Coping with Conflict: Examining the Influence of PSM on Coping with Union – Management Conflict

Randall S. Davis
Department of Political Science
Southern Illinois University–Carbondale
Email: rsdavis@siu.edu

Edmund C. Stazyk
Department of Public Administration and Policy
University at Albany, State University of New York
Email: estazyk@albany.edu
Abstract
Public sector unionization represents a politically contentious, yet critically important, human resources policy issue in the United States federal government. While many politicians and practitioners assume that a lack of cooperation between organized labor and management inhibits the performance of government agencies, limited empirical research specifically examines the psychological mechanisms through which performance reductions may occur. In this study we explore the complex connection between interpersonal conflict during bargaining and union member turnover intent. We use data from the 2010 merit principles survey to evaluate how stressors associated with unionization influence work experiences. The findings we present suggest that individuals with high public service motivation experience more pronounced negative emotions when they experience conflict between unions and management, which subsequently increases their intent to separate from the organization.
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Introduction

Over the past ten years unionization in the public workforce has become one of the most politically charged and managerially relevant issues in public administration. On the one hand, public sector labor relations remains a central work component for many practicing public managers in the federal government. The critical nature of labor relations is due, in part, to emphasis on collective bargaining as a “bedrock principle” of civil service systems in government organization (Partnership for Public Service, 2014, p. 13). The managerial relevance of collective bargaining as an integral component of the federal civil service system, however, is counterbalanced by political rhetoric demeaning unions for adversely influencing the cost of government and organizational performance. The inclusion of collective bargaining as a central component of civil service systems in conjunction with significant political opposition to unions raises the specter of heightened work stress for unionized employees in the form of increasing hostility in union – management relationships. Unfortunately, public administration research has failed to keep pace with growing challenges of managing within a heavily unionized public workforce (Ricucci 2011, Davis 2013, Kearney 2010, Kearney and Mareschal 2014).

Given this challenge, our paper seeks to examine individual factors that potentially influence the detrimental role hostile union-management interactions play on performance related outcomes. Public service motivation represents one individual factor commonly examined in public administration that could influence the way employees respond to stressors in general, as well as those specifically arising from union – management relationships. Conventional wisdom holds that organizations derive significant advantages from employing individuals who embrace the values, attitudes, and beliefs associated with PSM. Indeed,
empirical findings illustrate that PSM gives rise to a host of benefits including increased job satisfaction among employees, heightened levels of organizational commitment, decision-making rooted in virtue and integrity, increased willingness by individuals to engage in organizational citizenship behaviors, heightened levels of individual performance, and lower levels of employee turnover (Campbell and Im 2015, Naff and Crum 1999, Pandey, Wright, and Moynihan 2008, Vandenabeele 2009, Perry, Hondeghem, and Wise 2010, Pandey and Stazyk 2008, Davis 2013, Stazyk and Davis 2015, Bright 2008, Steijn 2008). Although myriad benefits accrue to organizations by capitalizing on the benefits of PSM, heightened PSM levels could also result in significant organizational drawbacks (Perry and Wise 1990). Despite early speculation about potential negative consequences associated with extreme levels of PSM, limited scholarship examines its less desirable side effects (van Loon, Vandenabeele, and Leisink 2015, Giauque, Anderfuhren-Biget, and Varone 2013).

The remainder of the paper proceeds in four steps. The first section of the paper draws from several streams of research in organization studies, public management, and labor relations to define the broader theoretical framework that connects work stress in the form of union – management conflict, PSM, and two performance related outcomes (i.e., facet job satisfaction and turnover intent). Evidence is mixed regarding the effects of unionization on turnover intent (Llorens and Stazyk 2011, Barling, Fullagar, and Kelloway 1992), yet many studies examine only the extent of unionization. We take a different approach by examining perceived conflict in labor relations as an important occupational stressor. In this section we also argue that individuals with higher levels of PSM experience heightened emotional distress in the face of work situations characterized by interpersonal conflict. Those who experience amplified emotional negativity, expressed as dissatisfaction with supervisors, are more likely to express
intentions to turnover as a mechanism to alleviate negative emotions associated with occupational stress. Second, we describe the data and method we use to test our hypotheses. Finally, we offer concluding remarks and recommendations for theory and practice.

