

**POWER, POLITICS, AND POLITICAL  
SKILL IN JOB STRESS**

# RESEARCH IN OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND WELL BEING

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RESEARCH IN OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND WELL BEING  
VOLUME 15

# **POWER, POLITICS, AND POLITICAL SKILL IN JOB STRESS**

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## OVERVIEW

In our 15th volume of *Research in Occupational Stress and Well Being*, we offer six chapters that examine the role of power, politics, and influence in occupational stress and well-being. The first two chapters take a more balanced perspective than what has been typically presented and discussed in the politics literature by focusing on negative, as well as positive aspects of organizational politics. In our lead chapter, Zinta S. Byrne, Steven G. Manning, James W. Weston, and Wayne A. Hochwarter develop an integrative conceptualization that explains how positive and negative organizational politics are perceived as challenge and hindrance stressors that affect employee outcomes through their influence on the social environment. In the second chapter, Erin M. Landells and Simon L. Albrecht propose a more positive conceptualization of organizational politics and explore potential associations between both positive and negative politics and employee engagement and consider a number of intervening variables (i.e., psychological meaningfulness, psychological availability, and psychological safety) that explain these relations.

The theme of the next section centers around power. In the third chapter, Galit Meisler, Eran Vigoda-Gadot, and Amos Drory consider the negative implications of the use of intimidation and pressure by supervisors, who hold positions of power in their organizations. Their model maintains that these influence tactics create stress in subordinates and are, ultimately, an ineffective means of motivation those in lower power positions. The fourth chapter, by Darren C. Treadway, Emily D. Campion, and Lisa V. Williams, views the phenomenon of power from “the other end of the telescope” by focusing on the concept of objective and/or subjective powerlessness. More specifically, the authors present a multi-level model that offers an accessible way to understand how perceptions of powerless come to be and how those perceptions impact psychological, physical, and behavioral responses.

The final section of this volume focuses on novel theoretical extensions to the power and politics literature. The fifth chapter, by Kaitlyn DeGhetto, Zachary A. Russell, and Gerald R. Ferris, considers organizational politics within the context of large-scale organizational change initiatives. More explicitly, this chapter introduces a conceptual model that draws from sensemaking theory and research to explain how employees perceive and interpret their uncertain environments, the politics in them, and the resulting work stress that follows from changes (i.e., Mergers and Acquisitions, CEO Succession, and Corporate Entrepreneurship) adopted to improve the firm’s strategy

and increase financial performance. In the sixth chapter, Paul E. Spector discusses how the control and strategic management of resources plays a role in the occupational stress process. This chapter presents a number of novel ideas that are centered around the idea that control of external and internal resources, and not resource acquisition or maintenance, is a vital element that contributes to how employees respond to workplace demands.

Together, these chapters offer an insight into the role of power, politics, and influence in occupational stress research. These chapters challenge our traditional thinking and offer several exciting and novel directions for future research. We hope you enjoy volume 15 of *Research in Occupational Stress and Well Being*.

Pamela L. Perrewé  
Christopher C. Rosen  
*Editors*

## Acknowledgment

On a personal note, I would like to thank Chris Rosen for serving as my Co-Editor for the past five volumes. Chris has been a critical part of the success of *Research in Occupational Stress and Well Being* and I will miss working directly with him very much. As Chris has continued to grow as a scholar, he is in constant demand to serve as a reviewer, editor, and research colleague, from journals, other editors, and elite researchers. I understand that his scholarly contributions to our field have created a great demand for his talents and he can no longer serve as my co-editor. Chris — thank you for sharing your talents with ROSWB and taking this journey with me. I wish you only the very best, my friend.

Pamela L. Perrewé  
*Editor*

# ALL ROADS LEAD TO WELL-BEING: UNEXPECTED RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS PERCEPTIONS, EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT, AND WORKER WELL-BEING

Zinta S. Byrne, Steven G. Manning, James W. Weston  
and Wayne A. Hochwarter

## ABSTRACT

*Research on perceptions of organizational politics has mostly explored the negative aspects and detrimental outcomes for organizations and employees. Responding to recent calls in the literature for a more balanced treatment, we expand on how positive and negative organizational politics perceptions are perceived as stressors and affect employee outcomes through their influence on the social environment. We propose that employees appraise positive and negative organization politics perceptions as either challenge or hindrance stressors, to which they respond with engagement and disengagement as problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies. Specifically, employees who appraise the negative politics perceptions as a hindrance, use both problem- and emotion-focused coping, which entails one of three strategies: (1) decreasing their engagement, (2) narrowing the focus of their*

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*engagement, or (3) disengaging. Although these strategies result in negative outcomes for the organization, employees' coping leads to their positive well-being. In contrast, employees appraising positive politics perceptions as a challenge stressor use problem-focused coping, which involves increasing their engagement to reap the perceived benefits of a positive political environment. Yet, positive politics perceptions may also be appraised as a hindrance stressor in certain situations, and, therefore lead employees to apply emotion-focused coping wherein they use a disengagement strategy. By disengaging, they deal with the negative effects of politics perceptions, resulting in positive well-being. Thus, our framework suggests an unexpected twist to the stress process of politics perceptions as a strain-provoking component of employee work environments.*

**Keywords:** Employee engagement; disengagement; well-being; coping strategies; hindrance stressors; challenge stressors

## INTRODUCTION

Our focus on the role of organizational politics in occupational stress, health, and well-being is on the intersection between perceptions of organizational politics, employee engagement, and disengagement. Historically, politics perceptions as a negative social influence (Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989) has received most of the scholarly attention. In this chapter, however, we respond to the call for a balanced treatment of organizational politics (Ferris & Hochwarter, 2011; Ferris, Adams, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, & Ammeter, 2002; Kapoutsis & Thanos, 2016). This recommendation encourages researchers to consider the entire spectrum of politics to uncover the bigger picture and a more accurate understanding of how employees actually perceive politics at play in their organization (Ferris, Perrewé, Daniels, Lawong, & Holmes, 2017). By integrating positive and negative politics perceptions with engagement and disengagement, and relating these dual-perspectives to stress and well-being, we propose to clarify how these responses to others' influence behaviors can improve employee well-being.

In this chapter, we aim to achieve several objectives. First, we advance the theoretical backing for a complex view of organizational politics that includes both positive and negative politics perceptions. Second, we link these perceptions to both engagement (positive role investment) and disengagement (role withdrawal; Manning, 2015). In doing so, we focus on the positive–negative dichotomy within the stressor–strain relationship, capitalizing on distinctions between challenge (positive) and hindrance (negative) stressors (Cavanaugh, Boswell, Roehling, & Boudreau, 2000) and problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010; Hertel, Raushenbach,

Thilgen, & Krumm, 2015). Lastly, we relate these relationships to worker positive well-being, the ultimate goal for occupational health practitioners.

