

The Effects of Intra-Personal and Environmental Factors on Accountability Acceptance and Their Consequences

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Accountability research suggests that numerous individual difference and contextual factors affect people's perceptions of accountability demands, while ignoring a more fundamental element embedded in all accountability experiences; whether employees' accept or reject responsibility for their behavior and outcomes. This article rectifies this omission through the development of the term accountability acceptance. Accountability acceptance is defined as the propensity and degree to which individuals accept or reject responsibility for behavior or outcomes their evaluators hold them accountable for. Accountability acceptance is argued to result from attributional processes.

INTRODUCTION

People vary in their acceptance of responsibility for their actions and outcomes (Cummings & Anton, 1990). The world was left shocked and outraged as Richard Nixon continued to deny responsibility for his involvement in the infamous Watergate scandal, despite mounting evidence of his direct and intentional participation in illegal actions. Even Mark McGwire, a famous homerun hitter in professional baseball, continued to evade personal responsibility for his usage of steroids, despite ample evidence that he did. How can people, despite clear and reasonable evidence of their involvement, refuse to accept responsibility for their behavior and/or outcomes? This paper addresses this intriguing question.

Accountability is one of the most foundational social forces that govern and control organizational, group, and individual behavior (Tetlock, 1992; Frink et al., 2008). Accountability has been described as the adhesive that binds social systems together (Frink & Klimoski, 1998), because if people are not held responsible for their behavior or outcomes, there would not be shared expectations nor a foundation for social order (Tetlock, 1985; Schlenker & Weigold, 1989). Researchers have studied accountability experiences through such characteristics as its source (Mero, Guidice, & Brownlee, 2007; Tetlock, 1999), focus (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999; Siegel-Jacobs & Yates, 1996), salience (Sandfort, 1999; Staw & Boettger, 1990), and intensity (Hall, Perryman, Zinko, & Ferris, 2009; Hochwarter, Ferris, Gavin, Perrewe, Hall, & Frink, 2007) and on human aspects such as cognition (Klimoski & Inks, 1990; Lerner & Tetlock, 1999; Tetlock, 1999; Schlenker, Britt, Pennington, Murphy, & Doherty, 1994), behavior (Tetlock, 1985, 1999), decision making (Mero & Motowidlo, 1995), and outcomes (Hall, Royle, Brymer, Perrewe, Ferris, & Hochwarter, 2006; Hall et al., 2007).

Despite this proliferation of research on the attributes and outcomes of accountability, an important gap in the literature still remains. Individuals' degree of "felt responsibility" in accountability contexts has only briefly been discussed in the literature (see Cummings & Anton, 1990; 265) without any sound theoretical reasons as to why individuals respond the way they do. While there has been immense conjecture as to why individuals avoid accountability experiences (for examples review Wohl, Pritchard, & Kelly, 2002; Tetlock, 1985; Wood & Quinn, 2003; Abrams, Rutland, Cameron, & Ferrell, 2007), the more important question remains of why do people accept or reject responsibility for these experiences all together.

The purposes of this paper are to introduce and develop the concept of *accountability acceptance* and extend a model in which intra-personal and environmental antecedents contribute to an individual's degree of accountability acceptance and inform important work outcomes from it. In the sections that follow, we define accountability acceptance and briefly review the accountability literature as it informs the context in which accountability acceptance occurs. This is followed by a discussion of how attribution theory may inform our understanding of accountability acceptance. We then develop our model with related propositions, which discusses how several key intra-personal and environmental factors may contribute to an individual's accountability acceptance followed by several important work outcomes that result from it. Finally, implications and future research directions are discussed.

Accountability

Accountability is defined as an expectation that a focal entity's decisions, actions, or outcomes will be subject to evaluation by some salient audience(s) with the belief that either rewards or sanctions are based on this evaluation (Hall et al., 2003), or more simply stated, the *experience of being held responsible* (Hochwarter et al., 2007). An accountability episode is simply an evaluator assessing the degree of personal responsibility of a target individual for an action, behavior, or outcome. Personal accountability experiences are influenced through both environmental aspects (e.g., job design and formal policies and practices) and intra-personal characteristics (e.g., personal difference variables or dispositions of the actors) (Frink et al., 2008). According to Tetlock's (1985, 1999) social judgment and choice model, individuals subjectively interpret accountability conditions, which result in their response strategy. Despite over 30 years of theoretical development in the accountability literature, there has yet to be discussion on the degree to which individuals accept or reject responsibility for workplace accountabilities or the underlying factors causing it.

