

An Integrative Model of Entitlement Beliefs

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Abstract Entitlement is frequently cited as a pressing managerial challenge in contemporary organizations, but the extant research on this topic has been inconsistent, vague, and incomplete. In response, this paper presents an integrative model of entitlement beliefs. Specifically, prior research across multiple disciplines is synthesized to offer an integrative conceptualization of entitlement beliefs, which is distinguished from trait entitlement. This synthesis forms the conceptual foundation for a theoretical model that specifies antecedents to entitlement beliefs, and the proximal and distal outcomes associated with these beliefs. Theoretical and practical implications for managing entitlement beliefs more effectively are discussed.

Key words Entitlement · Conflict · State · Trait

Perhaps one of the most frustrating contemporary organizational challenges is effectively managing individuals who exhibit a sense of entitlement. The popular business press abounds with accounts of managers venting their frustration with employees who appear to have inflated beliefs regarding the outcomes they are due (e.g., Alsop 2008; Wellner 2004; Zaslow 2007). While many of these writings are focused on workers from the Millennial generation, the pejorative “entitlement” label has also been applied to corporate executives (Fowler and Goldberg 2003; Samuelson 2003), professional athletes (Brennan 2010), and those associated with academic institutions (e.g., students (Fillion 2006; Roosevelt 2009), parents of student-athletes (Edds 2003), and college graduates entering the workforce (“Generation ‘why?’,” 2008)). The entitlement phenomenon does not appear to be unique to the US, as this term has been invoked as a prominent source of conflict over health care benefits offered to Canadian employees (Clay 2007), employee benefits and perks for Indian research and development professionals (Chaturvedi 2012), and even the response to the current economic crisis sweeping through European countries such as Greece, Italy, and

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France (“Europe’s entitlement reckoning,” 2011). Yet, the critical nature of this problem does not rest in its prevalence as much as the deleterious consequences with which it has been associated, including greed, corruption, and in some cases, organizational demise (Samuelson 2003). Managing “entitled” employees more effectively might be facilitated by research into the causes and dynamics of entitlement beliefs.

Fortunately, the concept of entitlement has received scholarly attention from several academic disciplines. This phenomenon has also been examined across cultures (see Table 1). However, it has only more recently been examined as a scientific construct, and extant work in this area has been inconsistent, vague, and incomplete. Therefore, the current research synthesizes prior scholarly perspectives to generate an integrative model of entitlement beliefs to guide future research. Toward that end, the following sections review how entitlement has been discussed in various academic disciplines, and draw from these perspectives to develop a model of entitlement beliefs.

Scholarly Perspectives on Entitlement

The social sciences have long been aware of people “looking out for number one,” so it is not surprising that a number of fields have explored the concept of entitlement. One recent effort to integrate these perspectives for use within the management field was undertaken by Naumann *et al.* (2002). These authors argued that while entitlement is often discussed as a relevant concept in many academic disciplines (each of which varies somewhat in its conceptualization), systematic study had been hindered due to the lack of developing entitlement as a scientific construct. This is because some degree of consensus must be reached on the defining features of entitlement to construct a nomological network that facilitates and guides theory building and empirical testing. Given that entitlement appears to play a pivotal role in the formation and evaluation of employee expectations, a more precise understanding of this process is warranted in order to enhance the efficacy of approaches to manage these expectations.

Accordingly, Naumann *et al.* (2002) included views on entitlement from legal, philosophy, political science, marketing, and anthropology disciplines, and identified a common defining element of entitlement as what individuals perceive they deserve. Briefly, legal scholars view entitlement as one’s legal rights (and as such, cannot be denied without due process) (Black 1990); philosophers similarly view entitlement as referring to one’s inalienable rights such as life and liberty (Nozick 1974); political scientists refer to individuals being entitled to the free expression and self-determination inherent in a democratic form of government (Franck 1992); marketing scholars have emphasized the importance of customer expectations (Kristensen *et al.* 1999); and anthropologists have asserted the entitlement of endangered indigenous people to political power (Carroll 1994).

While these perspectives all share the view that entitlements are predetermined due to certain norms or one’s status as a human being, Naumann *et al.* (2002) proceeded to review work from

Table 1 Selected Entitlement Research: Location of Sample by Country.

Reference	Country
Campbell <i>et al.</i> (2004)	US
De Cremer (2003)	The Netherlands
Feather (2003)	Australia
Lewis and Smithson (2001)	UK, Ireland, Portugal, Sweden, Norway
Maconachie and Goodwin (2010)	Australia

others suggesting a conception of entitlement tied to individual contribution or achievement (e.g., Friedman 1962; Rawls 1971) and concluded this view constitutes a second dimension of the entitlement construct (which they referred to as reciprocity).

Naumann *et al.* (2002) made a compelling argument for the importance of developing the construct of entitlement and began to integrate the nuances of entitlement discussed in the fields they covered. They also began the work of positing other constructs in its nomological network, as well as hypothesized outcomes. Unfortunately, two key fields (i.e., personality psychology and social psychology) were not included in their review, even though researchers in these areas had begun the work of construct development and empirical testing.

More recently, Fisk (2010) included research from these fields to focus on what she termed “excessive entitlement,” which she defined as a trait reflecting unjustified beliefs of deservingness. She proposed a model whereby this trait interacts with specific human resource practices related to staffing and performance management to predict counterproductive work behaviors (CWB). The trait conceptualization she presented is grounded firmly in prior research by personality psychologists. Specifically, personality psychologists view entitlement as a stable individual difference that – across situations – exerts a global impact on one’s thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors. Accordingly, trait entitlement is measured via an individual’s responses to a self-report scale (e.g., Campbell *et al.* 2004; Raskin and Terry 1988). The earliest work on entitlement in personality psychology is rooted in the narcissism literature, and it is considered a core component of Narcissistic Personality Disorder (American Psychiatric Association 1994). Personality psychologists are also concerned with how entitlement beliefs are associated with negative outcomes; studies have found that entitlement is correlated with lower accommodation, less empathy and perspective taking, less respect for others, selfishness, and even aggressive behavior (Campbell *et al.* 2004). Accordingly, Fisk posited that excessive entitlement leads to CWB.

