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Keywords

Justice, expectation, organization, behavior, applicant, application, perception, selection, hiring, psychology

Comments

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RUNNING HEAD: EXPECTATIONS AND APPLICANT PERCEPTIONS

Justice Expectations and Applicant Perceptions

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Abstract

Expectations, which are beliefs about a future state of affairs, constitute a basic psychological mechanism that underlies virtually all human behavior. Although expectations serve as a central component in many theories of organizational behavior, they have received limited attention in the organizational justice literature. The goal of this paper is to introduce the concept of justice expectations and explore its implications for understanding applicant perceptions. To conceptualize justice expectations, we draw on research on expectations conducted in multiple disciplines. We discuss the three sources of expectations – direct experience, indirect influences, and other beliefs – and use this typology to identify the likely antecedents of justice expectations in selection contexts. We also discuss the impact of expectations on attitudes, cognitions, and behaviors, focusing specifically on outcomes tied to selection environments. Finally, we explore the theoretical implications of incorporating expectations into research on applicant perceptions and discuss the practical significance of justice expectations in selection contexts.

Justice Expectations and Applicant Perceptions

We possess an inherent desire to predict or anticipate the future, because doing so allows us to regulate our actions so as to maximize rewards and minimize punishments. This approach-avoid process, commonly referred to as the pleasure principle, is motivation in its simplest form. Expectations, which can be defined as beliefs about a future state of affairs, play an important role in this process because they constitute the mechanism by which we use past experiences and knowledge to predict the future (Olson, Roese, & Zanna, 1996). Expectations represent our best guess about future contingencies (e.g., action X will yield outcome Y) and these assumptions not only guide our behavior but also have affective, cognitive, and physiological consequences. Because every deliberate action we take rests on our beliefs about how the world will operate/react to our actions, the generation of expectations is a fundamental psychological function. The pervasiveness of expectations is demonstrated by the fact that the concept has been applied to a broad array of domains, including medicine (e.g., placebo effects), mental health (e.g., hopelessness theory of depression), and education (e.g., self-fulfilling prophecy).

Given their central role in action regulation, it is not surprising that expectations also represent a core explanatory mechanism in many of our theories of organizational behavior (e.g., Bandura's (1982) self-efficacy theory; Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory; unmet expectations theory, Wanous, Poland, Premack, & Davis, 1992). One area in which expectations have only recently begun to attract attention is organizational justice, which is the study of fairness within organizations (Greenberg, 1990). Research on justice perceptions in general, and applicants' perceptions of selection procedures and decisions more specifically, has tended to focus on the outcome, process, informational, and interpersonal elements of events as prime determinants of individuals' justice perceptions. Recently, however, several researchers have suggested that

individuals' perceptions of justice may depend on not only what they experience during a focal event but also on what they bring with them to the situation (e.g., Brockner, Ackerman, & Fairchild, 2001; Shapiro & Kirkman, 2001; Steiner 2001). Specifically, individuals may enter a situation with a set of justice expectations and these expectations may influence how they perceive and react to organizational events.

The goal of the current article is to introduce the concept of justice expectations and explore this concept within the realm of applicant perceptions. A considerable body of literature clearly demonstrates that expectations have pervasive and substantial effects on not only perceptions but also on affect, behaviors, and cognitions (Olson et al., 1996). This research provides strong evidence that expectations may have important implications for understanding and influencing applicant perceptions. But, given that people can focus on a wide array of factors when trying to anticipate what they will encounter in a hiring situation, why would we expect them to focus on fairness? The answer is quite simple – because individuals value fairness. Research has shown that individuals value fairness because it serves a number of basic psychological needs, such as control, belonging, and self-esteem (Cropanzano, Byrne, Bobocel, & Rupp, 2001). This is important because research has found that expectations relevant to important needs are activated more frequently and, therefore, are more accessible and are more likely to be used (Olson et al., 1996). In other words, justice is likely to be a key variable in individuals' attempts to predict organizational events and interpersonal treatment (Lind, 2001; van den Bos, Wilke, & Lind, 1998). Moreover, justice expectations may be particularly powerful in selection settings because individuals are often focused on predicting the treatment they will receive not only in the hiring process itself but also as a future member of the organization (e.g., Robertson & Smith, 1989).

Over the last decade, our understanding of the applicant perspective has been enhanced considerably by research that has applied the organizational justice framework to the study of applicant perceptions (see Gilliland, 1993; Ryan & Ployhart, 2000). To date, however, research in the area of organizational justice in general, and applicant perceptions more specifically, has devoted little attention to the concept of expectations. This paper is designed to address this gap in the literature and is organized into three main sections. First, we provide an introduction to the concepts of organizational justice, applicant perceptions, and expectations. Second, we examine the antecedents of justice expectations (i.e., how they are formed) as well as their consequences, with an emphasis on factors relevant in selection contexts. Finally, we identify and discuss the theoretical and practical implications of justice expectations in selection contexts.

Organizational Justice and Applicant Perceptions

Organizational justice is the study of fairness within organizational settings and originates from work in social psychology aimed at understanding fairness issues in social interactions (Greenberg, 1990). Recent research suggests that justice perceptions are most aptly conceptualized along four dimensions – distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational (e.g., Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt, 2001; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001;). Drawing on this four dimensional conceptualization, justice in selection settings can be described as individuals' subjective perceptions of the fairness of outcome distributions (i.e., who gets hired or who advances in the selection process), the fairness of procedures used to determine outcome distributions (i.e., the selection tools and how they are implemented), the quality of interpersonal treatment received when procedures are implemented, and the adequacy of information conveyed about why procedures were used a certain way or how outcomes were determined.