"Organizations cannot effectively operate unless employees feel accountable to the organization or to some other entity" (Royle, Hall, Hochwarter, Perrew, & Ferris, 2005, p. 54). In other words, if employees do not accept or feel responsible for their work related actions or outcomes, a malfunctioning and/or ineffective relationship exists between employee and organization. For example, within an accountability episode (e.g., a performance evaluation), the target individual (e.g., subordinate) being held accountable should ideally feel and exhibit a degree of ownership and association with the behavior and/or outcome (e.g., subordinate's performance) that is being evaluated by their evaluator (e.g., supervisor) in order for the accountability experience to serve a function (e.g., guide/direct expectancies for future behavioral expectations). Felt responsibility is a result of subjective evaluations and individual perceptions, therefore there will naturally be inconsistencies between individuals in similar accountability situations (Cummings & Anton, 1990; Weiner, 1995). Accountability acceptance has critical implications to the phenomenological perceptions of accountability demands in the workplace (Hochwarter et al., 2007), such that it likely predicts the degree to which accountability pressures influence current and future behavior.

Accountability has been associated with both positive and negative attitudinal and behavioral outcomes (Frink et al., 2008), and these inconsistencies suggest potential for moderator variables to shape these relationships. *Accountability acceptance* is defined as the propensity and degree to which target individuals accept or reject responsibility for behavior and outcomes that evaluators hold them accountable for. High accountability acceptance refers to people's tendency to accept responsibility, and thus ownership, for their actions/outcomes whereas low accountability acceptance refers to their tendency

to not accept responsibility for actions/outcomes. Accountability acceptance typically occurs within accountability episodes.

The judgment of responsibility by an evaluator refers to “the responsibility inference process,” which is presumed initially to focus on causal understanding of action or outcome and then shifts to a consideration of the person (Weiner, 1995). It is further argued, “that causal beliefs give rise to inferences about personal responsibility, then these thoughts and feelings direct social behavior toward others” (Weiner, 1995, p. 3). Therefore, we contend that within the anatomy of responsibility are attributions of causality that drive individual assessments of responsibility, and thus accountability acceptance levels.

Prior research has revealed that people who accept responsibility for their outcomes are perceived as more honest and trustworthy (Weiner, 1995), having high moral character (Blumstein et al., 1974), evaluated as more credible, likeable, dedicated, competent (Dunn & Cody, 2000) and given more sympathy and forgiveness (Weiner, Figueroa-Munoz, & Kakihara, 1991). On the other hand, people who do not accept responsibility for their outcomes through tactics like excuse giving, denial, or justifications are perceived as less honest and trustworthy (Weiner, 1995), less credible, likeable, dedicated, competent (Dunn & Cody, 2000), and given less sympathy and forgiveness (Weiner, Figueroa-Munoz, & Kakihara, 1991). These research findings illustrate that people who “own up” to accountabilities directly influence evaluations of favorably and competence by others and thus influence future outcomes.

Furthermore, we argue that the propensity of individuals to believe they were not the cause of their behavior or outcomes will predict their tendency to reject responsibility (i.e., low accountability acceptance). Conversely, the propensity of individuals to believe they were the cause of their behavior or outcomes will predict their tendency to accept responsibility (i.e., high accountability acceptance). These conclusions align with prior arguments that attributions serve the purpose of self-presentation (Brewin & Antaki, 1987) and are used to identify responsibility for events (Lord & Smith, 1983). A more detailed discussion of these points will be provided within the model and proposition development section.

Attribution Theory

Heider (1958) espoused that people are naïve psychologists attempting to understand the causes of outcomes for both themselves and others. He believed the causal attributions for events influence how individuals view the world and these assigned causes predict future behavior through expectancies (Martinko, Douglas, and Harvey, 2006). Weiner (1972; 1985) later proposed the model of achievement motivation, which adds value through its predictions of how specific individual causal attributions influence subsequent expectancies, affect, and behavior. According to Weiner’s (1985) model, attributions vary along the dimensions of locus of causality, stability, and controllability. Locus of causality refers to an individual’s beliefs in whether the cause of an event resides within (i.e., internal) or outside (i.e., external) of themselves, stability designates whether the cause is consistent across time, and controllability assesses whether the cause was personally controllable or not. The dimension of stability informs and shapes expectancy beliefs, whereas controllability helps assign individual responsibility. Controllable outcomes often result in assigned personal responsibility while uncontrollable outcomes do not (Weiner, 1995).

