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Organizationally-induced work stress

The role of employee bureaucratic orientation

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Received February 2003
Revised September 2003
Accepted December 2004

Abstract

Purpose – This paper offers a model that illustrates the relationship between organizational structure, work stress and perceived strain based on the concept of bureaucratic orientation.

Design/methodology/approach – After a brief review of the stress and structure literatures, a number of propositions are developed concerning organizationally-induced stressors that are fostered by mechanistic or organic structures. Next, a model is presented illustrating the impact of members' bureaucratic orientation on the organizationally induced stressor-strain relationship.

Findings – It is argued that highly-mechanized structures manifest different stressors for employees from highly organic structures. The model also demonstrates how organizationally-induced stressors such as role conflict and ambiguity mediate the relation between structure and strain. However, the extent to which these stressors result in perceived strain is also dependent on employees' predisposition toward dominance, autonomy, achievement, ambiguity and control. Based on the model and propositions presented, conclusions and suggestions for future research are provided.

Practical implications – Noted implications include more flexible workplace rules for female executives to eliminate stress associated with work-family conflict as well as improved effectiveness of social support and person-organization fit based on individual bureaucratic orientation.

Originality/value – This paper uniquely advocates consideration of employee bureaucratic orientation and organizational structure in relation to person-organization fit and work stress. The propositions offered are of value to practitioners and researchers due to their implications for fostering person-organization fit and reducing work stress.

Keywords Stress, Role conflict, Bureaucracy, Organizational structures, Working practices, Business policy

Paper type Conceptual paper

Changes in the modern work environment brought on by technological advances, organizational restructuring, and various redesign options can elevate levels of work stress (Perrewe *et al.*, 2000), and increased stress has led to a rise in the number of employees who have considered leaving their jobs (Gunsauley, 2002). The organizational literature (e.g., Bacharach *et al.*, 2002; Dewe, 1992; Kahn and Byosiere, 1993; Lazarus, 1993) recognizes that structure influences employee stress and thus advocates for a more comprehensive and better understanding of organizational structure's role in the stress process. Despite this call, much of the literature focuses on issues concerning how to design jobs with more (or less) autonomy (e.g. Karasek, 1979; Westman, 1992; Xie and Johns, 1995) and control (Schaubroeck and Merritt, 1997)



rather than specifically addressing how organizational structures can manifest various stressors, which may lead to increased employee strain. Moreover, to our knowledge, no studies have considered how an employee's predisposition toward a structural alternative can influence the relation between various, organizationally induced stressors and employee strain. Thus, it appears that although there is a vast amount of research in the structure and stress literatures, few studies have actually examined the complex relationships between structure, stress and strain (Rahman and Zanzi, 1995). To this end, the purpose of this study is to develop a model illustrating how organizational structures foster various stressors and how employee predispositions toward structural alternatives can influence the extent these stressors result in increased employee strain.

Organizational restructuring influences employee strain (Perrewe *et al.*, 2000) since such changes can induce new sources of stress for employees. Stress can affect employees' psychological (e.g., heightened anxiety, job dissatisfaction, and depersonalization: Barnett and Brennan, 1995; Burke and Greenglass, 1993; Friedman, 1995) physiological (e.g. cardiovascular and gastrointestinal problems: Davidson *et al.*, 1990), and behavioral responses (e.g., withdrawal behaviors in the form of increased absenteeism and turnover: Lee and Ashforth, 1996; increased on-the-job drug use: Bacharach *et al.*, 2002; Beehr *et al.*, 1995; Davidson and Cooper, 1986), which often result in negative organizational outcomes such as lower job performance (Longenecker *et al.*, 1999; Nelson and Burke, 2000; Kahn and Byosiere, 1993). However, not all people who are faced with the same organizationally-induced stressors experience increased strain. One rationale for this difference in individual responses is that employees can differ in their bureaucratic orientation (i.e. individual tendencies to prefer authority and norms, strict adherence to procedures and rules, and impersonal and formal work relations: Ashforth *et al.*, 1998). This individual difference is important to recognize because it allows for the possibility that while some structural changes may induce new stressors that lead to increased employee strain for some workers, these same changes may reduce the levels of perceived strain for others.