We begin by describing a basic model of stress. It is not our intention to offend those who would find value in one of the more sophisticated theoretical frameworks that currently exist. Instead, we opt for a fundamental model because its inherent clarity allows for a discussion that is richer and applicable across disciplines. We then map in the balanced perspective of politics perceptions and how both positive and negative perceptions may ignite forward action (problem-focused coping) or instigate retreat (emotion-focused coping). We introduce how employee engagement and disengagement – states of motivation – can be used as either problem-focused or emotion-focused coping strategies to deal with appraisals of positive or negative politics perceptions as either hindrance or challenge stressors. Our chapter concludes with what may be considered an unconventional twist; the outcome to all coping paths leads to employee positive well-being.

## **STRESSORS LEAD TO STRAIN – THE STRESS PROCESS**

There are many views of the stress framework, including [Beehr and Newman's \(1978\)](#) model of job stress or the more recent Allostatic Load model ([Juster, McEwen, & Lupien, 2010](#)). However, for our purposes, a basic and older framework captures the fundamental mechanism by which perceived politics acts as a social/contextual influence on engagement and disengagement, affecting employee well-being. Our rudimentary understanding is that stress comprises a process, whereby stressors (stimuli acting on the employee) are appraised, and if considered threatening, are responded to accordingly. Often, these reactions create strain, the cognitive, emotional, and physical effects of stressors, or otherwise thought of as the response to stressors ([Lazarus, 1993](#)). Hence, the stress process represents an interaction between the employee and his or her work environment ([Dawson, O'Brien, & Beehr, 2016](#)). Examples of stressors in the workplace include role conflict, ambiguity, and overload ([Glazer & Beehr, 2005](#)), job insecurity ([Davy, Kinicki, & Scheck, 1997](#)), and shift work ([Landrigan et al., 2004](#)). Importantly, these stressors are considered dynamic, ever-changing, and inconsistent across time and environments ([Dewe, O'Driscoll, & Cooper, 2010](#)). Accordingly, stressors considered harmful one day may be considered helpful the next ([Rodell & Judge, 2009](#)).

Consistent with [Lazarus and Folkman's \(1987\)](#) transactional model, wherein individuals evaluate events in their environment determining whether they are a threat or not, [Cavanaugh et al. \(2000\)](#) argued that workers appraise stressors as either challenges or hindrances. Challenge stressors represent motivating obstacles ([LePine, Podsakoff, & LePine, 2005](#)) – problems to overcome and ones considered solvable. Though stressful, challenge stressors

produce *eustress*, a positive feeling of achievement (Seyle, 1974). Hindrance stressors, in contrast, are characterized as impasses, strain increasing, and demotivating (LePine et al., 2005), which result in distress, a feeling of depletion (Seyle, 1974). Meta-analytic evidence shows that challenge stressors are associated positively with organizational commitment, and negatively with withdrawal behaviors, whereas hindrance stressors display opposite relationships (Podsakoff, LePine, & LePine, 2007).

In response to challenge and hindrance stressors, employees may activate one of two different coping strategies: (1) problem-focused coping (also referred to as active-coping; Hertel et al., 2015), which involves employees industriously seeking ways to solve and overcome the threat, and (2) emotion-focused coping (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010; Lazarus, 1993; Nes & Segerstrom, 2006), in which employees attempt to alleviate negative stress effects through unresponsive actions, such as withdrawal or denial (Lazarus, 1993). Problem-focused coping is similar to approach motivation, whereas emotion-focused coping is comparable to avoidance motivation (Elliot, 2006; Reed, 2016). Research supports the belief that problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping reduce stress and increase well-being (Bond & Bunce, 2000; Chao, 2011; Lapiere & Allen, 2006).

## **POLITICS PERCEPTIONS WITHIN THE STRESS PROCESS: YIN AND YANG**

Within the stress framework, organizational politics is typically perceived as negative and often occupies a hindrance stressor role resulting in undesirable outcomes (Chang, Rosen, & Levy, 2009). Specifically, the view that others are manipulating people and policies to secure outcomes considered undeserved has been shown to trigger angst, perceived inequity, and a recalibration of one's work contribution (i.e., job performance; Chang et al., 2009; Poon, 2004). Recently, however, positive politics perceptions have been considered a challenge stressor resulting in positive outcomes (Kane-Frieder, Hochwarter, Hampton, & Ferris, 2014). Building on this discussion, we assert the opposite may also be true – negative politics perceptions may be appraised as challenge stressors and positive politics perceptions as hindrance stressors.

Organizational politics may be likened to Taoism yin and yang – dark and light, negative and positive, respectively. Influencing others self-servingly for personal or professional gain at work, either for oneself or for one's group (referred to as perceived organizational politics) is typically objectionable. In support, the majority of studies on perceptions of organizational politics focus on negative views and negative outcomes (e.g., Cohen, 2016; Ferris, Adams, et al., 2002; Gao & Zhao, 2014; Rosen & Hochwarter, 2014) – the yin or dark side. Yet, advocating for oneself and/or others by leveraging system procedures or effectively utilizing one's network can result in obtaining desired resources



and rewards through legitimate but obscure means (Eldor, 2016; Hochwarter & Thompson, 2010; Hochwarter, 2012). In virtually all organizations, slack resources exist, often remaining either dormant or completely unused (Marlin & Geiger, 2015). Rarely are these valuable assets unearthed via methods explicated in the company handbook (Hochwarter, 2012). Instead, nontypical approaches are generally more fruitful. For example, supervisors often advocate on behalf of high-performing subordinates for additional development activity, support, pay, or other untapped resources.

Documented byproducts of appropriately accessing the system, policies, and one's network include heightened alertness on the job, focus and attention to achieving organizational goals, and capacity to mitigate work–family conflict that leads to strain – the yang or light side (Frieder, Ma, & Hochwarter, 2016). Moreover, a “good” manager is considered someone who provides his or her employees with desirable assignments, extra support and help when a project is overcommitted, and with opportunities for promotion and reward that may not have been achieved otherwise without the manager's or his or her associated network (Kane-Frieder, Hochwarter, & Ferris, 2014). Conversely, those observing the accrual of others' positive influences likely consider these actions and outcomes as negative, unfair, and violating espoused values or norms (Landells & Albrecht, 2017).

