



**WORKPLACE INJUSTICE AND THE PLACE OF THE VICTIM;  
THE ANTECEDENTS OF TALK ABOUT WORKPLACE INJUSTICE  
IN THE UNIVERSITY OF BAMENDA, CAMEROON**

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**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** This study examines the role of a victim of workplace injustice in their own recovery process. It asks: can victims recover from the negative effects of a fairness violation, and more specifically, can talk, that is, conversation with others, aid such a recovery process? This study argues that such victims of workplace injustice will be motivated to reduce this distressing condition, to repair their relational selves, via talk. It is argued that this state of threatened relational need will lead to both emotional and cognition talk via anger. **Methodology/Design/Approaches:** A repeated cross-sectional survey was carried out at two time points separated by six weeks. The data and analyses for this study came from the first survey, with a replication of the results conducted with the second time point of data to examine the validity of the findings. The sample for this study used 166 employees of the University of Bamenda. The average age of participants was 43 years (SD = 15.66), and their tenure with the company was on average 7.94 years (SD = 7.33). Sixty percent (60%) of the participants were Female. **Findings:** The study

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uncovered antecedents and consequences of talk; anger and thwarted justice needs were found to trigger talk, with an interaction between emotion and cognition talk driving victim-centred outcomes of rumination, self-affirmation and active solutions. **Research Limitations:** It should be noted, that the present study is perhaps best assessed by cross-sectional design rather than separating predictor and criterion variables over separate time periods. The issue lies with the nature of talk – conversations unfold soon after an event. Too much temporal separation leaves a researcher open to missing the fundamental intricacies of conversation that occurs and perhaps artificially inflating the links between injustice, needs and talk. **Originality:** This empirical research is the first of its kind to be carried out within the context of the victims of injustice at the University of Bamenda. The study area is unique as no related research has been carried out within the University of Bamenda. As such, if the findings of this study are implemented within the study area, the present study will be one step towards a greater appreciation of workplace injustice as experienced through the eyes of a victim, providing impetus to the integration of both organisational justice and talk as fields of enquiry.

**Keywords:** workplace injustice, place of the victim, antecedents of talk, University of Bamenda

## 1. Introduction

*“The University as a whole takes more interest in its top management than it does in its employees who work for their bonuses...”*

*“When I worked under my previous supervisor, I felt very uneasy and unfairly treated. I felt victimised. Made my morale very low.”*

*“On a matter of sickness, genuine sickness, I was told by a superior how I had to be here to take important people to work, therefore implying I wasn't sick and that I was unimportant...”*

The above quotes, taken from interviews conducted as part of the present study describe the toll that workplace injustice can take on its victims. The experience of unfairness is posited as being a ubiquitous reality of organisational life (Bies & Tripp, 2002). The impact of unfairness triggers victims to engage in varied responses such as; counterproductive work-behaviours (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997; Ambrose et al., 2002), increased feelings of anger (Bies & Tripp, 2002) and sickness (Elovainio et al., 2002). In addition to these responses, research from literature uncovered that victims of workplace unfairness can also engage in talk.

### **1.1 Research purpose**

The purpose of this research is to present an empirical investigation of the antecedents of talk as it asks: what triggers victims of unfairness to engage in talk? This study seeks to examine the role of a victim of workplace injustice in their own recovery process. It asks: can victims recover from the negative effects of a fairness violation, and more specifically, can talk, that is, conversation with others, aid such a recovery process? This study argues that such victims of workplace injustice will be motivated to reduce this distressing condition, to repair their relational selves, via talk. It is argued that this state of threatened relational need will lead to both emotional and cognition talk via anger.