In today's rapidly changing environment organizational structure is a crucial issue (Burns and Wholey, 1993; Ilinitch *et al.*, 1996; Mitroff *et al.*, 1994; Quinn and Spreitzer, 1997). There is growing belief that more flexible and decentralized, organic structures are better suited to meet changing environments than rigid and centralized, mechanistic structures (Greenberg, 1999). Fast changing workforce demographics coupled with a rapidly changing global environment, however, also call for greater attention to the needs and health and welfare of workers if organizations are to avoid obsolescence (Mitroff *et al.*, 1994). Today's organizations can ill afford the adoption of an organizational structure that does not account for the dysfunctional impact of work stress on their members' performance. Thus, the conventional wisdom toward more organic forms and away from more mechanistic forms should give greater consideration to the different sources of stressors these forms induce as well as employees' predisposition toward structural alternatives since, for some employees, more organic structures have the potential to produce negative organizational consequences.

We begin this article with brief reviews of the stress and structure literatures, paying special attention to organic and mechanistic forms (Burns and Stalker, 1961). Next, we develop propositions concerning organizationally-induced stressors that are

fostered by mechanistic or organic structures. We follow this with a discussion and development of propositions and a model illustrating the impact of members' bureaucratic orientation on the organizationally-induced stressor-strain relationship. Finally, conclusions and suggestions for future research are provided.

Stress

Stressors can be viewed as antecedent conditions in the person and in the environment that lead to the appraisal of different types of stress states (Lazarus, 1993). Moreover, stressors act as stimuli that evoke an adverse behavioral, psychological, or physiological response (Kahn and Byosiere, 1993). Workplace stressors however are antecedent conditions within the employee's job or the organization that require adaptive responses from the employee (Jex and Beehr, 1991).

The work stress literature identifies a number of workplace stressors that can relate to a greater or lesser degree to organizational structure. Job loss (including the threat of and layoffs; Leana and Feldman; 1990), job relocation (Martin, 1996; Munton, 1990), increased work-family conflict (Anderson *et al.*, 2002; Beehr *et al.*, 1995; Jones and Fletcher, 1993), and increased organizational politics (Cropanzano *et al.*, 1997; Ferris *et al.*, 1996; 1994) are potential work-related stressors that may be related to organizational structure. Other studies of workplace stress have examined the impact of social support (e.g., Carlson and Perrewe, 1999; Daniels and Guppy, 1994; Flett *et al.*, 1995), coping (e.g., Beehr *et al.*, 1995; Buunk and Ybema, 1995; Dewe and Guest, 1990; Oakland and Ostell, 1996), past history (Nelson and Sutton, 1990), cognitive appraisal (e.g., Dewe, 1992), and stress management interventions (e.g., Bunce and West, 1996), on the stress process and its outcomes. Perhaps even more directly related to the issue of organizational structure though, workplace stress studies on person-organization fit (e.g., Edwards, 1992), role behavior (e.g., role overload, role ambiguity, role conflict; Frone, 1990; Grover, 1993; Grunberg *et al.*, 1998; Leigh *et al.*, 1988; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1992; Westman and Eden, 1992), task uncertainty and task content (Arsenault *et al.*, 1991; Kahn and Byosiere, 1993; Nelson and Burke, 2000), job design (decision latitude, situational constraints, job demands, and perceived control; Dwyer and Ganster, 1991; Kaldenberg and Becker, 1992), shift work (Barnett and Brennan, 1995; Kahn and Byosiere, 1993), and physical environment (Arsenault *et al.*, 1991; Jex and Beehr, 1991) have been identified as potential workplace stressors (Hurrell, 1995). However, to more fully understand how an organizational form induces workplace stressors, a closer examination of organizational structure is warranted.

