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The Emergence of Justice Climate in Groups, Teams, and Organizations: A Theory of Multilevel Information Aggregation and Judgment

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Citation

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Information Aggregation and Judgment

The organizational justice literature is currently in a paradoxical state. On the one hand, considerable attention has been placed on specifying the discrete perceptions made by employees regarding fair and unfair treatment at work. In this sense, we have "sliced the pie" every way possible and shown that workers judge outcomes, processes, information, and interpersonal treatment, as well as entities such as supervisors, subordinates, co-workers, and customers in terms of fairness (Colquitt, 2001; Rupp, Bashshur, & Liao, 2007a). On the other hand, there is a parallel movement in the literature that is advocating for a more holistic approach to the study of justice (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009, 2007; Rupp & Aquino, 2009). This research argues that although employees can make distinct judgments about the outcomes, procedures, and interpersonal treatment coming from supervisors, coworker, customers, and the like, it may not be these specific judgments that are at the phenomenological heart of employees' perceptions of workplace fairness, and there may be variance left unaccounted for by taking such a fine-grained approach. This approach explores employees' overall justice judgments, which require a perceptual summary of work experiences.

Further still, we also see a divergence in the literature as to the level of analysis at which justice phenomena reside. Some research measures justice perceptions at the level of the event (Judge, Scott, & Ilies, 2006), considering employees' immediate reactions to workplace encounters. Other research asks employees to aggregate their judgments across situations, asking employees for more generalized justice facet perceptions (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009). Still other research has taken a "higher-level" perspective, arguing that justice is group-level phenomenon (Mossholder, Bennett, & Martin, 1998; Nauman & Bennettt, 2000). This research

has proposed that both organizational contexts and social information processing lead to the formation of justice climates. Within this work, we see similar debates about dimensionality that we see in the individual-level justice research (Liao & Rupp, 2005).

From the outside, one might argue that consensus is lacking as to what justice is, the nature of its true dimensionality, and the level of analysis at which justice effects are exerted. In other words, where is the crux of "the justice effect" and how should we be studying it more completely in order to understand how to manage groups and teams in such a way that both productivity and psychological well-being are maximized? In this paper, we seek to address this question. Certainly, we are not the first to delineate and integrate divergent perspectives of organizational justice. For example, both the system-agent and the event-social entities models have sought to differentiate aggregate and source-specific fairness perceptions[1] (Bies & Moag, 1986; Colquitt, 2001; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng., 2001; Cropanzano, Byrne, Bobocel, & Rupp, 2001).

In this paper we do not simply review these literatures, nor do we directly argue how varying perspectives might be integrated. Instead, our goal is to *temporally* align these literatures to propose a broader model of justice emergence. What we seek to show is that when *time* is considered in conjunction with these discriminant perspectives, the various models fall into place within a dynamic system of justice climate formation. Our theoretical model is depicted in Figure 1. In it, we explain the temporal evolution of justice perceptions, beginning within persons, moving to between persons, and ending at the level of collective perceptions among persons. To do so, we build on prior research related to each of these stages. Thinking of our

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[1] Note that we use the terms "source," "party," and "focus/foci" interchangeably to refer to the party who is being held responsible for an unfair act or judged over time as a perpetrator of justice.

model as a dynamic series of cross sections, we know from past research that interesting effects occur at each stage. The contribution we seek to make here is the weaving together of these cross-sections across time to explain the unfolding of overall justice climate.

Specifically, we, as have others (Rupp & Spencer, 2006; Judge, Scott, & Ilies, 2006), propose that justice is spawned at the level of the individual experiencing discrete events. It is at this point we propose information about outcomes, procedures, and interactions is most salient. We then purport this event-level distributive, procedural, and interaction justice information is encoded according to the party held accountable for the fair or unfair act, which is then relied upon to form source- or foci-based judgments (which represent an aggregate of the categorized event information over time). An important element of our model, which has not been discussed directly in the literature, is the explicit recognition that such a process is ongoing within each and every member of a work group. Thus, an overlaying, quasi-simultaneous process that must be considered in parallel to this involves how group members influence each others' perceptions, and how the process impacts collective or shared perceptions of justice within a work group (i.e., justice climate). We posit that these parallel processes lead to the formation of multfoci justice climates (i.e., group-level perceptions of the fairness of various parties with whom the group interacts), which over time lead to the emergence of an overall justice climate. We propose that overall justice climate exerts a strong force on the culture of workgroups and is stable, long-lasting, and relatively impervious to change. In the sections that follow, we will review literature relevant to each of these steps in the process.