### *Perceptions of Politics*

As noted, most studies to date cast politics perceptions in a negative light (Adams et al, 2002; Hochwarter, 2012). Lately though, researchers agree employees have positive perceptions of politics as well (Fedor, Maslyn, Farmer, & Bettenhausen, 2008; Landells & Albrecht, 2017). For example, employees recognize that organizational politics may be a mechanism for obtaining resources (e.g., supplies, funding, people) or moving decisions forward when they otherwise may have stalled, making the behaviors perceived as positive rather than negative (Randolph, 1985). Moreover, Landells and Albrecht (2017) identified the development of social and physical resources and a richer understanding of decision-making processes as favorable consequences of political engagement. Consequently, positive politics have been described as welfare-enhancing (Windsor, 2016), and dedicated primarily to the growth and well-being of the organization (Dillon, 2013). Given these benefits, scholars have increasingly recognized the previously heretical view that politics is necessary to organizational functioning (Eldor, 2016; Ferris & Treadway, 2012). Hence, the view that politics perceptions can be either or both positive and negative appears largely accepted in the literature (Ellen, 2014; Ellen, Ferris, & Buckley, 2013; Hochwarter, 2012).

Ostensibly, whether perceptions of politics are considered positive or negative depends on the idiosyncratic uniqueness of the perceiver (Frieder et al., 2016). For example, in the case of individuals with anticipatory injustice (Shapiro & Kirkman, 2001), politics may be perceived negatively because when fair procedures do exist, few view politics as injurious (Allen, Madison, Porter, Renwick, & Mayes, 1979; Andrews & Kacmar, 2001; Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Kacmar & Baron, 1999; Kacmar & Ferris, 1991). Moreover, positive politics perceptions may exist when someone gains tremendous resources (e.g., time, extra help, computer support) for a coveted project because of his or her leader's savvy negotiations rather than contributions. People assess the favorability of the outcome and infer intentions on the actor to decide whether to perceive their actions as positive or negative politics (Davis & Gardner, 2004).

In addition, employees may use Weick's (1995) sense-making perspective (Hall, Franczak, Ma, Herrera, & Hochwarter, 2016) to determine whether politics is positive or negative. Sensemaking refers to the process by which employees interpret and make meaning of events, actions, disruptions, and changes that have occurred in the workplace (Weick, 1979; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). It is the "interplay of action and interpretation" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409), whereby employees act, affecting their environment, which causes them to label and make sense of the changes to the environment (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). With regards to politics, the labeling may be positive influence (positive politics) or negative ill-intent (negative politics), but still remains dependent on the individual.

Extensive research shows that employees' perceptions of politics affect their behavior and attitudes at work more so than objective, agreed-upon levels of behavior (Ferris, Frink, et al., 1996). Therefore, perceptions of politics have been considered more appropriate to study than the actual behaviors themselves (see Hochwarter & Byrne, 2006; for perspective on behaviors). Thus, researchers are careful to define organizational politics as "an individual's *subjective evaluation* about the extent to which the work environment is characterized by coworkers and supervisors who demonstrate such self-serving behavior" (italics added for emphasis; Ferris, Harrell-Cook, & Dulebohn, 2000, p. 90). In this chapter, we focus on these perceptions of organizational politics and not on the specific behaviors.

### *Negative Politics Perceptions*

Negative perceptions of politics come about when employees perceive that their workplace is fraught with subversive and unsanctioned activity that furthers the goals of others in the organization while leaving them disadvantaged (Ferris & Hochwarter, 2011). Such perceptions infer intentional actions by individuals to promote their self-interest, often at the expense of others. Foundationally, politics at work is conceptualized as a mix of power and

influence (Allen et al., 1979; Andrews & Kacmar, 2001; Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Kacmar & Ferris, 1991; Vigoda, 2002). Example behaviors considered especially noxious include sabotaging the work efforts of colleagues, excessive ingratiation towards one's boss prior to an evaluation, and dismissing or diminishing the contributions of others (Rosen, Harris, & Kacmar, 2009).

Employees perceiving negative politics typically report the following behaviors as illustrative of leaders or coworkers participating in self-serving behavior: acts of intentional manipulation, unauthorized and unsanctioned activities, back-stabbing, and suppressing information or outright lying as behaviors (Ferris & Hochwarter, 2011; Rosen & Hochwarter, 2014). Landells and Albrecht (2017) included bullying, withholding information, and disregarding the advice of others in their typology of negative political behaviors. Given the tone and motives of negative political behavior, it is hardly surprising that employees react negatively, experiencing high anxiety and stress, dissatisfaction, and turnover intentions, and demonstrating reduced job involvement and performance (Ferris, Frink, et al., 1996; Miller, Rutherford, & Kolodinsky, 2008).

A number of reviews of negative politics exist (e.g., Allen et al., 1979; Cropanzano & Li, 2006; Fedor & Maslyn, 2002; Ferris, Adams et al., 2002; Ferris, Frink, et al., 1996; Hall, Hochwarter, Ferris, & Bowen, 2004), including recent contributions by Windsor (2016), Landells and Albrecht (2017), and Hill, Thomas, and Meriac (2016). Accordingly, we do not find it beneficial to duplicate previous discussions here. Instead, we acknowledge how far the evaluation of perceived negative politics has taken the field, but also recognize how focusing nearly exclusively on this position limits an appreciation of the importance, prevalence, and value of positively charged political environments (Ellen, 2014; Hochwarter, 2012). In fact, employees' understanding of organizational politics is actually more nuanced than originally suspected and deserves closer attention. Namely, although some employees view organizational politics as an unfortunate reality, others view it as an essential tool for securing job resources and getting work done (Landells & Albrecht, 2017; Pfeffer, 1992).

### *Positive Politics Perceptions*

Perceptions of organizational politics may be considered positive when they benefit individuals or the organization, appear legitimate, fair, and transparent, and fall within the espoused values of the organization (Ellen, 2014). Scholars suggest that political behavior, when viewed favorably, enables career advancement, and healthy work environments and workloads (Bacharach & Lawler, 1988; Hochwarter & Thompson, 2010; Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005). Appropriately, positive politics has been described as socially constructed (Vigoda, 2003) and motivated to secure communal benefits (Windsor, 2016).

By definition, politics perceptions manifest when decisions are required that fall outside existing policies, and therefore, rely on individual's interpretations, cognitions, and reactions in response to contextual threats or opportunities

(Buchanan, 2016; Fedor et al., 2008). Thus, what might start out as a positively motivated action to move the organization forward (i.e., functional politics; Kanter, 1972; Katz & Kahn, 2008; Pichault, 1995), turns into one that others perceive as hasty decision-making or deciding without the input of all stakeholders.