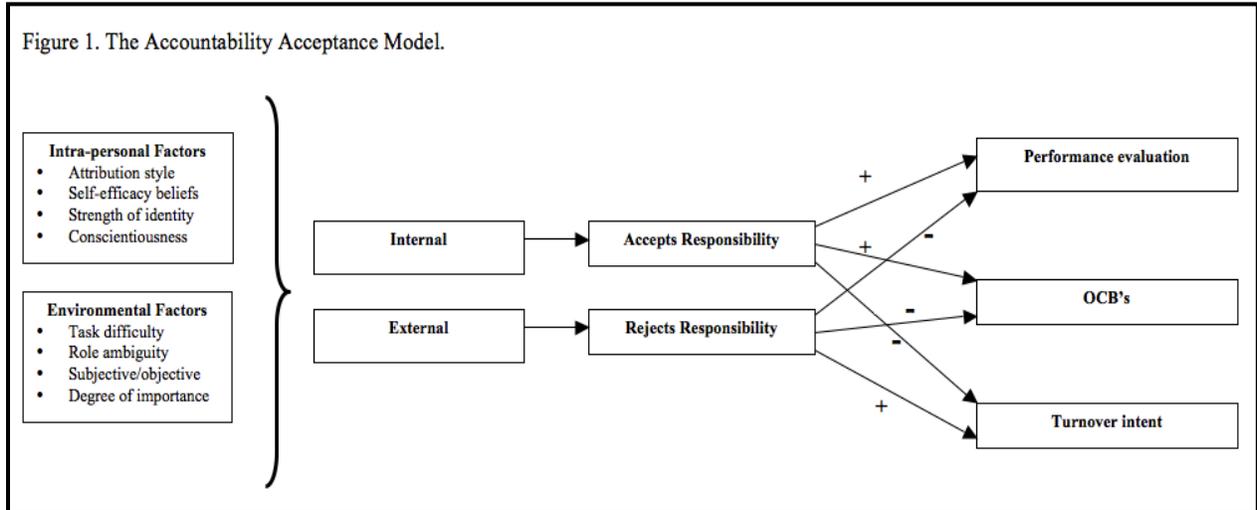
Attribution theorists argue that the underlying causal mechanisms individuals assign to events influence their responses to them (Campbell & Martinko, 1998; Martinko, 1995; Salancik & Meindl, 1984). Additionally, “while one is judged on responsibility, one acts on felt responsibility” (Cummings & Anton, 1990, p. 266). Therefore, we contend that attributional beliefs inform how target individuals, and their evaluators, assign cause, and thus responsibility, within accountability experiences.

MODEL DEVELOPMENT AND PROPOSITIONS

By integrating attribution theory and accountability experiences, we developed the accountability acceptance model (Figure 1). This model enables us to demonstrate that individuals can, and often do, reject responsibility for their behavior and/or outcomes within the workplace. Development and

postulation of important antecedents to and outcomes from accountability acceptance are discussed with accompanying propositions.

FIGURE 1
THE ACCOUNTABILITY ACCEPTANCE MODEL



A discussion of the model and related propositions are found in three sections. In the first and second sections, we propose key intra-personal and environmental antecedents that may influence the degree to which individuals accept responsibility for behavior and outcomes. These intra-individual and environmental factors were chosen specifically based to their potential strength to produce either internal versus external attributions of outcomes. In the third section, several important work outcomes are discussed with respect to their relationship with either acceptance or rejection of responsibility. These outcomes were chosen because they are likely to be associated with perceptions of social rule breaking within accountability experiences. An important assumption within the model and propositions is that evaluators are primarily assigning responsibility to individuals (i.e., internal causes) versus contextual or environmental factors (i.e., external causes).

Intra-Individual Factors

Individual difference variables have been strongly associated with perceptions of accountability experiences (Tetlock, 2000; Tetlock, 1985; Schlenker et al., 1994; Schlenker & Weigold, 1989). Fiske (1995) argues that the manner in which individuals make sense of their environment is more predictive of their behavior than the actual environment itself. In this section, we argue that each of the following intra-individual factors is an important antecedent to accountability acceptance due to their effects on target individuals' attributions for success and failure. More specifically, people's attributions that are biased toward assignment of internal causality will more often result in higher accountability acceptance due to beliefs of internal causes of their behavior and outcomes. Conversely, people's attributions that are biased toward assignment of external causality will more often result in lower accountability acceptance due to beliefs of outcomes due to external causes outside of themselves.