The Unfolding of Overall Justice Climate

Daily Work Events and Individual Justice

A body of research exists within the justice literature that focuses on multiple types of high-magnitude, low-frequency workplace events. To date, this work focuses on common HR practices as events. For example, studies have asked employees about the fairness of selection processes (Gilliland, 1994), performance evaluations (Greenberg, 1986), and layoff procedures (Brockner, Grover, & Blonder, 1988). Whereas this research helps us understand such events, it does not provide adequate information about the daily "encounters" that comprise the starting point of our model. Whereas a judgment regarding the fairness of a selection process is more specific than a general judgment of workplace policies overall, this does not directly link to a specific incident where the employee was directly interacting with a party, and potentially, experiencing an event that is justice-related (whether just or injust). In fact, only a handful of justice studies have drilled down to the level of a true fairness-related event (e.g., Liebrand, Messick, & Wolters, 1986; Messick, Bloom, Boldizar & Samuelson, 1985; Mikula, 1986, 1989).

For instance, Mikula (1986) asked 57 psychology students to recall and write about a justice event. Qualitative analysis indicated that the content of the events involved all aspects of the students' lives (e.g., school, home, etc.), and were temporally varied, with some students recalling relatively recent injustices (23% of events recalled) and other students reporting injustices that were more than a year old (35% of events). Two explanations for this temporal variation are possible: injustices occur relatively infrequently, or, when asked to recall only one injustice, participants worked to remember an injustice larger in magnitude. Whereas the magnitude of these events is unclear, subsequent work by Messick and colleagues, which shows individuals experience many fair and unfair incidents, supports the latter explanation (Liebrand, Messick, & Wolters, 1986; Messick, Bloom, Boldizar & Samuelson, 1985).

Other researchers have conducted experience sampling (daily diary) studies focused on employees' daily experiences, providing evidence for the impact of justice perceptions at the daily level (Paddock, Judge, Bagger, & Scott, 2009; Judge, Scott, & Ilies, 2006). For instance, using an interval contingent design, Paddock and colleagues show that many daily events relate to justice facets. Using a similar design, Judge, Scott, and Ilies (2006) investigated employees' daily perceptions of interpersonal justice directly (vs. the specific events that spur justice perceptions). This research revealed that state interpersonal justice relates negatively to state hostility and positively to state job satisfaction. Together experience sampling studies suggest that, as we implied above, there is evidence for justice-related psychological processing and reactivity at the level of the event and within persons.

On the left-hand side of Figure 1 we represent the daily events individuals experience. Some events that occur within the working day of an individual may easily be classified as justice-related encounters (e.g., being denied a promotion), whereas others may not contain such clear fairness-related experiences (e.g., going to lunch with one's coworker). Congruent with previous research (Rupp, 2008), we argue that to varying extents, all daily events inform individuals' general sense of fairness. However, we acknowledge (consistent with the Messick et al., 1985 findings) that those events that are more easily recognized as fairness-related likely are weighted more heavily in individuals' general sense of fairness. In the following section we draw on fairness theories to highlight when events are more easily recognized as fairness-related.

In the model we also highlight that while events may overlap among individuals, each individual experiences his or her own unique set of events. Focusing only on one individual in the model, Person A, we see a sample of events represented: a dysfunctional performance appraisal session with her boss, being denied a promotion by her boss, being denied a health

claim by the organization, going to lunch with a coworker, and learning that a coworker was gossiping about her. Notice that the frequency of justice-related encounters with a specific party varies across people, with Person A experiencing two boss-related events and only one organizationally-related event. We anticipate that, over time, the number of justice-related encounters with a specific party will relate to the variance in individuals' justice perceptions of that party over days, such that an increase in encounters leads to decreased variance in an individual's across-days justice perception of that party.

The process Person A follows in forming justice perceptions – from events to source-specific justice judgments – is influenced both by the event-related affect she experiences and her cognitive modeling of the event. Following, we draw on existing theory as a foundation for these affective and cognitive pathways.