While Fisk’s (2010) review also included relevant research from social psychology, a key distinction in the conceptualization of entitlement in this field was not incorporated into her work. Briefly, due to the interest social psychologists have in understanding how individuals evaluate others to make allocation decisions, the concepts of deservingness and entitlement have been extensively studied. In this vein, Feather (1999a) acknowledges that these two terms are similar in meaning and often used interchangeably. But a more careful analysis argues for a distinction between these two terms, such that entitlement has to do with some ascribed status or quality of a person or some social contract or norms, while deservingness is based on what has been earned. Thus, in this analysis, “deservingness” is not a second dimension of entitlement as Naumann *et al.* (2002) argue, nor should it be conflated with entitlement (Fisk 2010); it is a separate construct altogether.

Finally, while both Naumann *et al.* (2002) and Fisk (2010) reviewed how entitlement has primarily been examined up to this point in the management literature – in relation to equity sensitivity – key insight from this literature was not integrated into their conceptualizations. Because the fields of social psychology and management have made significant contributions to studying entitlement as a scientific construct yet were either neglected or not fully incorporated by prior efforts to synthesize entitlement research, it is essential to describe in more detail how each of these perspectives can augment and refine our understanding of the entitlement construct.

Social Psychology

A long and venerable stream of research within social psychology has dealt extensively with how individuals evaluate others. This has given rise to research that studies – from the observer’s perspective of the actor – entitlement and deservingness. While it is true that

scholars in many disciplines (including social psychology) have considered these terms synonymous and used them interchangeably (e.g., Major 1994) and even used one of these terms in service of defining the other, this approach reveals a critical lack of semantic precision (Feather 1999a, b). Specifically, deservingness refers explicitly to contingent outcomes; that is, deservingness connotes some action or (de)merit of individuals that gives rise to commensurate outcomes (Feather 1999a). Furthermore, these outcomes can be positive or negative. Entitlement, however, more directly speaks to “an external [to the actor] framework involving rights, rules, and social norms” (Feather 2003, p. 367). The basis for entitlement may derive from a tacit understanding of social norms or formally prescribed rules, laws, and rights. Therefore, a key distinction between these terms exists in psychological meaning, specifically in the locus of causality and controllability (Weiner 1986): deservingness is a product of what one has internally and controllably earned or achieved, whereas entitlement refers to an external prescriptive frame of reference that is independent of individual actions and due to causes beyond individual control. This distinction has also been made by legal and social theorists (Feinberg 1970; A. Heath 1976). For example, an invalid might be considered entitled to government aid, whereas a student deserves the high or low grade received based on course performance (Steil 1994). Furthermore, unlike deservingness, entitlement is consistently used only in reference to positive (not negative) outcomes. Finally, chronology plays an important role: students must earn certain grades to obtain an academic degree (a matter of deservingness); but once that degree is earned, it confers upon the recipient “all the honors, rights, and privileges thereunto appertaining” (a matter of entitlement). A stream of empirical work by Feather (Feather 2003, 2008; Feather and Johnstone 2001) has provided evidence for the distinction between entitlement and deservingness.

Management

Equity sensitivity research (Huseman *et al.* 1985; 1987) is predicated on the basis of observations that individuals differ in their reactions to inequity, and thus offers the potential to enhance the utility of equity theory. Equity theory predicts how individuals will evaluate the fairness of outcomes they receive (Adams 1965). This evaluation occurs as individuals mentally calculate their ratio of outcomes (e.g., pay, promotions) to inputs (e.g., effort, performance-related achievements) to that of a referent other. While equity theory specifies that all individuals will prefer and be satisfied with equitable ratio comparisons, empirical research has indicated that individual differences exist (Huseman *et al.* 1985). Huseman *et al.* (1987) developed the construct of equity sensitivity to capture individuals’ degree of preference for inequitable states, although they expressed uncertainty on whether equity sensitivity is best understood as a trait or a state. Equity sensitivity was originally conceptualized and measured as a unidimensional construct, such that an individual might be considered benevolent (i.e., prefers underpayment inequity), equity sensitive (i.e., prefers equity) or entitled (i.e., prefers overpayment inequity). Subsequent conceptual and empirical work (Davison and Bing 2008; King *et al.* 1993; Sauley and Bedian 2000) now regards “entitled” to refer to individuals who “are more focused on the outcomes they receive than the inputs they contribute, and thus are more tolerant of over-reward and less tolerant of under-reward” (Davison and Bing 2008 132). In other words, being entitled is not so much a matter of preferring overpayment inequity (i.e., that one’s ratio of outcomes-to-inputs exceeds the referent’s), but rather a matter of predominant focus on obtaining valued outcomes and *neglecting* the inputs that give rise to those outcomes (i.e., no consideration of deservingness).

In summary, this expanded review suggests three key insights. First, entitlement is most appropriately understood as referring to outcomes associated with the quality or status of a person and/or prescribed via an external frame of reference such as rights, rules or norms (making them distinct from deservingness). Accordingly, *entitlement beliefs are defined here as an actor's beliefs regarding his/her rightful claim of privileges*. Secondly, these beliefs may or may not correspond to what objective observers deem to be the actor's rightful claim. Individuals may indeed be entitled to certain privileges (e.g., citizens in many countries are entitled to due process under the law), or their entitlement beliefs may exceed an objective observer's assessment (e.g., a student perceives a right to a high grade due to effort instead of quality: Roosevelt 2009). Third, entitlement beliefs might be due to both trait (i.e., stable individual difference) and state (i.e., malleable and can be altered depending on the rights, rules, or social norms governing the situation) influences (cf. Fisk 2010). If entitlement beliefs are to some extent malleable, it offers organizations much greater potential to effectively manage these beliefs (e.g., compared to simply seeking to avoid hiring applicants who appear to have high entitlement beliefs). Indeed, Naumann *et al.* (2002) cited several studies which appeared to assume that management generally desires to reduce employee entitlement beliefs (Becker and Huselid 1998; Heath *et al.* 1993; Kossek *et al.* 1998; Sturman *et al.* 1996); such a perspective rests on the premise that entitlement beliefs are malleable. However, reductions in employee entitlement beliefs as a result of management interventions have not been empirically established.