Researchers have applied the organizational justice framework to better understand how applicants react to personnel decisions and procedures and the effects of these perceptions (see Ryan & Ployhart, 2000 for a review; see Anderson, Born & Cunningham-Snell, 2001 for an overall model of applicant decision-making). Research has examined the features of selection procedures and decisions that influence fairness perceptions (e.g., Bauer, Truxillo, Sanchez, Craig, Ferrara, & Campion 2001; Horvath, Ryan & Stierwalt, 2000) and also has shown that these perceptions influence a number of important outcomes such as attraction to organizations, job acceptance intentions, recommendation intentions, and test performance (e.g., Gilliland, 1994; Ployhart, Ryan, & Bennett, 1999).

Organizational Justice Expectations

Olson and colleagues (1996) define expectations as “beliefs about a future state of affairs. They are subjective probabilities linking the future with an outcome of some level of probability from merely possible to virtually certain” (p. 211). Drawing on this general definition, we can define justice expectations as an individual’s beliefs that he or she will experience fairness in a future event or social interaction. As this definition highlights, our focus is on probabilistic expectations or beliefs about the future, not normative expectations, which refer to obligations or perceived prescriptions. As noted earlier, all behavioral choices are based on our assumptions of the future. This anticipatory activity is driven by the basic human desire to engage in activities that we expect will produce rewards and to avoid activities that we expect will result in negative outcomes. Furthermore, although our expectations are not always confirmed, the generation of expectations is a sense-making activity that provides a feeling of control over what is often an uncertain future. Absent this sense of control, people often experience uncomfortable and debilitating cognitive and emotional states (Festinger, 1954; Jones, Bentler, & Petry, 1966).

Although expectations have a powerful influence on human behaviors and attitudes, they have received only limited attention in the field of organizational justice. There have been three approaches to considering expectations in the context of organizational justice and we briefly discuss each of these below.

Met expectations. There is a small body of research that has examined the influence of met expectations on justice perceptions. This work mirrors the larger body of research on the effects of met expectations on newcomers' attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Wanous et al., 1992). In the area of justice, the met expectations hypothesis has been explored most often in the context of distributive justice. Researchers have examined people's reactions to rewards that are consistent or inconsistent with what would be expected on the basis of equity theory (see Greenberg, 1982). In essence, expectations are viewed as a point of reference in the process of evaluating the fairness of outcomes received. Related work has been conducted in the relative deprivation literature (e.g., deCarufel & Schopler, 1979) and the idea has also been expanded to the area of procedural justice (e.g., Brockner et al., 2001; van den Bos, Vermunt, & Wilke, 1996; van den Bos, Wilke, Lind, & Vermunt, 1998) and applied specifically to the selection context (Gilliland, 1994). Although there are exceptions, the basic finding across all these studies is that perceived justice is highest when expectations are confirmed. When discrepancies exist, positive violations (e.g., outcomes that fall above expectations) tend to lead to more positive evaluations than negative violations (e.g., outcomes that fall below expectations) (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).

This approach has provided limited information about the role of expectations in shaping justice judgments. In these studies, expectations are rarely assessed directly and are instead typically assumed on the basis of the manipulations employed. As a result, it is difficult to determine the extent to which individuals' expectations are confirmed and it is not possible to

test the met expectations hypothesis with an algebraic difference model that accounts for the separate and joint effects of expectations and experiences (Edwards, 1991; Irving & Meyer, 1994). Furthermore, the expectations manipulations are often confounded with extraneous process and outcome elements that make it difficult to eliminate alternative theoretical explanations for findings, such as procedural consistency/differential treatment (e.g., van den Bos et al., 1996) or the temporal ordering of frames of reference (e.g., van den Bos, Vermunt, & Wilke, 1997).

We also believe that there are several important issues that have yet to be examined in the research on met justice expectations. First, since expectations are typically manipulated, there is no attempt to assess the expectations that participants possess before entering the situation and the impact these have on individuals' attitudes and behaviors. It is typically assumed that if participants are not explicitly informed about a justice element they will not possess an expectation about it (e.g., van den Bos et al., 1996). This is inconsistent with research that shows that people often draw on past experiences and other beliefs to form expectations (often implicit expectations) about objects and events that they have not experienced directly or have been told about. The implication is that individuals may possess expectations about justice elements not being manipulated and these expectations may be having a significant, unmeasured effect. Second, the majority of these studies have focused on expectations of a single, specific justice element, such as outcome distributions or voice. Research suggests that expectancies that are broader in scope tend to have stronger effects because they have more numerous and important implications (Olson et al., 1996). Thus, there may be value in assessing individuals' expectations of broader justice dimensions (e.g., distributive, procedural, informational, interpersonal).

Fairness heuristics. The second approach to considering expectations in the context of justice is exemplified by Lind's fairness heuristic theory (Lind, 2001). This theory is based on the notion that when individuals enter a new situation they are often uncertain of how they will be treated and whether they will be exploited. As a result, the moment individuals enter a situation they start to gather information to build a justice judgment. Once this initial judgment is formed, it serves as a heuristic or shortcut for interpreting subsequent events. The most important implication of this theory is that perceptions of justice will be based largely on what an individual experiences early in an event. Recent research has provided support for this position and has shown that not only are individuals' justice judgments strongly influenced by the information first received but also initial fairness impressions are rarely revisited (e.g., Lind, Kray, & Thomson, 2001; van den Bos et al., 1997). It is important to note that individuals are most likely to process fairness information heuristically in incomplete or insufficient information conditions (see van den Bos, 2001 for a review). When there is more unambiguous and trustworthy information (e.g., a comparison other) available to serve as a basis for justice judgments, fairness heuristics will be less impactful.