Scholars have been making calls for well over a decade now urging for a shift in focus toward the victims of workplace injustice. The impact notwithstanding effects on individual victims themselves, including heightened negative emotions (Bies & Tripp, 2002), psychological distress (Tepper, 2001) and sickness absence (Elovainio, Kivimaki & Vahtera, 2002). The result has been, unfortunately, a neglect of the victim who is at the heart of an unjust encounter, as well as his/her unjust experience. Heeding calls from Shapiro (2001) and Barclay et al. (2009), this study examines workplace injustice from the perspective of the victim. It seeks to understand the aftermath of injustice through the eyes of those who experience it. In particular, this study explores the process of recovery and it attempts to answer such questions as, how does the experience of one who has suffered workplace injustice unfold? How does a victim manage his/her recovery process, and what are the outcomes of such a process?

Ironically, however, with an amassing body of literature dedicated to understanding how many types of justice there are, how they are distinguished from one another and how justice judgements are formed, the organisational justice field has largely failed to account for those who experience and suffer workplace injustice.

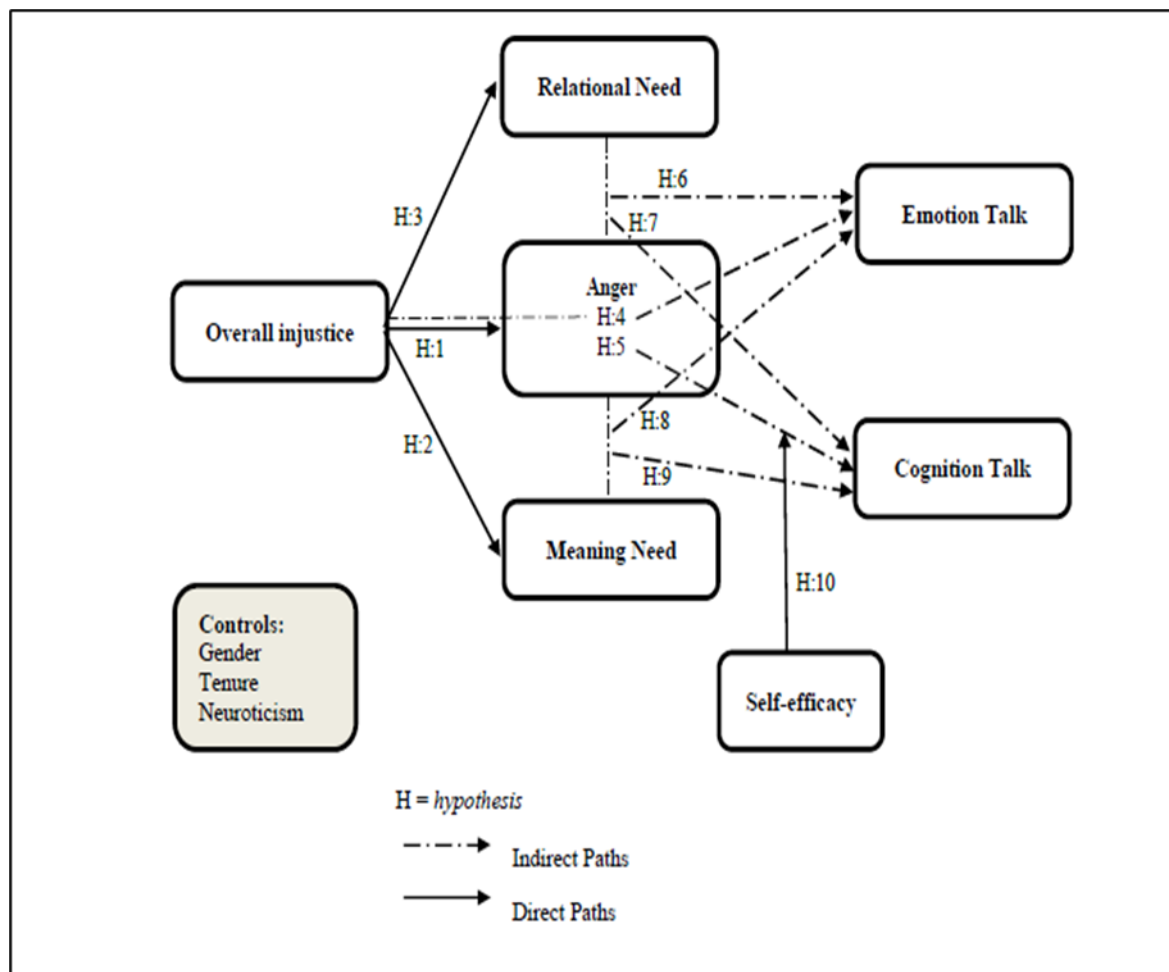
In addressing Barclay et al.'s (2009) suggestion for a test of 'interventions' that can aid recovery, this study examines talk; that is, conversation with others through spoken words. This research will explore if, when, and how, talk can assist victims with their recovery process following their experience of organisational injustice. Recovery in the context of this study is defined as the emotional, cognitive and behavioural journey an individual goes through in order to work towards a resolution to their experience: it is a victim's ongoing efforts to manage an injustice.

