Role Conflict and Burnout: The Direct and Moderating Effects of Political Skill and Perceived Organizational Support on Burnout Dimensions

I. M. Jawahar
Department of Management & Quantitative Methods
Illinois State University

Thomas H. Stone
Department of Management
Oklahoma State University

Jennifer L. Kisamore
Department of Psychology
University of Oklahoma in Tulsa

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to I. M. Jawahar, Department of Management & Quantitative Methods, 211 College of Business, Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois 61790. Ph: (309) 438-2395. Fax: (309) 438-5510. E-Mail: jimoham@ilstu.edu

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ABSTRACT

Drawing from previous research on the effect of role conflict on burnout and the Conservation of Resources theory, we propose that individual differences in political skill and perceptions of organizational support will be negatively related to burnout and will also moderate the relationship between perceived role conflict and burnout. In a sample of 120 professional employees, political skill was associated with less depersonalization and feelings of reduced personal accomplishment and moderated the role conflict-reduced personal accomplishment relationship. Perceived organizational support was associated with less emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and moderated the role conflict-emotional exhaustion relationship. Implications of results are discussed and directions for future research are offered.

KEY WORDS: Role conflict, Burnout, Political skill, Perceived organizational support, Conservation of resources model

Role Conflict and Burnout: The Direct and Moderating Effects of Political Skill and Perceived Organizational Support on Burnout Dimensions

The prevalence of job stress including burnout is increasing (e.g., Kahn & Langlieb, 2003). Since job stress has major significance for both employees and organizations, it is important to continue searching for mechanisms that reduce the negative effects of job stress. Drawing on theoretical frameworks of the stress-strain relationship (Hobfoll, 1989; Lazarus, 1991), we examined the direct as well as the moderating effects of political skill and perceived organizational support on the relationship between role conflict and burnout. Political skill and perceived organizational support are coping resources (Hobfoll, 1989) that can deter burnout as well as moderate the relationship between role conflict and burnout (Brotheridge, 2001).

This study makes several contributions to the literature. First, it is a response to the call for more research on organizational and interpersonal factors that may serve as moderators, buffers, or even antidotes to stresses and their effects (Kahn & Byosiere, 1992; Stamper & Johlke, 2003). Second, given that individual and situational factors are central to most models of stress (e.g., Hobfoll, 1989), it is important to examine the direct and moderating effects of both individual and situational factors in a single study. To our knowledge, this study is the first to examine the direct and moderating effects of an individual difference variable and an organizational variable on burnout dimensions in a single study.

BURNOUT

Job stress has continued to grow, costing organizations billions of dollars in employee disability claims, employee absenteeism, and lost productivity (Spector, Chen, & O'Connell, 2000; Xie & Schaubroeck, 2001). Burnout refers to a drain of mental/emotional resources caused by chronic job stress and is a work-related indicator of psychological health (Schaufeli &

Enzmann, 1998). Burnout manifests itself in the form of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization of others, and lack of felt accomplishment in working with others (Maslach, 1982). Emotional exhaustion involves feelings of being depleted of energy and drained of sensation. Depersonalization is the tendency to deindividuate and dehumanize others through cynical, callous, and uncaring attitudes and behaviors. Reduced personal accomplishment involves repeated efforts that fail to produce results, leading to a feeling of inefficacy and reduced motivation. Maslach's (1982) tripartite model of burnout has received strong support (Boles, Dean, Ricks, Short, & Wang, 2000).

The negative consequences of burnout are well documented. For instance, burnout decreases organizational commitment (e.g., Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Leiter & Maslach, 1988), job performance (e.g., Tubre & Collins, 2000), contextual performance (Cropanzano, Rupp, & Byrne, 2003) and increases turnover intentions (Cropanzano, Rupp, & Byrne, 2003; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). Given the dysfunctional consequences of burnout for both employees and organizations, pursuit of approaches to reduce the negative effects of job stress and burnout is vital (Perrewé , Zellars, Ferris, Rossi, Kacmar, & Ralston, 2004; Perrewé et al., 2005).