Structure

Academics and practitioners have strived to determine an organizational structure that is the most advantageous for businesses (Hellriegel and Slocum, 1973; Hoskisson *et al.*, 1993; Markus *et al.*, 2000; Werther, 1999), industries (Burns and Wholey, 1993; Cleaver, 2000; Conner, 2003a; Hellriegel and Slocum, 1973; Slevin and Covin, 1997), and employees (e.g., Ashforth *et al.*, 1998; Bacharach *et al.*, 2002; Conner, 2003b; Quinn and Spreitzer, 1997; Zanzi, 1987). Classicalists such as Weber (1947) and Taylor (1911; 1947) believed that effective organizational structures were ones that emphasized specialization of tasks and administrative impersonality. Weber (1947) conceived of the bureaucracy as an ideal organizational form that would address many important issues faced by organizations. During the earlier part of the twentieth century,

organizations that adopted a bureaucratic structure were characterized by a drive toward production standardization via assembly lines, mass production, and rigid controls, without much concern for workers (Blank, 1986).

An increasing concern for human welfare in organizations however led to a different approach to designing and evaluating structural alternatives. Scholars of the human relations movement focused on the competitive advantages derived from enhanced employee satisfaction. Elton Mayo (1933) encouraged practitioners to attend to the workers' emotional needs. Mary Parker Follett (1949) argued that managers should motivate job performance rather than demand it. Douglas McGregor (1960) argued later that managers would accomplish more by viewing their employees as self-motivated, committed, responsible, and creative members of the organization, rather than viewing them as irresponsible and lazy. Hence, advocates of the human relations movement tend to argue that organizational structures should be flexible such that they are responsive to a variety of human needs.

The mechanistic-organic structure continuum (Burns and Stalker, 1961) has also enjoyed much popularity. More mechanistic structures are characterized by:

- formal lines of authority and a well-defined chain of command;
- highly departmentalized and specialized functions;
- clearly spelled out rules, policies, and procedural methodologies;
- formal and well-defined communication channels;
- vertical interaction;
- dyadic leader-member relations; and
- compartmentalized pockets of knowledge and expertise.

In contrast, organic structures are characterized by:

- shared control;
- opportunities for participation based on knowledge;
- an informal network of authority;
- an informal network of communication;
- lateral interaction; and
- adaptability and continual readjustment.

The notions of mechanistic and organic structures (e.g. Burns and Stalker, 1961; Zanzi, 1987) can be viewed as outgrowths of the classical school and the human relations movement, respectively. Characteristics of the mechanistic structure such as a high degree of specialization and inflexibility ring of the classical school and the bureaucratic structure that was popular amongst its scholars. Characteristics of organic forms (e.g., heavy reliance on employee participation, self-control, flexibility, and adaptability) meanwhile echo the human relations movement.

Several studies examined organizational structure based on the mechanistic-organic continuum. Pitts (1980) looked at multi-business organizational designs based on degree of structure (mechanistic vs. organic), and concluded that the firm's diversification strategy was a determinant of its organizational structure. Later, Slevin and Covin (1997) associated structural orientation with choice of organizational strategy (i.e. organic and emergent vs mechanistic and planned). Donaldson (1985)

examined organizational design in mechanistic structures with organic project teams and concluded that product life cycles impact on organizational design. Courtright *et al.* (1989) found that communication patterns in organic structures tend to be more consultative, while in mechanistic structures communication patterns tend to be more command-like. Quinn and Spreitzer (1997) examined mechanistic and organic structural perspectives of employee empowerment. Lastly, Zanzi (1987) argued that while pure mechanistic and pure organic structures may represent two extremes of a structural continuum, most organizations have structures that are oriented somewhere in between.

Much of the existing literature on structural alternatives however suggests that organizational structure should be based on the nature of the environment within which the organization operates (e.g. Burns and Stalker, 1961; Courtright *et al.*, 1989; Hellriegel and Slocum, 1973; Slevin and Covin, 1997; Zanzi, 1987). This literature suggests that an organization operating in an environment that is characterized as turbulent, unstable, and continuously changing would benefit most from a more organic structure (Dervitsiotis, 1998). The rationale for this is based on the underlying assumption that more organic structures offer greater degrees of flexibility and adaptability than more mechanistic structures. Consequently, this literature also indicates that an organization operating in an environment that is characterized as stable with a predictable market and relatively unchanging technology would benefit most from a more mechanistic structure. The reasoning for this position is based on the underlying assumption that within a stable environment, more mechanistic structures offer a greater degree of efficiency and control than more organic structures. Despite the inclination to advocate a particular structure based on external, environmental dictates, the structure literature (e.g. Hellriegel and Slocum, 1973; Mitroff *et al.*, 1994) also places some emphasis on the importance of recognizing the internal needs and conditions of the organization (e.g. employee health and welfare). It is to this issue that we now turn our attention.