Attribution Styles

Attribution styles, by definition, will influence the attributions individuals make for personal success and failure outcomes (Martinko, Harvey, & Douglas, 2007), and are likely used to explain accountability experiences (Frink et al., 2008; Dubnick, 2003). Attribution style is the tendency for individuals to make

attributions that are consistent across time and situations (Kent & Martinko, 1995; Russell, 1991). The most researched types are the optimistic and pessimistic styles (Seligman, 1990). Individuals with an optimistic style exhibit the tendency to attribute failures to external and unstable causes while attributing successes to internal and stable causes (Abramson et al., 1978). Individuals exhibiting a pessimistic style have a tendency to attribute internal and stable factors for failure while attributing external and unstable causes for success.

Based on these descriptions, in failure situations we believe individuals exhibiting an optimistic attributional style will be associated with lower accountability acceptance due to their propensity to see failures as due to external causes and thus not of their own volition. Alternatively, in success situations those with an optimistic attributional style will exhibit higher accountability acceptance due to their propensity to see successes as due to internal causes and thus of their own volition. On the other hand, in failure situations we believe individuals exhibiting a pessimistic attributional style will be associated with higher accountability acceptance due to their tendency to see failures as due to internal causes and thus as a result of their own actions and behavior. Alternatively, in success situations those with a pessimistic attributional style will exhibit lower accountability acceptance due to their tendency to believe successes as due to external causes and thus not of their own actions and behavior.

Proposition 1a: An optimistic attribution style is associated with lower accountability acceptance in failure situations and higher accountability acceptance in success situations.

Proposition 1b: A pessimistic attribution style is associated with higher accountability acceptance in failure situations and lower accountability acceptance in success situations.

Self-Efficacy Beliefs

Self-efficacy beliefs are “the beliefs in one’s capabilities to mobilize the motivations, cognitive resources, and course of action needed to meet given situational demands” (Wood & Bandura, 1989, p. 408). Prior research (Thomas & Mathieu, 1994; Silver, Mitchell, & Gist, 1995) shows that self-efficacy beliefs are closely related to attributions and thus influence the degree to which internal or external causes for performance outcomes are assessed. Specifically, individuals estimate their performance capabilities through personal judgments, which in turn influence future motivation and performance levels. Bandura (1988) argued that self-efficacy beliefs influence causal attributions such that individuals exhibiting high self-efficacy believe failures are more likely due to insufficient expended effort (i.e., internal and controllable causes) whereas low self-efficacy beliefs were attributed to low ability (i.e., internal and uncontrollable causes). Other research supports that low self-efficacy is often associated with internal attributions for failure (Gundlach, Martinko, & Douglas, 2003). In success situations, higher self-efficacy beliefs are associated with prior success outcomes (Bandura, 1988) and thus internal causes, whereas low self-efficacy beliefs are associated with more external explanations provided for successes (Silver et al., 1995).

Proposition 2a: Higher self-efficacy beliefs are associated with higher accountability acceptance in both success and failure situations.

Proposition 2b: Lower self-efficacy beliefs are associated with higher accountability acceptance in failure situations and lower accountability acceptance in success situations.

Regulatory Focus

When people pursue outcomes, they often begin with a motivational orientation (Higgins, 2005), and these orientation influence behavioral responses to successes and failures. Regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997, 1998) argues that individuals exhibit a self-regulation process aligned with either a promotion focus (e.g., accomplishments and aspirations) or with a prevention focus (e.g., safety and

responsibility). For example, gaining resources motivates people with a promotion focus, whereas those with a prevention focus are motivated by not losing resources. Regulatory focus suggests that individual differences in motivations found in performance, decision-making, and perceptions of outcomes are embedded in the perspective individuals identify with more and interpret the world through (Higgins, 1997).

While no research exists to date linking regulatory focus styles with behavioral reactions to outcomes, prior research have shown that prevention focused individuals tend to avoid punishments, have minimal goals, exhibit short term perspectives, are sensitive to social pressures, are motivated by negative feedback, and seek to maintain the status quo (Higgins, 2000; Van-Dijk & Kluger, 2004). On the other hand, promotion focused individuals tend to actively seek rewards, have maximum goals, exhibit long-term perspectives, are motivated by positive feedback, and are more attuned to developmental feedback (Higgins, 2000; Van-Dijk & Kluger, 2004). Researchers have also argued that dissimilar situations or contexts allow for more or less congruence between the salient –regulation focus and type of salient outcome (Higgins, 1998; Shah, Higgins, & Friedman, 1998; Van-Dijk & Kluger, 2004), with greater congruence yielding greater motivation. In other words, if an individual with promotion focus is faced with an outcome framed from a minimization of losses perspective, less motivation will be exerted in the attainment of that outcome.