Positive politics has not been examined as extensively as has negative politics, which may be best illustrated by the dearth of measures available to researchers to empirically study positive politics. Fedor et al. (2008) developed a measure that includes the positive aspects of politics, such as “Bending the rules has aided me in doing a superior job” and “The better my manager is at being a politician, the better it is for my work group.” In contrast to negative politics, this operationalization highlights the favorability of political organizations and is positively related to satisfaction (Fedor et al., 2008). Although others have argued for the importance of the positive side of politics (Hochwarter, 2012; Landells & Albrecht, 2017), to our knowledge no other measure has been developed to empirically examine positive perceptions of politics.

The focus on negative politics also overwhelms that of positive politics most likely because the behaviors and actions defined as favorable appear less obstructive (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2010). For example, guidance given to individuals at the start of their careers includes building relationships and networking with more accomplished individuals. Successfully building relationships in this way generally requires impression management and typically calling on partners of a developed coalition. If done well and genuinely, recipients may not perceive the behavior as political, but rather as good networking skills (Forret & Dougherty, 2001). Yet, these behaviors are effectively political in nature in that they are perceived as intentional acts to benefit the self, may come at the unknown and unintended expense of another, and may involve the use of influence and leverage of power (Douglas & Ammeter, 2004). Similarly, when managers manipulate company rules to acquire resources or obtain deserved but scarce raises for their employees, their behavior is typically considered part of being an effective boss rather than participating in political behavior (Ellen, 2014; Yammarino, 2013). Even self-serving political actions can be perceived positively by employees and managers, if the behaviors also benefit the organization in some way (Buchanan, 2008; Zanzi & O’Neill, 2001).

## **COPING WITH POLITICS PERCEPTIONS: ENGAGEMENT AND DISENGAGEMENT**

Recognizing both negative and positive perceptions of politics has implications for employee engagement, a motivational state wherein employees are focused, positive, and undistracted by competing demands for their emotional and

cognitive energies (Kahn, 1990). For example, when employees perceive the workplace as a negative, back-stabbing environment, they may use their personal power to rebel against their leaders' influence attempts by choosing increased engagement or disengagement. They may choose to narrowly focus their engagement to specific tasks thereby withdrawing energy and focus from otherwise organizationally beneficial activities (Saks, 2006). In contrast, employees perceiving politics as positive may be inspired by the support, the observed investment in them, and the sense of belongingness conveyed by management. In these situations, workers strive to push their level of engagement even higher, feeling more powerful and in control of how they invest themselves at work. For them, their manager is "good" and serves a critical role in providing a psychologically safe, supportive, and empowering work environment, which leads directly to positive well-being.

We assert that employee engagement may be used as an emotion-focused coping strategy when appraising negative politics as a hindrance stressor, and as a problem-focused coping strategy when appraising negative or positive politics as a challenge stressor. In contrast, we propose that disengagement is only employed when politics (either positive or negative) is interpreted as hindrance stressors, and only serves as an emotion-focused coping strategy (see Fig. 1).

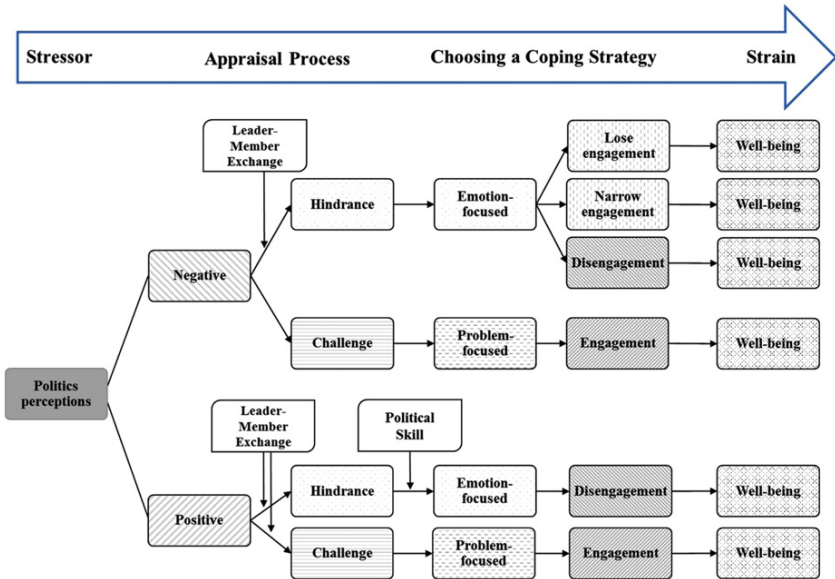


Fig. 1. Paths from Politics Perceptions to Well-being.

*Employee Engagement*

Employee engagement represents a motivational construct, characterized by the active exertion of one's preferred self into one's work role (Kahn, 1990). The preferred self refers to employees' cognitive, emotional, and physical qualities and attributes that they choose, desire, and wish to express in their roles within the organization (Kahn, 1990). Other definitions of engagement position it towards a broad opposite-of-burnout construct encompassing a number of job attitudes and positive affect (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002), or as a tripartite construct comprising behavioral, situational, and dispositional components (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Regardless of the specific conceptualization of engagement, it represents an inherently positive view on employee's intentional behavior at work influenced by the person him or herself and the contextual environment (Byrne, 2015).

Prior to engaging in one's work role, an employee may experience one or more of three psychological conditions: psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety, and psychological availability (Kahn, 1990). These conditions resemble many of the less varying antecedent conditions of job characteristics theory (JCT; Hackman & Oldham, 1980), as well as the evaluative decisions employees make as explained by Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory (evaluating the expectancy, instrumentality, and valence of a situation and actions). In engagement theory, these psychological conditions allow employees to answer personal questions about the meaning of a work role, security in investing efforts, and resource ability to invest efforts.

Theoretically and empirically (Byrne, Peters, & Weston, 2016; Kahn, 1990; May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004; Rich, LePine, & Crawford, 2010), engagement is preceded by these perceptions and experiences of psychological meaningfulness, safety, and availability, which are influenced by the contextual work environment. Psychological meaningfulness exists when employees perceive their job has meaning and is personally fulfilling (Kahn, 1990). Meaningfulness may be derived from a sense of purpose, autonomy, and inclusive relationships at work. Psychological safety refers to employees' perceptions that employing their preferred self at work will not result in criticism, ridicule, or negative consequences to their career (Kahn, 1990). A variety of workplace elements may affect perceived safety, such as supervisor and coworker interactions, or organizational policies.

Lastly, psychological availability refers to employees' ability to focus on their work tasks without distraction (Binyamin & Carmeli, 2010). Similar to the other psychological conditions, availability is a momentary assessment rather than an overarching job characteristic. Employees must make evaluations of whether they have the energies and resources to commit themselves to their work role at that time, and be free of larger organizational and nonwork intrusions. Congruent with the JD-R model (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001), employees must feel they have the psychological availability – the mental

capacity and resources to exert themselves on the job. Resources are necessary for engaging employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), and employees rely on their own self-evaluations of their current state to make judgments as to whether they have the capabilities to engage in their work role in that moment.