There is considerable overlap between fairness heuristic theory and the general expectations literature we use as the theoretical foundation for justice expectations. Both fairness heuristics and expectations are based on a model of automatic information processing in which individuals develop shortcuts or schemas to guide their attitudes and behaviors (Cropanzano et al., 2001). In addition, both research on fairness heuristics and expectations suggests that these cognitive shortcuts are relatively stable in the absence of radically contradicting information. A major difference between fairness heuristic theory and our notion of justice expectations is that our focus is on expectations that are formed prior to entering or

experiencing an event. We view justice expectations as being derived not from early event information but rather from factors with a historical presence. For example, a person may have low expectations of justice when entering a hiring situation due to negative past experiences. It is important to note that our notion of justice expectations does not preclude the importance of fairness heuristics. Rather, we view justice expectations as an upstream influence that is likely to influence how individuals interpret and react to justice information encountered early in an event.

Anticipatory injustice. Shapiro and Kirkman (2001) present the idea of “anticipatory injustice,” which suggests that individuals may attempt to anticipate how unfairly they will be treated as a consequence of uncertainty in the organization. Shapiro and Kirkman suggest that this negative expectation can have a number of detrimental consequences both to the individual and the organization, such as increasing the likelihood that individuals will perceive unfair treatment, regardless of the nature of the organizational event. In a study examining anticipatory injustice, Shapiro and Kirkman (1999) found that anticipation of distributive injustice was related to employee resistance, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions.

Shapiro and Kirkman’s (2001) notion of anticipatory injustice is probably most similar to our idea of justice expectations. First, the focus is on anticipating the level of justice experienced in future events. Second, they adopt a main-effect model and argue that expectations of justice will directly influence multiple outcomes, including perceptions and behaviors. Support for this main effect model comes from not only their own preliminary research (Shapiro & Kirkman, 1999) but also research on expectations conducted in other domains. For example, Pulakos and Schmitt (1983) found that individuals’ pre-hire expectations positively related to their job satisfaction and considerable research in the area of social

psychology supports the direct effects of expectations (see Olson et al., 1996 for a review).

Finally, many of the psychological processes (e.g., confirmation bias phenomenon) that they argue as underlying the effects of anticipatory injustice are drawn directly from the expectations literature and also underlie our conceptualization of justice expectations.

Justice expectations. The work reviewed above leads us to conclude that individuals' expectations of organizational justice and their organizational justice perceptions are inextricably linked. To fully understand how justice judgments are formed, work is needed to conceptualize justice expectations and establish the utility of this concept. Figure 1 depicts our conceptualization of justice expectations. It highlights the sources of knowledge on which expectations are based as well as the various types of outcomes that expectations have been shown to influence. In the current article, we focus our discussion on further conceptualizing justice expectations in selection contexts by identifying the antecedents and consequences of these expectations and considering the implications of justice expectations in selection environments. The remainder of this paper is focused on these issues.

Antecedents of justice expectations in selection systems

There are two ways to approach the issue of understanding the antecedents of justice expectations in selection contexts. The first is to distinguish expectations on the basis of the type of beliefs or knowledge from which they are derived (Olson et al., 1996). For example, one can distinguish expectations about the self (e.g., performance expectations) from expectations about other people (e.g., interpersonal expectations). However, there are really a limitless number of ways to categorize expectations and this somewhat arbitrary approach tells us relatively little about the actual antecedents of expectations. A second and more productive approach, therefore, is to focus on the sources from which beliefs themselves are developed. This approach provides

a general typology that we can use to identify the general sources of expectations as well as the specific antecedents likely to arise in specific contexts.

All expectations are derived from beliefs, or our knowledge/schemas about how the world operates. As shown in Figure 1, the three major sources of beliefs are direct experiences, indirect experiences, and existing beliefs. First, direct experience underlies much of our knowledge and serves as a potent antecedent of our expectations. For example, self-efficacy theory argues that past performance is one of the strongest predictors of individuals' self-efficacy expectations (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Second, beliefs can be derived from indirect experiences. Indirect experiences is a broad category that can include observing others or communication from other individuals (e.g., parents, peers, partners), institutions (e.g., schools, religious organizations), or the media. In self-efficacy theory, for example, vicarious experience (i.e., observing others' performance) is viewed as having a major impact on individuals' expectations of their future capabilities (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). A final source of beliefs is other, existing beliefs. For instance, research suggests that self-efficacy beliefs can be influenced by whether a person believes that the abilities needed to perform a task are fixed (e.g., inborn talent) or can be acquired or improved through additional training and experience (Wood & Bandura, 1989). With respect to justice, a person's belief in a just world may impact the fairness he or she is likely to expect in future situations (e.g., Ball, Trevino, & Sims, 1993). To a certain extent, all expectations, even those derived from direct and indirect experiences, are influenced by other, existing beliefs an individual holds. For instance, existing beliefs guide our inferences about events or people and also impact our willingness to rely on indirect sources (Olson et al., 1996).