Based on these findings, individuals with a greater promotion focus will not likely shy away from ownership to failed pursuits toward resource optimizing outcomes, however, may avoid responsibility for situations associated with loss minimization. Conversely, individuals who exhibit a greater prevention focus will more actively attempt to disassociate themselves from resource optimizing outcomes and accept responsibility for those situations associated with loss minimization.

Proposition 3a: Promotion focused individuals are associated with higher accountability acceptance for resource optimizing outcomes and are associated with lower accountability acceptance for loss minimization outcomes.

Proposition 3b: Prevention focused individuals are associated with lower accountability acceptance for resource optimizing outcomes and are associated with higher accountability acceptance for loss minimization outcomes.

Strength of Identity

“Identity can be viewed as a theory of self that is formed and maintained through actual or imagined interpersonal agreement about what the self is like” (Schlenker & Weigold, 1989, p. 23). According to Schlenker et al., (1994) personal identity images (e.g., actor roles, qualities, convictions, and aspirations) are relevant in accountability experiences in the extent to which identity prescribes appropriate behavior for that individual. Similarly, Tetlock’s (1985) social contingency model argues that individuals are motivated primarily to maintain and protect their social image and identity. Lastly, Schlenker and Weigold (1989, pp. 22-23) state that “identity and accountability are intertwined, and the construction and evaluation of identity takes place in the context of accountability.”

Self-identification is comprised of the process, means, or result of presenting oneself as a specific type of person (Schlenker, 1984, 1985), and even though this process is accomplished privately, it is implemented publicly through self-disclosure, self-presentation, and task performance. When individuals are held responsible for failure outcomes, there are direct negative implications for personal identity, however, if they are not held responsible the implications will likely not “adhere to the self” (Schlenker & Weigold, 1989, p. 23). Therefore, when strongly held identity beliefs are challenged through associations with failure outcomes, avoidance responses will likely be exhibited and external causal factors blamed because the failure directly contradicts strongly held beliefs about oneself. Conversely, when weak identity beliefs are associated with failure outcomes, less identity threat will result and thus more chances internal causal factors will likely be exhibited.

Proposition 4a: Individuals with greater identity attachment to accountability outcomes will be associated with lower accountability acceptance for failures and higher accountability acceptance for successes.

Proposition 4b: Individuals with less identity attachment to accountability outcomes will be associated with higher accountability acceptance for both failures and successes.

Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness is defined as the tendency of an individual toward being dependable, disciplined, purposeful, organized, and achievement-oriented (Perrewe & Spector, 2002). Mount and Barrick (1995) argue there are two primary dimensions of conscientiousness; dependability and achievement. This finding has been strongly supported through numerous studies associating high conscientiousness and work performance (Barrick, Mount, & Judge, 2001). The concept of conscientiousness is associated with how individuals approach work tasks and the degree to which they are personally engaged in and take responsibility for their behavior and outcomes. Based on the degree of engagement and discipline exhibited by prior research of high conscientiousness individuals, we would naturally expect to see a high degree of personal ownership in their performance, behavior, and outcomes (i.e., internal causality), yielding higher accountability acceptance in accountability contexts regardless of failure or success outcomes. Conversely, we would expect low conscientiousness individuals to alternatively show less personal ownership and responsibility for their performance, behavior, and outcomes (i.e., more external causality) in failure situations and claim ownership for successes.

Proposition 5a: Higher conscientiousness individuals will be associated with higher accountability acceptance for both success and failure outcomes.

Proposition 5b: Lower conscientiousness individuals will be associated with lower accountability acceptance for failure outcomes and higher accountability acceptance for success outcomes.

Environmental Factors

Environmental context contributes a great deal of influence on the nature and degree to which accountability experiences are interpreted and responded to (Frink et al., 2008; Dutton & Ottensmeyer, 1987). In this section, we argue that each of the following environmental factors is an important antecedent to accountability acceptance due to their effects on target individuals' attributions for success and failure. More specifically, environmental contexts and factors that provide target individuals more clear and objective information linkages between their specific behaviors and outcomes will facilitate more accurate assessments of internal causation for behavior. Conversely, context and factors that hinder these information linkages will likely impede more internal attributions for behavior.