This review enables the development of a model of entitlement beliefs that specifies the major types of entitlement beliefs, the antecedents of these beliefs, and the outcomes associated with them. An overview of the proposed relationships appears in Figure 1, and the following sections expand on each respective component of the model, beginning with entitlement beliefs.

Entitlement Beliefs

The literature reviewed above indicates that some fields have approached entitlement from a purely descriptive perspective. For example, social psychologists offer a somewhat detached view on how observers conclude what actors are entitled to (versus what they deserve).

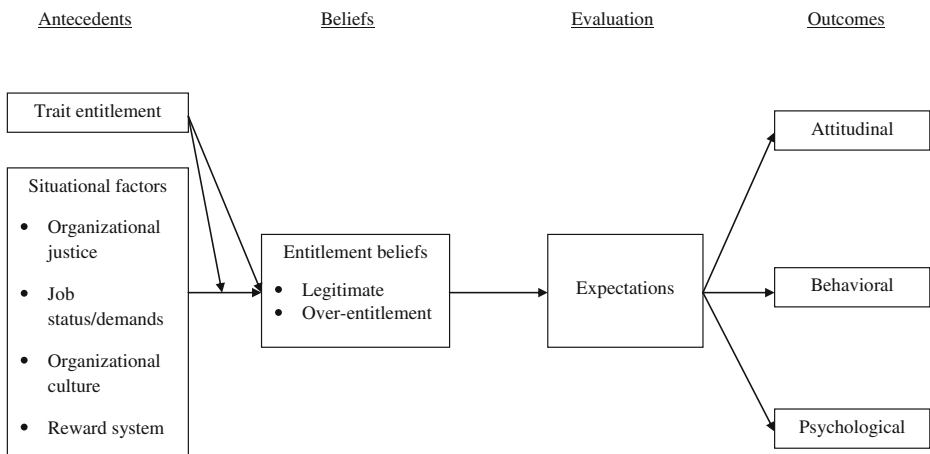


Figure 1 A model of entitlement beliefs.

Clearly, much of this literature has an objective orientation (such that “entitlement” is not a pejorative label). In short, there are legitimate entitlements accruing to individuals within organizations. Legitimate entitlements in organizations might include due process in disciplinary actions, equal employment opportunity in selection and other major aspects of the employment relationship, and so on. In these cases, such privileges are due to one’s human status and/or norms and rules that guide decisions apart from any individual merit. Many organizations have recognized the compelling interest they have in conveying to their employees what their legitimate entitlements are and have no apparent problem with employees perceiving and acting in pursuit of these entitlements (for an exception, see Maconachie and Goodwin (2010)). Therefore, any complete articulation of the entitlement construct must recognize that (despite popular usage) legitimate beliefs regarding due privileges belong in this conceptual domain.

However, when many business press writers (and managers) complain about a “sense of entitlement” they are actually referring to what we may call “over-entitlement” (following C. Heath *et al.* 1993; cf. Fisk 2010 (“excessive entitlement”)). In this case, that to which an actor asserts a rightful claim exceeds what is deemed appropriate (based on one’s human status or rules/norms) by an objective observer (whose assessment is not susceptible to the self-serving biases of the actor) (Fisk 2010; C. Heath *et al.* 1993). The actor’s beliefs are skewed positively, and his/her actions are viewed by others as inappropriate, offensive, and even disruptive.

Therefore, entitlement beliefs are conceptualized as a matter of degree. In the case of legitimate entitlement, an actor’s beliefs regarding due privileges *are consistent with* standards based on one’s human status and/or norms and rules (as judged by an objective observer); in the case of over-entitlement, an actor’s beliefs regarding due privileges *exceed* these standards. The following section explicates the factors that give rise to entitlement beliefs, and (in the case of situational factors) describes how these factors contribute to both legitimate entitlement beliefs and over-entitlement.

Antecedents of Entitlement Beliefs

Many researchers (particularly within personality psychology) have approached entitlement solely from a trait-based perspective (which is referred to hereafter as trait entitlement). From this standpoint, entitlement simply describes an individual characteristic, rather than how situational factors might influence a person’s beliefs. The current research separates trait entitlement from entitlement beliefs, and proceeds to cover other (more situational) factors that are also likely to give rise to entitlement beliefs.

Trait Entitlement

As reviewed earlier, trait entitlement refers to a global sense of due privileges that is stable across time and situations. It is conceptualized as a feature of one’s personality, and as such, it is not regarded as very malleable. However, recent research has indicated that entitlement can also be usefully regarded as a state (Zitek *et al.* 2010). Here, trait entitlement is separated from entitlement beliefs (which are situation-specific). That is, one can form entitlement beliefs (i.e., a state of entitlement) with respect to a particular situation regardless of his/her level of trait entitlement. Nonetheless, one’s dispositional tendencies or traits (e.g., self-efficacy, self-esteem,

goal orientation) directly influence corresponding situation-specific states (Head and Lindsey 1983; Payne *et al.* 2007). Therefore, the higher one is in trait entitlement, the higher (i.e., more favorable) one's entitlement beliefs are likely to be (such that over-entitlement beliefs are especially likely for individuals high in trait entitlement). The distinction made here between entitlement as a trait versus a state is similar to other constructs used in organizational behavior (e.g., predisposition to trust is a personality trait regarding how much an individual trusts others in general, which is distinct from and predicts trust in a specific trustee: Mayer *et al.* 1995).

Proposition 1 *The level of an individual's trait entitlement is positively related to that individual's entitlement beliefs.*

Because entitlement beliefs can be formed regardless of one's level of trait entitlement, it is necessary to explicate what types of situational factors in organizations influence beliefs regarding due privileges. The following section describes these factors.