What are the specific antecedents of justice expectations in a selection context? There are many types of expectations one can have in a selection context (e.g., expectations regarding

interpersonal treatment, expectations regarding the type of questions to be asked in an interview, expectations about how long before a decision is made), but they all likely arise from the three categories of sources just described. Indeed, procedural justice rules (e.g., Gilliland, 1993; Leventhal, 1980) can be considered one framework of types of expectations, with the favorability of an individual's expectancies based on these three sources. Applicants will draw upon a) their own past experiences in selection contexts, b) indirect experiences or what they have heard from others as well any information the organization or its members might provide, and c) other enduring beliefs about fairness. Next, we will discuss how research on applicant perceptions supports these categories as potential antecedents of justice expectations.

Direct Experience. An applicant's expectations of justice in a selection context are likely to be greatly influenced by his/her past experiences. Although most applicants will have little history with a particular organization or organizational agent, they may use past experiences in similar situations to form expectations. Gilliland (1993) proposed that experienced applicants may develop selection system scripts. In particular, he suggested that prior violation of a procedural justice rule would increase its salience in subsequent selection encounters. Research has demonstrated that previous experience with a selection procedure influences perceptions of the fairness of that procedure (Kravitz, Stinson & Chavez, 1994; Ryan, Greguras, & Ployhart, 1996). Experience in computing provided incremental validity beyond test taking attitudes in predicting perceptions of computerized tests (Wiechmann & Ryan, in press). Experience with discrimination and racism has been found to influence perceptions of the fairness of affirmative action plans (Gilliland, 1993; Slaughter, Sinar and Bachiochi, 2002). In general, we would expect that those who have had unfavorable outcomes from a given type of process in the past may have more negative justice expectations. Indeed, research has found pretest perceptions of

applicants to be reflective of previous success or failure with similar processes (Chan, Schmitt, Sacco, & DeShon, 1998). Further, Gilliland and Steiner (2001) have suggested that inexperienced individuals will be more tolerant of justice violations because they will not have strong expectations. However, the relative influence of expectations and experienced events on perceptions of fairness of a given selection process or decision is an area warranting further research.

Indirect Influences. Another source of applicant expectations of justice is indirect, through learning about how others have been treated. For example, peers may communicate details about their experiences with a particular organization, and an applicant may use this information to form his/her own expectations. In part, this is why employee referrals often are seen as a good source of applicants (see Zottoli & Wanous, 2000 for a review of the literature on recruiting sources). Also, Goldman (2001) demonstrated that the strongest predictor of discrimination-claiming behavior was social guidance, or the perceptions of family and friends that one had been treated unfairly.

Ryan and Ployhart (2000) concluded that social information has been somewhat neglected in the applicant perceptions literature (with the exception of Bazerman, Schroth, Shah, Diekmann & Tenbrunsel, 1994, which showed that friends can influence one's perceptions of job offers). While the literature on justice has indicated that individuals rely on cues from others to form fairness perceptions (Ambrose, Harland & Kulik 1991; Lind & Tyler, 1988), there has been no systematic study of how information from others influences expectations of fairness in selection contexts.

Lind, Kray and Thompson (1998) found that while others' reports of injustice influenced perceptions of fairness, these were given much less weight than personal experiences. They

concluded “it takes a great deal of *reported* injustice to equal even a little *experienced* injustice.” (p. 17). Thus, while we would expect applicants to consider the experiences of others in forming expectations of fairness in a selection context, these will be afforded much less weight than applicants’ own experiences. Further, research suggests that whether one has empathy for or derogates a victim of injustice depends on whether one has personally experienced an injustice (Kray & Lind, 2002), suggesting that indirect information about fairness is interpreted in light of one’s direct experiences. Thus, badmouthing of an organization’s selection process may not get much weight in expectation formation of others who have not had similar experiences.

Another indirect influence is what the organization provides in terms of specific information about the selection process and justice elements (e.g., all candidates are treated consistently) in recruiting materials. Further, there may be publicly available information that influences expectations. Research in settings where an organization has a history of discriminatory practices and/or the presence of a strong affirmative action program has indicated that these context variables influence perceptions of fairness (Ryan, Ployhart, Greguras & Schmit, 1998; Ryan, Sacco, McFarland & Kriska, 2000; Schmit & Ryan, 1997; Truxillo & Bauer, 1999) – we would expect that these would influence expectations of a selection process as well.

There is some research that directly addresses how providing information influences applicant perceptions. Lievens, DeCorte and Brysse (2003) found that providing information on the reliability and validity of selection procedures had no effect on perceptions of fairness. Their study involved applicants reading descriptions of procedures, rather than experiencing them. Truxillo, Bauer, Campion and Parento (2002) found that providing information on job relatedness and the feedback process to applicants prior to their experiencing a procedure led to

more positive fairness perceptions both at the time of testing as well as after the decision was made, as compared to a group not receiving such information.

In sum, the incorporation of indirect information about fairness into the formation of expectations may vary, depending upon the extent to which information fits with one's own experiences and expectations (i.e., confirmatory bias), as well as the source and nature of the information.

Existing beliefs. There are also other, existing beliefs that might influence applicant expectations, as a result of one's personal characteristics (e.g., an ethnic minority expecting a lack of distributive justice because of societal level employment patterns) or stable individual differences. For example, researchers have demonstrated that individuals with a stronger belief in a just world may have different expectations than those not possessing this trait (Boyce, 2003), general beliefs in testing may influence expectations (Chan et al., 1998), and personality traits may influence applicant expectations (Boyce, 2003; Thibodeaux, Avis & Kudisch, 2003).