Difficulty of Task

Task difficulty has been aptly described as a person-task interaction (Campbell, 1988), which considers the skills, knowledge, and capabilities of the individual as well as the actual task. Not surprisingly, more difficult tasks are associated with poorer performance (Huber, 1985). Weiner (1985) argued that in achievement-striving situations, task difficulty is often believed by those evaluated as an external dimension of success or failure. Therefore, the more difficult a task, the more likely the target individual who is to accomplish it will conclude that if failure occurs, it is due to the difficulty of the task (i.e., an external attribution) in order to prevent any loss of self-esteem (Weiner, 1985). However, if a difficult task is combined with a successful outcome, there is a much greater chance an individual will believe success is due to ability or effort exerted (Weiner, 1985) in order to build self-esteem.

Proposition 6: Greater task difficulty will be associated with lower accountability acceptance in failure situations and higher accountability acceptance in success situations.

Role Ambiguity

Role ambiguity refers to a perceived lack of role-related information (Breugh & Colihan, 1994; Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). Role ambiguity frustrates the human need for clarity or structure in the environment (Katz & Kahn, 1978) and negatively impacts an individual's ability to attain personal and organizational goals (King & King, 1990). Jackson and Schuler (1985) showed that role ambiguity is associated with decreased task feedback, role participation, job satisfaction, and poor performance ratings by evaluators. More importantly, as role ambiguity increases, it is likely that individuals will actively disassociate from work outcomes (Jackson & Schuler, 1985) and their beliefs in their ability to meet any performance expectations associated with them.

Weiner (1985) noted that ambiguous situations or contexts make it more difficult to make accurate attributions because the causes of outcomes become increasingly difficult to identify. As situational ambiguity increases so does complexity. In order to both maintain self esteem and be seen in a positive light (Weiner, 1985), target individuals will more likely attribute failures to more external factors in their environment when ambiguity is high. Conversely, Martinko (2002) argued that decreased ambiguity facilitates more accurate assessments of behavior through more clear causal reasoning. As ambiguity decreases and a target individual's behavior and actions are more reliability ascribed to outcomes, more internal attributions will likely be made when a relationship truly exists between target individual and their outcomes.

Proposition 7: Greater role ambiguity will be associated with lower accountability acceptance in failure situations and higher accountability acceptance in success situations.

Subjective vs. Objective Work

Roles and work outcomes that are more specific, measurable, and attainable often motivate individuals to perform better and result in better performance than more general or lack of specified goals (Locke & Latham, 1990). Objective work goals and outcomes yield greater clarity between outcomes and the causal agents of those outcomes. For example, a salesman with a target goal to increase sales by 10% over last year's sales has a more objective goal and outcome than a salesman who is merely asked to increase sales. Similarly, the extremely subjective nature of a CEO's work is more distally associated with specific and measurable outcomes.

If performance goals and outcomes are more subjective and less clear, there is much greater room to debate regarding the degree of success or failure in an individual's actual contributions to that outcome. Alternatively, the more concrete and concise the actual work tasks and goals, the less likely subjective attributional discrepancies will interfere with connecting outcomes and the causes of those outcomes. Therefore, more objective role tasks and work outcomes will increase the chances that internal causal attributions are used for a target individual's behavior or actions, whereas more subjective role tasks and work outcomes will increase the changes that external causal attributions are made for those outcomes.

Proposition 8: More objective work and outcomes will be associated with higher accountability acceptance for both failures and successes.

Job Description

The official relationship between an employee and their employer is a type of social exchange relationship (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982) and the formal job description often serves the purpose of providing a clear and explicit document that acts as a employment contract between the two parties. The job description enables both the target individual (e.g., subordinate) and evaluator (e.g., supervisor) to explicitly see the nature of the role accountabilities. In theory, the more explicit and clear a job description, the less opportunity for biased causal attributions in assessing performance of that role.

However, research shows that job descriptions are not always provided to employees as the usage of formal job descriptions is predominantly within larger organizations. Some research has shown that the

amount of job description content and characteristics of that content have been associated with the quality of performance evaluation judgments (Smith, Benson, & Hornsby, 1990) and job analysis accuracy (Harvey & Lozada-Larsen, 1988). It has been argued the more explicit and detailed a job description, the less likely attributional errors in causal ascriptions will occur by target individuals. Therefore, the degree to which those held accountable have an available and detailed job description of tasks and responsibilities will increase the chances that internal attributions can be used with certainty rather than external attributions made if a job description did not exist.