A large body of research has identified role demands as antecedents of burnout (Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Peeters, Montgomery, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2005). Role conflict, a type of role demand, occurs when two or more sets of role pressures exist in an individual's workspace, and compliance with one of these pressures impedes the accomplishment of another (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). Role conflict introduces uncertainty because the employee is not certain whether all of her or his role requirements are successfully balanced.

Experiencing incompatible or irreconcilable expectations associated with multiple roles, or with a single role, is presumed to be psychologically uncomfortable for individuals and to

generate negative emotional reactions (Schaubroeck, Cotton, & Jennings, 1989). For instance, role conflict has been linked to a number of dysfunctional outcomes, including job dissatisfaction and psychological strain (e.g., Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970; Schaubroeck et al., 1989). Indeed, in their meta-analysis, Lee and Ashforth (1996) reported a corrected correlation of .53 between role conflict and emotional exhaustion, .37 between role conflict and depersonalization, and .21 between role conflict and reduced personal accomplishment.

Although the relationship between perceived role conflict and burnout dimensions is well established, we included it as a hypothesis for two reasons. First, while we did not expect sample-specific differences in the support of this relationship, it is worth noting that most of the research on burnout has been conducted with participants in the human service occupations, such as nurses, teachers, police officers, and social service workers (see Boles et al., 2000, p. 13). Second, and more importantly, this hypothesis serves as a foundation for our subsequent hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Perceived role conflict will be positively related to emotional exhaustion (1a), depersonalization (1b), and reduced personal accomplishment (1c).

DETERRENTS OF BURNOUT AND MODERATORS OF ROLE CONFLICT – BURNOUT RELATIONSHIP

According to the transactional theory (Lazarus, 1991, 1999; Lazarus, & Folkman, 1984), stress is the result of a psychologically mediated process, such that the impact of any given stressor depends on the way that it is construed by the person who is exposed to it. More specifically, stress is seen as the outcome of a two-phase appraisal process. Primary appraisal involves the perceiver assessing the degree to which a particular stressor poses a threat to self. In the event that any stimulus is categorized as a threat, secondary appraisal involves the

perceiver's assessment of available resources to cope with the threat. Stress only leads to strain when a threat to self is perceived to exist in conjunction with insufficient coping resources.

Resources are central to the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989). The basic tenet of the COR theory is that people strive to acquire, maintain, and protect resources, and perceive potential or actual loss of resources, or lack of an expected gain in resources to be stressful (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002). Resources include objects, conditions, personal characteristics, and energies. Loss of these resources, or the threat of such a loss, may cause the experience of stress (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002).

Employees experiencing role conflict may come to believe that they cannot successfully perform the job. Consequently, they may be forced to invest additional resources into their work role for fear of losing their job status. This additional investment of resources into the work role represents a loss of resources that could lead to negative states including dissatisfaction and psychological strain. Hobfoll (2002) suggested that personal characteristics could act as resources and buffer against stress. In the COR theory, social relations are seen as a resource to the extent that they provide or facilitate the preservation of valued resources. Thus, social support could also act as a buffer to the extent it limits loss of resources or enables gain of other resources (Hobfoll, 2002). We assert that an individual's political skill (an individual difference) and perceptions of organizational support (a situational factor) have the potential to deter feelings of burnout and also mitigate the effects of role conflict on burnout.

Political Skill

Previous research has examined the influence on the stress-strain relationship of individual differences including locus of control (Rahim, & Psenicka, 1996), proactive personality (Parker & Sprigg, 1999), self-efficacy (Schaubroeck, Jones, & Xie, 2001), and Type

A (Froggatt & Cotton, 1987). Political skill, an individual difference construct, is particularly relevant to how individuals perceive stressors and manage stress. Political skill could act as a deterrent to burnout and also moderate the relationship between role conflict and burnout (Brotheridge, 2001).

Political skill is the ability to understand others at work, and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives (Perrewé et al., 2004). It is characterized by social perceptiveness and the ability to adjust one's behavior to different and changing situational needs (Ferris et al., 1999; Ferris et al., 2005).