Another source of beliefs is cultural values, which have been shown to have a pervasive influence on multiple aspects of justice perceptions such as preferences for procedures and process elements (e.g., Lind & Tyler, 1988; Steiner & Gilliland, 1996), reactions to injustice (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991; 1994), and perceptions of what is fair/unfair (e.g., Hofstede, 1980; James, 1993) (see Steiner & Gilliland, 2001 for a review of the culture and applicant perceptions literature; see James, 1993 for a broader review of the culture and organizational justice literature). As Morris and Leung (2000) note, cultural differences in justice judgments are not due to cultural values directly affecting judgments but to values leading to the accessing of different belief structures, which then influence perceptions of fairness. This is consistent with the notion of cultural values being an influence on expectations. Steiner (2001) and Steiner

and Gilliland (2001), for example, argue that numerous cultural dimensions, including patterns of communication and patterns of institutions and social systems, influence the distributive and procedural rules that individuals expect to encounter in a focal event, and these expectations serve as a lens through which individuals interpret and react to events. Further, organizations designing global selection systems are aware that culture can influence what individuals expect regarding a selection process, and that these expectations are considered in attempting to standardize selection systems globally (Ryan, Wiechmann, & Hemingway, 2003).

An interesting finding from the general literature on anticipatory injustice illustrates the role of less obvious beliefs in expectation formation. Ritter, Fischbein, and Lord (2003) assessed injustice expectations both implicitly (via reaction times) and explicitly (via direct questionnaire items). They found that minorities were more likely to implicitly expect leaders to be unjust, even if the manager was of one's own race; however this effect was not present with the explicit measure of expectations. Although research suggests that asking individuals about their expectations can make implicit expectations explicit (e.g., Ross & Olson, 1982), this study also suggests that expectations may be influenced by unconscious beliefs and may not always be reported by applicants.

In sum, individuals are likely to develop expectations regarding what will occur in a hiring process and how fair the procedures, treatment, and outcomes will be. Table 1 provides a summary of how applicant expectations of justice might evolve.

Consequences of justice expectations in selection systems

Research has shown that expectations have relatively substantial effects on a range of cognitive, attitudinal, motivational, and behavioral outcomes (see Higgins & Bargh, 1987; Miller & Turnbull, 1986; Olson et al., 1996 for reviews). Although the rationale behind specific effects

will be discussed below, there are a few key mechanisms that underlie many of the effects of expectations that should be briefly outlined. As shown in Figure 1, one of the key mechanisms involves the effect of expectations on information processing activities. One of the most consistent findings in the expectations literature has been that individuals demonstrate a bias toward confirmation of their expectations (Higgins & Bargh, 1987). Expectations direct attention and influence what information gets encoded. Specifically, people have a tendency to notice instances that confirm expectations or to “see what they expect to see” (Rothbart, Evans, & Fulero, 1979). It should be noted that information that is clearly inconsistent with expectations also gets noticed (Hastie & Kumar, 1979). However, recent research in the justice arena suggests that fairness schemas are rarely revisited and information must be radically different for individuals to reconsider their validity (Lind et al., 1998). Research also suggests that information tends to be interpreted in line with (i.e., supporting or confirming) expectations rather than as opposing (i.e., disconfirming) expectations (Darely & Gross, 1983; Duncan, 1976;). Thus, expectations not only influence what information gets processed but also how that information is processed. Together, these two processes suggest that information processing activities are likely to be largely congruent with a person’s expectations. However, as we have noted several times, research specifically examining justice expectancies in selection contexts and how disconfirming information (e.g., an unexpected unfair treatment) is interpreted in light of those expectancies is needed to better understand the magnitude of confirmatory biases in these settings.

The confirmation bias also manifests in individuals’ behavior, such that individuals tend to behave in a manner consistent with their expectations or in a manner that will result in confirmation of their expectations. The basic principle here is quite simple - if a person believes

that someone or something possesses a particular characteristic (e.g., a selection procedure is unfair), he or she will behave consistently with that assumption. Moreover, we tend to view the behavior of others in a manner that confirms our expectations, a phenomenon known as the self-fulfilling prophecy (see Miller & Turnbull, 1986 for a review). Finally, research has demonstrated that we tend to possess more positive attitudes and affect when we have more positive expectations about valued outcomes (e.g., Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). For example, positive performance expectations have been shown to reduce anxiety and foster a positive attitude toward the task (Bandura, 1982). So, as shown in Figure 1, expectations have numerous consequences for individuals' information processing activities, behaviors, and attitudes and affect. We next discuss specific consequences that we believe may be tied to justice expectations in selection environments. Figure 2 provides an illustration of these effects.

Expectations and attitudes. Expectations may influence the attitudes and affect of applicants. For example, research indicates that applicant variations in motivation may be linked to differences in beliefs in testing and experienced discrimination (Chan, 1997; Sanchez, Truxillo & Bauer, 2000), which we see as direct antecedents of expectations. Individuals with low expectations of justice may be more likely to experience negative affective perceptions (greater anxiety during the process, less satisfaction with the process), regardless of actual experiences or the selection outcome. That is, if expectations regarding the fairness of the process lead one to expect (or not expect) success in the process, or expect to have control over the outcomes, this will affect applicant test-taking attitudes (Gilliland, 1993). For example, test-taking motivation might be lowered among applicants who have formed an expectation that the hiring at an organization is based on who you know, not what you know.