These three psychological conditions (i.e., meaningfulness, safety, availability) combine to serve as sources of influence in deciding whether to become engaged. Additionally, as with other motivational theories, such as JCT (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), employees engage when they feel connected to their work, sense a relatedness to their coworkers, and understand why they are doing the work (i.e., task significance). Without these conditions, workers are likely to “withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performance” (Kahn, 1990, p. 694).

Engaged employees are emotionally connected to what they are doing at work, and in tune with the meaning and power of their work role (Kahn & Fellows, 2014). Employees’ physical investment into their work role is characterized by physiological and/or physical arousal (Byrne, 2015). Additionally, engagement entails being cognitively focused, driven, and absorbed by work tasks almost in a flow-like state, while tuning out the periphery. The simultaneous representation of physical, emotional, and cognitive energies leads to productive (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011), committed (Byrne et al., 2016), and satisfied employees. Moreover, researchers argue that engaged workers perform their job with passion and personal commitment, and who are typically willing to extend themselves for their fellow employees and the organization as a whole (Christian et al., 2011; Rich et al., 2010). Finally, engaged employees are considered, with few exceptions, better performers than those who are less absorbed at work (Reijseger, Peeters, Taris, & Schaufeli, 2016).

### *Disengagement*

In contrast to engagement, disengagement is a state in which employees remove and actively protect their preferred selves from a work environment they perceive is inhospitable (Kahn, 1990; Rich et al., 2010). When disengaged, individuals shelter this form of the self from a threatening environment by employing other, less desired characteristics, such as performing without conscious thought (e.g., going through the motions), withholding passion, and suppressing trust (Manning, 2015). Disengagement goes beyond the mere absence or low levels of engagement (Kahn, 1990; Wollard, 2011), though it is also not identical to burnout (Byrne et al., 2016). Specifically, when employees disengage, they actively retract and simultaneously defend their true and preferred self from their work, coworkers, and organization (Kahn, 1990). Despite these choices, disengaged employees continue performing to meet organizational expectations.

Thus, rather than fully investing physical, cognitive, and emotional energies into their work, disengaged employees retreat from their relationships with coworkers, and complete their work passively while actively searching for other distraction. Unlike burnout or other less extreme withdrawal behaviors, such as job seeking, disengaged employees continue contributing albeit without great enthusiasm, passionate focus, or physical excitement (Kahn, 1990). Because disengagement is a state that requires effort, conditions in the environment must be threatening enough to push employees past low engagement and into a condition that elicits a decision to pull back and protect (Manning, 2015). Their disengagement is an attitude, a state of mind, a way of being; a protective shell that suppresses emotional attachment, cognitive absorption, and physical energy from work. Initial research shows that disengagement may lead to absenteeism and decreased commitment (Karatepe, Beirami, Bouzari, & Safavi, 2014).

A lack of experiencing one or more of the three psychological condition (meaningfulness, availability, and safety) precursors to engagement may cause employees to perceive the environment as not conducive to expressing their preferred self (Manning, 2015). Specifically, perceptions of negative politics can erode the work environment that leads to the experience of low psychological safety by creating distrust, unpredictability, and imbalances of social influence and power (Byrne, 2015; Kahn, 1990). If employees perceive high negative politics exists at decision-making levels (Fedor et al., 2008), they may expect career advancement delays due to competition created for the existing management team. Employees, in particular leaders, may feel forced to participate equally in what they deem as potentially unethical behavior (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2010) to maintain their existing work standing or seek ways to advance.

Perceived negative politics may also reduce employees' feelings of psychological availability. Specifically, employees may be overly concerned with influential factions that exist in the organization (Gargiulo, 1993), drawing cognitive and physical energy away from actual job tasks. With increased social cues requiring sense-making resources, employees become distracted by activities considered outside their range of control. The constant distraction of perceived negative politics (Bakker, Demerouti, & Euwema, 2005; Treadway et al., 2005) hinders absorption and attentiveness to one task or objective. In this regard, both positive and negative politics perceptions introduce an additional job demand that may not be accounted for in the employee's available resource reservoir.

## **NEGATIVE POLITICS PERCEPTIONS AS A STRESSOR**

Perceived negative politics is typically appraised as a hindrance stressor by threatening the security of work, the fairness of decisions, and the ability of employees to control their environment (and their workplace fate; Rosen & Hochwarter, 2014). Empirical evidence supports that employees experience



negative strains in response to negative politics perceptions (Chang et al., 2009), including increased job anxiety, job tension, alienation, psychological withdrawal, somatic tension, and burnout, to name a few (Bedi & Schat, 2013; Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey, & Toth, 1997; Ferris, Frink, et al., 1996; Karatepe, Babakus, & Yavas, 2012; Munyon, Summers, Thompson, & Ferris, 2015; Valle & Perrewé, 2000). Thus, negative politics perceptions jeopardize employee well-being (Rosen & Ganster, 2014).

Employees perceive negative politics when their inability to attain expected resources can be attributed directly to the egotistic behaviors of others (e.g., Chang et al., 2009). The JD-R model suggests that employees who are unable to offset job demands with resources that enable coping end up experiencing strain (Demerouti et al., 2001). Those in power positions control the job and organizational resources that others' use politics to obtain (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977). The lack of an ability to get those resources creates a sense of lack of control. Job demands with low job control (e.g., predictability, task control: Troup & Dewe, 2002) or power result in high job strain (Karasek, 1979). Consequently, negative politics is positively associated with high job strain.

Stress of perceived organizational politics may be more chronic and extensive than independent studies of acute stress-responses would suggest (Vigoda, 2002). In particular, researchers showing that burnout is an outcome of perceived negative politics (e.g., Cropanzano et al., 1997) are inherently identifying a long-term consequence – burnout does not occur overnight (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Cropanzano et al.'s reasoning for the relationship between politics and burnout is that viewing others' self-serving behavior represents a persistent, continuous activity causing nervousness and apprehension that builds over time. The accumulation of job stressors, such as the ongoing lack of control that comes with politics without adequate coping skills, inevitably results in burnout (Golembiewski, Boudreau, Ben-Chu, & Hauping, 1998; Maslach & Jackson, 1984). Vigoda (2002) also noted that inherent within political behavior is a constant level of ambiguity and uncertainty, evoking tension due to employees' inability to predict whether threat or calming will result.

### *Coping with Negative Politics Perceptions*

When negative politics perceptions are appraised as hindering progress, employees may respond with a loss of engagement, a narrowing of engagement, or disengagement as coping mechanisms (see Fig. 1). However, if negative politics perceptions are appraised as a challenge stressor, employees may increase

their engagement as a coping strategy. We address all four potential mechanisms below.