Organizational Justice

The concept of entitlement has a long history within the study of fairness in organizations, going back to seminal work in areas such as relative deprivation (a social comparison theory dealing with how individuals evaluate their outcomes). Deutsch (1985) argued that a violation of entitlement arouses feelings of injustice (with this sense of injustice corresponding to the degree of relative deprivation). Similarly, other research (Crosby 1976, 1982) has posited entitlement as an antecedent to resentment over relative deprivation. What individuals perceive as fair is often very subjective and egocentric (such that (un)favorable outcomes are more likely to be seen as (un)fair). Komorita and Chertkoff (1973) found that individuals have a tendency to adopt an allocation norm that provides them with the greatest advantage. Thus, whereas one relationship partner might have made more significant contributions (and argue for a division of resources that provides equity), the other partner might assert that success would not have been possible without his/her involvement and thus argue for outcomes distributed equally (i.e., cognitively framing his/her due outcomes as an entitlement). On a societal scale, some researchers have posited that the creation of wealth and norms of materialism have led to expanding conceptions of universal rights (e.g., Derber 1978). In any event, whereas entitlement may lead to perceptions of injustice, it is also likely that facets of organizational justice contribute to entitlement beliefs in certain ways.

Legitimate Entitlement In terms of legitimate entitlement, individuals care about distributive justice (the fairness of outcomes), procedural justice (the fairness of procedures to guide outcome allocations), and interactional justice (the fairness of interpersonal treatment from the one allocating outcomes). As a standard of distributive justice, equality specifies that outcomes should be granted on an egalitarian basis to all members of a given group (Deutsch 1975). Even according to equity theory (a theory of distributive justice that evaluates outcomes based on merit: Adams 1965) individuals perceive a legitimate entitlement to the same outcomes accruing to others who contribute the same degree of legitimate inputs. Outcomes awarded on irrelevant criteria (such as gender or race) are a violation of one's legitimate entitlement. External frameworks such as wage legislation (e.g., the Equal Pay Act) and organizational pay practices (e.g., pay grades) seek to assure individual entitlements in this way. The recently passed Lily Ledbetter Act (which enhances protections against gender-based wage bias)

was inspired by a case in which a female manager for Goodyear was repeatedly paid less than her male counterparts. The 1998 court case against Texaco, where many minority employees were systematically paid less than the minimum for their pay grade stands as another particularly egregious example of violated legitimate entitlement (Labich 1999).

Individuals may also be due legitimate entitlements on the basis of procedural justice (Leventhal *et al.* 1980; Thibaut and Walker 1975). Organizations can take measures to enhance the accuracy and acceptability of their outcome allocations by promoting procedural justice (Cole and Latham 1997). For example, disciplinary procedures often contain elements of due process, such as employee voice, consistent application to all employees, and the ability to appeal (Bohlander and Snell 2004). Similarly, employees are sensitive to the quality of interpersonal treatment they receive from the decision maker, such as the degree of information given to support the decision, and the degree of social sensitivity with which it is provided (Bies and Moag 1986; Colquitt 2001). In short, employees expect to be given adequate explanations in a way that treats them with human dignity. Employees are more likely to accept even unfavorable outcomes when procedural and interactional justice are high (Lind *et al.* 2000; Tomlinson and Bockanic 2009). Once again, in these cases, there is an external framework that extends privileges apart from any internal and controllable aspects of the individual; rules and norms are expected to be applied to all individuals equally.

Over-Entitlement Recent research has found that when individuals feel treated unfairly, this may heighten their sense of entitlement (Zitek *et al.* 2010). Departing from the psychological tradition of conceptualizing entitlement as a trait, Zitek and her colleagues manipulated feelings of unfair treatment. Their results suggest that when individuals feel treated unfairly, they come to believe that what they have already endured entitles them to avoid any further inconvenience or suffering. In turn, entitlement beliefs lead victimized individuals to engage in more selfish behaviors, and this effect can even cross domains (such that being wronged in one domain can invoke selfish behavior in a completely different domain). For example, participants in Zitek *et al.*'s study who were unable to win extra money in a computer game because they were led to believe there was a glitch in the program made more selfish money allocations in a separate, subsequent task.

Job Status and Demands

Job status refers to the level of prestige a job has within an organization (e.g., position in the organization's hierarchy), whereas job demands refer to the degree and type of stressors faced by the job incumbent. While jobs of higher status are generally accompanied by higher demands, there are jobs that are highly demanding, but not usually regarded as high in status (e.g., child care worker). For this reason, these are considered separately.

Legitimate Entitlement In many organizations, there are norms and practices that illustrate the old adage, "rank has its privileges." By virtue of one's status in the organization, rewards might be granted that are not contingent on the level of individual performance. Full-time employees generally receive more (and more generous) benefits than their part-time counterparts; benefits are granted based on job status, and not individual performance. Perks such as a special parking place near the entrance might be conferred on the basis of job status, such that all who have the same status get the same entitlements. Indeed, some research indicates that some types of benefits are perceived by employees as entitlements or rights

(Weathington and Tetrick 2000). These entitlements are provided to offset the less desirable aspects of the work (a compensating differential) or to facilitate greater focus on work that entails greater responsibilities (Milkovich *et al.* 2011). Thus, jobs with higher demands may relate to higher legitimate entitlement beliefs.

Violations of legitimate entitlement may arise when employers engage in practices that misclassify workers as temporary workers or independent contractors rather than common law employees in order to avoid provision of employee benefits (Kondrasuk *et al.* 2002). When such nontraditional workers are performing identical work under identical circumstances (e.g., the company exerts control over what the worker does and how that work is to be performed, their tenure is indefinite, they work alongside traditional employees, they have the same security clearances, etc.), court rulings have established a legitimate entitlement to the same benefits common law employees receive (for a review, see Kondrasuk *et al.* 2002).

Over-Entitlement One's job status may also lead to over-entitlement, as higher status heightens the natural tendency individuals have to engage in social comparisons (i.e., they evaluate their opinions and abilities in relation to a target they deem to be similar to themselves: Festinger 1954). Because this social comparison is tied to one's feelings of self-worth (Collins 1996), there is a tendency to select a target that is actually superior to him/her in some way (for a review, see Harris *et al.* 2008). Most individuals perceive themselves to be above average (Alicke *et al.* 1995), and this appears to facilitate such "upward comparisons" because of greater perceived relevance (Harris *et al.* 2008). Due to such biased perceptions and selective (i.e., favorable) upward comparisons, individuals are naturally inclined to perceive their entitlements as more than what the organization intends (C. Heath *et al.* 1993); executives in particular are likely to select other, more elite executives as a standard of comparison (while neglecting referents who are actually more similar to themselves), which leads them to "expect and negotiate ever-higher rewards... to match or exceed those of other elites" (Chen *et al.* 2009, p. 324). To the extent that those with high job status interact with others of higher status more often than those with lower status, the accoutrements of these more powerful positions become more salient and raise the belief that they are also entitled to the same privileges.