Expectations and cognition. As noted above, research has established that expectations have a powerful influence on individuals' information processing activities. Individuals are biased in their need to confirm their expectations and, as a result, are more likely to notice information that is consistent with their expectations (Higgins & Bargh, 1987). For example, an individual who expects to be treated unfairly in a selection process may be more likely to notice procedural violations, such as inconsistencies in administration or inequities in hiring decisions. In addition to influencing what gets noticed, expectations have been shown to influence how information is encoded and processed. Research suggests that individuals will process information from the selection environment in a manner that is consistent with their expectations. Stevens (1997), for example, found that applicants who expected to receive job offers evaluated their recruiters more positively (e.g., as more personable), regardless of objective recruiter behavior. She argues that this is evidence of confirmatory information processing and suggests that that "applicants' acceptance decisions may be largely determined before formal recruitment activities begin" (p. 963).

This confirmatory information processing should also translate into direct and positive relationships between applicants' expectations and their perceptions of the fairness of the selection process and outcome. Research on justice perceptions in selection contexts has typically shown that the hiring decision has a large influence on post-process perceptions of fairness (e.g., Gilliland, 1994; Ployhart & Ryan, 1998). While at first blush this may seem to suggest that expectations matter less than the outcome of a selection decision, it is important to consider that there are fairly strong correlations between measures of process fairness measured pre-process and post-decision. For example, Chan et al. (1998) found a correlation of .60 for pre-post fairness perceptions of a cognitive ability test and .66 for pre-post fairness perceptions

of a personality test. It will be interesting to gather further data directly using measures of expectations of process fairness (e.g., asking whether one expects the process to be fair) and to see if the role of expectations in this context is less than what one would expect based on the social psychological literature because of the evaluative nature of selection. That is, while the social psychology literature on expectations, and the literatures on fairness heuristics and met expectations all suggest the pervasiveness of expectancy confirmation effects, research is needed to better understand how outcome favorability is interpreted in light of expectancies. Of particular interest is how unexpected unfavorable outcomes (i.e., rejections) are interpreted when one has expectations of a fair process and outcome. That is, expectation of being hired is something distinct from expectations of distributive and procedural justice, and longitudinal research is needed to clarify how these relate. We also note that the confirmation bias argument suggests that expectations would be strongly linked to the outcome one receives when there is knowledge of performance on similar devices, and this is consistent with what some researchers have found regarding fairness perceptions and outcomes (Chan et al., 1998; Ryan et al., 2000).

Expectations and behavior. Expectations will also influence behavior, both directly and indirectly through influencing applicant attitudes and perceptions of the selection process (see Gilliland & Cherry, 2000; Ryan & Ployhart, 2000 for reviews of the links of applicant perceptions and behavior). For example, individuals who do not expect a fair process will be unlikely to apply for a job. Recently Reeve and Schultz (2003) demonstrated that individuals had justice perceptions of processes as job seekers and these influenced job pursuit evaluations. Those who have less positive expectations may be more likely to self-select out of the process, although research connecting fairness perceptions to applicant withdrawal has had mixed support

(Ployhart & Ryan, 1998; Ryan et al., 2000). Those who have more negative expectations may also be less likely to recommend the organization to others, regardless of their actual experience.

A very clear link has been established between applicant perceptions and performance on cognitive ability tests, but fairness has not been as clearly linked to performance on other devices with which individuals have less experience and which are less transparent, such as personality tests (Chan et al., 1998). Thus, justice expectations may influence performance in the selection process (perhaps through their effect on test-taking attitudes), but this effect may vary in magnitude depending upon available performance history from which to form expectations of outcomes.

Theoretical Implications & Future Research

In the previous sections, we reviewed research that suggests that justice expectations may serve as a powerful determinant of individuals' perceptions, behaviors, attitudes, and affect. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that individuals' expectations of justice may be particularly important in selection contexts because of the uncertainty and ambiguity that applicants' encounter (e.g., Shapiro & Kirkman, 2001). However, future research is needed to better understand exactly how expectations fit into the larger organizational justice framework and the implications of justice expectations for understanding and enhancing applicant perceptions.

One issue that future research will need to examine involves the role of expectation strength in determining the effects of justice expectations. We know that as the strength of an expectation increases so does its impact on an individual's cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors (Olson et al., 1996). However, past research has typically failed to assess the strength of individuals' expectations, which can lead to problems in interpreting research findings.

Consider, for example, a recent study by van den Bos et al. (1998). In this study, the authors found that outcome evaluations exhibited strong effects of procedural fairness when outcomes were better or worse than expected, but not when individuals received outcomes that were equal to, better than, or worse than those of comparison others. Based on these findings, the authors suggest that expectations may serve as a relatively uncertain and ambiguous reference point about outcomes, thereby forcing individuals to rely on procedural information to form outcome judgments. However, the authors also note that this finding might have emerged because their manipulations of outcome expectations were not strong enough to be informative to study participants. In fact, van den Bos (2001, p. 72) notes that “sometimes, at least under some conditions, the certainty could be greater from expectations than from social comparison.”