The Role of Affect in the Encoding of Events

A common theoretical foundation for event-level justice research is affective events theory (AET, Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). AET suggests that specific work events spur emotional reactions, which, in turn, impact employees' discrete job attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction) and behaviors (e.g., performance). As Rupp and Spencer (2006; Spencer & Rupp, in press) note, one particular class of events, which seems to have a particularly poignant reactionary mechanism associated with them, are justice-related events. AET suggests that positive and negative events produce positive and negative emotional reactions, respectively. Congruent with this, the justice literature has long acknowledged the relationship between injustice and negative emotions, specifically the emotions of anger and guilt (Adams, 1965; Homans, 1961). Evidence supports this, showing that individuals perceiving unfairness experience anger, whereas individuals perceiving fairness experience happiness (e.g.,

Cropanzano, Paddock, Rupp, Bagger, & Baldwin, 2008; Cropanzano et al., 2001, 2007; Krehbiel & Cropanzano, 2000; Mikula, 1986; Spencer & Rupp, in press; Weiss et al., 1999).

A second theoretical perspective relevant here is the deontic model (Folger, 1998, 2001). A component of Folger's fairness theory (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001—described below), this model speaks specifically about *why* individuals have quick, often automatic emotional reactions to fairness-related events. Taken from the Greek root *deon*, meaning "ought," the deontic perspective integrates Kantian ethics and evolutionary psychology. Essentially, it argues that we have an evolutionarily-based sense of duty, obligation, and moral virtue, which aids in the regulation of social order.

As such, humans have categorical imperatives, or *a priori* universal ethical principles of an innate and/or selfless nature (Kant, 1999; Wood, 1999). This adaptation manifests itself through the elicitation of negative emotion (termed "moral outrage" but most closely aligned with anger) when an unfair act is witnessed. An important element of the model, which we will return to later, is that deonance is elicited not only during events in which the perceiver is being treated unfairly, but also during events when the perceiver is an unaffected third party witnessing the mistreatment of another. Together, deonance regulates behavior and reaffirms norms of interpersonal conduct by motivating sanctions for inappropriate behavior. The empirical evidence to date is supportive of these notions (Kahneman, Knetsch, & Thaler,1986; Rupp & Bell, in press; Turillo, Folger, Lavelle, Umphress, & Gee, 2002).

In sum, whereas AET shows that events can catalyze emotional responses, the deontic model proposes that such responses reflect an evolved system of ethics that aid in regulating interpersonal behavior. In our model, we propose that the emotional responses elicited as individuals experience events are critical to the process by which events are encoded as justice-

related. Further, we propose that the *strength* of these emotional reactions is also used in early classification of events into memory. These emotional experiences are then used as information in subsequent perception formation processes.

Cognitive Processes in Perception Formation

With the sense-making assistance of primary emotion information, this event-level justice information is encoded into memory, and then used during the formation of more stable justice perceptions. At this point, a more cognitive process is evoked. A number of theoretical frameworks focus on the cognitive processes involved in justice perception formation. Particularly relevant are justice integration theory (Gilliland & Paddock, 2005), fairness heuristic theory (Lind, 1995; Van den Bos, Lind, et al., 1997; Van den Bos, Vermunt, & Wilke, 1997), and fairness theory (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001).

Justice integration theory. Justice integration theory (Gilliland & Paddock, 2005) accounts for how information about justice-related events is cognitively integrated. Specifically, it suggests that individuals either *recognize* an event because it contains nearly identical context or event attributes to a previous situation or they *identify* an event because it contains similarities to previous experiences. Justice integration theory informs our sequential (dynamic) model of justice climate emergence in two ways. First, it speaks to how event-related information informs justice perceptions of specific parties. To the extent that source-related events are recognized rather than identified as being related, source-specific justice perceptions should be less variable. For instance, as modeled in Figure 1, Person A's boss holds a dysfunctional performance review session; the boss in this event is a clear source. In contrast, Person A's colleague relays information that another colleague is gossiping; the extent to which this event is attributed to the gossiping colleague is not as clear. Additionally, justice integration theory highlights the

importance of situational and personal characteristics in the formation of fairness judgments, a

point we will return to in subsequent sections. Finally, and very important to our model, is that

justice integration theory argues that justice perceptions are not static one-shot judgments.

Rather, past fairness-related information is used to judge new situations that are encountered and

in the formation of subsequent judgments. This dynamic use of information is also discussed in

and supported by research on our next focal theory: fairness heuristic theory.

Fairness heuristic theory. Fairness heuristic theory (FHT) borrows from the judgment

and decision making literature, using the concept of heuristics to explain justice perception

formation. FHT is particularly relevant to our sequential (dynamic) model of justice climate

emergence in that the theory directly speaks to how different information is used at different

times to form justice judgments. For example, FHT argues that when individuals lack

information about whether they can trust another not to exploit or exclude them from social

relationships, information regarding procedures is especially relevant to the formation of justice

perceptions (cf. Huo, Smith, Tyler, & Lind, 1996). Further, information that has been encoded

that is of a procedural nature is especially relevant to developing fairness perceptions about

parties who have authority over the individual.