Politically skilled individuals view interpersonal interactions as opportunities rather than as threats, facilitating the establishment of friendships, connections, and alliances, which in turn ensures a favorable identity in their network (Perrewé et al., 2000). A positive identity in one's social network generates significant and tangible benefits (Baron & Markman, 2000). For example, politically skilled individuals may enjoy network centrality, enabling them to gain access to important information. Moreover, the confidence and trust placed in politically skilled individuals likely increases cooperation from others in the network. Therefore, in addition to contributing to a greater sense of confidence, political skill, and the accompanying interpersonal influence, may enable individuals to gain actual control over resources. Political skill can be viewed as a valued resource and COR model suggests that those better endowed with resources are less negatively affected by resource losses that accompany role conflict (Hobfoll, 2002).

Ferris et al. (1999) argued that politically skilled individuals enjoy a sense of personal security and self-confidence from prior experience in, and efficacy within their work environments and the individuals with whom they interact. Such personal security and self-confidence may contribute to politically skilled individuals experiencing lower levels of burnout.

Results of two studies are consistent with this argument. In one study conducted with 230 full-time employees, Perrewé et al. (2004) reported that political skill was negatively related to psychological anxiety and to somatic complaints. In another study, politically skilled individuals reported lower levels of job tension and general anxiety (Perrewé et al., 2005). Results of studies by Perrewé and her colleagues indicate that political skill is related to lower levels of anxiety and somatic complaints. Burnout is more severe than psychological anxiety and somatic complaints, and this study is the first to examine if political skill is related to burnout.

Hypothesis 2: Political skill will be negatively related to emotional exhaustion (2a), depersonalization (2b), and reduced personal accomplishment (2c).

Politically skilled individuals have a distinctive interpersonal style that affords them a greater sense of confidence and interpersonal influence (Ferris et al., 1999). In the study mentioned earlier, Perrewé et al. (2004) also found that political skill moderated the influence of role conflict on psychological anxiety, somatic complaints and physiological strain, such that the relationship between role conflict and the negative effects weakened with increasing levels of political skill. In a second study, Perrewé et al. (2005) reported that political skill moderated the relationship between perceived role overload and three measures of strain, such that the relationship between role overload and measures of strain (job tension, job dissatisfaction and general anxiety) weakened at increasing levels of political skill.

Thus, it is likely political skill will moderate the effects of role stressors on burnout. The negative effects arising from a stressor should be reduced for individuals high in political skill because of their increased confidence, and ability to cope through self-regulation (Hobfoll, 1989; Lazarus, 1991). In addition, politically skilled individuals will be better able to gain necessary

resources to replace resource loss resulting from role conflict (Hobfoll, 1989). Thus, politically skilled individuals will experience less stress than individuals with lower levels of political skill.

Hypothesis 3: Political skill will moderate the relationship between perceived role conflict and burnout, such that less politically skilled individuals will experience more emotional exhaustion (3a), depersonalization (3b), and reduced personal accomplishment (3c) than politically skilled individuals.

Perceived Organizational Support

Considerable research has focused on social support as a means of reducing the harmful effects of stressors (see Brotheridge & Lee, 2005; Pearlin, 1993). In general, when people feel that they have social support from others, they report less psychological distress or strain (e.g., Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). In the organizational stress literature, several researchers (e.g., Carlson & Perrewé. 1999; Parsuraman, Greenhaus, & Granrose, 1992) have argued that social support reduces the negative effects of role stressors by helping employees cope with stress. However, with few exceptions (e.g., Jain & Sinha, 2005; Stamper & Johlke, 2003), most studies focused on coworker or supervisor support (e.g., Brotheridge & Lee, 2005; Ganster, Fusilier, & Mayes, 1996; La Rocco et al., 1980), not organizational support.