#### *Loss of Engagement*

First, employees could simply fail to engage in their work role. For example, perceptions of negative politics are often associated with low job resource availability (Bouckenoghe, 2012), prompting lower engagement (Demerouti et al., 2001). Similar to presenteeism, these low-engagement employees are at work, but for all intents and purposes they are not actually there mentally or emotionally. Although still contributing to the success of the organization, employees with low levels of engagement are not motivated to put forth their full effort (Christian et al., 2011; Rich et al., 2010). In this case, employees protect their well-being by limiting and containing the negative effects of politics. Specifically, by lowering their engagement, employees conserve available resources (Hobfoll, 2011), which leads to reductions in negative stress effects. By pulling back on personal energies (i.e., engagement), employees employ an emotion-focused coping mechanism – they remove stress by minimizing their engagement.

**Proposition 1:** When politics perceptions are perceived as negative, employees appraise them as a hindrance stressor and cope using an emotion-focused strategy, which includes lessening their engagement levels.

#### *Narrowing of Engagement*

Second, employees could choose to engage in certain areas of work only, narrowing the focus of their active employment of the preferred self. Though not entirely a negative outcome since employees are still engaged (different from loss of engagement), the narrowing of their engagement has critical implications for the organization. Specifically, employees may express their engagement in work tasks, but fail to engage with the organization as a whole (Saks, 2006). An important characteristic of engaged employees is their alignment with company goals and their passion towards doing their job in a meaningful way that supports the organization (Byrne, 2015; Macey & Schneider, 2008). Thus, although employees would be engaged – a positive state – their engagement would not be aimed at the overall organizational goals, thereby limiting the breadth of its effect.

Furthermore, by narrowing the focus of their overall engagement, employees may also reduce their interactions with coworkers and their supervisor as a means of protecting their personal investment at work (Kahn, 1990). When negative politics is perceived, coworkers and supervisors are the most likely to jeopardize legitimate paths to power and success (Ferris et al., 2000). Thus, employees may use their engagement as an emotion-focused coping mechanism to protect themselves against the effects of perceiving negative politics in their immediate work contexts.

**Proposition 2:** When politics perceptions are perceived as negative, employees appraise them as a hindrance stressor and cope using an emotion-focused strategy, which includes narrowing their engagement to focus on the job tasks only.

### *Disengagement*

Perceptions of negative organizational politics promote conditions in the environment that can erode psychological meaningfulness, safety, and availability, resulting in employees' disengagement (Kahn, 1990; Manning, 2015). For example, extra demands placed on employees in highly political environments likely distract employees from their work tasks, thereby reducing their psychological availability. Negative politics perceptions breed distrust (Albrecht, 2006), which erodes psychological safety. Lastly, the ambiguity and lack of role clarity that comes with negatively politically charged work environments reduces employees' ability to derive meaningfulness from their work, as the significance of what they do becomes unclear (Hackman & Oldham, 1980).

Research shows engagement is negatively affected by stress and employees will participate in protective behaviors in stressful environments (Schaufeli, Bakker, & van Rhenen, 2009). Thus, disengagement may be a coping strategy for dealing with negative politics perceptions, especially when this stressful work context persists (Wollard, 2011). Employees strive to distance themselves from the stressful environment and protect themselves from external threats (Kahn, 1990). For example, job insecurity, employees' perception or fear that they are likely to lose their job (De Witte, 1999), is an increasing pervasive stressor in the workplace (De Witte, 1999; Jiang & Probst, 2016; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001) and is associated with low levels of engagement (Bosman, Rothmann, & Buitendach, 2005). Unable to resolve the constant uncertainty of job loss, employees may look for temporary distractions (e.g., fun websites, social media, gathering around the water cooler), enabling them to conserve their energy and resources (Geurts & Sonnentag, 2006), while still completing assigned work tasks. Engagement has been defined as a moment-to-moment state, and temporary distractions may actually serve as a brief recovery cycle between momentary engagement (i.e., Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). When in a state of disengagement, however, employees may seek ongoing opportunities to acquire or access additional resources (and distractions) to restore depleted reserves (Meijman & Mulder, 1998). Recovery leads to decreased experienced strain for the employee (de Bloom, Kinnunen, & Korpela, 2015; Demerouti, Bakker, Geurts, & Taris, 2009; Geurts & Sonnentag, 2006; Sguera, Bagozzi, Huy, Boss, & Boss, 2016). By facilitating recovery, disengagement can serve as an emotion-focused coping mechanism leading to positive well-being (Parker, Martin, Colmar, & Liem, 2012).

Some researchers have speculated that disengagement may occur as employees' resist their leaders attempt to influence them (e.g., Ferris & Hochwarter, 2011). This response to influence may be especially true when the leader

attempting to persuade others is using dysfunctional, nonsanctioned, or negative tactics (Zanzi & O'Neill, 2001). For example, when a supervisor distorts facts and relies on manipulation, employees may disengage in response, and presumably resist future influence attempts, as well. Although using temporary disengagement as a coping mechanism can provide a short-term form of respite, negative employee and organizational outcomes result when this approach is prolonged (Byrne, 2015; Kahn, 1990).

**Proposition 3:** When politics perceptions are perceived as negative, employees appraise them as a hindrance stressor and cope using an emotion-focused strategy, which includes disengagement.

### *Increasing Engagement*

In contrast to appraising negative politics perceptions as a hindrance stressor, in some settings employees may appraise perceived negative politics as a challenge stressor (Albrecht & Landells, 2012). In this regard, employees view a potentially toxic situation as one that can be constructed to provide benefit. Consider the leader who sees significant negative politics occurring either at or below his or her level and disapproves of the lack of perceived fairness. Such a leader may increase his or her engagement as a means of coping with the perceptions of negative politics and put forth extra effort to improve decision-making policies, encourage better mechanisms for obtaining resources, and reinforcing transparency. This argument differs somewhat from Ferris and Kacmar's (1992) assertion that job involvement may be heightened and an immersion in work tasks results from perceived negative politics, because engagement represents a much broader construct than job involvement (Rich et al., 2010). Job involvement is cognitively based, only, whereas engagement requires a synergistic combination of cognitive, physical, and emotional energies (Kahn, 1990). Hence, the immersion into work achieved by engagement is more holistic and all-encompassing than job involvement. For the politically oriented, such high engagement directed at "winning the game" is bound to be challenging, leading to heightened job satisfaction (Mencl, Wefald, & van Ittersum, 2016).