Organizationally-induced stressors

As noted above, role conflict and role ambiguity have been identified as types of work-related stressors. Role conflict may result from employees facing inconsistent expectations of various parties, or from a perceived incongruency between role demands and personal needs, values, and etc. (Leigh *et al.*, 1988). Role ambiguity refers to situations where job responsibilities and accompanying tasks are not clearly defined (Leigh *et al.*, 1988; Westman, 1992). Thus, to the extent characteristics of the organization (e.g., structure) foster the development of inconsistent expectations and uncertainty, role conflict and role ambiguity can be viewed as organizationally-induced stressors.

Organic structures promote informal networks of authority and consultative forms of communication (Courtright *et al.*, 1989). Further, organic structures encourage continuous task adaptation, flexibility, and adjustment (Burns and Stalker, 1961). On the other hand, mechanistic structures promote a system of clearly defined rules and well-defined chains of command (Burns and Stalker, 1961) that are advantageous for fostering role clarity. Consequently, we expect that more organic structures foster the development of work environments that are conducive to members experiencing higher levels of role conflict and role ambiguity than more mechanistic structures.

Some support for this position is evident by the results of a study conducted by Ashforth *et al.* (1998). In this study of new employee socialization practices, institutionalized practices (e.g., formally structured practices) were positively related to worker adjustment and mechanistic orientations. Therefore, we propose the following:

- P1. Role conflict will be more prevalent within more organic structures than within more mechanistic structures.
- P2. Role ambiguity will be more prevalent within more organic structures than within more mechanistic structures.

Perceived lack of control (Perrewe and Ganster, 1989) and lack of decision latitude (Karasek, 1979; Westman, 1992) have also been identified as work-related stressors. More specifically, this line of research indicates that stress results when employees perceive a lack of adequate control over deciding how to perform their task. Job decision latitude refers to individuals' potential control over their tasks and conduct during the work day (Karasek, 1979), and has often been equated with autonomy (e.g. Westman, 1992). Kaldenberg and Becker (1992) examined the relationship between the amount of workload preferred and the actual amount experienced. They concluded that workers with greater control and autonomy experienced less strain. Hence, to the extent characteristics of organizations result in affording employees less control and decision latitude, lack of control and lack of decision latitude can be viewed as organizationally-induced stressors.

On the one hand, the mechanistic structure is geared toward vesting control and decision latitude within a hierarchical chain of command. On the other hand, the organic structure is geared toward providing ample opportunities for employee participation, informal networks of authority, and shared systems of control (Burns and Stalker, 1961; Tannenbaum and Dupuree-Bruno, 1994). Based on these observations, we anticipate that more mechanistic structures foster the development of work environments that are more conducive to members experiencing lower levels of control and decision latitude than more organic structures:

- P3. Lack of decision latitude will be more prevalent within more mechanistic structures than within more organic structures.
- P4. Lack of perceived control will be more prevalent within more mechanistic structures than within more organic structures.

While different structural characteristics of organizations have been proposed to manifest different sources of workplace stress, the extent these potential stressors result in perceived employee strain has yet to be addressed. Therefore, we now turn our attention to the discussion on how employees' predisposition toward structural alternatives can attenuate or enhance the relation between workplace stressors induced by structural characteristics and perceived employee strain.