Perceptions of organizational support (POS) are an important resource (Hobfoll, 1989) that could bolster employees' confidence in their ability to cope with role demands (Lazarus, 1991). POS is defined as the extent to which employees perceive that their contributions are valued by their organization and that the organization cares about their well-being (Eisenberger, Fasolo & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). POS is thought to develop over time through multiple interactions

between employees and their employers and to reflect the degree to which employees perceive that their work organization is committed to them (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Models of stress (Hobfoll, 1989; Lazarus, 1991) and research suggest that POS could directly reduce role stress as well as buffer the negative effects of role stress. For instance, high levels of POS may be negatively associated with role stress as organizations that care about their employees' well-being are more likely to reduce unnecessary work complications and distractions for their workers, such as conflicting job requirements. In addition, such organizations are likely to specify and clarify job expectations and norms for their employees in order to better prepare them for work assignments. Indeed, in a study conducted with sales personnel, Stamper and Johlke (2003) reported POS to be negatively related to role stressors, role conflict and role ambiguity.

Employees who perceive that their organization cares about them and is genuinely interested in their well-being are likely to experience lower levels of burnout. At least two studies have examined the relationship between POS and burnout. In a study conducted with part-time employees, Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey, and Toth (1997, Study 2) reported POS to be negatively related to an overall measure of burnout. In a recent study conducted in the context of reorganization, Armstrong-Stassen (2004) reported that POS was negatively related to burnout in two different samples, but only the emotional exhaustion subscale of burnout was used in her study. The current study is the first to relate POS to all three dimensions of burnout.

Hypothesis 4: Perceived organizational support will be negatively related to emotional exhaustion (4a), depersonalization (4b), and reduced personal accomplishment (4c).

In general, support could also moderate the stressor-strain relationship by acting as a buffer that reduces the effects of the stressors on the outcomes or strain (Brotheridge, 2001;

Viswesvaran, Sanchez, & Fisher, 1999). A review of the literature uncovered three studies in which the potential of POS to moderate the stress-strain relationship was examined. In one study, Leather, Lawrence, Beale, Cox, and Dickson (1998) reported that POS moderates the negative effect of workplace violence on both job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Casper, Martin, Buffardi, and Erdwins (2002) found that POS moderated the relationship between work-family conflict and organizational commitment. Stamper and Johlke (2003) found that POS moderated the relationship between role ambiguity and job satisfaction, and between role conflict and turnover intentions. Thus, previous research has not examined the potential moderating role of POS in the relationship between role conflict and burnout.

POS as a valued resource could bolster one's confidence to cope with stressors, and consistent with Lazarus' (1991) transaction theory of stress and the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), enhanced confidence to cope with stressors should result in reduced levels of burnout. To our knowledge, this study is the first to examine the moderating role of POS on the relationship between perceived role conflict and burnout dimensions.

Hypothesis 5: Perceived organizational support will moderate the relationship between perceived role conflict and burnout, such that individuals who perceive lower levels of support will experience more emotional exhaustion (5a), depersonalization (5b), and reduced personal accomplishment (5c) than individuals who perceive higher levels of support.

METHOD

Sample and Procedure

Participants were employed in a software development organization located on the West Coast of the United States. Surveys were distributed to all 171 employees. The study was part of a

comprehensive employee survey. A letter from the researcher accompanied each survey. The letter informed employees that only the researcher (and no one in the organization) would have access to their responses and that only summary statistics would be shared with the organization. Employees were requested to complete the survey and return it directly to the researcher. A total of 120 employees completed the survey (response rate 70%). The participants were professionals and were employed as programmers, software and hardware engineers, marketing specialists, and managers. Average age of participants was 37.92 years (*SD* = 7.93). Seventy-four percent of the participants were male. On average, participants had 16.07 years of work experience (*SD* = 8.12), and 3.67 years of job tenure (*SD* = 1.84).

Measures

Perceived Role Conflict

Perceived role conflict was measured with Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman's (1970) 8-item scale. This scale has been widely used to measure role conflict (see Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Sample items include "I receive incompatible requests from 2 or more people," and "I work under incompatible policies and guidelines." Participants used a 7-point Likert scale with anchors ranging from Strongly disagree to Strongly agree.