In addition to social comparison processes, it appears that individuals have a cognitive schema of what it means to be a "leader," such that when they are formally designated to have that role, their expectations of due privileges increase accordingly. As DeCremer, van Duk, and Folmer (2009, p. 109) indicate, "merely referring to an individual as a 'leader' may be enough for him or her to benefit him- or herself at the expense of others." As mentioned above, job status may contribute to legitimate entitlement insofar as leaders often are due greater privileges due to external frameworks acknowledging their substantive roles. That said, when the *only* differentiation between a "leader" and a "follower" is this specific role nomenclature, status is more illusory than real; any additional privileges due on this basis constitute over-entitlement. A series of social dilemma experiments by DeCremer and colleagues (De Cremer 2003; De Cremer and van Dijk 2005; Stouten *et al.* 2005; Van Dijk and De Cremer 2006) revealed that participants given identical information and instructions except for whether they were labeled a "leader" or "follower" exhibited this trend, such that "those labeled as leaders ... consistently take more than those labeled as followers" (De Cremer *et al.* 2009, p. 110), and that this trend is due to greater perceptions of entitlement. This over-entitlement tendency among those labeled as leaders was found to be mitigated when (1) they perceived the need to justify their allocation choices to others, (2) they possessed a prosocial value orientation, and (3) they were elected (as opposed to appointed) leaders (De Cremer *et al.* 2009).

De facto, high job demands involve very high levels and unique types of stressors. These may include lack of control, interpersonal conflict, organizational constraints, role ambiguity, role conflict, and workload (Jex and Beehr 1991). While managers often use rationalizations to cope with the unpleasant and exacting demands of their jobs, sometimes these rationalizations enable and encourage behaviors that threaten the organization's well-being (Anand *et al.* 2004). For example, individuals may make exemplary contributions to the organization, and as a result conclude that they are entitled to indulge in a certain degree of deviant behavior with impunity (Anand *et al.* 2004; Hollander 1964). Similarly, enduring hardships on the job can lead one to rationalize that his sacrifices entitle him to more than what is appropriate according to organizational norms and rules. Furthermore, high job demands tax cognitive resources, rendering one more susceptible to self-serving biases that facilitate over-entitlement.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture refers to the shared assumptions, beliefs and values of an organization that underlie its identity (Denison 1996; Schein 1985). Strong organizational cultures are a powerful influence on individual beliefs regarding what is appropriate in their organizations (Trevino 1986).

Legitimate Entitlement Organizations often strive to cultivate norms that reinforce their culture, and some of these norms deal explicitly with the types of privileges their members can expect. Southwest Airlines, for example, is known for cultivating a culture that embraces fun as well as warm and cooperative working relationships. Organizations with stronger cultures have a greater degree of consensus regarding what their values and norms are (O'Reilly and Chatman 1996). Accordingly, organizations with strong cultures convey more explicit and unambiguous signals regarding what entitlements employees are due.

Over-Entitlement It must also be acknowledged that strong organizational cultures can be a liability, especially when those cultures embrace values and norms that are unethical and/or illegal (Anand *et al.* 2004; Raghavan *et al.* 2002; Trevino 1986). Even a Sunday school teacher can cook the books in her accounting job when the organizational culture facilitates such behavior (Pulliam 2003). Some researchers have explicitly drawn the connection between unethical organizational cultures and entitlement-related behaviors. For example, Duchon and Drake (2009, p. 304) describe Enron as having “developed an organizational culture possessed of a powerful sense of entitlement where lavish, even wasteful spending was seen as not merely normal, but necessary. Such spending was necessary to the extent it allowed the organization to protect and preserve its identity.” Seeing everyone else in one's organization exhibiting over-entitlement is likely to fuel one's own over-entitlement, as such beliefs are regarded as normal within this context. However, this does not change the fact that such an organization operates in a larger social context that is governed by the rule of law; objective observers perceive over-entitlement when they witness those in organizations acting as if they are above the law.

Reward System

The reward system refers to characteristics of the compensation and benefits given to employees, such as the standardization of benefits, compensation delivery practices, and pay structure policies.

Legitimate Entitlement Employee benefits programs generally provide the same benefits or menu of benefit options to all employees (although sometimes more benefits are provided for full time than part time employees, and certain perks may accompany higher-status jobs, as mentioned earlier). Indeed, Section 125 of the Internal Revenue Code includes a nondiscrimination clause whereby benefits in a cafeteria plan may not give preferential treatment to highly compensated and/or key employees (Martocchio 2011). Benefits are not contingent upon performance or individual merit. They are simply available to employees based on their membership in the organization (Milkovich *et al.* 2011). In addition, the benefits that are provided and the way in which they are administered are regulated by federal and state legislation (Milkovich *et al.* 2011). Taken together, the organization's benefits program and the relevant laws governing their administration form an external framework determining what benefits an employee is entitled to receive (independent of his/her performance).

Over-Entitlement While the amount of pay is relevant to entitlement beliefs (alluded to earlier in the section on organizational justice), the basis on which compensation is delivered can also significantly affect entitlement beliefs. Many pay practices have been criticized for the way in which they breed over-entitlement among employees (Fisk 2010; Spitzer 1996; Wellner 2004). Pay practices that depart from a pay-for-performance philosophy (e.g., failing to separate bonuses from regular paychecks, failing to administer incentive pay contingent on performance only, pay increases based on seniority, across the board "merit" increases) can affect entitlement beliefs such that employees come to believe that the extra pay is their rightful claim. This emphasizes how critical it is for organizations to base rewards on performance only (Vroom 1964), such that rewards are regarded as a matter of deservingness, not entitlement. Accordingly, many organizations are paying closer attention to the proper administration of merit programs, or even supplanting merit pay with lump sum bonuses. Unlike merit pay (which permanently increases base pay), lump sum bonuses must be re-earned each period (Milkovich *et al.* 2011).