Bureaucratic orientation

Research indicates that individuals react to many of the same stressors in different ways (e.g. Bacharach *et al.*, 2002; Buunk and Ybema, 1995; Dewe, 1992; Edwards, 1992; Frone, 1990; Kobasa, 1979; Latack and Havlovic, 1992; Lazarus, 1993; 1994; Perrewe *et al.*, 2000). However, we have yet to reach consensus concerning the factors involved

in individual resistance to stress (Kahn and Byosiere, 1993). Some argue that an individual's organizational fit in terms of their skills at managing certain types of work environments is a primary factor in dealing with workplace stressors (e.g. Perrewe *et al.*, 2000). Dewe (1992) concluded that individuals give meaning to events and individually decide what demands are stressors as well as what coping methods are appropriate. Similarly, Lazarus (1993; 1994) took a transactional approach toward individual resistance to stress. He contended that the individual evaluates a potential stressor as harmful, threatening, or challenging, and that this perception varies from individual to individual. Buunk and Ybema (1995) also explained the individual stress-coping process as one of selective evaluation and appraisal. More recently though, Bacharach *et al.* (2002) related resistance to workplace stress to the presence and enforcement of organizational policies.

As early as 1979, Kobasa argued that psychological hardiness could in part explain why some individuals appear to be more or less resistant to commonly identified stressors. Psychological hardiness refers to individuals that have a tendency to exhibit an internal locus of control and high levels of commitment and view stressors as challenges (Kobasa, 1979). Thus, psychological hardiness is yet another individual level construct used by researchers to explain varying levels of individual resistance to commonly identified stressors. In a similar vein, Ashforth *et al.* (1998) used the bureaucratic orientation construct to explain differences in individual socialization and adjustment within organizations. In short, the bureaucratic orientation approach contends that workers have a predisposition toward mechanistic or organic structures.

Bureaucratic orientation refers to the tendency of some employees to prefer authority and norms, strict adherence to procedures and rules, and impersonal and formal work relationships (Allinson, 1984; Ashforth *et al.*, 1998). In a study examining variation in employee satisfaction across structural orientations, Meadows (1980) found that the strength of certain traits was related to a more positive response to organic structure and a more negative response to mechanistic structure. Similar to the work of McClelland *et al.* (1953), and based on the earlier pioneering work of Murray (1938), Meadows (1980) conceptualized three traits: need for dominance, need for achievement, and need for autonomy. The need for dominance refers to an individual's need to influence and direct the actions of others. The need for achievement refers to an individual's need to personally accomplish substantial and difficult pieces of work. The need for autonomy refers to an individual's need to be free of rules, regulations, conventions, and dictates of others. Meadows (1980) concluded that individuals high in need for achievement, dominance, and autonomy are more likely to respond negatively to a more mechanistic than organic structure.

Based on Meadows' (1980) arguments, we expect that individuals with a strong bureaucratic orientation exhibit a lower need for dominance, a lower need for achievement, and a lower need for autonomy than individuals with a weak bureaucratic orientation. Subsequently, individuals with a strong bureaucratic orientation should prefer to work in settings that provide more structure than individuals with weak bureaucratic orientations. Furthermore, we anticipate that individuals with a strong bureaucratic orientation would prefer to work in settings where control is exercised via an adherence to a system of rigid rules and policies. Thus, the following are proposed:

- P5.* An individual's bureaucratic orientation moderates the relationship between organizationally-induced stressors and strain.
- P5a.* Individuals with a strong bureaucratic orientation characterized by low need for dominance, low need for achievement, and low need for autonomy will experience lower strain as a result of organizationally-induced stressors that are fostered by a more mechanistic structure (e.g. lack of control, lack of decision latitude) than individuals with a weak bureaucratic orientation.
- P5b.* Individuals with a weak bureaucratic orientation characterized by high need for dominance, high need for achievement, and high need for autonomy will experience lower strain as a result of organizationally-induced stressors that are fostered by a more organic structure (e.g. role conflict, role ambiguity) than individuals with a strong bureaucratic orientation.