Proposition 9: The presence of and more explicit degree of a job description will be associated with higher accountability acceptance for successes and failures.

Degree of Importance

Task importance is defined as the degree of pressure individuals feel to make accurate work judgments in their work roles (Baron, Vandello, & Brunsman, 1996). Task importance is typically derived from personal characteristics (e.g., type A personality), contextual or job type characteristics (e.g., surgeons and law enforcement agencies), and/or the importance of reward or sanctions derived from such tasks (e.g., promotion or termination of employment). Within accountability research, the degree of importance of an outcome is argued to influence the degree to which individuals own up to accounts (Frink et al., 2008).

Greater degrees of task importance have been associated with more harsh performance assessments of failures by evaluators in the workplace (Dossett & Greenberg, 1981). Therefore those evaluated have more motivation to alter audience interpretations of causality as task importance increases. Just as observer attributional biases are pervasive in situations of greater task importance (Martinko, 2002), so too are actor biases (e.g., self-serving, actor-observer, and hedonic relevance biases) likely to attribute personal failures to external causes when task importance and negative consequences are likely (Martinko et al., 2006).

Proposition 10: Greater task importance will be associated with lower accountability acceptance for failure outcomes and higher accountability acceptance for success outcomes.

Accountability Acceptance Outcomes

Just as intra-individual and environmental factors are antecedents to target individual's accountability acceptance, there are likely important work outcomes that result from it as well. Target individual agreement, and more decisively disagreement, with evaluators who hold reward and sanction power over them will naturally have impacts on work outcomes mediated through perceptions of social rule breaking. Social rules are defined as "shared beliefs about what should or should not be performed in particular settings" (Ramsey, Gallois, & Callan, 1997, p. 189), and should be followed, not violated, if satisfactory behavior and/or performance is to be assessed. Social rules predict and bound individual behavior in organizational settings (Argyle, Furnham, & Graham, 1981). Acceptance of responsibility for what one is held accountable for by one's superiors is seen as acceptable behavior under the social rules category within organizational contexts. Not accepting responsibility is in violation of social rules. The relationship between degree of accountability acceptance and important work outcomes is largely believed to be a result of the target individual's level of disagreement (i.e., low accountability acceptance) or agreement (i.e., high accountability acceptance) with evaluators.

Performance Evaluations

Current research argues that accountability likely has positive effects on job performance (e.g., Schlenker et al., 1994; Yarnold, Mueser, & Lyons, 1988). The primary argument for these claims is found through the belief that a certain degree of answerability and responsibility is required to motivate individual performance striving (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999; Ammeter, Douglas, Ferris, & Goka, 2004). At

the core of any accountability experience is the target individual's expectation that the type of accountability outcome received will be primarily driven by the degree of success in the performance process that caused it (Frink et al., 2008). An important caveat should be stated regarding the true relationship between job performance and accountability acceptance. We not only believe that job performance can be predicted from an individual's accountability acceptance, but it may also be a predictor of it. However, our present argument is focused on the influence of an individual's accountability acceptance on job performance evaluations. More specifically, we don't believe that the degree to which a target individual accepts or rejects responsibility equates to actual "raw" differences in performance, but rather plays an indirect role on performance evaluations through agreement or violation of social rules.

Gallois and Callan (1991) argued that rules are used in making judgments and interpretations of the behavior of others, and Jones and Gallios (1989) showed that knowing and following rules contributes to successful performance. Medcof (1990) argued that behavioral expectations (i.e., social rules) are central to the causal attributions others make for observed behavior and rule breaking (Ramsey et al., 1997). A recent study finds when internal and controllable attributions (i.e., acceptance of responsibility) are used to explain personal failures (as opposed to external attributions), individuals were evaluated more positively (Silvester, Anderson-Gough, Anderson, & Mohamed, 2002). Therefore, when people violate social rules by not accepting responsibility when others believes they are responsible, this avoidance behavior will negatively influence future assessments of performance.

Proposition 11: Lower accountability acceptance will be associated with poorer performance assessments indirectly through the performance assessment process.

Organizational Citizenship Behaviors

Organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB's) are defined as "individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization" (Organ, 1988, p. 4). Prior research supports a positive association between felt accountability and OCB's (Hochwater, Perrewe, Hall, & Ferris, 2005; Hall, Frink, Ferris, Hochwarter, Kacmar, Bowen, 2003) and pro-social behaviors (Mitchell, Hopper, Daniels, Falvy, & Ferris, 1998).