Organizations also develop pay structure policies based on their internal alignment strategy (i.e., how they wish to determine the relative value of work performed in their organization). Some pay structures range from being highly hierarchical to highly egalitarian (Milkovich *et al.* 2011). Those that are more hierarchical are characterized by an emphasis on individual performance. This tends to produce a very competitive environment, and tends to reduce teamwork and cooperation. The emphasis it places on individual achievement may lead to over-entitlement as a means of coping with the stress inherent in a competitive system. In a more competitive system, individuals may feel more pressure to "look out for number one" as they are evaluated based on their own achievements alone. They may be relatively more inclined to perceive higher entitlements as a means of self-affirmation and self-worth in competitive environments that are inherently threatening to one's psychological well-being.

Proposition 2 *Organizational justice, job status and demands, organizational culture, and the reward system influence an individual's entitlement beliefs.*

The Interaction Between Trait Entitlement and Situational Factors

Finally, it is predicted that trait entitlement will moderate (i.e., intensify) relationships between situational factors and entitlement beliefs. Differences in entitlement beliefs be-

tween those high and low in trait entitlement should become more pronounced due to the nature of these situational factors. In addition, individuals with higher trait entitlement are more likely to generate over-entitlement beliefs based on specific situational factors that serve to influence perceptions of due privileges. In fact, this argument is analogous to theory and empirical research on the trait-state relationship in the anxiety literature (Eysenck and Eysenck 1985).

Proposition 3 *The level of an individual's trait entitlement moderates the influence of situational factors on entitlement beliefs.*

The following section considers the most proximal outcome of entitlement beliefs: the evaluation of privileges received in relation to these beliefs regarding what is due.

Proximal Outcome: Evaluation

Once individuals have developed beliefs regarding their entitlements, these beliefs are essentially expectations that will be evaluated to see if they are met by the organization. This is because entitlement beliefs are largely informed by an external framework of norms and rules that provide the basis for what privileges one can expect. Because the results of this evaluation affect key organizationally-relevant outcomes such as satisfaction, commitment, performance, and turnover (reviewed in more detail in the following section), it is important to explore this evaluation process in more detail.

The most prominent stream of research into met expectations deals with organizational newcomers. Simply stated, met expectations are associated with beneficial attitudinal and behavioral outcomes (Greenhaus *et al.* 1983; Tannebaum *et al.* 1991; Wanous *et al.* 1992), and unmet expectations are associated with harmful attitudinal and behavioral outcomes (Porter and Steers 1973; Van Maanen 1975; Wanous *et al.* 1992). More specifically, newcomers often enter organizations with unrealistically high expectations, and when they encounter a reality that is significantly less desirable, they experience “reality shock”: feelings of resentment and betrayal that reduce commitment, satisfaction, performance, and intention to remain (Wanous *et al.* 1992). This accounts for the use of realistic job previews (RJPs) that explicitly reduce high expectations by accurately depicting both the benefits and drawbacks of the job before the newcomer enters the organization. Such RJPs are generally effective in mitigating the risks associated with unmet expectations (Wanous *et al.* 1992). As a result, RJPs have been suggested as a strategy to prevent over-entitlement (Fisk 2010; C. Heath *et al.* 1993).

When entitlement beliefs are the basis for expectations, a disconfirmation model of unmet expectations is most appropriate (Brown *et al.* 2008). The disconfirmation model specifies that negative outcomes result from situations where outcomes fall short of expectations (unmet expectations), and positive outcomes result from outcomes exceeding expectations (overmet expectations). Since the focus of entitlement beliefs centers on the perception of due privileges, these outcomes are highly desired by the individual. Accordingly, positive discrepancies (i.e., overmet expectations) will not be viewed negatively (i.e., “You can’t have too much of a good thing”), and in fact, are likely to further fuel over-entitlement beliefs (cf. Fisk 2010).

Furthermore, legitimate entitlement is more likely to result in met expectations than unmet expectations. Organizations take care to manage expectations (often by lowering them so they can hopefully deliver experiences that satisfy them). Crafting rules and creating norms that convey due privileges to employees provides a system that should usually deliver

these same privileges. On the other hand, over-entitlement is more likely to result in unmet expectations than met expectations. Because over-entitlement entails one's perceptions of due privileges as exceeding what is deemed appropriate by an objective observer, it is more likely that the organization will fail to satisfy his/her over-entitlement beliefs.

Proposition 4 *An individual's entitlement beliefs motivate an evaluation of the extent to which his/her expectations are met.*

Building on the met expectations literature, and prior research on entitlement, the next section considers the likely outcomes of the extent to which outcomes are met in relation to entitlement beliefs.

Distal Outcomes

Drawing upon prior research on met expectations and narcissism, distal outcomes of entitlement beliefs fall into three categories: attitudinal, behavioral, and psychological. Because entitlement beliefs appear to be most salient and important to managers when employees perceive that their entitlements have not been delivered, these outcomes will be discussed in relation to unmet expectations only.

Attitudinal Outcomes

Meta-analytic studies in the met expectations literature indicate that unmet expectations are associated with lower job satisfaction and commitment (Wanous *et al.* 1992). Based on the disconfirmation model of met expectations, satisfaction is a function of the degree to which expectations are exceeded or unfulfilled. When experiences fall short of one's expectations (of what is rightfully his/hers), dissatisfaction should result. Harvey and Martinko (2009) empirically confirmed a link between entitlement and a self-serving attribution style, which in turn negatively related to job satisfaction. Furthermore, because entitlement beliefs consist of due privileges based on one's status as a human being and/or an external framework of norms or rules, unmet expectations (i.e., experiences that fall short of perceived entitlements) should result in cynicism (cf. Wanous *et al.* 2000). The organization's failure to deliver what is perceived as rightfully due to the employee is posited to engender the employee's distrust in the organization's intentions. Twenge (2006) documents the generational rise in cynicism beliefs, which she attributes to the narcissistic expectations of the "Me Generation" (which she defines as those born after 1970) that have largely gone unfulfilled.