For future research to consider the issue of expectation strength, it will be necessary to engage in direct measurement of individuals’ justice expectations. Recent research by Colquitt (2001) revealed that organizational justice is most aptly conceptualized along four dimensions: distributive, procedural, informational, and interpersonal. We recommend that in designing measures of justice expectations researchers utilize this four-dimensional conceptualization of organizational justice so as to provide a comprehensive picture of applicants’ justice expectations. For example, researchers may modify the scales developed by Colquitt (2001) to focus on expectations rather than perceptions. Some preliminary data we have collected suggests that this referent shift does not alter the properties (e.g., factor structure, intercorrelations) of these scales. However, additional research is needed to address several issues concerning the measurement of justice expectations. For example, expectations, like any other internal process, are reactive to measurement, such that the measurement process may induce expectancies that would not have been generated spontaneously or may make implicit expectancies explicit (Olson

et al., 1996). To address this issue, it may be useful to examine alternative measurement systems, such as free response or reaction times, that assess implicit expectations and may have less of a priming effect. This issue may also be dealt with by introducing a temporal separation between measurement of expectations and the focal event. It will be important for future research to consider these measurement questions.

In addition to directly measuring individuals' expectations, it will be important for future research to identify factors that determine the strength of individuals' justice expectations. Research has shown that other properties of expectations influence their strength (see Higgins & Bargh, 1987). For example, expectations that are more certain and accessible provide a firmer foundation for information processing and behavioral choice and expectations that are more important (i.e., more relevant to individuals' underlying needs or values) have stronger implications. These properties not only indicate the strength of an expectation but also provide information on how expectation strength can be influenced. For instance, providing consensus information from other people increases the certainty, and therefore the strength, of an expectation (Kelley, 1973). In addition, research should examine the impact that different sources have on expectation strength. For example, expectations derived from direct experiences tend to be more clear, more confidently held, more accessible, and, therefore, more predictive of future attitudes and behaviors than expectations derived from other sources (Fazio & Zanna, 1981). In addition, research needs to explore how different sources interact to influence the strength of expectations. For example, the influence of expectations derived from indirect sources can depend on the nature of one's past experiences as well as the strength of existing beliefs (Olson et al., 1996). Overall, a better understanding of these issues will allow organizations to derive maximum impact from their efforts to enhance applicants' expectations.

Another important issue for future research to examine involves the relative effects of justice expectations and the actual, objective characteristics of events. In other words, to what extent are applicants' perceptions influenced by what they expect versus what they actually experience? Lievens, van Dam, and Anderson (2002) note that most studies in the applicant perceptions area assess only post-process perceptions, leaving us with little knowledge of how expectations relate to perceptions measured after participation in the process. To disentangle the effects of expectations from "reality", it will be important for future research to systematically assess applicants' experiences. This may be best achieved in laboratory experiments where the outcome, process, and interpersonal elements of a selection event can be controlled and manipulated. It may be possible to also assess applicants' experiences in field settings. However, this research will need to incorporate objective measures of experiences because expectations will likely bias self-report measures of applicant experiences. For example, in a study on newcomer expectations, Irving and Meyer (1994) report correlations ranging from .59 to .67 between various dimensions of pre-entry expectations and self-reported, post-entry work experiences. Given these significant relationships, it is difficult to determine the relative influence of these two components because perceived experiences are partially a product of expectations.

A final issue researchers may want to examine is how the influence of justice expectations varies over time. Miceli's (1986) fadeout model suggests that the effects of expectations should decrease over time as individuals draw on direct and indirect experiences to guide their attitudes and behaviors. While there is some evidence that expectations are rather resilient, it is likely that applicants will use their experiences to test and potentially revise their pre-process hypotheses. Future research that employs multiple measurements of individuals'

justice expectations over time can provide insight into not only how expectations change as a result of experiences but also how expectations generated before and during a selection process influence individuals' attitudes and behaviors. Research on this issue has the potential to highlight how characteristics of the selection process, such as duration, influence the impact of justice expectations and may also help articulate the relationship between justice expectations and fairness heuristics.

Practical Implications

Given the significant impact that expectations have on individuals' attitudes and behaviors, organizations should attempt to actively manage applicants' expectations of justice. One approach is to create a selection system that will meet or exceed applicants' expectations of fairness. For example, organizations can benchmark competitors' selection practices to get a better feel for applicants' past experiences and ensure that their own practices meet or exceed existing norms. While organizations may be focused on doing what they are doing well (e.g., using valid instruments), if competitors are doing things differently (e.g., making offers on the spot), the process may not meet an applicant's expectations (e.g., a fair process is one that provides an immediate decision).

Although there are certainly benefits to designing selection systems with the goal of meeting or exceeding applicants' expectations, there are two potential problems with this approach. First, consider the applicant who enters the selection process with low expectations of justice. Even if the system is objectively fair, the applicant may not perceive it as such because of the inherent bias to engage in cognitive and behavioral activities that confirm rather than disconfirm expectations (Olson et al., 1996). Second, even if sufficient information is available to disconfirm an applicants' negative expectations, he or she may not have the cognitive

resources available to process this information (Cropanzano et al., 2001; Lind, 2001). When overloaded, applicants will be more likely to rely on expectations for making quick and efficient judgments.

This suggests that a more effective approach may be to focus on enhancing applicants' pre-process expectations. There are several potential benefits to this approach. First, if applicants possess positive expectations of justice then the confirmation bias should work for rather than against the organization. Second, positive justice expectations are likely to be associated with a number of favorable outcomes, such as greater applicant motivation, reduced likelihood of withdrawal, and more positive affect. Finally, by targeting applicants' expectations, organizations are able to take a proactive approach to enhancing applicants' perceptions. An important caveat is that organizations should focus on creating realistic expectations among applicants. If the expectations an organization creates, or that an applicant initially possesses, are significantly more favorable than what an applicant experiences, the resulting "reality shock" may lead the applicant to feel betrayed by the organization (Wanous et al., 1992). Ultimately, we believe the optimal approach is to establish positive justice expectations and create a selection system that meets those expectations.