Perceived Organizational Support

Eisenberger et al.'s (1986) 17-item POS Scale was used. Sample items include "My organization values my contribution to it's success," and "My organization really cares about my well-being." Participants used a 7-point Likert scale with anchors ranging from Strongly disagree to Strongly agree to respond to the items.

Political Skill

Political skill was measured with the 18-item Political Skill Inventory (PSI) developed by Ferris et al. (2005). Ferris and his colleagues have reported a substantial body of construct validity evidence for the political skill construct (e.g., Ferris et al., 1999; Perrewé et al., 2004; Perrewé et al., 2005) and the PSI measure (e.g., Ferris et al., 2005). "I am good at getting people to like me" and "It is easy for me to develop rapport with most people" are sample items. A 7-point response format was used (Strongly disagree to Strongly agree).

Burnout

The original Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Maslach & Jackson, 1981, 1986) has 22 items. Using structural equation modeling techniques, Boles et al. (2000) revised the MBI and reduced it to 19 items (items 2, 12, and 16 from MBI were dropped). The 19-item revised MBI (Boles et al., 2000) was used to measure burnout. A sample item used to measure emotional exhaustion is "I feel emotionally drained from my work," A sample item used to measure depersonalization is "I feel I treat others (employees) as if they were impersonal objects." A sample item used to measure reduced personal accomplishment is "I feel that I am positively influencing other peoples' lives through my work" (reverse scored). Participants used a 7-point scale with anchors ranging from Almost never to Almost always.

RESULTS

Means, standard deviations and correlations between study variables are reported in Table 1. The pattern of correlations is consistent with hypothesized relationships. To test our hypotheses, we conducted moderated hierarchical regression analyses (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). In the first step, age, sex, and level in the organization were entered as control variables. Men and women might be experiencing different levels of burnout for reasons other than variables

examined in this study. Older individuals are likely to hold jobs with more responsibilities, and job duties of individuals at higher organizational levels are likely to involve more uncertainty. Thus, we controlled for sex, age, and hierarchical level. In the second step, the main effects, perceived role conflict, political skill, and perceived organizational support were entered. The centering technique was used to properly test for the interaction terms. Centering a variable involves simply replacing it by its deviation from the mean. The variables role conflict, political skill, and perceived organizational support were centered; and the product of centered role conflict and centered political skill, and the product of centered role conflict and centered organizational support were used to test for interactions (Cohen & Cohen, 1983, p. 238). These interaction terms were entered in Step 3 of each hierarchical regression equation.

Insert Table 1 about here

In the first hierarchical regression (see Table 2), the control variables entered in Step 1 failed to explain any variance in emotional exhaustion ($R^2 = .02$, $F_{3,115} = 0.68$, $p = .57$). Perceived role conflict, political skill and perceived organizational support entered in Step 2 collectively explained 29% of variance in emotional exhaustion (adjusted $R^2 = .29$, $F_{3,112} = 16.83$, $p < .001$). Of these variables, only perceived role conflict ($\beta = .39$, $t = 4.45$, $p < .001$; $sR^2 = .12$) and perceived organizational support ($\beta = -.27$, $t = -3.13$, $p < .01$; $sR^2 = .06$) explained unique variance in emotional exhaustion. The squared semi-partial correlation, sR^2, was used to ascertain the unique contribution of each variable to the criterion. sR^2 indicates the incremental change in R^2 for a given variable beyond all other variables.

Insert Table 2 about here

The interaction terms entered in Step 3 explained 2% of additional variance in emotional exhaustion ($\Delta R^2 = .02$, $F_{2,110} = 2.32$, $p < .05$), but only the cross-product of perceived role

conflict and perceived organizational support was significant (β = .13, t = 1.93, p < .05; sR^2 = .02). Because the interaction was significant, we performed follow-up split-group analyses by taking a median-split on perceived organizational support and then regressing emotional exhaustion on perceived role conflict at low and high levels of perceived organizational support (Aiken & West, 1991). Role conflict was significantly related to emotional exhaustion at low levels of perceived organizational support (R^2 = .02, p < .05, β = .21, t = 1.93, p < .05) but not at high levels of perceived organizational support (R^2 = .00, p =.51). These results indicate support for Hypotheses 1a, 4a, and 5a but not for Hypotheses 2a and 3a.