**Occupational Stressors, Emotions, PSM, and Turnover Intent**

Although not widely examined in public management scholarship, excessive levels of occupational stress among employees represents a significant problem for organizations. Occupational stress has been characterized as an epidemic that degrades the physical and psychological health of employees (Cavanaugh et al. 2000, Dawson, O'Brien, and Beehr 2016, Matteson and Ivancevich 1987). In addition to the drawbacks employees experience as a result of occupational stress, its deleterious side effects may cost organizations up to $300 billion per year in the form of lost productivity (Dawson, O'Brien, and Beehr 2016, Cynkar 2007). However, workplace stress comes in at least two forms, and not all stressors compromise employees’ productive capacity. Challenge stressors refer to demands associated with one’s job, such as deadline pressures or heavy workloads, which can provide encouragement that motivates employees to achieve work goals and meet performance expectations. Alternatively, hindrance stressors including red tape, role confusion, and interpersonal conflict, undermine employee performance potential by inhibiting one’s ability to achieve personal or organizational goals (Cavanaugh et al. 2000, Dawson, O'Brien, and Beehr 2015, Lepine, Podsakoff, and Lepine 2005).

Compared to research in generic management, public administration invests comparatively little attention to the causes, consequences, and forms of workplace stress. Yet, given the degree and form of potential stressors in public work environments, public administration could reasonably profit from a more concerted research emphasis examining these
themes. To some extent, increased levels of hindrance stressors may characterize the public sector work environment. Although evidence is mixed (Boyne 2002, Rainey, Pandey, and Bozeman 1995), conventional wisdom suggests that the political context of public sector work environments contributes to heightened levels of certain hindrance stressors. Public administration research frequently indicates that some forms of red tape, goal ambiguity, goal conflict, and role ambiguity characterize the public work environment to a greater degree (Bozeman 1993, Pandey and Wright 2006, Davis and Stazyk 2015, 2016, Hoek, Groeneveld, and Kuipers, Rainey and Steinbauer 1999, Wright and Davis 2003). Mainstream public administration scholarship rarely examines these concepts under the moniker of hindrance stressors, however, scholarship in the general management literature often uses the umbrella heading of workplace stress to connect the concepts (Dawson, O'Brien, and Beehr 2016, Lepine, Podsakoff, and Lepine 2005).

In addition to these commonly examined hindrance stressors, others stem from conflictual interpersonal relationships among organizational members. Research comparing relative levels of interpersonal conflict in public and private work environments, however, remains scant. While public organizations may not be inherently characterized by greater volumes of interpersonal conflict, certain features of public organizations’ environments may increase interpersonal conflict in some aspects of work. Union – management interaction constitutes one potential arena for greater frequency and intensity of interpersonal conflict in public sector work environments. Public organizations may experience particularly acute instances of interpersonal conflict between labor and management for at least two interconnected reasons.
First, the political environment in which public sector unions operate has become increasingly characterized by rhetoric demeaning unions as fiscally expensive impediments to governmental efficiency. It is possible that efficiency reductions due to unionization may stem from constraints established during collective bargaining designed to reduce the flexibility and discretionary authority of human resources managers to tie work incentives to performance expectations (Donahue, Selden, and Ingraham 2000, Donahue 2008, Moe 2009, Ingraham 2006, Meyer 1975). Given this observation, legislators at all levels of government often cite eradication of organized labor as a major policy initiative during campaign cycles. Additionally, some elected officials grow increasingly willing to stall other governmental action until opposing parties concede to enact union weakening legislation. As an example, as of March 2017, the state of Illinois had not passed a full operating budget for nearly two years. The budgetary stalemate is due, in part, to disagreements between a Republican governor and a Democrats in the state legislature over union weakening legislation. While the example of Illinois represents an extreme case, several other states have experienced similar political turbulence regarding the role of organized labor in the public workplace. Political posturing such as this may lead to union–management conflict by signaling to some public managers and labor leaders that compromise between organization heads and labor unions remains politically impossible.

Second, in terms of percentage of employees, unionization in the public sector far outstrips unionization in the private sector. In 2017 the unionization rate in the public sector was 34.4%, whereas the unionization rate in the private sector was only 6.4% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2017). Given comparatively high unionization rates, union–management interaction likely occupies a larger proportion of the public manager’s time and attention. Increased interaction between union officials and agency heads, in turn, contributes to increased
opportunity for potential conflict between opposing parties. Nevertheless, increased opportunity for potential conflict may not manifest as interpersonal disagreements until coupled with other environmental conditions that encourage overt conflict between unions and management. In sum, comparatively high levels of unionization in public organizations in unison with increasingly negative political rhetoric demeaning organized labor may encourage heightened occupational stress in the form of interpersonal conflict between labor and management.