FHT, then, helps to explain what specific events will contribute to what specific fairness-

related perceptions, as well as how past lower-level perception influence later higher-level

(eventually shared) perceptions. As shown in Figure 1, we propose that once an event is encoded

as justice-related (thanks to the role of emotion), a cognitive process ensues by which individuals

begin to cognitively sort and classify this information. FHT provides us with part of this picture.

For example, it suggests that events involving procedural elements will often be used as evidence

to make judgments about authority members[2]. We see this depicted in Figure 1 as Person A experiences a dysfunctional performance appraisal with her boss and as Person C is excluded from a conference call on which he planned to express his opinion about a decision. We also see that for Person C, this is not the first time that his boss has failed to provide him voice: earlier his boss did not call on him in a meeting during which he wished to contribute. Regardless of the extent to which Person C cognitively relates these two events (recognition vs. identification in justice integration theory terms), it is likely information from the earlier event will further inform his boss-focused justice perception updated following the latter event.

Fairness theory. Folger and Cropanzano's (2001) Fairness theory extended past theoretical work (referent cognitions theory, Folger, 1986, 1987), relying on the concept of counterfactual thinking. Fairness theory describes how, following an automatic deontic/emotional response to an unfavorable event, counterfactual reasoning is triggered. This process points to how different types of information are combined to form source-based justice judgments. According to fairness theory, following an experience of deonance, individuals seek answers to three "counterfactual" questions: *Would* the victim have been better off given a different outcome, procedure, etc., *could* the decision maker have acted differently, and *should* the decision maker have acted differently?

A key component of fairness theory is the notion of accountability. This theory states very clearly that injustice requires a perpetrator. That is, individuals go through a cognitive process whereby they assess if harm has been done to some party (the self or another), if someone is responsible for this harm, and if the responsible party had the ability to act in an

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[2] The idea the employees hold managers accountable for procedural justice has also been argued by several researchers (e.g., Masterson et al., 2000, Cropanzano Prehar, & Chen, 2002; Walumba, Wu, and Orwa, 2008).

alternative way that would have avoided the harm. Finally, this party's actions are compared to moral/ethical standards of behavior. Thus, what takes place, and consistent with our model (see Figure 1), is that fairness-related events occur and trigger an emotional reaction, which then leads to more controlled cognitive processing, concluding with an attribution of accountability toward the party felt responsible for the unfair act.

As we mentioned in our introduction—each cross-section of our model yields important reactions. Consistent with this, the empirical research to date supporting fairness theory is focused on individuals' reactions at this stage of their perceptual reasoning. This research has shown that individuals are motivated to punish transgressors deemed to be unfair, and will even sacrifice their own resources if it is necessary to do so (Kahneman, Knetsch, & Thaler,1986; Rupp & Bell, in press; Spencer & Rupp, in press; Turillo, Folger, Lavelle, Umphress, & Gee, 2002). Fairness theory is critical to our model because it implicitly proposes a process by which perceptions move from stored events about outcomes, procedures, information, and interpersonal treatment, involving various parties with whom the perceiver interacts, to more salient judgments, representing aggregates of events, about specific parties who have been judged accountable for unfair behaviors. This moves us forward one more stage in our model, to the consideration of multfoci justice judgments.

Multifoci Justice Perceptions

As is illustrated in Figure 1, we purport that individuals store memories about justice-related events according to the party held accountable for unfair situations. Over time, we predict that this information is then aggregated to form more stable perceptions of source-specific fairness. The justice literature has referred to these sorts of judgments as *multifoci* justice

perceptions (Cropanzano, et al., 2001; Lavelle, Rupp & Brockner, 2007; Rupp & Cropanzano, 2002).

The multifoci approach has its foundation in social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). Social exchange research has shown that employees form exchange relationships with multiple parties. These relationships can be of an *economic* nature, involving the *quid pro quo* exchange of tangible resources, or *social* in nature, based on trust, and involving the exchange of socio-emotional resources. Work in this area indicates that social exchange relationships, as compared to economic exchange relationships, are relatively stronger predictors of important workplace outcomes such as job attitudes and organizational citizenship behavior (Shore, Tetrick, Lynch, and Barksdale, 2006). Further, research shows that justice perceptions are a robust predictor of social exchange (Rupp & Cropanzano, 2002).