Prior OCB conceptualizations have cast organization/individual relationships as a form of social exchange (Graham & Organ, 1993; Royle, Hochwarter, & Hall, 2008) such that perceptions of obligatory behaviors are offered due to proper norms of reciprocation (Organ, 1988). Prior theory also argues that individual differences (e.g., accountability acceptance) are particularly useful in predicting the extent to which individuals engage in contextual performance (Motowidlo, Borman, & Schmit, 1997). Therefore, individuals who are more likely to understand and feel bound by social and organizational relationships of mutual obligation will more likely engage in extra-role behaviors designed to facilitate larger organizational goals. In an extension of our prior arguments, we believe that individuals who are more prone to violate social rules for behavior will also be less motivated to engage in helping behaviors outside their own work.

Proposition 12: Lower accountability acceptance will be associated with fewer OCB's.

Turnover Intent

Individuals stay in their job if they are satisfied and leave if they aren't (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez, 2001). Employee turnover intentions have long been theoretically associated with job satisfaction beliefs (Porter & Steers, 1973; Hulin, Roznowski, & Hachiya, 1985; Lee & Mitchell, 1994), whereby greater levels of dissatisfaction have been found to influence individuals seeking employment alternatives (Tett & Meyer, 1993). Individuals who are less prone to accept responsibility for behavior and/or outcomes will naturally increase the occurrence of interpersonal conflict and strain, which has

been associated with dissatisfaction (Nathan, Mohrman, Millman, 1991; Ferris, Munyon, Basik, & Buckley, 2008) and therefore increase a target individual's intentions to leave.

Proposition 13: Lower accountability acceptance will be associated with greater turnover intentions.

DISCUSSION

We have proposed that people vary in accountability acceptance, which is the propensity and degree to which target individuals accept or reject responsibility for behavior/outcomes their evaluators hold them accountable for. We argued that key intra-personal and environmental antecedents contribute to an individual's accountability acceptance and important work outcomes result from it. While the accountability literature has largely focused its theoretical development efforts on accountability attributes and its effects on human behavior and cognitive processes (Frink et al., 2008), we believe the introduction of accountability acceptance fills an important gap within this literature. More specifically, this paper adds value through the acknowledgement that people have inherent tendencies to accept or reject responsibility for behavior and outcomes within accountability experiences.

Limitations

This paper is not without its limitations. Perhaps the most obvious limitation is the lack of prior theoretical development and empirical evidence that supports accountability acceptance as a real construct. Instead, our primary intention was to simply introduce this concept and conceptualize what personal and environmental factors likely contribute to it and how it influences work outcomes.

Another limitation may be our selection for inclusion of intra-individual and environmental factors that contribute to accountability acceptance. While great time and care were taken in choosing these factors due to their potential influence over causal assessments of behavior and outcomes in the workplace, there may be antecedents that have a stronger influence.

Lastly, we acknowledge and recognize there likely exists plenty of opportunities and reasons for people in a workplace setting to accept responsibility of an outcome despite their true beliefs of the causes for them (i.e., external causes). Several reasons to this to happen are due to specific impression management purposes and those who are more politically skilled may need to pose as an individual to accept responsibility for actions or outcomes.

Future Directions

The opportunities for further exploration of accountability acceptance are almost limitless within the organizational sciences. Besides the obvious next steps of providing a more holistic and deeper theoretical development of the existence of this construct, developing an appropriate measurement instrument would perhaps be the most fruitful.

Since accountability acceptance occurs within accountability experiences, and accountability experiences are influenced by a myriad of intra-individual, environmental, and contextual cues, there is great room for development of those personal and social forces that influence the degree of accountability acceptance. Some useful literatures to consider in this development might be personal defensiveness, cognitive biases, avoidance, narcissism, and entitlement beliefs.

Conclusion

In this paper we introduced the concept of accountability acceptance, which is defined as the propensity and degree to which individuals accept or reject responsibility for behavior/outcomes their evaluators attempt to hold them accountable for. We predicted the intra-personal factors of conscientiousness, attribution style, self-efficacy beliefs, regulatory focus, and strength of identity as well as the environmental factors of job description, difficulty of work, role ambiguity, degree of importance, and degree of objectivity in role would influence an individual's accountability acceptance. We also

argued that accountability acceptance would influence important work outcomes such as turnover intention, organizational citizenship behaviors, and job performance. We believe this is a good first step in the development of the concept of accountability acceptance.

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