Proposition 5 *The degree to which expectations are unmet is negatively associated with job satisfaction and positively associated with cynicism.*

Behavioral Outcomes

Several work-related behaviors are also posited as distal outcomes of entitlement beliefs. Meta-analytic studies have documented the negative effect of unmet expectations on job performance (e.g., Wanous *et al.* 1992). It is also predicted that unmet expectations will

result in decreased citizenship and increased deviant behaviors. Models of job performance, organizational citizenship, and deviance are grounded in a social exchange framework (Blau 1964), whereby employees reciprocate the treatment they have received from the organization. Concluding that the organization has failed to provide the (perceived) obligated entitlements will reduce the motivation to contribute to the organization's success via in-role performance and OCBs (Blakely *et al.* 2005); it also may increase the motivation for retribution via deviant behaviors (Bennett *et al.* 2005; Fisk 2010; Harvey and Harris 2010). The psychological contract literature, which differs from entitlement because of its inclusion of "consideration" (a conception of deservingness due to its emphasis on mutual obligations), has produced findings consistent with this predicted pattern (e.g., Bordia *et al.* 2008; Hao *et al.* 2007; Kickul and Lester 2001). More directly, empirical research has confirmed that narcissists respond more aggressively and exhibit more antisocial behavior when criticized (Bushman and Baumeister 1998; Campbell *et al.* 2004; Twenge and Campbell 2009). Another recent study found that entitlement predicted relational conflict with one's supervisor (Harvey and Martinko 2009); relational conflict can inhibit performance (De Dreu and Weingart 2003) and may also give rise to interpersonal deviance. Thus, entitlement beliefs give rise to conflict as the employee is likely to take steps to argue for or demand that to which he/she feels entitled.

Unmet expectations can also inhibit acceptance of organizational change efforts. Heath *et al.* (1993) contend that individuals resist changes that fail to deliver their perceived entitlements. This is especially likely when employees have over-entitlement beliefs, and is harmful to organizations insofar as these beliefs (and the resistance they produce) limit the ability of organizations to adapt to their environment. Finally, unmet expectations can lead to both turnover intentions (Wanous *et al.* 1992; cf. also Harvey and Martinko 2009) and behavior (Pearson 1995).

Proposition 6 *The degree to which expectations are unmet is negatively associated with job performance and citizenship behaviors, and positively associated with deviant behavior, resistance of organizational change, and turnover.*

Psychological Outcomes

The last category of outcomes to be considered is psychological outcomes. There is some preliminary evidence suggesting that undelivered entitlements can lead to depression and anxiety (Levine 2006; Twenge 2006). Twenge's (2006) study of Generation Me documented a ten-fold increase in major depression relative to those born before 1915 (who lived through the Great Depression and two world wars); she also confirmed large increases in anxiety relative to previous generations. These types of psychological outcomes are often associated with insomnia, intestinal problems, panic attacks, low life satisfaction, and even suicide-related cognitions and behaviors. Whereas Twenge's analysis focused on generational differences (primarily in relation to narcissism), the current research posits that these types of outcomes are more likely to the extent that entitlement beliefs reflect over-entitlement and are driven by trait entitlement. That is, when individuals consistently have unrealistically high expectations across all facets of their lives, they are likely to chronically experience unmet expectations (as reality will rarely deliver experiences that match such high expectations), and this aggregate reality shock will then be more likely to result in adverse psychological outcomes.

Proposition 7 *The degree to which expectations are unmet is positively associated with depression and anxiety.*

Discussion of the Theoretical Model

An excessive “sense of entitlement” is regularly lamented by a number of commentators, as evidenced in part by LexisNexis searches of major newspapers that find increasing references to this term (Campbell *et al.* 2004; Harvey and Martinko 2009). While the management literature has indeed begun to address a concern of obvious importance to practitioners (Rynes 2007), a review of this work reveals that it is currently inconsistent (i.e., with some researchers conflating entitlement with deservingness, while others separate the two constructs), vague (i.e., regarding the distinction between legitimate and over-entitlement), and incomplete (i.e., due to the predominant emphasis on trait entitlement to the virtual neglect of state entitlement beliefs). This calls for an integrative model of entitlement beliefs.

Developing the conceptualization of entitlement beliefs is the most central focus of this model. This model separates trait entitlement from entitlement beliefs to clarify the difference between a stable aspect of personality and subsequent beliefs regarding due rights and privileges in a specific situation. This also facilitates the identification of situational factors that also give rise to entitlement beliefs, and how these situational factors might be moderated (i.e., intensified) by trait entitlement. This paper also adopts the logical and linguistic precision developed by Feather (1999, 2003) that isolates entitlement as separate from deservingness, and emphasizes the role of an external framework (such as social norms, formal rules and laws) in determining due privileges. It further clarifies that entitlement beliefs may be perfectly legitimate (i.e., accurate), or constitute “over-entitlement” (i.e., exceeding what is deemed appropriate by an objective observer). This distinction is important, as the degree of entitlement beliefs is predicted to differ as a function of both main and interactive effects of trait entitlement and situational factors. Further, situational factors might lead to either legitimate entitlement or over-entitlement, depending on how these factors are administered. The degree of entitlement beliefs is also predicted to produce different evaluations of met expectations by the actor. Finally, the model indicates that unmet expectations are more likely to result from over-entitlement than legitimate entitlement; in turn, these unmet expectations are associated with a variety of negative consequences for both the organization and *the holder of the entitlement belief him- or herself*.

Theoretical Implications

Some researchers have posited that entitlement beliefs may be malleable (C. Heath *et al.* 1993; Naumann *et al.* 2002), some studies have been conducted based on this assumption without testing it directly (Kossek *et al.* 1998; Sturman *et al.* 1996), and some preliminary evidence now exists that entitlement can be experimentally induced (Zitek *et al.* 2010). The framework developed here builds on this prior work to specify both individual (i.e., stable trait) and situational (i.e., malleable) influences on entitlement beliefs, and thus offers greater insight into the situational factors that give rise to entitlement beliefs. In this regard, this model is firmly established on prior theoretical frameworks (e.g., relative deprivation and organizational justice, social comparison), and extends this prior research to the domain of entitlement.