It is at this point that this literature has entered the ongoing dialog regarding the dimensionality of justice. That is, researchers in this area argue that phenomenologically, stable justice perceptions are less about outcomes, procedures, and interpersonal treatment (although this serves as important information earlier in the perception formation process, as we have depicted in our model), and more about the parties with whom employees must interact (Rupp, et al., 2007a; Rupp & Aquino, 2009). Consequently, the multifoci perspective posits that employees form justice perceptions about exchange partners (e.g., supervisors, co-workers, customers, subordinates, even the organizational whole as a personified exchange partner), and these source-specific justice perceptions impact the level of social exchange been the perceiver and the party being judged in terms of fairness. Consequently, research has found that subsequent attitudes and behaviors are then targeted at these parties (Malatesta & Byrne, 1997;

Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, & Chen, 2000; Rupp & Cropanzano, 2002). Lavelle and colleagues

have referred to this process as the target similarity effect (Lavelle, Rupp, & Brockner, 2007).

As mentioned above, we are less focused on the relational, attitudinal, and behavioral

outcomes of multifoci justice judgments in the current paper, and more focused on the how prior

information is encoded and combined to form these perceptions, as well as how these

perceptions influence the formation of multifoci justice climates. We propose that justice-related

events (which involve outcomes, procedures, or interpersonal treatment) trigger an emotional

(deontic) reaction, which launches a cognitive process by which parties are held accountable for

unfair acts. This information is encoded into memory according to party, such that over time,

stable, source-specific perceptions of multifoci justice are formed. As we mentioned at the start

of this paper, this process implies a single-individual case. However such processes are on-going

within multiple individuals who are working together. Thus we would be remiss not to discuss

how social information processing overlays and intertwines these individual processes, leading

over time to shared perceptions, i.e., multfoci justice climate.

Justice Climate

Given the increasing number of employees working interactively in formal organizational

structures such as team-based structures (Cropanzano & Schminke, 2001) and greater

recognition of the importance of social networks within teams (Balkundi & Harrison, 2006),

understanding fairness perceptions at an interactive level is of increasing importance within

organizations. Whereas justice perceptions originate at the individual level of analysis (as

reviewed), they can also form a shared, collective cognition. A recent focus of justice

researchers—justice climate—focuses on this collective cognition and moves the study of justice

perceptions from a nearly complete focus on individual work contexts to interactive structures.

Congruent with the broader multilevel research (Chen, Mathieu, & Bliese, 2004; Kozlowski & Klein, 2000), justice research has shown differential effects for justice constructs at varying levels of analysis (e.g., Liao & Rupp, 2005; Simons & Roberson, 2003).

The emergence of justice climate at the group level is explained by several theoretical frameworks. Social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) argues that individuals in social contexts use information gathered from others to form judgments about organizational practices, values, and norms. As Schneider's (1975) *attraction-selection-attrition* (ASA) model shows, similar individuals are attracted to, selected by, and retained by groups. Thus, over time members of groups become more similar. This process is expedited by the socialization process, in which those selected as new members learn typical organizational procedures and policies via interactions with existing members (e.g., Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992).

Mossholder and colleagues (1998) introduced *procedural justice context*, defined as the within-work-unit average of justice perceptions assigned to each unit member. To do so, they drew on research linking procedural perceptions to social context factors (e.g., norms, work environments) and research suggesting that individuals' fairness perceptions are based, in part, on others' fairness perceptions to argue that over time, members of the same group will hold similar justice perceptions. Subsequently justice climate was extended to relate to interactional justice (Liao & Rupp, 2005; Simons & Roberson, 2003). Empirical research shows that justice climate explains variance in individual level outcomes (e.g., commitment and satisfaction, Mossholder et al., 1998; helping behaviors, Naumann & Bennett, 2000; organizational commitment and organization-directed citizenship behavior, Yang, Mossholder, & Peng, 2007) and group level outcomes (e.g., team performance and absenteeism, Colquitt, Noe, & Jackson,

2002; department-level employee affective commitment, satisfaction with supervision, discretionary service behavior, and intent to remain and business-unit-level customer service and employee turnover, Simons & Roberson, 2003). It also provides evidence of some moderators (e.g., group power distance, which at higher levels attenuates the effect of procedural justice climate on organizational commitment and organization-direction citizenship behaviors, Yang, Mossholder, & Peng, 2007) and mediators (e.g., group identification as a mediator of the team interdependence—procedural justice climate strength relationship, Roberson, 2006) of related effects (see also Ansari, Hung, & Aafaqi, 2007; Choi, 2008; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008).