Even when workplace stress in the form of union – management conflict occurs, it likely varies in severity. Relationships between labor and management fall at varying points on a continuum with complete cooperation at one pole and absolute conflict at the other (Angle and Perry 1986, Newland 1968, Walton and McKersie 1965, Harbison and Coleman 1951). While anything other than perfect cooperation constitutes the presence of an occupational stressor, increasingly conflictual relationships between unions and management contribute to heightened potential for union – management interactions to hinder employee and organizational goals. While all instances of interpersonal conflict influence employees’ emotional responses to work, isolating union – management relationships as the specific source of interpersonal conflict affords three advantages for better understanding the public workplace.

First, general models of job stress may not apply to every work context, which means that identifying salient elements of work with increased likelihood of stress offers a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between stress and other important work outcomes (Fairbrother and Warn 2003). For public administration scholars, specifying union – management interaction as one possible source of work stress also results in the opportunity to build more specific recommendations for remediating the damaging outcomes of workplace stress. Second, although the percentage of unionized employees in the public sector significantly outstrips unionization
rates in the private sector, public administration scholarship invests limited attention toward examining the influence of unionization on public organizations (Riccucci 2011). Focusing on labor relations offers a more holistic, and accurate, picture of the public sector work environment. Finally, given the current political salience of public sector unionization, focusing on union – management relationships affords us the opportunity to examine a timely human resources policy issue for many public organizations.

To the extent that hostility between unions and management serves as one form of occupational stress, understanding psychological mechanisms through which individuals process stressors provides insight into how union – management conflict influences work attitudes and outcomes. The stressor – emotion model argues that voluntary work behaviors, both productive and counterproductive, represent behavioral responses that result from various responses to workplace stressors (Spector 1998, 2002, Spector and Fox 2002, 2005). Whereas challenge stressors may not negatively influence employees’ emotional appraisal of work, hindrance stressors appear to consistently invoke negative emotions (Dawson, O'Brien, and Beehr 2016, Spector and Fox 2002, Spector 2002). Indeed, previous research suggests that hindrance stressors in general, and interpersonal conflict specifically, directly diminish one critical emotional response to work – job satisfaction (Lepine, Podsakoff, and Lepine 2005, Podsakoff, LePine, and LePine 2007).

Job dissatisfaction represents a negative emotional appraisal of the work environment that results from a discrepancy between the way an individual perceives the work environment and what one desires at work (Locke 1969). Yet, job satisfaction is a complex concept that scholars have either evaluated globally or examined in terms of specific facets of work (Wanous and Lawler 1972). While the facet approach to satisfaction may offer added specificity for
understanding which dimensions of one’s job serve as the most important drivers of overall work attitudes, research on facet satisfaction often confronts the “problem of specifying which facets are relevant in a given setting to a particular person and in defending their choice of facets” (Wanous & Lawler, 1972, p. 95). Our focus in this study is on the stress that arises from interpersonal conflict in labor – management relationships. As such, it seems reasonable to eschew the global approach to satisfaction and instead examine facets of satisfaction directly related to interaction between labor and management. We specifically focus on elements of satisfaction that ask employees to evaluate how they relate to their supervisors. Much like the negative emotion arising from global dissatisfaction, dissatisfaction with these specific facets of work also necessitate a behavioral response. Behavioral responses designed to remedy negative emotions associated with occupational stressors range from revenge seeking behavior to “even the score” (Spector & Fox, 2002, p. 178) to job search and voluntary separation from the organization (Cavanaugh et al. 2000).

Recent public management literature has invested significant attention to the topic of turnover. Turnover retains conceptual credence in public management not only because organizations incur significant costs associated with replacing personnel (Balfour and Neff 1993, Staw 1980), but also because turnover leads to the loss of critical tacit knowledge that helps organizations function effectively (Moynihan and Pandey 2008, Staw 1980, Llorens and Stazyk 2011). The sources of turnover, while varied, often indirectly relate to negative emotional byproducts of unfavorable work experiences, or dissatisfaction (Moynihan and Pandey 2008, Llorens and Stazyk 2011, Cavanaugh et al. 2000, Bright 2008, Bertelli 2007). While dissatisfaction represents one of the most critical drivers of turnover, it is important to note that dissatisfaction represents the emotional intermediary between perceptions of the work context
and voluntary behaviors including separation from the organization (Spector and Fox 2002). As such, it is important to treat satisfaction, both global and facet, as the emotional process that carries perceptions of the work context to organizational behaviors including turnover.