In the second hierarchical regression (see Table 2), the control variables entered in Step 1 failed to explain any variance in depersonalization (R^2 = .01, $F_{3,115}$ = 0.15, p = .93). Perceived role conflict, political skill and perceived organizational support entered in Step 2 collectively explained 18% of variance in depersonalization (adjusted R^2 = .18, $F_{3,112}$ = 8.23, p < .001). Of these variables, only perceived organizational support (β = -.33, t = - 3.50, p < .001; sR^2 = .09) and political skill (β = -.21, t = -2.46, p < .05; sR^2 = .044) explained unique variance in depersonalization. The interaction terms entered in Step 3 failed to explain any additional variance in depersonalization (ΔR^2 = .01, $F_{2,110}$ = 0.39, p = .82). Thus, only Hypotheses 2b and 4b were supported.

The control variables entered in Step 1 of another hierarchical regression (see Table 2) failed to explain any variance in reduced personal accomplishment (R^2 = .03, $F_{3,115}$ = 1.33, p = .27). Perceived role conflict, political skill and perceived organizational support entered in Step 2 collectively explained 33% of variance in reduced personal accomplishment (adjusted R^2 = .33, $F_{3,112}$ = 19.43, p < .001). Of these variables, only political skill (β = -.58, t = -7.59, p < .001; sR^2 = .32) explained unique variance in reduced personal accomplishment. The interaction terms

entered in Step 3 explained an additional 2% of the variance in reduced personal accomplishment ($\Delta R^2 = .02$, $F_{2, 110} = 1.97$, $p < .05$) and the cross-product of perceived role conflict and political skill was significant ($\beta = .13$, $t = 1.93$, $p < .05$; $sR^2 = .02$).

Because the interaction was significant, we performed split-group analyses by taking a median-split on political skill, and regressing reduced personal accomplishment on perceived role conflict at low and high levels of political skill (Aiken & West, 1991). Role conflict was significantly related to reduced personal accomplishment at low levels of political skill ($R^2 = .07$, $p < .001$, $\beta = .26$, $t = 1.98$, $p < .05$) but not at high levels of political skill ($R^2 = .00$, $p = .90$). These results provide strong support for Hypotheses 2c and 3c.

DISCUSSION

Drawing on previous research on the effect of role conflict on burnout (e.g., Lee & Ashforth, 1986) and models of the stress-strain relationship (e.g., Hobfoll, 1989; Lazarus, 1991), we proposed that individual differences in political skill and perceptions of organizational support would be negatively related to burnout and would also moderate the relationship between role conflict and burnout. This study is the first to examine the effect of an individual difference variable and an organizational variable on burnout dimensions in a single study. It is the first study to relate political skill to burnout, and consequently also the first to investigate the moderating effect of political skill on the role conflict-burnout relationship. We are also unaware of any study that has examined the moderating effects of POS on the role conflict-burnout relationship. Results of our study contribute not only to the literature on burnout but also to the large body of research on POS and the emerging stream of research on political skill.

Perceptions of role conflict, political skill and perceptions of organizational support exhibited differential relationships with the different dimensions of burnout. For instance,

perceived role conflict and perceived organizational support interacted to influence emotional exhaustion, such that the relationship between role conflict and emotional exhaustion was weaker at higher levels of perceived organizational support. That is, high levels of support had a buffering effect and mitigated the negative effects of role conflict on emotional exhaustion.

Both perceived organizational support and political skill were negatively related with depersonalization. However, only political skill was negatively related to feelings of reduced personal accomplishment. In addition, it also interacted with role conflict, such that high levels of political skill mitigated the negative effects of role conflict on reduced personal accomplishment. These results indicate that perceived organizational support influences emotional exhaustion but not reduced personal accomplishment whereas political skill exhibits the opposite pattern.