More recently, Liao and Rupp (2005) investigated justice climates (procedural, interpersonal, and informational) formed about multiple foci (organization and supervisor), providing initial evidence that justice climates should be differentiated by source. Further investigation was carried out by Rupp, et al. (2007b), who provided evidence that taking a multifoci approach to the measurement of justice climate that aggregates across justice facets (e.g., supervisory justice climate, coworker justice climate, etc.) represents a more robust operationalization of the construct than measuring justice by either facet (e.g., procedural justice climate, interpersonal justice climate, etc.), or a crossing of the two (e.g., supervisory procedural justice climate, coworker interactional justice climate). This is supportive of the propositions made in our model, where the justice facets are more relevant at the event level, and social exchange partners more relevant as we move between individuals and up to the unit level of analysis.

Overall Justice Climate

Our model ends as we move from foci-specific justice climates to overall justice climate. This reflects a recent avenue of individual-level research exploring holistic justice perceptions

(Ambrose & Schminke, 2009). Increasingly, researchers are acknowledging that the classic, facet-based taxonomy of organizational justice, consisting of distributive, procedureal, and interactional fairness perceptions, may not capture the entirety of the justice domain. As pointed out by Rupp and Aquino (2009), although employees *can* assess the fairness of these facets when asked to in employee surveys, this does not mean that these facets are at the heart of the phenomenon. Rather it may very well be that justice judgments are more holistic in nature (Greenberg, 2001) and individuals justice-related behaviors (Lind, 2001) and reactions (Shapiro, 2001) stem from a general experience of (in)justice. Further, a focus on overall organizational justice better matches the level of specificity between justice as a construct and many outcomes of interest such as overall performance (Colquitt & Shaw, 2005).

Ambrose and Shminke tested these assumptions empirically. That is they proposed a model building on past theoretical arguments (e.g., Colquitt & Shaw, 2005; Scott, Colquitt, & Zepata-Phelan, 2005; Lind, 2001) that posed overall justice as a second-order construct. They showed that whereas the justice facets do serve as important antecedents to overall justice, significant variance in overall justice remains over and above that accounted for by the facets. This suggests that overall justice is something more. Further these authors showed that the relationship between justice facet perceptions and outcomes is mediated by overall justice.

As depicted in Figure 1, we extend this research by proposing overall justice not as an individual-level construct, but as group level climate which is formed through the dynamic integration of lower-level perceptions. As is mentioned previously, we argue that the justice facets are more relevant at the event level, in influencing the formation of multifoci perceptions. Social processes then lead to shared perceptions of multifoci justice (multifoci justice climates), which then serve as the most proximal antecedent of overall justice climate—a variable we

propose has a significant impact on group functioning (moreso than any of the lower-level perceptions).

The only study of which we are aware that includes a measure of overall justice climate is presented by Kwon, Rupp, and Young, 2008. Using a sample of 413 groups across 48 organizations, these researchers provided evidence overall justice climate mediated the relationship between high performance work systems and both firm-level performance and individual-level attitudes. However, virtually no research has been conducted on overall justice climate emergence—that is, how group-level perceptions aggregate to form higher-order climates. One exception is some preliminary data reported by Rupp, et al., 2007b, who, using polynomial regression and response surface methodology, considered the interaction of multifoci justice climates on individual-level outcomes within groups. Results showed more visceral reactions to inconsistent justice climates (e.g., fair co-worker climate yet unfair supervisor climate) than climates that were consistently unfair (e.g., unfair co-worker and supervisor climate). This suggests that the aggregation of information during social information processing is complex and certainly should be further explored in future research.

Contextual Influences

A final component of our model involves the contextual variables that influence justice perception and climate formation. At the level of the individual, this can include personality characteristics and person-job fit. At the level of the group, this can involve group composition and focus. At all levels, top-down influences such as organizational structure and management practices can exert effects, as can the existence and structure of social networks. We will briefly summarize these contextual influences in the following sections.

Individual differences. Multiple individual differences are theoretically linked to justice

perceptions and reactions to (un)fair treatment. Colquitt and colleagues (2006) drew on fairness

heuristic theory, uncertainty management theory, and fairness theory to show how three

individual differences – trust propensity (defined as a generalized expectation about the

trustworthiness of others, Mayer et al., 1995), risk aversion (defined as differential attention to

stimuli in potentially risky situations and the tendency to react to risk with anxiety and

withdrawal, Cable & Judge, 1994), and trait morality (defined as high conscientiousness and

agreeableness, Hofstee, de Raad, & Goldberg, 1992) – moderate the effect of individuals'

distributive, procedural, and interpersonal fairness perceptions on task performance and

counterproductive work behavior. Their findings showed trust propensity, risk aversion, and trait

morality to account for more variance in individuals' behavioral responses than the five factor

model of personality (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Goldberg, 1990; a broader, widely accepted

personality taxonomy) or equity sensitivity and sensitivity to befallen injustice (Huseman et al.,

1987; Schmitt et al., 1995; very specific personality facets specific to justice). Thus, at the

individual level, we include trust propensity, risk aversion and trait morality as individual

differences in our model.