In sum, the stressor – emotion model suggests that the connection between union – management conflict and turnover intent is a three-step process. First, the individual experiences a hindrance stressor, in this case due to observed interpersonal conflict in the labor relations process, which inhibits the ability of employees to achieve personal goals. Second, dissatisfaction grows due to an increasing discrepancy between one’s desire to connect job effort to goal attainment and the actual likelihood that effort will result in expected outcomes (Locke and Latham 1990). Specifically, to the extent that union – management conflict inhibits individual goal attainment, the individual experiences displeasure with their supervisor because they view their job related activity as unrelated to securing desired work rewards from management. Finally, the individual cultivates attitudes and engages in behavior designed to eliminate experienced dissatisfaction associated with inability to achieve individual and organizational goals. Expressing an intent to leave one’s current job serves as one mechanism to eradicate the negative emotions associated with dissatisfaction with management. As such, to the extent that contentious labor – management relationships constitute a form of hindrance stressor in public sector work environments, it is reasonable to expect that:

**Hypothesis 1:** Increased perceptions of labor - management conflict will indirectly increase turnover intent by decreasing one’s satisfaction with supervisors.
Additionally, specific personality traits likely influence the way an individual appraises a given work situation as well as their emotional response to occupational stress (Spector and Fox 2002). According to Spector and Fox (2002) “[p]ersonality includes conscientiousness, agreeableness, emotional stability (trait anxiety), trait anger, and empathy” among others (p. 274, emphasis is our own), and each plays a role in influencing the connections between experienced stress and emotional byproducts. To the extent that empathy encourages individuals to view circumstances through the eyes of others, it may serve as a critical personality trait that encourages enhanced emotional negativity during experienced interpersonal conflict. Specifically, those individuals who are more empathetic likely desire harmonious relationships between labor and management because they have the capacity to view the problem from the perspective of both parties. As such, they would experience a greater discrepancy between the perceived and desired work environment during times of conflict. In the field of public management, the term public service motivation (PSM) may broadly characterize individuals with an increased sense of benevolence, empathy, and understanding toward others (Perry and Wise 1990, Houston 2000, Brewer et al. 2000, Koehler and Rainey 2008).

While public service motivation represents one of the native concepts of public management, and serves as the basis for one of the most prominent research streams in the field, scholars have yet to coalesce around a common definition or unifying theoretical framework (Bozeman and Su 2015). To some extent conceptual disagreement among scholars regarding whether PSM represents an attitude, belief, or value along with methodological challenges has complicated efforts to understanding how those individuals with heightened PSM behave (Wright and Grant 2010, Bozeman and Su 2015). As such, research examining PSM must clearly elaborate guiding assumptions regarding conceptual definitions and causal mechanisms (Wright
Given current conceptual and theoretical disagreement in the PSM literature, it may be useful to ground PSM in broader frameworks to examine behavioral and attitudinal outcomes (Vandenabeele, Brewer, and Ritz 2014, Wright and Grant 2010). To serve this aim we situate PSM within the “stressor – emotion” model of workplace behavior (Fox, Spector, and Miles 2001, Spector 2002, Spector and Fox 2002). Specifically, we treat PSM less as a form of motivation and more as an element of personality associated with empathy, understanding, and benevolence. When conceptualized in this way PSM relates to the “prosocial personality” (Finkelstein and Brannick 2007, Penner et al. 1995), which describes a set of personality attributes including empathy, acceptance of responsibility, moral reasoning, and helpfulness among others. Conceptualizing PSM as a series of personality traits including benevolence and compassion aids in understanding how those with heightened PSM emotionally respond to stressful work situations characterized by interpersonal conflict.

To the extent that individuals with heightened levels of PSM exhibit greater degrees of benevolence and empathy traits, it seems reasonable to believe that individuals with high PSM also experience more intense emotional negativity when organizations become embroiled in interpersonal conflict. While some research indicates that PSM reduces an employee’s desire to voluntarily separate from public organizations (Campbell and Im 2015, Naff and Crum 1999), these studies rarely account for stressful elements of the work context. It is equally reasonable to conclude that, under some circumstances, those with high PSM are more likely to turnover during times of high interpersonal conflict. Although some studies suggest that PSM does not directly contribute to turnover when accounting for other variables (Bright 2008), we are unaware of evidence that suggests high PSM could actually increase turnover in certain instances. In the context of our study, we argue that those with high PSM are more likely to
express intent to turnover due to amplified emotional negativity, expressed as dissatisfaction with supervisors, when they confront interpersonal conflict in labor relations. Moreover, we assert that those with high PSM are likely to view a wider discrepancy between the perceived and desired work environment during conflict because they directly absorb others’ distress as personal distress. As such we expect that:

*Hypothesis 2:* The negative relationship between union – management conflict and satisfaction with supervisors will be more pronounced for individuals with high PSM.