Theoretical Implications

Based on our results, it is reasonable to suggest that: (1) different variables influence different forms of burnout, and (2) the different forms of burnout may not unfold in a sequential manner. With respect to the second point, the proponents of the burnout construct (Leiter & Maslach, 1988; Maslach, 1982; Maslach & Jackson, 1981) noted that emotional exhaustion should appear first as excessive demands drain an individual's emotional resources. They suggested that as a coping strategy, individuals limit their involvement with others and distance themselves psychologically (depersonalization). Finally, individuals recognize the discrepancy between their original optimistic attitude and their current attitude, and consequently, experience a feeling of inadequacy in relating to people and performing their job (reduced personal accomplishment). At the suggestion of one reviewer of this article, we examined if emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between role conflict and depersonalization, and between

role conflict and reduced personal accomplishment. We were unable to find support for such mediational relationships.

Results of the current study suggest, however, that it is possible for role demands to overwhelm an individual, triggering feelings of reduced personal accomplishment without the individual feeling emotional exhaustion. For instance, less politically skilled individuals might experience reduced personal accomplishment but may not feel emotionally exhausted because of high levels of organizational support. Thus, it is quite possible that the three forms of burnout are independent of each other, and it is also possible for them to be manifested in a concurrent manner as opposed to in a sequential manner. This interpretation of results should be viewed with caution because of the cross-sectional design employed. Future research employing longitudinal designs should examine these possibilities.

As noted previously, perceived organizational support was related to depersonalization and emotional exhaustion and moderated the relationship between role conflict and emotional exhaustion. Although support was measured subjectively, the source remained the organization, an external entity. In contrast, political skill is an internal resource, and results indicate that political skill but not perceived organizational support could alleviate feelings of reduced personal accomplishment. Future research should investigate if internal and external resources relate differently to the different dimensions of burnout.

The results for political skill reinforce Ferris et al.'s (1999, 2005) conceptualization of political skill as an interpersonal construct. Politically skilled individuals are masters of social interactions who enjoy a sense of personal security and self-confidence from prior experience in, and efficacy within their work environments and with the individuals with whom they interact. Thus, while role conflict might be emotionally exhausting, politically skilled individuals have the

internal resources to cope with stress without experiencing diminished levels of personal accomplishments. Results for POS suggest that while perceptions of support help individuals cope with emotional exhaustion, such perceptions do nothing to prevent feelings of inefficacy (reduced personal accomplishment), suggesting a potential limit for the benefits of support.

To our knowledge, the two prior studies reporting a relationship between POS and burnout did not use all three dimensions of burnout. Armstrong-Stassen (2004) reported that POS was negatively related to burnout, but only the emotional exhaustion subscale of burnout was used in her study. Cropanzano et al. (1997, Study 2) reported POS to be negatively related to an overall measure of burnout. However, at the dimension level, results for overall burnout are misleading as POS related to lower emotional exhaustion and less depersonalization but not to reduced personal accomplishment. The different pattern of relationships exhibited by the different dimensions of burnout in our data reinforces the methodological argument against collapsing burnout dimensions (e.g., Boles et al. 2000).

Potential Limitations and Directions for Future Research

One potential limitation is our sample size. It is difficult to detect small effects in a sample of 120 participants. Even though we found support for two two-way interactions, it is difficult to establish whether lack of support for the other hypothesized interactions is due to a true lack of interactive relationships or because of insufficient statistical power to detect small effects. This concern highlights the need to replicate results of this study. Second, the cross-sectional nature of these data prevents inferences of causality. It is quite possible that employees experiencing burnout attributed it to role conflict and lack of organizational support. On the other hand, it is difficult to suggest that burnout could encourage participants to report lower levels of political skill. While a longitudinal study would allow for more confidence in inferences of

causality, difficult issues, such as the appropriate time interval between measurement of independent variables and burnout would need to be resolved (Mitchell & James, 2001).