The bureaucratic orientation structure-stress model (BOSS: Figure 1) illustrates the relationships we have discussed in this article. The model illustrates that organizational structure can be oriented along a continuum from pure organic to pure mechanistic forms. According to the BOSS model, structural orientation impacts the type of organizationally-induced stressors that one is more likely to observe. Specifically, more organic structures foster perceptions of role conflict and role ambiguity, whereas more mechanistic structures foster perceptions of lack of control and lack of decision latitude. Next, the model illustrates that organizationally-induced stressors have a direct impact on individuals' perceived strain. Finally, the BOSS model illustrates that the strength of the organizationally-induced stressor-strain relationship depends upon the individual's bureaucratic orientation.

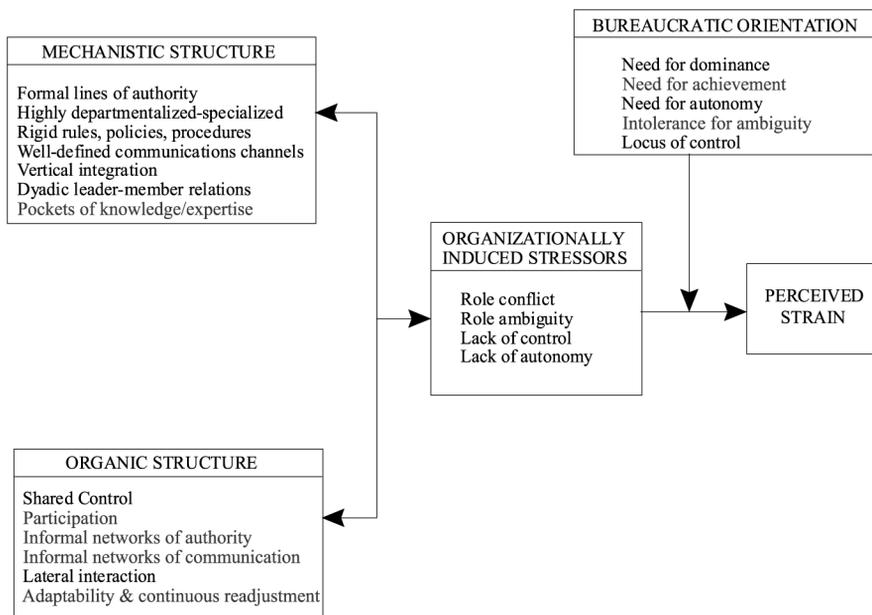


Figure 1.
Bureaucratic orientation
structure-stress model
(BOSS)

Recommendations for future research

At least two studies cited above used a sample of two departments (one with a more organic orientation and one with a more mechanistic orientation) within the same organization or within different organizations to test propositions similar to those presented herein. For example, Zanzi (1987) compared two units within a single public accounting firm (auditors and management consultants) to determine their organic/mechanistic tendencies. Later, Rahman and Zanzi (1995) examined job satisfaction and job stress between departments in two big-six CPA firms. We believe that this same strategy could be used to test *P1* through *P4*. In so doing, we would anticipate that researchers would observe more perceptions of role conflict and role ambiguity in more organic structures, and more perceptions of lack of control and lack of decision latitude in more mechanistic structures. *P5* through *P5b* could also be tested using this same format. Additionally however, researchers would need to assess individuals' bureaucratic orientation and then test to see if their bureaucratic orientation moderated the stress strain relationship in general (*P5*), as well as in the specific manner indicated by *P5a* and *P5b*.

Contemporary trends in workforce demographics (e.g. more women and more women executives; Nelson and Burke, 2000) further demonstrate a need for more research in this area. For example, in light of our current work, researchers might consider recommendations such as Nelson and Burke's (2000) call for more flexible workplace rules for female executives to eliminate stress in conjunction with research from the work-family conflict literature (Anderson *et al.*, 2002; Gunsauley, 2002) and its links to stress. Perhaps, further exploration of these topics will prove directly beneficial for organizations as the ranks of female executives continue to increase. This is especially true given that women are reported to experience higher levels of distress symptoms than men (Nelson and Burke, 2000). It may be the case that bureaucratic orientation is influenced by work-family needs.