Additionally, given the indirect influence of union – management conflict on turnover intent, it is also reasonable to expect:

*Hypothesis 3:* The indirect increase on turnover intent due to increased perceptions of labor - management via reductions in satisfaction with supervisors will be more pronounced for those with high PSM.

Figure 1 provides a graphical representation of the complex relationships between work stress, in the form of interpersonal conflict in labor relations, PSM, facet satisfaction with supervisors, and turnover intent.

<<<Insert Figure 1 about here>>>

**Data, Measurement, and Methodology**

The data we employ to examine the connections between conflict in union – management relationships, PSM, and turnover intent were collected as a part of the 2010 Merit
Principles Survey (MPS). The 2010 MPS was conducted by the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board and was administered to a random sample of over 70,000 federal government employees across a range of agencies (U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board 2010). When the survey concluded 58% of the potential respondents completed the survey for an overall sample size of 42,020. However, for the purposes of our analysis we focus only on respondents who indicated their position was covered by a collective bargaining contract. These individuals are more likely to possess working knowledge of the labor relations process and the extent to which interpersonal conflict characterizes the relationship between unions and management. The total final sample size when including only employees covered by a bargaining contract is 12,748. A sizable majority of respondents in these data identified as white (80.8%) and were well educated (58.8% hold a Bachelor’s degree or greater). Moreover, the vast majority of employees are in the General Schedule pay system (78.2%) and hold non-supervisory positions (76.7%). Unfortunately, the age and sex of respondents were not available to us in these data. Table 1 provides select demographic characteristics of the respondents.

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In order to evaluate the complex connections between interpersonal conflict in labor relations, PSM, facet satisfaction with supervisors, and turnover intent we employed several questionnaire items. First, to examine union – management conflict we drew four items designed to assess the extent to which union leaders and management work well together to achieve a host of organizational functions. Second, we assessed public service motivation based on 5 questionnaire items adapted from the work of Perry (1996), which are routinely included in the MPS survey. Third, we used three items to evaluate facet satisfaction with supervisors that ask respondents to evaluate their satisfaction with supervisors, managers, and the recognition they
receive at work. While few studies in public management examine this particular facet of job satisfaction, the extent of satisfaction with supervisors is particularly relevant in the case of labor relations. Finally, we use a single item to assess turnover intent. The item asks the respondent to evaluate the likelihood they will leave their job in the next year. We have included a detailed description of all items used for the analysis in the appendix.

In order to evaluate the hypotheses above we estimated several statistical models. In the first model we sought to evaluate the overall fit of our model to the data by estimating a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). To ensure the identification of each construct in the CFA we constrained the residual variance of the turnover intent item to zero. The results from the CFA model indicated that our model adequately fit the data ($\chi^2(60, N=12,747) = 2,181.305, p < .001$; RMSEA = .053 (.051, .055); CFI = .975; NNFI(TLI) = .968). Additionally, the relationship between all constructs in the CFA model can be interpreted as bivariate correlations. The correlations between each theoretical variable was statistically significant and in the expected direction. Given that our measurement model was a good fit to the data, we next tested several subsequent models to examine our three hypotheses. Figure 2 provides the fully standardized estimates from the CFA model.

<<Insert Figure 2 about here>>>

Findings

After establishing measurement accuracy we introduced five control variables – tenure, race, education, supervisory status, and retirement eligibility – and estimated a two subsequent structural equation models (SEM) based on the diagram presented in figure 1. All information about control variables is included in the appendix. First, we estimated an SEM to evaluate the indirect relationship between union – management conflict and turnover intent through facet
satisfaction with supervisors (hypothesis 1). The results from the SEM revealed that the direct relationship between union – management conflict and turnover intent was not statistically significant \( (p = 0.747) \) when accounting for facet satisfaction and the other control variables. This suggests that the relationship between work stress, in the form of union management conflict, and turnover intent is fully mediated by facet satisfaction with supervisors. The indirect relationship between union – management conflict and turnover intent through facet satisfaction can be computed as the product of the two direct relationships between (a) union – management conflict and facet satisfaction and (b) facet satisfaction and turnover intent (Kline 2016). The indirect effect of union – management conflict on turnover intent is 0.199 \( (p < 0.001) \). The absence of a direct relationship between union – management conflict in conjunction with the presence of a significant indirect effect, provide support for hypothesis 1. Given these results are reported in the standardized metric, this result can be interpreted in terms of standard deviation changes.