Results of our study suggest several avenues for research. For instance, in this study, we examined the moderating effects of political skill and perceived organizational support on the relationship between role conflict and burnout. In addition to replicating results of our study, future research should also investigate moderating effects of these two variables on the relationship between other role demands, such as role ambiguity and role overload, and burnout. Second, in this study, we only investigated the mitigating effects of perceived support from the organization itself. Future research could examine the relative importance of support from the organization, supervisor and one's coworkers on burnout. It is quite possible that support from different sources may differentially moderate the relationship between different role demands and burnout dimensions.

Third, more research is needed on the consequences of burnout. Examining how the different dimensions of burnout influence outcomes, such as job satisfaction, job involvement, task performance, contextual performance, and dysfunctional behaviors, such as workplace aggression is likely to result in theoretical advancement of the burnout construct. For instance, one could expect emotional exhaustion to lead to reduced job involvement and organizational commitment whereas depersonalization is likely to result in incivility and potentially escalate into workplace aggression.

Practical Implications

Clearly, enhancing organizational support is one way to reduce feelings of emotional exhaustion and prevent depersonalization. Valuing employees' contributions, acting in their best

interests, showing concern, and helping employees when they need help the most are some ways to enhance employees' perceptions of organizational support (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Second, enhancing political skill might be another avenue to reduce depersonalization and avoid feelings of reduced personal accomplishment. To enhance political skill, proponents of the political skill construct (Ferris et al., 1999) suggest use of process-focused techniques, such as drama-based training, developmental simulations, and behavior modeling (Ferris, Anthony, Kolodinsky, Gilmore & Harvey, 2002). In summary, results suggest that burnout can be reduced by decreasing role conflict, increasing political skill, and enhancing organizational support of employees.

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Table 1: Means, standard deviations and correlations between study variables

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Perceived role conflict	3.67	1.14	(.86)						
2. Political skill	5.32	0.89	-.16^{+}	(.93)					
3. Perceived organizational support	4.51	1.18	-.41**	.14	(.94)				
4. Emotional exhaustion	3.16	1.26	.50**	-.17^{+}	-.43**	(.87)			
5. Depersonalization	1.92	0.99	.17^{+}	-.26**	-.36**	.48**	(.86)		
6. Reduced personal accomplishment	2.76	0.94	.09	-.65**	-.08	.13	.24*	(.80)	
7. Overall burnout	2.68	0.78	.41**	-.46**	-.43**	.82**	.73**	.60**	(.78)

Note: Scale reliabilities are noted on the diagonal. $^{**}p < .01$, $^{*}p < .05$, $^{+}p < .10$

Table 2: Results of hierarchical regression for burnout dimensions

	EE		DP		RPA		Burnout	
Variables	β	sR^2	β	sR^2	β	sR^2	β	sR^2
Step 1 (control variables)								
Age	-.04		.07		-.03		-.01	
Sex	.06		-.01		-.02		.02	
Organizational level	-.07		-.05		.15		.01	
Step 2								
Perceived role conflict (PRC)	.39***	.12	.02		.01		.25***	.05
Political skill (PS)	-.09		-.21*	.04	-.58***	.32	-.38***	.14
Perceived organizational support (POS)	-.27**	.06	-.33**	.09	.03		-.27***	.06
Step 3 (interaction terms)								
PRC **X** PS	.07		.05		.13*	.02	.03	
PRC **X** POS	.13*	.02	-.04		.03		.07	
Step 1								
Adjusted R^2	.02		.01		.03		.01	
Step 2								
Adjusted R^2	.29***		.18***		.33***		.35***	
ΔR^2	.29***		.18***		.33***		.35***	
Step 3								
Adjusted R^2	.31***		.18***		.35***		.35***	
ΔR^2	.02*		.01		.02*		.01	

Note. Beta weights are controlled for all other variables. EE – emotional exhaustion, DP – depersonalization, and RPA – reduced personal accomplishment. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$