In this article, we emphasized the impact of employees' bureaucratic orientation on the organizationally-induced stressor-strain relationship. Research involving stress that results from the perception of inadequate control over the work environment has shown the benefits of social support (Anderson *et al.*, 2002; Carlson and Perrewe, 1999; Thomas and Ganster, 1995). Given the arguments we have presented, one might anticipate that social support would be more effective when individuals exhibit a weak bureaucratic orientation than when individuals exhibit a strong bureaucratic orientation. In a similar vein, future studies may examine the effectiveness of different methods of stress intervention for individuals who exhibit a strong bureaucratic orientation versus a weak bureaucratic orientation. One promising avenue might be attributional training (e.g. Albert, 1983; Fiedler *et al.*, 1971; Martinko, 1995). Such training seeks to make people more aware of their attributional tendencies (Douglas and Martinko, 2001; Martinko and Douglas, 1999). For example, attributional training may prove beneficial in helping people with strong bureaucratic orientations (external locus of control) develop attributional tendencies that reflect more personal control over their outcomes (internal locus of control).

One possible limitation of the present study (and an opportunity for future research) resides in a possible distinction between the bureaucratic orientation of management and non-management employees. In Meadows' (1980, p. 390) study, he determined, "that employees with strong [higher] traits aspiring to dominance, autonomy, and

achievement respond more positively to organic structure and more negatively to mechanistic structure than those with weaker traits.” Hence, the average employee with a low need for dominance should find a more mechanistic environment more appealing (i.e. someone tells them what to do). However, it is possible that management/executive employees might differ from non-management employees in terms of their need for dominance (i.e. influencing and telling others what to do). Such a difference might affect an employee’s overall bureaucratic orientation in terms of individual preference for mechanistic or organic structures. Therefore, empirical testing is needed to confirm such a distinction.

Conclusions

As noted by Bacharach *et al.* (2002), inconsistencies between employee expectations and capabilities and organizational policies and expectations are stressful. While Bacharach *et al.* (2002) and others (e.g. Barley and Kunda, 1992; Merton, 1968; Perrow, 1986) suggest making organizational expectations clearer and engaging in stricter policy enforcement as a solution to alleviating stress; the current work takes a different (although, arguably complementary) approach. That is to say, organizations should consider the bureaucratic orientation of employees/applicants as well. This goes beyond simply strictly enforcing existing rules and policies and is clearly more in sync with the long established person-organization fit research stream (Edwards, 1996; Kristof, 1996). Considering and combining both approaches more aptly meets the goal of matching employee characteristics with those of the organization and is better for workers and firms.

Over the years, many scholars have suggested that the organic structure is the way of the future (e.g. Blank, 1986; Courtright, 1989; Dervitsiotis, 1998; Gullett, 1975; Meadows, 1980; Nelson and Burke, 2000; Perrewe *et al.*, 2000; Zanzi, 1987). Such scholars attack mechanistic structures on the grounds that mechanistic structures attempt to maintain the status quo, while organic structures promote flexibility and adaptability to environmental dictates (e.g. Ashforth *et al.*, 1998; Blank, 1986). We submit that today’s business environments are changing at an astronomical pace; however, we contend that the organic structure can be problematic if implemented without consideration of employee bureaucratic orientation. Thus, we have presented arguments to suggest that from a work stress perspective a more organic structure may result in observing more dysfunctional employee responses (e.g. lower performance, increased absenteeism) to organizationally-induced stressors than may be observed in more mechanistic structures. This is not to say that mechanistic structures are better than organic structures. Instead, in keeping with the ideals of person-organization fit, organizations should consider both employee/applicant characteristics (i.e. bureaucratic orientation) as well as organizational characteristics (i.e. appropriate structural orientation) for maximum organizational effectiveness. As such, the consideration of organizational characteristics alone is inappropriate and blindly following trends (e.g. becoming more organic) can prove disastrous.

Organizations, much like the human body, must stay internally healthy in order to function properly. In this article, we argued that accounting for the employees’ bureaucratic orientation when considering structural alternatives represents one way that organizations can bolster their internal health. In short, organizations should consider the personal characteristics – the identity if you will – of its workforce when considering structural adoption alternatives.

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