Given this finding we have enough evidence to conclude that union – management conflict influences turnover intent via facet satisfaction with supervisors. Additionally, although we did not specifically hypothesize about the relationship between PSM and turnover intent, the findings from the SEM also suggested that the direct relationship between these two constructs was not statistically significant \( (p = 0.084) \). This supports findings in previous research that indicate that PSM does not directly influence turnover intent when accounting for additional factors in the organization’s environment (Bright 2008). All other relationships between theoretical constructs in the structural model were significant at \( p < 0.001 \). Figure 3 provides the standardized estimates from the SEM.

<<Insert Figure 3 about here>>
In addition to relationships the hypothesized relationships, the results indicated some significant relationships between control variables and other model constructs. First, increases in tenure resulted in increased perceptions of union – management conflict, decreased PSM, decreased satisfaction with supervisors, and decreased turnover intent. Second, white respondents reported higher levels of union – management conflict, lower levels of PSM, higher job satisfaction, and lower turnover intent. Third, increased education was associated with increases in perceived union – management conflict and reduced PSM. Fourth, increased supervisory responsibility was associated with increases in PSM, increased job satisfaction, and increased in turnover intent. Finally, eligibility to retire was associated with decreased perceptions of union – management conflict, higher PSM, and higher turnover intent. The results illustrating the relationships between model controls and theoretical constructs are provided in table 2. Additionally, there are several $R^2$ values associated with each endogenous variable in SEM models. First, the model controls explain 1.2% of the variation in union – management conflict and 2.9% of the variation in PSM. Second, the model controls, union – management conflict, and PSM explain 28.5% of the variation in facet satisfaction with supervisors. Finally, all model variables explain 22.8% of the variation in turnover intent.

Given that hypothesis 1 was supported, we removed insignificant paths and estimated a second SEM model to evaluate whether the relationship between union – management conflict and facet satisfaction was moderated by PSM (hypothesis 2). Our findings indicate that PSM serves as a significant moderator of the relationship between union – management conflict and
facet satisfaction ($p < 0.001$), which supports hypothesis 2. Figure 4 presents the estimates from the model including the interaction effect between union management – conflict and PSM. However, to understand the nature of a moderating relationship it is useful to plot and probe the interaction effect to determine the nature of the relationship between the focal predictor and outcome variable at different levels of the moderator (Little et al. 2007, Aiken and West 1991). Figure 5 illustrates the nature of the relationship between union – management conflict and turnover intent, along with the 95% confidence bands, at 2 standard deviations above and below the PSM mean. Practically, this graph illustrates that individuals with high PSM (two standard deviations above the mean) experience more pronounced emotional declines as a result of interpersonal conflict between unions and management.

The final step involves evaluating the conditional indirect relationship between conflict between unions and management and turnover intent. Since the results supported hypothesis 2, the first step of the indirect relationship, the pathway between union – management conflict and satisfaction with supervisors, is moderated. As such, the magnitude of the indirect effect is also conditioned upon changing levels of PSM. To fully understand the extent to which the magnitude of the indirect effect changes as a function of PSM it is necessary to generate a graph that plots the magnitude of the indirect relationship across values of the moderator (Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes 2007). Figure 6 illustrates the estimated indirect effect between union – management conflict and turnover intent at varying levels of PSM. The dashed line in figure 6 provides the estimated indirect effect at a given level of PSM. The solid lines above and below the dashed line provide the 95% confidence bands associated with the estimated indirect effect. For example, when PSM is held at its mean of 0, the estimated indirect effect is 0.199. However,
at 1 standard deviation above the PSM mean the indirect effect of union – management conflict on turnover intent via facet satisfaction increases to approximately 0.225. Practically, this finding supports hypothesis 3 and illustrates that union – management conflict influences turnover intent to a greater degree for those with high PSM.

Discussion and Conclusions

This paper examined the complex relationships between work stress, in the form of interpersonal conflict between unions and management, facet satisfaction with supervisors, and turnover intent while accounting for variation in individual PSM. Examining these themes offers advantages for public management given that researchers have invested comparatively little attention to the costs and consequences of stressors in the public workplace (except see (Giauque, Anderfuhen-Biget, and Varone 2013, Tummers et al. 2015). Although this study emphasized stress in the form of interpersonal conflict between unions and management, as opposed to stress in general, the findings presented here offer added insight into the dynamics that govern individual behavior in the public workplace.