Another collection of individual difference constructs that have been shown to impact

justice phenomena can be broadly classified as moral or ethical in nature. These include moral

identity (Aquino & Reed, 2002), moral awareness (Reynolds, in press), behavioral integrity

(Simons, 2002) and justice orientation (Rupp, Byrne, & Wadlington, 2003). As a group, these

constructs refer roughly to the extent to which people are apt to notice the ethical implications of

events and use their ethical frameworks to react to such events. Empirical research has shown

that trait level morality-related constructs such as these are influential in influencing both

perceptions of justice and reactions once injustice is perceived (e.g., Aquino, Skarlicki, Freeman, Nadisic, & Fortin, M., 2009; Liao & Rupp, 2005; Simons, 2002). Further research in needed that considers the role of these constructs in the justice perception formation processes, across levels and over time.

Group characteristics. Multiple antecedents of justice climate exist. Often, these constructs are proposed to impact either the mean *level* of justice climate or what is known as climate *strength*—the extent to which group members agree on the level of fairness (i.e., within-group variability). For instance, relying on Leventhal's (1980) work, Colquitt et al. (2002) focus on three antecdents—collectivism, demographic diversity, and size—and their results show collectivism as an antecedent of level, demographic diversity as an antecedent of strength, and size as an antecedent of both.

Common themes in demographic diversity research reflect that greater psychological distance is linked to demographic diversity (Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). Congruent with this, demographically diverse teams are related to psychologically diversity and differences in workplace perceptions (Klein et al., 2001). Building on this research, Colquitt et al. (2002) propose and show demographic diversity to be an antecedent of justice climate strength.

Given that individuals in larger sized teams are less likely to participate on a regular basis (Hare, 1981) and individuals who participate less will be less likely to express their own views, appeal decisions, or seek procedural information, Colquitt and colleagues proposed that team size negatively relates to procedural justice climate level. Further, larger sized teams have weaker bond strength between employees, and thus procedural justice climate strength in larger teams is likely to be lower. Specifically, larger teams are characterized by less member interaction and more physical distance among members (Hare, 1981), resulting in less

convergence among members' perceptions. In contrast, the more proximate members, the greater

the amount of interaction and the more member perceptions should converge (Klein et al., 2001;

Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978), resulting in stronger procedural justice climate. Congruent with this,

Colquitt and colleagues find team size to relate to both procedural justice climate level and

strength. Future research is needed that tests if group characteristics such as diversity and size

influence the emergence of overall justice climate.

Organizational structure. Organizational environment helps to shape employees' justice

perceptions (Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997), and a series of studies provide empirical evidence

relating organizational structural elements to fairness (Schminke, Ambrose, & Cropanzano,

2000; Schminke, Ambrose, & Rupp, 2002). For instance, Schminke, Ambrose, and Cropanzano

(2000) assessed the relationship between centralization (the concentration of organizational

authority) and procedural justice perceptions in samples from 11 organizations. Results suggest

employees working in a more centralized environment, within which they had fewer decision

making opportunities, reported lower procedural justice. Findings of a subsequent study focused

on 45 departments across 35 organizations and including the additional justice types of

distributive, procedural, and interactional justice obtained similar findings: centralization is

negatively related to justice perceptions (Schminke, Cropanzano, & Rupp, 2002). Additionally,

this study shows another structural element – formalization (defined as the extent to which

organizational policies and procedures are well documented) – to relate to higher levels of

perceived fairness.

Organizational structure also moderates reactions to injustice. Specifically, taking a

approach, Ambrose and Schminke (2003) studied 102 departments across 68 organizations,

finding that in more mechanistic organizations (those that are more centralized, hierarchical,

uniform, and formal in structure), the relationship between procedural justice and perceived

organizational support was stronger than in less mechanistic organizations. In contrast, in more

organic organizations (those that are more decentralized, loose, and flexible in structure), the

relationship between interactional justice and supervisor trust is stronger than in less organic

organizations. Research is needed that explores the roles of these sorts of structural variables in

each stage of the justice climate emergence model.

