1996) or (4) how they cognitively appraisal a situation (appraisal-related perspective taking, Williams, 2007; 2011). Research has shown that different dimensions of perspective taking operate differently in competitive versus cooperative contexts (Gilin et al., 2013). For instance, whereas affective perspective taking leads to increased joint gains in both competitive and cooperative contexts (Gilin et al., 2013), cognitive perspective taking can actually increase competitiveness in a competitive situations (Epley et al., 2006). Future research should investigate the relationships among different dimensions of perspective taking, potential moderators of perspective taking and relational outcomes such as restraint and conflict.

**Dispositional nature of perspective taking.** In addition to dimensions of perspective taking, people possess both a dispositional and a relationship-specific tendency to engage in perspective taking (Davis, 1996). The processes through which perspective taking influences outcomes should be the same whether one's level of perspective taking is motivated by disposition or relationship-specific concerns. However, interpersonal factors, such as liking or hatred for a specific individual, will influence the level of perspective taking in any given relationship. Studies of empathy—a process closely related to perspective taking, have found that within the context of a particular relationship, empathic tendencies specific to that relationship are usually more predictive of outcomes than are dispositional empathic tendencies (Davis, 1996). Thus, our study, which measures the effect that people's general propensity to engage in perspective taking has on a specific relationship, may reflect a conservative test of the impact of perspective taking. Future studies should investigate the relative impact of dispositional, relationship-specific and context-specific perspective taking on outcomes.

### **Implications for Practice**

First, our findings suggest that knowledge workers not only actively engage in perspective taking but that this intrapsychic, cognitive process influences perceptions of their restraint and performance. Because perspective taking requires cognitive effort (Rosnagel, 2000), cognitive constraints such as time pressure and work load are likely to inhibit perspective taking at exactly the times when it would be most helpful to understand how one's actions will impact others (Williams & Belkin, 2013; Williams & Emich, 2014). Thus, reaping the benefits of perspective taking may require managerial foresight. Leaders not only need to sponsor professional development seminars that enable knowledge workers to understand the benefits of perspective taking, but also encourage the use of perspective taking during slack times to enable the effective use of perspective taking during the most critical times in the organization—when people are under pressure.

Second, our findings have important implications for conflict and conflict resolution. The relationship between perspective taking and restraint suggests that leaders who foster cultures associated

with increased perspective taking such as cultures of forgiveness and compassionate love (Fehr & Gelfand, 2012; Barsade & O'Neill, 2014) may not only reduce opportunism but also reduce the likelihood that subordinates enter into conflict cycles of revenge and retaliation.

### **CONCLUSION**

All interpersonal relationships carry with them the risk of harm—disrespectful behavior, broken promises, self-interested behavior, etc. Thus, the pain and suffering experienced by organizational members may not reflect isolated incidents perpetrated by a few “bad apples,” but rather a pervasive aspect of organizational life that generates and is generated by conflict. We identified perspective taking as a proactive strategy people can use to signal their restraint from harmful, opportunistic behavior and build performance. Theoretically, restraint is central to avoiding harm to others and therefore, is likely to play a central role both in reducing the conflict associated experiencing harm and in preventing the escalation of conflict associated with vengeful behaviors, which inherently involve a lack of restraint. We argued that perspective taking promotes restraint by motivating and enabling people to act with concern. We found that for knowledge workers, perspective taking was positively related to leaders' perceptions of the knowledge workers' restraint and that, in turn, restraint was related to their performance as rated by their leaders. Through this paper we seek to prompt further empirical examination of the roles of perspective taking and restraint in organizations.

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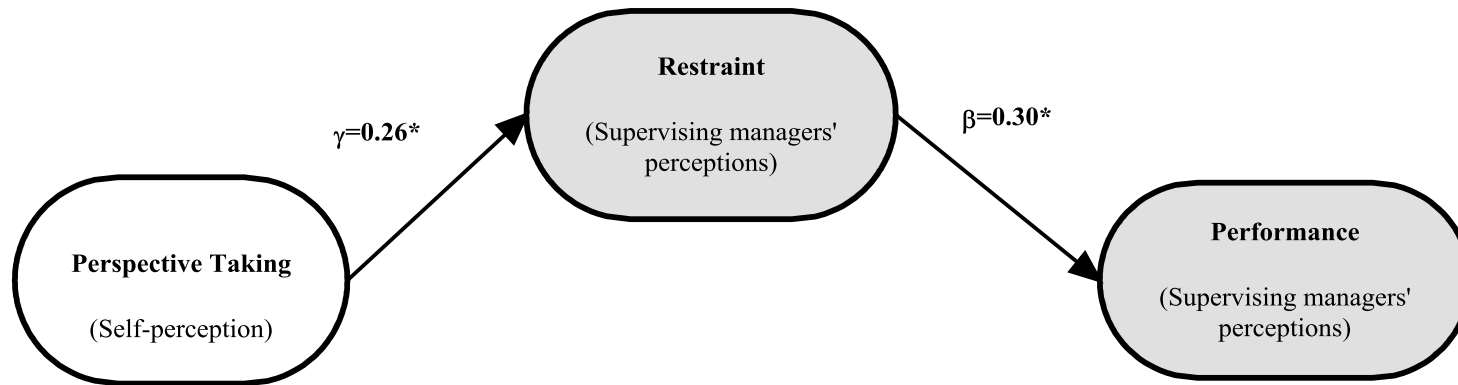
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**Figure 1: Structural Model of Perspective Taking, Restraint and Performance (SEM Results)**



$\chi^2(22)=27.66, p=.19$   
CFI=.99  
RMSEA=.04

<sup>a</sup> Insignificant paths and control variables are not illustrated (i.e., gender, nationality)

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics (Cronbach's alpha provided on the diagonal)**

Variables	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>1. Perspective-taking</b>	3.99	0.71	0.83				
<b>2. Restraint (from harm and opportunism)</b>	4.49	0.63	0.23 **	0.80			
<b>3. Performance</b>	4.16	0.55	0.18 *	0.24 **	0.84		
<b>4. Gender (2=female, 1=male)</b>	1.21	0.41	0.25 **	0.16 †	0.21 **	--	
<b>5. Nationality (1=Asian, 0=non-Asian)</b>	0.28	0.45	-0.04	-0.09	-0.08	-0.07	--

† p<0.1, \*p<0.05, \*\*p< 0.01



## APPENDIX A

### Scale Items

#### **Perspective Taking (self-version, $\alpha=.83$ )<sup>a</sup>**

- I look at things from the perspective of others.
- I imagine how my actions will affect things that are important to others.
- I understand why particular issues hold emotional significance for others.
- I look at matters in terms of other people's personal concerns.

#### **Restraint (reverse coded, leader's version, $\alpha=.80$ )**

He/she...

- Takes advantage of people who are vulnerable. (R)
- Manipulates information for personal gain. (R)
- Uses confidential information to his/her benefit. (R)
- Misleads people if it will benefit him/her. (R)
- Treats others in a demeaning manner. (R)

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<sup>a</sup> 4-item version of Williams' (2011) 3-item measure of appraisal-related perspective taking