Much of the literature on unions in public management tends to indicate that labor unions, due to their mere presence, encourage several detrimental outcomes that undermine organizational performance (Donahue, Selden, and Ingraham 2000, Donahue 2008, Hammer and Avgar 2005, Heywood, Siebert, and Wei 2002, Moe 2009). The findings we present seek to add nuance to this claim. Whereas conflict in labor relations diminishes satisfaction and increases turnover intent, the findings we present also suggest the inverse. Cooperative relationships between unions and management can encourage favorable outcomes for employees and organizations by encouraging favorable emotional appraisals of work. Although this finding may
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contradict some of the political rhetoric surrounding unions, the presence of collective bargaining increases autonomy in work organizations and reduces wage inequality (Belman, Heywood, and Lund 1997, Kearney 2003, Kearney and Morgan 1980, Llorens 2008). To the extent that the presence of unions serves this equalizing function it seems possible that the employees feel fewer negative emotions, such as injustice or anger, for which they seek a behavioral remedy.

In this specific instance, the results from our analysis also indicate that extremely high levels of PSM may not always result in beneficial outcomes for public organizations. Since the origins of PSM research, some scholars suggested that extreme levels of commitment associated with high PSM could lead to zealotry and other unsavory organizational outcomes (Perry and Wise 1990). Though public management scholars have yet to invest in a concerted research agenda designed to examine the individual and organizational drawbacks of excessive PSM, some research indicates that PSM can encourage burnout, diminished satisfaction, and higher perceptions of stress under certain conditions (van Loon, Vandenabeele, and Leisink 2015, Giauque, Anderfuhen-Biget, and Varone 2013). While these studies certainly advance understanding the drawbacks of PSM, it is important to include emotion when examining the connections between stress, PSM, and organizational behavior. Giauque and colleagues (2013), for example, expressed surprise that PSM related with higher stress perceptions among employees. This result is less surprising, however, when PSM is viewed as a cluster of personality attributes that invoke negative emotions in the presence of stressful situations. While we focused specifically on one narrow form of interpersonal conflict in this study, research appears to be accumulating that indicates those with high PSM find it difficult to psychologically cope with challenging work environments. To the extent that those with high PSM are more
likely to join the public workforce, public organizations would accrue added advantage from workplace structures that mitigate the deleterious effects of organizational stressors.

Our findings also exhibit support for the emotion stressor model of voluntary work behavior (Fox, Spector, and Miles 2001, Spector and Fox 2002, 2005). While several studies in public management illustrate that job satisfaction plays perhaps the most important role in turnover and turnover intent (Moynihan and Pandey 2008, Llorens and Stazyk 2011, Bright 2008, Bertelli 2007), public management research can profit from recognizing that dissatisfaction represents the emotional intermediary between work stress and workplace behavior. The results we present suggest that dissatisfaction fully mediates the relationship between work stress, in the form of interpersonal conflict between unions and management, and turnover intent. This finding indicates that practitioners, both labor leaders and management, must account for the emotional byproducts of labor relations as well as the instrumental outcomes. Emotions should be taken seriously in the bargaining process, and training can provide important avenues for conflict resolution strategies that minimize negative emotions (e.g., anger, fear, resentment) between bargaining parties. Given that the indirect effect of union – management conflict on turnover intent is more pronounced for those with high PSM, organizations must also acknowledge that the emotional byproducts of union – management conflict vary across different personality types.

While the findings presented here provide added insight into the connections between work stress, dissatisfaction, and turnover intent the study has certain limitations. First, the data used for this analysis are cross sectional. Complex causal relationships like the ones examined here are necessarily temporal in nature. Future studies should examine similar psychological mechanisms using longitudinal data to determine whether the effects observed here become more
– or less – pronounced over time. Second, there are several forms of work stress present in public organizations. Admittedly, the stress experienced in the labor relations process influences some employees more prominently than others. Interpersonal conflict in collective bargaining likely influences union members and labor leaders, but other members of the organization may be relatively immune to this form of workplace stress. Future research should examine the extent to which PSM conditions the relationship between other forms of stressors and workplace behaviors.

Even with these limitations, this research adds to a growing stream of literature that suggests high PSM could result in negative work experiences for employees under certain circumstances. Moreover, given that public organizations exhibit significantly higher rates of unionization, it is important to include unionization as an important theoretical variable in models of public organizational behavior. Our understanding of the psychological outcomes of unionization and work stress in the public sector is far from complete, however, this study presents a more comprehensive picture about how those with high PSM respond to work stressors induced by interpersonal conflict between unions and management.
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Appendix: Operational Definitions

Union – Management Conflict

The items used to measure union – management conflict seek to examine the extent to which labor unions and organizational managers work well together to promote employee and organizational performance. Respondents rated the extent to which they agreed with the following statements on a 5-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” at the high end to “strongly agree” at the low end. Items were coded such that high values reflect a greater degree of conflict.