<div align="center">Empirical Assessment of the Current Model</div>

The dynamic and multilevel nature of our model makes empirical testing more complex.

However, methods do exist from which we can draw. Specifically, experience sampling

techniques allow us to assess individuals' ongoing experience of daily events. Further, this

technique has the advantage of assessing affect in closer proximity to these events than other

methods. Data collected in this way can be subjected to multi-level random coefficient analyses,

which allow us to test for within-person effects while simultaneously assessing effects within

which individual events are nested at the person, group/ team, and organizational levels. Already

studies using these methods integrate level-specific moderators, such as those discussed above.

Thus, not only do such methods allow us to test our Figure 1 model, but they also allow us to

incorporate the personality characteristics, group composition variables, and organizational

structure constructs described above. Further, social networking analyses provide additional

factors which may be integrated (e.g., individual or team centrality in specific network

structures).

Given the number of factors involved and the longitudinal nature of the model, a

reasonable question related to the assessment of our model is "Do I have to include everything?"

This question is already one faced by justice researchers focused on topics that lack a temporal

element (e.g., how justice types relate to multiple foci, Colquitt & Shaw, 2005). The answer

offered by some (e.g., Colquitt & Shaw, 2005) and followed empirically (e.g., Avery &

Quinones, 2002) is less than compelling: try to measure all justice aspects (e.g., dimensions,

Coqluitt et al., 2001; Cropanzano et al., 2001), however, if this is not possible eliminate aspects

less related to the research question. We are at a loss to suggest which facets of our model might

be best omitted, but we encourage researchers to maintain the temporal element of our model.

Conclusion

As we acknowledge in the beginning of this chapter, organizational justice research

conducted over the last several decades provides evidence for how justice facet perceptions

relate to individuals' attitudes and behaviors. As Colquitt et al. (2005) delineate, this evidence

has been built in waves. These authors foreshadow a subsequent stage in our research history, an

integrative wave, which involves an ongoing focus on the cognitive formation of justice

perceptions and the implications that group membership has on such judgments. Certainly our

model, which begins even prior to the cognitive pathway by which individuals form justice

perceptions and focuses largely on how individuals' justice perceptions evolve over time into

shared group-level perceptions, reflects these integrative trends. In addition, our model

incorporates other recent trends in the organizational justice literature, and more generally, the

organizational behavior literature. Within the organizational behavior literature, researchers are

increasingly focusing on within-individual effects across days, including daily events

experienced by individuals and the affect associated with these events. Our model shows how

events initiate the justice perception process, including both affective and cognitive pathways,

and involving information congruent with the traditional justice facets. Further, our model

acknowledges an ongoing discussion among justice researchers related to the careful

specification of both justice type *and* justice source in justice constructs. Justice events relate to specific justice types and events inform individuals' multifoci justice perceptions. Through socialization and social influence, multifoci justice perceptions at the individual level are then aggregated to the team, group, and organizational levels. Finally, congruent with recent organizational justice research, the temporal end of our model is perceptions of overall justice, shared among members of work groups. Our model and suggestions for the empirical testing of this model brings us (and we hope the reader) one step closer in understanding of the emergence of overall justice climate in groups, teams, and organizations, yet much remains to be done. We look forward to continued work (by both ourselves and others) which contribute to a shared understanding of this multidimensional process.

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Figure 1. An overall view of the origin of justice perceptions.

Events

**Source-Specific
Fairness Judgements**

Affect and Cognitive
Processing

**Source-Specific
Justice Climates**

Social Information
Processing

Person A (Barbara)

Event 1 - dysfunctional performance appraisal session with boss

Event 2 - receipt of official organizational paperwork denying health benefit claim

Event 3 - coworker A told you coworker B is gossiping about you

Event 4 - denied promotion by boss

Event 5 - lunch with a coworker

. . .

Boss

Coworkers

Customers

Organization

. . .

Supervisory
Climate

Person B (Katie)

Event 1 - irate customer yelled, despite the fact that company policy limited what could be done

Event 2 - coworker took shift typically have

Event 3 - coworker did not pull his own weight on large project

. . .

Boss

Coworkers

Customers

Organization

. . .

Coworker
Climate

Overall
Justice
Climate

Person C (Tom)

Event 1 - boss excluded from a conference call on which C wished to voice input on a decision

Event 2 - coworkers threw a birthday party for

Event 3 - boss did not call on at a meeting in which C wished to talk

. . .

Boss

Coworkers

Customers

Organization

. . .

Customer
Climate

. . .

. . .