Researchers in the field of alcohol prevention have developed an intervention known as expectancy challenge (e.g., Darkes & Goldman, 1993; Cruz & Dunn, 2003) that might serve as a useful model for programs aimed at enhancing applicants' justice expectations. The expectancy challenge approach aims to modify expectancies by undermining or challenging false (negative) beliefs and increasing participants' attention to accurate (positive) information. A facilitator elicits and discusses participants' existing beliefs, then presents information designed to challenge false beliefs and facilitate the development of accurate beliefs, and uses exercises and

discussions to reinforce the accurate beliefs. Research has shown that expectancy challenge interventions are effective for modifying individuals' alcohol expectancies and subsequently reducing individuals' alcohol consumption (e.g., Darkes & Goldman, 1993; Dunn, Lau, & Cruz, 2000).

Using the expectancy challenge approach as a model, organizations may be able to design pre-process orientation sessions that challenge applicants' negative expectations and stress the fairness of different elements of the selection process. Gilliland (1995) found that individuals recalled more unfair than fair incidents related to fakeability, dishonesty, and question propriety and that some procedural justice rules were more salient in their violation while others were more salient in their satisfaction. To facilitate the disconfirmation of applicants' negative expectations, attention can be given in particular to those procedural justice areas where more applicants are more likely to have had negative experiences. Also, research suggests that the fairness information made available to individuals must be unambiguous and trustworthy to override existing expectations (e.g., Davidson & Friedman, 1998; Elaad, Ginton, & Ben-Shakkar, 1994). For example, an expectancy challenge directed toward changing minority group member perceptions of a cognitive ability screening instrument as an unfair selection tool would need to present information that is perceived as trustworthy.

When attempting to modify applicants' expectations, it may be useful to manipulate different sources of information (see Table 1). For example, pre-process sessions may use exercises or simulations to give applicants' direct experience with elements of the selection system. This firsthand experience can highlight the fairness of the selection process and is likely to have a powerful, positive influence on applicants' justice expectations (Olson et al., 1996). Another source an organization can leverage in selection situations is indirect experience or

communication. For example, organizations may use recruiting materials and other publicly available information (e.g., website, media) to communicate fairness information to potential applicants. When fairness is part of an organization's brand or image, applicants' might be more likely to have positive justice expectations. In addition, organizations can encourage employee referrals to increase the likelihood of attracting applicants who have received positive communication from others.

Ultimately the issue of how best to manage and enhance applicants' expectations underscores the importance of understanding how different sources combine to determine applicants' justice expectations. For example, can organizational information about fairness override an applicants' negative past experiences? Can communication from peers have a larger influence on applicants' justice expectations than their existing beliefs? What is the relative role of expectation versus experience of the event? Current evidence on such issues is mixed (e.g., Lievens et al., 2003; Truxillo et al., 2002); thus, future research is needed.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is considerable evidence to suggest that our understanding of organizational justice perceptions in general, and applicant perceptions in particular, may be enhanced by incorporating the concept of justice expectations into future theoretical and empirical work. Existing research in the areas of both expectations and organizational justice is quite substantial and provides a solid foundation for the theoretical integration of these constructs. Research on justice expectations may enhance our understanding of how what individuals bring with them to organizational events influences their attitudes and behaviors, and organizations may be able to use these pre-event expectations as a point of leverage in attempts

to enhance important individual and organizational outcomes. We hope that this article provides some guidance to individuals interested in pursuing these opportunities.

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Table 1. Antecedents of justice expectations: sources, properties, selection examples, and practical implications.

| Source | Description & Properties | Selection Examples | Practical Implications |
|---------------------|---|---|---|
| Direct Experience | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Direct personal experience with an object or entity plays a major role in the formation of beliefs. - Expectancies derived from firsthand experience are especially trustworthy and therefore tend to be more confidently held and stronger than expectancies derived from other sources. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Past experiences in similar hiring situations/with similar selection procedures. - Past experiences with an organization or organizational agent. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Distinguish the organization's selection procedure from others that might be seen as unfair - Attend to justice rules that are commonly violated or are more salient in their violation - Benchmark competitor's hiring practices to meet or exceed applicants' prior experiences. - Use exercises or simulations to provide firsthand knowledge of the fairness of selection process. |
| Indirect Experience | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Indirect experience involves communication from other people as well as observation (vicarious experience). - Sources that tend to be particularly influential include family (e.g., parents), peers, institutions (e.g., schools), and the mass media. - Indirect experience can be particularly influential when existing beliefs are weak. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peer communication about experiences with organization. - Communication through application or recruiting materials. - General organizational communication (e.g., media). - Witnessing others' experiences in the hiring situation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use employee referrals as method for generating applicants. - Communicate fairness information to potential applicants. |
| Existing Beliefs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Beliefs can be inferred logically from other, existing beliefs. - Direct or indirect experience is not necessary for generating expectations. - Existing beliefs underlie most expectations because they influence the inferences we draw from direct experiences and our willingness to rely on indirect sources. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Influence of belief in a just world on expectations - Culture or global differences in norms of accepted practices. - General belief in testing - Stereotypes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify potential individual differences and use them to target expectation modification efforts. - Design selection practices to be sensitive to cultural differences in expectations. |

Figure Captions

Figure 1. Basic model of justice expectations.

Figure 2. Consequences of justice expectations in selection settings.