### **1.2 Literature review**

This study is the first field investigation of the integration of the phenomenon of talk into a workplace (in)justice paradigm. It seeks to explore more specifically the conditions under which talk takes place; in other words, what features of an unjust encounter trigger someone to turn to another to share their experience?

Figure 1 depicts the research framework model for investigation. In sum, it is posited that the emotion of anger, plus the thwarting of justice needs (Relational need and meaning need), trigger engagement in talk. In presenting its hypotheses, this study

will proceed by discussing the direct paths of the model first (the first half of the model), and then the indirect paths leading to talk (the second half of the model).



**Figure 1:** Schematic conceptual model of the antecedents to talk in the context of workplace injustice

### 1.2.1 Workplace injustice and anger

The first antecedent posited is the negative emotion of anger, which is argued as being driven by perceptions of injustice. The question is, how do perceptions of injustice drive a victim to engage in talk via the emotion of anger?

Theoretical and empirical insights provide impetus to the choice of anger as the central emotion in Figure 1. Theoretically, fairness theory (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998, 2001) asserts that perceptions of injustice are drawn on by a counterfactual thought process. Perceptions of unfairness are evaluated by a cognitive stage, referred to as the “black box” between a precipitating event and the resultant response (Cropanzano, Weiss, Suckow & Grandey, 2000: 55). Following these justice judgements, an emotional response ensues and this is asserted in Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). They suggested that workplace events trigger emotional reactions, which in turn drive behaviours (job satisfaction, performance). The scholars argue for parallels between the structure of a justice situation and a typical emotional event, arguing that an injustice

situation is an affective event. They note that, "...the justice paradigm can be understood as a special instance of the more general appraisal models of emotion and that the typical justice situation can be seen as an affective event..." (ibid).

Empirically, justice researchers also emphasised that emotion arousing the capacity of injustice, with anger, posited frequently as an outcome. In perhaps one of the first justice studies exploring discrete emotional reactions, Weiss et al. (1999) investigated emotional reactions to events by interacting procedural (un)fairness with outcome (un)fairness in a decision-making task. The procedural conditions involved one of three variations; a confederate mentioning that a friend had already undertaken the study and had provided answers (favourably biased condition); a participant overhearing this conversation (unfavourably biased condition); and finally, no information given at all (procedurally just condition). The outcome conditions involved either pairs of participants winning or losing the task. The study discovered that the emotion of anger, as self-rated by participants, was at its highest when both the procedure and the outcome were unfavourable.

Further justice research posits anger as an outcome of underpayment (distributive injustice) (Adams, 1965), the derogation of one's status and power (interpersonal injustice) (Bies & Tripp, 1996) and unfair processes (procedural injustice) (Vermunt, Wit, van den Bos & Lind, 1996). It has also been posited as an outcome of the additive effect of justice types (i.e., the impact of unfairness from all justice types) (Goldman, 2003). Literature suggests that a perception of organizational injustice will trigger anger and so result to anger responses which can lead to talking. Literature on justice and need agree that fairness has profound implications on individuals and organisations (Colquitt et al., 2001; Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001). Despite this, there is no one agreed upon reason as to why justice matters. But the researchers noticed that even in the spec of talk, the victim of organizational injustice will express both emotional talk and cognition talk which will be elaborated on below.