1. My agency's management and unions work well together to improve employee work-life balance.
2. My agency's management and unions work well together to improve the efficiency of agency operations.
3. My agency's management and unions work well together to improve employee performance.
4. My agency's management and unions work well together to improve overall agency performance.

Public Service Motivation

These items were adapted from the work of Perry (1996). Respondents rated the extent to which they agreed with the following statements on a 5-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” at the low end to “strongly agree” at the high end:

1. Meaningful public service is important to me.
2. I am not afraid to go to bat for the rights of others even if it means I will be ridiculed.
3. I am prepared to make enormous sacrifices for the good of the agency.
4. I am often reminded by daily events about how dependent we are on one another.

5. Making a difference in society means more to me than personal achievements.

**Facet Satisfaction with Supervisors**

We measured facet satisfaction with supervisors based on three items that seek to assess the way an employee evaluates their relationships with supervisors. All items were coded such that high values reflect a greater degree of satisfaction with a given facet of supervisor–subordinate relationships. Respondents rated their agreement with the following statements on a 5-point scale where the low end was strongly disagree and the high end was strongly agree:

1. Overall, I am satisfied with my supervisor.
2. Overall, I am satisfied with managers above my immediate supervisor.
3. I am satisfied with the recognition and rewards I receive for my work.

**Turnover Intent**

Turnover intent was measured using a single item that asks the employee to assess the likelihood they will leave their agency. The item was coded on a 5-point scale where 1 = Very Unlikely, 2 = Somewhat Unlikely, 3 = Neither Likely nor Unlikely, 4 = Somewhat Likely, and 5 = Very Likely. Employees stated the likelihood that they would leave by answering the following question:

1. How likely is it that you will leave your agency in the next 12 months?

**Model Controls**

Five control variables were also included in the analysis to rule out the possibility of alternative explanations. The model controls were as follows:

1. Tenure was measured in the number of years the individual has been a federal civil service employee.
2. Race was dichotomized such that 1 = White and 0 = Other

3. Current education was coded such that 1 = Less than a high school diploma; 2 = High school diploma or equivalent; 3 = Some college but no degree; 4 = Associate’s degree; 5 = Bachelor’s Degree; 6 = Master’s degree; 7 = Professional degree; 8 = Ph.D.

4. Supervisory status was coded such that 1 = Non-supervisor; 2 = Team leader; 3 = Supervisor; 4 = Manager; 5 = Executive

5. Retirement eligibility was evaluated with a single question that read “Are you or will you become eligible to retire within the next 12 months?” The question was coded such that 1 = No and 2 = Yes.
Figure 1: Conditional Indirect Effect of Union – Management Conflict on Turnover Intent

Union – Management Conflict (Stressor) → Dissatisfaction with Supervisors (Emotion) → Turnover Intent (Behavioral Strain)

PSM (Empathetic Personality Traits)
Table 1: Select Demographic Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>2,443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>89</td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>9,088</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Education Level</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Less than High School</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>High School Diploma or GED</td>
<td>1,023</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>2,963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate's Degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bachelor's Degree</td>
<td>4,445</td>
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<tr>
<td>Master's Degree</td>
<td>2,144</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional Degree (e.g. J.D., M.D.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
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<td><strong>Pay System</strong></td>
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<td>General Schedule</td>
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<td>Wage Grade</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senior Executive Service</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<td><strong>Supervisory Status</strong></td>
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<td>Team Leader</td>
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<td>Supervisor</td>
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<td>Manager</td>
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<td>Executive</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>Missing</td>
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Note: Respondents were allowed to check all racial categories that applied. As such, the total number of respondents for race is greater than the sample size.
Fully Standardized CFA Estimates

Union – Management Conflict

PSM

Facet Satisfaction

Turnover Intent

Model Fit: \( (60, n=12,747) = 2181.305, p < .001; \) RMSEA = .053, (.051, .055); CFI = .975; NNFI(TLI) = .968
Figure 3: Standardized SEM Estimates - Indirect Relationship

Model Fit: $(105, n=12,474) = 2822.969, p < .001; \text{RMSEA} = .046_{(.044, .047)}; \text{CFI} = .968; \text{NNFI(TLI)} = .957$
## Table 2: Standardized Control Variable Estimates

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<th></th>
<th>EST</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>EST/SE</th>
<th>p</th>
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<td><strong>Union - Management Conflict</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
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<td>0.009</td>
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<td>0.010</td>
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<td>-2.445</td>
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<td><strong>Public Service Motivation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.073</td>
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<td><strong>Turnover Intent</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
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Figure 4: Standardized SEM Estimates – Moderated Relationship
Figure 5: Interaction Graph
Figure 6: Conditional Indirect Effect