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COMMENTARY

Industrial, organizational, political?

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Hüffmeier and Zacher's (2021) focal article suggests that the employment relationship–not to mention the industrial, work, and organizational (IWO) psychology field itself–could be radically altered by a basic income (BI) policy due to the power that workers stand to gain relative to their employers. That said, favorable changes, such as the improvement of working conditions or a healthier understanding of work's importance, should not be treated as inevitable. Power gained is not the same thing as power used. Indeed, the authors call for "more theory on the individual (e.g., personality) and contextual factors (e.g., current working conditions, cultural values) that may moderate people's reactions to the BI idea".

We contend, however, that new theory is not needed to predict these reactions, let alone to understand the existing problems they would address. Rather, IWO psychologists can borrow insights from the field of political psychology, particularly those concerning intergroup power relations (e.g., Haslam & Reicher, 2012; Jost & Banaji, 1994). Although the field's scholarship already acknowledges work and organizations' inherently political nature, much research in that domain has concentrated on the individual or interpersonal level and/or is mainly focused on task-related outcomes (cf. Longenecker et al., 1987; Rosen & Perrewé, 2017). In this commentary, we argue that political perspectives should be extended to the employee–organization relationship's study and particularly worker empowerment in that context. Such applications would position IWO psychologists not just to better predict BI's effects but also to better serve workers' needs in general regardless of whether BI is ever implemented.

Political power structures at work

Organizations' power structures are similar to those of public governments, just with a different set of goals (Anderson, 2019). Selectorate theory (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003) suggests that the main difference between dictatorships and democracies in any hierarchical entity is the number of people to whom leaders must stay accountable to accrue and maintain power. In stable dictatorships, leaders need only please maybe a dozen people at most to maintain their positions. In democracies, the number is much larger, and thus, quality of life is much better.

Selectorate theory's tenets suggest that workplaces are often far closer to dictatorships than democracies (Anderson, 2019; Bueno de Mesquita & Smith, 2011). Managers in organizations, like any other leaders, are accountable mainly to those who elevate them to their positions. Those selectors are usually higher in rank than the people they choose; there is little structural accountability from managers to subordinates. The profit motive's primacy further incentivizes this upward accountability at the expense of those with less power both within organizations and the surrounding communities that are affected by them (Lux, 2003). Practices like corporate social responsibility (CSR), which stresses the satisfaction of needs beyond shareholder profits, can

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to some degree positively influence a wider variety of stakeholders (Orlitzky et al., 2003). However, as evidenced by problems with working conditions at otherwise quite profitable companies that engage in CSR initiatives (e.g., Sainato, 2020; The Strategic Organizing Center, 2021), substantive CSR is neither imperative to organizational functioning nor a panacea for the issues it addresses.

Any comprehensive labor history will confirm that employees have at times had to exert their limited power in dramatic ways to win the rights and protections they have sought, such as through militant work stoppages and other disruptive tactics, usually overseen by labor unions or other worker collectives (e.g., Murolo & Chitty, 2012). Workers' power to enact these measures has gradually declined, however, and the results have been devastating. Wages have decreased along with union density and workers' collective bargaining power (Cooper & Mishel, 2015; Kollmeyer, 2018). Economic mobility has decreased most dramatically in the United States, but much of the Global North is catching up (e.g., Markussen & Røed, 2020). In many domains, risk assumption has shifted from organizations to individual workers (e.g., workplace health and safety; Evans & Reid, 2013).

Though organized labor has long been a niche topic in IWO psychology research (e.g., Kelloway & Barling, 1993; Mellor, 2016; Tetrick et al., 2007), practitioners have historically helped organizations to counter organized worker advocacy efforts (Logan, 2006; Zickar, 2001). Animosity toward organized labor is not an explicit tenet of the field, but its values (e.g., the primacy of efficiency and productivity) often clash with those of organized labor, leading at best to indifference (Lefkowitz, 2009; Zickar, 2004). Greater study of and assistance with labor union formation, commitment, and involvement could help reverse growing inequality's adverse effects. Beyond this, however, a more fundamental understanding of the psychological processes that underlie formal and informal advocacy efforts at work is needed. For this, political psychology can be useful.

A political organizational psychology

Instituting a BI could potentially remedy many of the issues that are described above (Hüffmeier & Zacher, 2021). However, as psychologists will readily acknowledge, perceptions are just as important as reality itself (Fiske, 2018). Some have argued that IWO psychologists' work on workplace justice focuses too much on employee perceptions, without sufficient regard for their material conditions (Lefkowitz, 2009). This suggests that although institutional processes can explain much of the harmful decrease in employees' resistance to poor working conditions, there are psychological processes involved as well. We will next highlight two political psychology frameworks that can be especially useful to understanding and remedying this depoliticization beyond what the simple institution of a BI can do: system justification theory (SJT; Jost & Banaji, 1994) and Haslam and Reicher's (2012) model of subordinate groups' resistance of dominant groups.