As noted, heightened engagement represents a coping strategy for those faced with challenge stressors (Guglielmi et al., 2016). However, researchers have also speculated that if taken to the extreme, high engagement may lead to workaholism (Griffiths & Karanika-Murray, 2012). As a facet of well-being (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008), unmanaged workaholism can trigger serious negative health consequences (Wright & Huang, 2012). For example, as evidenced in a recent meta-analysis (Clark, Michel, Zhdanova, Pui, & Baltes, 2016), workaholism is associated work-life conflict, stress, and the deterioration of physical and mental health.

**Proposition 4:** When politics perceptions are perceived as negative, employees appraise them as a challenge stressor and cope using a problem-focused strategy, which includes increasing their engagement.

## POSITIVE POLITICS PERCEPTIONS AS A STRESSOR

The JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001) and the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 2011) together propose when people are able to obtain and defend resources, they are able to cope with distress and experience eustress. Thus, participating in personal resource management can be a self-regulating process (Hochwarter, 2012). Scholars have proposed that political behavior facilitates restorative efforts and ego nurturing (Drory & Vigoda-Gadot, 2010; Treadway et al., 2005), all of which suggest politics can encourage actions intended to obtain and defend resources, and develop and nurture relationships (Hochwarter, 2012; Lawrence, 2010).

When framed within the context of engagement theory (Kahn, 1990; Schaufeli et al., 2002), participating in positive politics may promote engagement because politics facilitates the development of interpersonal relations, a predictor of engagement (Kahn & Fellows, 2014). Under these conditions, politics can be perceived positively and as a challenge stressor, especially when coupled with individual difference variables, such as efficacy and optimism (Abbas, Raja, Darr, & Bouckenooghe, 2014).

For those perceiving positive politics but not participating in political behavior itself, the same positive outcomes may develop. In contrast, perceptions of positive politics may also be judged as a hindrance stressor, especially if participation is required to maintain power or social influence. Perceptions of positive politics may also be considered a hindrance stressor if desired results were obtained through legitimate means. In these settings, the flow of outcomes cannot easily be overturned through favoritism, negative politicking, or other means of manipulation.

### *Coping with Positive Politics Perceptions*

Employees may invoke disengagement as emotion-focused coping when interpreting perceived positive politics as a hindrance stressor, and increased engagement as problem-solving focused coping when appraising perceived positive politics as a challenge stressor (see Fig. 1).

#### *Disengagement*

Researchers have posited that positive politics, if excessively strong or prevalent in the organization for an extended period of time, may lead to negative

outcomes (Fedor et al., 2008). Positive politics by definition has a favorable impact on the organization. However, even ethical and fair political behavior increases the job demands placed on employees (Hochwarter, Ferris, Laird, Treadway, & Gallagher, 2010). Building relationships, using networks to secure resources, and building coalitions to lobby leaders are tasks not typically stated in many formal job descriptions; they go beyond the expected in-role performance expectations for many jobs. When employees perceive that their organization has a strong positive political environment, they may be content with some of the positive outcomes enjoyed by the organization and other employees.

However, if the political environment persists, political behavior can become part of the job (Buchanan, 2008). Thus, employees may be *expected* to participate in politics just to be treated equitably. Consequences of failing to participate in political maneuvering include lost resource gathering opportunities, as well as being passed over for promotions or coveted assignments (Hochwarter, 2003). We propose that in such cases employees may appraise positive politics as a hindrance stressor and turn to disengagement as a coping mechanism. Employees feeling forced to behave in ways that dishonor their preferred selves may perceive their psychological safety threatened by the expectations of having to behave in a particular way, and become disengaged (Kahn, 1990).

**Proposition 5:** When politics perceptions are positively perceived, employees appraise them as a hindrance stressor and cope using an emotion-focused strategy, which includes disengagement.

### *Engagement*

Perceiving the existence of positive politics is to perceive the leaders' or influential members' obtaining resources and benefits that would otherwise not be possible by adhering to legitimate structures in the organization (Hochwarter, 2012). Focusing on a broader definition, Ferris and Judge (1991) indicated that politics is characterized by an unspoken adherence to a mutual and common understanding in the workplace. Leader-member exchange (LMX; Liden & Maslyn, 1998) relationships capture a form of unspoken agreement about attaining resources in exchange for information between a supervisor/leader and his or her employees within a specific and exclusive group, typically referred to as an in-group (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Thus, an LMX relationship may be considered the epitome of politics, where on one hand those in the in-group perceive the leader's actions as positive politics, and on the other hand those in the out-group who receive fewer privileges or personal benefits perceive the leaders' actions as negative politics. Employees experiencing high-quality LMX relationships, characterized by trust in leaders to provide resources, typically report high engagement (Breevaart, Bakker, Demerouti, & van den Heuvel, 2015; Matta, Scott, Koopman, & Conlon, 2015).

Positive political action on the part of the leader may produce more work for subordinates, more people to do the work, and more access to resources to get the work done (Hochwarter, 2012). Such infusion of resources and assignments can be invigorating. Specifically, perceiving politics positively may excite these employees to increase their engagement to take on the challenge, as additional resources foster higher engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Furthermore, building new relations, problem-solving, and experiencing meaningfulness in the work promotes engagement (Kahn, 1990). Researchers have shown that employees perceive organizational politics as *strategic*, enabling task completion, and *integrated*, necessary for effective decision-making (Landells & Albrecht, 2017). Both strategic and integrated politics are associated with building relationships and securing resources. Some find a work climate filled with negotiation, deal-making, and strategy to secure necessary and extra social and material capital invigorating because of high person–organization fit (Gao & Zhao, 2014), resulting in perceiving the political environment as positive. Employees perceiving high fit in such work environments may view politics as a challenge. Indeed, research supports a positive relationship between person–organization fit and engagement (Ümal & Turgut, 2015).

**Proposition 6:** When politics perceptions are perceived positively employees appraise the politics as a challenge stressor and cope using a problem-focused strategy, which includes increasing their engagement levels.

## BOUNDARY CONDITIONS

We proposed that negative and positive politics perceptions lead to different types of coping mechanisms that result in varying levels of engagement and disengagement. In addition, specific boundary conditions exist dependent on two primary constructs: political skill and LMX.

### *Political Skill*

Political skill could act as a moderator of the relationship between perceptions of positive politics and disengagement (Kane-Frieder, Hochwarter, & Ferris, 2014). Political skill refers to an individual's ability to understand how others at work perceive their behavior and the degree to which they can use this understanding to influence the behavior of others (Ferris et al., 2005). Those who have high political skill are able to maintain an outward rather than inward focus and will be perceived as being sincere when they are acting in

ways meant to influence others. When employees have high political skill, they position themselves to reap the benefits of organizational politics because they can maneuver within the expectations, negotiations, and relationships that make up politicking. In highly political environments, high political skill enables individuals to achieve personal success through others, garner social capital, and acquire resources that may not be available to others (Brouer, Ferris, Hochwarter, Laird, & Gilmore, 2006). Consequently, it stands to reason that employees with high political skill need not turn to disengagement to cope with the political environment. In contrast, individuals with poor political skill are perceived as being self-serving or self-centered and are not able to adapt their behavior in specific situations to influence others' behavior (Ferris et al., 2005). Thus, employees with high political skill, which may be considered a problem-focused strategy, are able to reduce their emotion-focused coping in comparison to their low political skilled peers when dealing with positive politics as a hindrance stressor.