In line with theoretical and empirical research position and the association between injustice and anger, therefore, it states the following hypothesis:

**H1:** The experience of workplace injustice is positively related to the emotion of anger.

### **1.2.2 Workplace injustice and meaning needs**

Turning now to virtue, a need for meaningfulness is driven by "...a basic respect for human dignity and worth..." (Cropanzano et al., 2001: 175). Individuals are interested in fairness because we hold a collective concern that all people are entitled to be treated fairly. Justice relates to morality and values, and it is this need that individuals look to in order to provide themselves with a sense of purpose, ethics, morality and virtue. This need is perhaps most closely captured in Folger's (1998) deontic model of justice, which proposes that people care about justice for the sake of justice itself.

Psychologists have treated the need for virtue more generally as representing an individual's concern with finding meaning in their lives (Cropanzano et al., 2001). For

example, Williams (1997) initially suggested that humans have a need for a meaningful existence. In other words, the need for virtue has been linked to morality, such that fairness generates moral standards which enable individuals to be virtuous humans in a world that provides significance to their existence.

Indeed, Van den Bos and Miedema (2000) argue implicitly for an association between unfairness and meaning-related needs, by asserting that when people are uncertain about fundamental aspects of their lives (i.e., a breakdown in order, stability, meaning), they pay greater attention to matters of fairness: the hypothesis can therefore be stated that:

**H2:** The experience of workplace injustice is negatively related to a meaning need.

### **1.2.3 Workplace injustice and relational needs**

Belonging and self-regard needs are merged together under the term relational. This need is most central to the group value/relational models of justice presented by Lind, Tyler and their colleagues (e.g., Lind, 1995; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & Lind, 1992; Tyler, 1997). These models posit that what is of importance to individuals is the need to be respected and valued as members of social groups. Fairness is desired because it impinges upon our human need to form interpersonal relations with others, allowing us to build lasting relationships with those we interact with. When individuals within any given group or organisation feel as if they don't belong or are regarded as important members of that organisation, it leads to a perception of injustice, which triggers the desire to express frustration through talk (emotion and cognition talk).

Just treatment amplifies value, dignity and respect, providing individuals with a sense of identity. This is central to one's sense of relational self, which incorporates one's values, beliefs and abilities, and is described as an individual's most prized personal possession (Sedikides & Gregg, 2007). One of the primary motives of human behaviour is to maintain a positive view of the self (Baumeister, 1993, 1998; Steele, 1988). This need is so crucial that individuals are argued as going to great lengths in order to promote and protect their sense of self, playing up its strengths and downplaying any weakness (Sedikides & Gregg, 2007). Self-regard is intertwined with self-esteem, described generally as one's attitude towards oneself (ibid; Brockner, 1988). In this vein, fair treatment at work signals regards for individuals, letting them know that they are valued and respected members of a group and an organisation as well as sharing their experiences which is also an important element of unfairness. Interactional justice itself is built upon the idea that the treatment of employees at work should follow principles of respect and dignity (Colquitt, 2001). Empirical evidence from the justice sphere reports a positive relationship between just treatment at work and one's sense of self, captured as self-esteem and self-evaluations (Brockner, Heuer, Magner, Folger, Umphress, van den Bos & Siegel, 2003; Smith & Tyler, 1997; Schroth & Shah, 2000).