System justification and attitudes toward work

SJT (Jost & Banaji, 1994) holds that individuals, regardless of their social status, are typically motivated to uphold their society's status quo. Such motives are stoked by both traits (e.g., intolerance of ambiguity) and states (e.g., perceptions of danger). The Protestant work ethic (PWE), mentioned in the focal article, is a system-justifying ideology (Jost & Hunyady, 2002). One manifestation of these ideologies and motives is the employment of stereotypes and attributions to help make sense of belief-threatening events and phenomena (Kay et al., 2005). For example, the COVID-19 pandemic's essential workers were lauded as "heroes" even as their wages and working conditions remained poor (Hennekam et al., 2020; Manjoo, 2020). Meritocracy, the Protestant work ethic, hustle culture, and other strong, psychological connections that are fostered between work ethic and social status play into these stereotypes as well (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004; Sandel, 2020). They elicit praise and create personal meaning for those who put work above

their own well-being, interpersonal relationships, and other nonwork facets of life. SJT shows that these are not merely idiosyncratic individual differences but status symbols that are the product of deeply ingrained sociocultural narratives. Like any other cultural narratives, those that concern work are spread most easily by those with the loudest voices (i.e., the most situational power) and will remain deeply ingrained into organizational cultures until they are forcefully negated (Wakeham, 2017). Although BI would give workers greater power to negate unfavorable narratives (e.g., the inevitability or even nobility of poor working conditions in many socially valuable jobs; Graeber, 2018; Jaffe, 2021), SJT suggests that a change in material conditions would not on its own motivate negation. Among other questions, then, IWO psychologists could look to SJT to explain the gaps between BI's implementation and some of Hüffmeier and Zacher's (2021) expected changes in attitudes and values surrounding work.

Subordinate group resistance at work

Whereas SJT could explain the affective and cognitive effects of BI (or lack thereof), Haslam and Reicher's (2012) social psychological model of resistance is appropriate for studying behavioral outcomes. Drawing on examples of political prison dynamics, they outline several conditions that must be fulfilled for subordinate groups to resist dominant groups' control that could easily be applied to the employee–organization relationship. According to this model, undesirable consequences like those that BI would mitigate are only one of several obstacles to resistance. Subordinate groups are also unlikely to resist their poor conditions without developing a collective, adversarial identity. BI alone would not directly counter the other identity-undermining phenomena that are described in the model.

These identity-undermining phenomena can already easily be seen in workplaces. For example, individual traits that could help with resistance are often co-opted by organizations, such as when workers leading collective resistance efforts are promoted to management positions to remove them from those efforts (Lepie, 2016). Such measures might benefit the organization from a task perspective, but they also create group membership permeability, which stifles collective identity formation (Haslam & Reicher, 2012). Identification with one's job or organization encourages workers to withhold the use of their limited power as well. For example, those in service-based occupations like teaching have long been told that asking for better working conditions would harm the well-being of those they serve (Jaffe, 2021). Similarly, although some meaningful work scholars advocate for cultivating the image of an organization as a family (e.g., Pratt et al., 2013), the same rhetoric is deployed in antiunion campaigns (Communication Workers of America, n.d.). These examples' relative mundanity suggests that structural aspects of workplaces themselves may stifle collective identity formation and resistance. IWO psychologists who are hoping to promote social justice would be wise to explore these phenomena further.

Conclusion: Applying political psychology

Shymko and Frémeaux (in press) argue that the best way to restore the rights and protections that workers have lost in recent years is to repoliticize work (i.e., allow workers to advocate for themselves on more even footing with their employers). A form this could take besides BI might be the complete democratization of workplaces through employee ownership (Felicetti, 2018; Wolff, 2012). Indeed, meta-analysis has already highlighted myriad psychological benefits of workplace democracy (Weber et al., 2020). Although IWO psychology's top-down approach to solving problems (Lefkowitz, 2009) may leave the field in an awkward position for facilitating democracy, there are surely roles for both scientists and practitioners to play.

Whether or not organizational democracy, BI, or other institutional changes ever come to pass, IWO psychologists can use political psychology's insights to aid bottom-up resistance to poor working conditions rather than simply politely asking organizations to change them. In a more

formal and structured capacity, they could partner with unions or other advocacy groups to help coordinate or strengthen campaigns. After all, IWO psychologists excel at identifying which competencies lead to desired outcomes for an organization, and profit-oriented efficiency and productivity are not the only ends to which these skills can be used. Less formally, they can assist workers in advocating for themselves by helping them to identify the attitudes, manipulations, and other factors that affect their relationship with their employers. Such work is quite different than what the field is currently oriented toward and may be difficult to envision. However, the time to begin considering what that work could look like is now.

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