**Proposition 7:** When perceiving positive politics as a hindrance, employees high in political skill use less emotion-focused coping and hence are less disengaged than those low in political skill who rely heavily on emotion-focused coping to deal with the hindrance stressor.

### *LMX*

The distinctly different preferential treatment LMX leaders display towards their in-group versus their out-group creates different experiences and perceptions for employees – those in the in-group respond to positive politics more favorably than those with low-quality LMX because they receive more resources to address the extra work (Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, & Ferris, 2012). Thus, high LMX employees appraise positive politics as a challenge stressor as opposed to a hindrance stressor like their low LMX contemporaries. Consequently, in-group members are more likely than their counterparts in the out-group member to experience higher engagement because they perceive politics positively and they have the resources to handle the extra challenge.

**Proposition 8:** Employees with high-quality LMX relationships appraise positive politics as a challenge stressor, whereas those with low-quality LMX relationships appraise positive politics as a hindrance stressor.

High LMX employees who perceive negative politics view them as a particularly overwhelming hindrance because their in-group status suggests the



political actions should have been in their favor or they should have been protected from negative politics. Thus, their reactions are exaggerated.

**Proposition 9:** Employees with high-quality LMX relationships appraise negative politics as a hindrance stressor to a greater degree than those with low-quality LMX relationships.

## ALL ROADS LEAD TO WELL-BEING

Engagement is associated with positivity (Bledow, Schmitt, Frese, & Kühnel, 2011), job satisfaction (Christian et al., 2011; Kane-Frieder et al., 2014), work–family facilitation (Culbertson, Mills, & Fullager, 2012), commitment (Rich et al., 2010), meaningfulness (Byrne et al., 2016), and low job tension (Kane-Frieder et al., 2014), all indicators of positive well-being (Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002; Schaufeli, Taris, & van Rhenen, 2008). When defined in vague terms, well-being represents a subjective self-perception of positivity throughout one’s life (Wright & Huang, 2012). Well-being is considered an indicator of quality of life, successful aging, successful progression through life-span development, and emotional stability (see Keyes et al., 2002; for a review).

Further explicating the concept, researchers have delineated well-being into two streams: (1) subjective well-being, which includes happiness and appraisals of life satisfaction; and (2) psychological well-being, which includes personal growth, self-acceptance, and purpose in life (Keyes et al., 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Empirical evidence supports the two dimensions of well-being as related but distinct facets (Keyes et al., 2002). Of the two dimensions, psychological well-being may be most closely related to engagement. According to Ryff and Keyes (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff, 1989), psychological well-being is experienced when employees take on challenges, self-accept their limitations and feel good about themselves, develop positive relations, and find meaning and purpose. Employees report high engagement do so because they are challenged at work, have positive coworker relations, experience meaningfulness in their work, and understand the significance of what they do thereby creating purpose (Byrne, 2015; Christian et al., 2011; Kahn, 1990; May et al., 2004).

As a movement toward a positive outlook in occupational health began to take hold in the late 1990s and early 2000s, research in the area shifted from focusing on burnout to a budding focus on employee engagement as an indicator of well-being (Bakker et al., 2008). Hence, some researchers incorporated engagement within well-being (Robertson & Cooper, 2010; Robertson, Birch, & Cooper, 2012; Schaufeli et al., 2008). Although valuable in its own right, this view of engagement *as* well-being does not fully capture

the construct that practitioners and scholars have defined (e.g., Kahn, 1990; Macey & Schneider, 2008).

Although argued that the positive energy associated with engagement is well-being, it is fruitful to explore how engagement, as a distinct construct, can relate to the independent dimensions of subjective well-being or psychological well-being; specifically, positive affectivity, satisfaction, and meaningfulness. Provided at least one of the psychological conditions of safety, meaningfulness, and availability, employees respond by actively exerting their energies on the job (Kahn, 1990). The absorbed state of engagement leaves an employee feeling satisfied (Christian et al., 2011) and in a positive mood (Bledow et al., 2011). As positivity and joy from being engaged at work spillover into the home domain, family and life concerns are alleviated (Culbertson et al., 2012). Furthermore, looking at engagement through the crossover-spillover lens (e.g., Bakker & Xanthopoulou, 2009) suggests engagement is contagious (Byrne, 2015). Thus, engagement may be considered a predictor of well-being.

Although these relations seem reasonably straightforward – well-being from engagement pervades an individual's overall outlook – these relationships are most likely reciprocal and complex rather than linear. Take for instance, the relationship between psychological meaningfulness and employee engagement. Theoretically positioned as an antecedent to engaging employees, researchers have recently clarified that meaningfulness shares a large portion of variance with engagement (Byrne et al., 2016). Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that this relationship is reciprocal as opposed to unidirectional. Engaged employees find meaningfulness as a reason to engage in the first place, but the process of becoming absorbed in one's work tasks and dedicated to the job as a whole (Schaufeli et al., 2002) may also lead to feelings of meaningfulness. Contributions from one's own work toward the greater organizational goals can be fulfilling for employees, thereby heightening their experienced meaning. Similarly, the relationship between engagement and positive affectivity has been fraught with issues of directionality. Employees who have a positive outlook may be predisposed to find meaning and engage in their work (Kahn, 1992). Although engagement inherently fluctuates from time to time, certain individuals are more or less inclined to be engaged at any given time (Kahn & Fellows, 2014).

## CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that organizational politics is perceived throughout the workplace and employees perceive such behaviors as positive or negative. Our position has been that engagement and disengagement serve as emotion-focused coping or problem-focused coping when organizational politics is interpreted as either a hindrance or challenge stressor, respectively. We further explored how,

regardless of which strategy is used, both engagement and disengagement can result in increased well-being across a range of politics perceptions.

The arguments and propositions we present here provide readers with novel and nuanced areas to explore in the organization politics area. The theoretical relationships and model we present also provide some insight into how organizational politics may be impacting individual well-being in unexpected ways. Our hope is that readers have gained an appreciation of what overall organizational politics can do for employees, how negative politics may have a silver lining, and why positive politics ought to be explored because it may be more complicated than previously imagined.

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