On a related note, this integrative model makes a distinction between entitlement expressed as a stable trait of an individual versus a malleable state (i.e., entitlement beliefs). This stands in marked contrast to the predominant view in the management literature that entitlement is a trait (Byrne *et al.* 2010; Fisk 2010; Harvey and Harris 2010; Harvey and Martinko 2009; Huseman *et al.* 1985, 1987). Here, it is argued that (1) trait entitlement is distinct from (yet predicts) entitlement beliefs, (2) various situational factors also predict entitlement beliefs, and (3) trait entitlement interacts with these situational factors in a way that intensifies entitlement beliefs. Disentangling trait influences, situational influences, and subsequent evaluative beliefs has led to major theoretical refinements in other areas of organizational behavior, such as job satisfaction (Judge *et al.* 1997), goal orientation (Payne *et al.* 2007), and trust (Mayer *et al.* 1995); these distinctions are argued to offer increased theoretical precision and clarity to the entitlement literature as well.

Furthermore, greater precision is inherent in clarifying that the “entitlement” domain is expressly not a matter of deservingness, even though individuals often use these two terms interchangeably. A prince might be entitled to the throne because of a monarchical form of government, but may not truly “deserve” it; similarly, an employee may deserve a promotion because of hard work yet not be considered “entitled” to it. A comprehensive review of the entitlement literature suggests that it is best to view entitlement beliefs as an actor’s beliefs regarding his/her rightful claim of privileges. These beliefs can further be clarified as either legitimate or excessive (building on the prior work of C. Heath *et al.* 1993). Heath *et al.* (1993) coined the term “over-entitlement” used here, but did not specify the difference between legitimate entitlement and over-entitlement and did not articulate how these two forms may differ in specific antecedents or outcomes. The current research specifies that the difference between these two forms is a matter of degree, such that legitimate entitlement beliefs are aligned with standards grounded in one’s human status and/or an external framework and over-entitlement beliefs exceed these standards (see also Fisk 2010). Compared to prior research, this model also provides more in-depth elaboration on what factors are associated with the development of both sets of beliefs (cf. Fisk 2010), as well as the proximal and distal outcomes associated with these beliefs.

Practical Implications

To the extent that the relationships in this model are empirically supported, there are a number of practical implications for managing entitlement beliefs in organizations more effectively. It is critical to understand that individuals respond to the world as they perceive it; the perceptions of any given employee are likely to differ in predictable ways from those of objective observers. Therefore, managers must clarify the basis on which valued outcomes will be distributed. Managers should explicitly articulate what are legitimate entitlements, and what outcomes are based on deservingness. Due to the biases employees tend to have, it would be helpful to “reality-check” such communication efforts by asking employees to verify their understanding. However, some caution may be warranted due to recent research suggesting that heightened supervisory communication, while helpful for those lower on trait entitlement, actually exacerbates negative reactions for those high in trait entitlement (Harvey and Harris 2010). It is also imperative to consistently enforce this distinction between what is legitimately an entitlement and what must be earned. Otherwise, managers may unwittingly ignite the very employee reactions they find

inappropriate, offensive, and disruptive – even among employees low in trait entitlement. In addition, managers cannot fully understand and predict entitlement-related attitudes and behaviors without a full understanding of the entitlement domain. While entitlement often has a pejorative connotation, some entitlement beliefs are indeed legitimate, and managers should strive to fully meet these legitimate expectations. Failure to meet expectations (according to the model described here) leads to the same deleterious outcomes regardless of whether entitlement beliefs are legitimate or excessive.

Another implication is that trait entitlement might be a helpful selection tool (Harvey and Martinko 2009), given its posited main and moderating (i.e., intensifying) effects on entitlement beliefs. Yet, the model offered here goes beyond merely implying the use of trait entitlement as a selection tool (i.e., screening out applicants scoring high in this trait), as it specifies a number of situational factors that employers can control more directly, and on an ongoing basis. To the extent that entitlement beliefs are malleable, it enhances the ability for organizations to manage these beliefs proactively. In fact, this model suggests that over-entitlement can not only be managed, but (to some extent) prevented to begin with (see also C. Heath *et al.* 1993).

Directions for Future Research

The model presented here also invites a number of avenues for further research. The most central agenda item in entitlement research is empirical testing of the proposed model. Such testing would ideally span several countries (as the bulk of extant research appears to be concentrated in the US) and test for cross-cultural differences (e.g., Lewis and Smithson 2001). Another issue involves the dynamics of external frameworks that are one perceived basis for entitlement beliefs. These frameworks can change over time (e.g., organizations can change their compensation systems, legal requirements change, etc.), and research is needed to understand whether and how employees adapt their entitlement beliefs. It may be that if external frameworks are seen as fundamentally unjust, they prompt action to remedy the injustice. Similarly, if proposed changes to external frameworks are suspected to reduce one's rightful claim to desired privileges, this may produce high resistance (C. Heath *et al.* 1993).

This model also echoes the position that entitlement beliefs are best assessed by objective observers (Fisk 2010; C. Heath *et al.* 1993), which implies that the optimal strategy to measure these beliefs is via observer-report (as opposed to self-report scales used to measure trait entitlement). Subsequent research is needed to develop and validate such measures. Finally, future research should also further explore observer reactions to those who exhibit legitimate entitlement beliefs versus over-entitlement (e.g., Hochwarter *et al.* 2010). Observers are likely to take offense at those who believe they are due excessive privileges. How does this affect conflict in the organization, the organization's reputation with these observers, and efforts to change entitlement programs or articulate them more clearly? What is the effect (if any) of observer reactions when they themselves are high in trait entitlement?

Conclusion

Entitlement beliefs among those in organizations are important to understand, as employees often react very negatively when these entitlements are not delivered as expected. It is hoped

that this framework offers a much-needed advance in conceptualizing entitlement and articulating its antecedents and outcomes.

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