Heck, Bedeian and Day (2005) report that unfair procedures and outcomes led employees to feel less valued and fulfilled, lowering their self-esteem. Unfairness signals

to individuals that they are not included, valued or respected members of a collective. Thus, if justice is a carrier of important goal-relevant information central to one's needs, unjust treatment threatens one's belongingness to a group and harms one's sense of self-esteem among the staff of the University of Bamenda. As Cropanzano et al. (2001: 177) assert: *"Injustice tends to separate people from others, and justice brings them closer together"*. It is thus hypothetically stated that:

**H3:** The experience of workplace injustice is negatively related to a relational need.

### **1.2.3 Workplace injustice, anger and talk (Emotional talk and Cognition talk)**

#### **1.2.3.1 Emotional talk**

Turning now to the mediated paths, it is predicted that injustice will trigger both emotion and cognition talk, via anger. Indeed, anger should trigger both emotion and cognition talk, an assertion that holds true in studies of talk, which suggest that the expression of emotions of talk is the direct result of felt distress, sadness and anger due to injustice situations (Rimé, 2009b). Repeated empirical investigations from related studies conclude that it is exposure to a negative experience that instigates a negative emotional reaction, which in turn triggers talk (Luminet et al., 2000; Pennebaker et al., 2001; Rimé, 2009). This trajectory of research evidence that people share everyday emotional experiences with others, such that talk follows a situation such as not considered for a well-deserved position. In a study, Rimé, Paez, Basabe and Martinez (2010) measured the social sharing of emotions immediately after the 2004 Madrid terrorist attacks. What characterised early conversations was higher event-related emotional arousal: individuals felt a need to off-load their emotional experience. The hypothesis is therefore stated as;

**H4:** The experience of workplace injustice will have an indirect effect on emotion talk through anger.

#### **1.2.3.2 Cognition talk**

A theoretical reason that can be posited to explain this reaction can be drawn from appraisal theories of emotion. Lazarus (1991) writes that each emotion involves an action tendency which is an outlet for one's physiological response. For example, fear-anxiety is tied with avoidance and escape, guilt with making amends, shame with hiding, and anger with an outward response to release frustration, such as an attack. Applying this assertion to the present argument, it is suggested that if individuals act in congruence with their felt emotions in one outlet, they can deploy to release their emotional frustration to offset it via talk. This argument has resonance with Freud's early writing which posited an association between pent up frustration and its discharge (Breuer & Freud, 1895). Thus, in light of this preceding argument, it is stated that:

**H5:** The experience of workplace injustice will have an indirect effect on cognition talk through anger.

#### **1.2.4 Relational need, anger and talk**

The aforementioned reasoning on the relational needs suggests that injustice has the potential to destabilise an individual's self-system, rendering upon them a state of lowered self-esteem and of detachment. One's relational self is thus weakened. This study argues that such victims of workplace injustice will be motivated to reduce this distressing condition, to repair their relational selves, via talk. It is argued that this state of threatened relational need will lead to both emotional and cognition talk via anger.

Within the social psychology talk literature, Rimé (2009) argues that it is a negative experience which directs people to talk, from which their needs for comfort, empathy and validation are met. One can argue therefore that an outlet individual will seek to follow their injustice experience and will offset it via talk. Thus, in light of this preceding argument it is hypothesized that;

**H6:** The experience of a lowered relational need will have an indirect effect on emotion talk through anger.

**H7:** The experience of a lowered relational need will have an indirect effect on cognition talk through anger.

#### **1.2.5 Meaning need, anger and talk**

The aforementioned reasoning on the meaning need suggests that injustice has the potential to destabilise an individual's sense of meaning, rendering upon them a state of uncertainty and instability. We argue that victims of workplace injustice will be motivated to reduce this distressing condition, to repair their sense of meaning, via talk. It is argued that this state of threatened meaning need will lead to both emotional and cognition talk via anger.

Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld (2005) argue that sensemaking occurs at the point at which a state of affairs is perceived to be different from the expected *modus operandi*. At this juncture, individuals attempt to make sense of the disruption, looking for reasons that will enable them to continue life. They argue that sensemaking is about organising through communication; it takes place through interactive talk. In doing so, it is about bringing meaning into existence, and by extension, stability and order back into one's world. The scholars argue that sensemaking is the search for meaning as a way to deal with uncertainty; "*...people...make sense of equivocal inputs and enact this sense back into the world to make that world more orderly...*" (410). Thus, in light of this proceeding arguments it is hypothesized that:

**H8:** The experience of a lowered meaning need will have an indirect effect on emotion talk through anger.

**H9:** The experience of a lowered meaning need will have an indirect effect on cognition talk through anger.



### **1.2.6 The moderating impact of self-efficacy**

Self-efficacy is defined as individuals' beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance (Bandura, 1994). Self-efficacy has been reported as predicting important work-related outcomes including attitudes (Saks, 1995), performance (Martocchio & Judge, 1997; Judge, Jackson, Shaw, Scott & Rich, 2007) and stress (Jex, Bliese, Buzzell & Primeau, 2001). It has also been studied in the form of a trait, referred to as generalised self-efficacy (GSE) (Chen, Gully & Eden, 2001), defined as an individual's belief in their overall competence and ability to perform across different situations. It is expected that individuals with higher self-efficacy will succeed across tasks and situations, compared to those who are less efficacious (Chen et al., 2001).

It is suggested that self-efficacy moderates the relationship between anger and cognition talk. The researcher has chosen this construct to moderate cognition talk specifically to test conditions under which a victim may move out of their emotional frustration following injustice and focus on finding a solution to their predicament. This requires a focus not on one's blocked goal, but on moving ahead. It is expected that individuals higher in self-efficacy are more likely to engage in cognition talk, than those lower in self-efficacy. Lower efficacious individuals are more likely to be affected by their experience of injustice such that they may be reluctant to abandon their frustration and anger regarding their experience of injustice; they may not be ready to reframe, re-interpret or think of solutions to their unfairness. Therefore:

**H10:** Self-efficacy will moderate the relationship between anger and cognition talk such that the relationship is stronger for individuals who are higher in self-efficacy than for individuals who are lower in self-efficacy.

### **1.2.7 Control variables**

#### **a. Gender**

Gender was controlled because, in line with popular stereotypes, women are often found to be more prone to talk via sharing their emotions compared to men (Bergmann, 1993) though this has not always been evidenced in research (Rimé, 2009). It will therefore be important to use genders to control the research model so as to understand the discrepancies surrounding the act of talk between men and women, especially at the University of Bamaneda.

#### **b. Tenure**

Tenure may affect the degree to which employees engage in emotional versus cognition talk. Research on responses to stress at work cites tenure as moderating an individual's responses, such that knowledge of an organisation's systems and procedures can lead to more adaptive responses (i.e., Parasuraman & Cleek, 1984). Employee tenure was controlled given that experience within a company may influence the degree to which an employee is able to manage their experience of injustice.

### **c. Neuroticism**

This is in line with previous research (Aquino et al., 2006) which controlled for the impact of neuroticism on adverse outcomes following injustice. Neuroticism was controlled because one's propensity to experience negative emotions might make them react more strongly to injustice events, and/or influence the degree and nature of talk they engage in.

## **2. Methodology**

A survey was deemed the most appropriate methodology to explore such research aims. Unlike interviews, surveys allowed for ease of data collection with regard to time resources. They also allowed for an assessment of the psychometric properties of the newly developed measure of talk. The access we obtained to repeat this cross-sectional survey at two separate time points permitted us to attain replication of findings from the first time point to the second. This was useful, in particular, in providing impetus to the findings since the overall design of the survey was cross-sectional.

### **2.1.2 Participants**

The University of Bamenda has an approximate 250 employees in the category of support staff (administrative and support staff). Academic staff of the university of Bamenda were not considered in this study because they are considered as state employees and in most cases guided by general state policies. The sample for this study incorporated 166 employees administrative and support staff of the University of Bamenda. The average age of participants was 35 years ( $SD = 15.66$ ), and their tenure with the University was on average 4.94 years ( $SD = 7.33$ ). 65% of the participants were female employees. This is an indication that the majority of administrative and support staff of the University of Bamenda are female. The participants were drawn from all the establishments, faculties and administrative departments of the university of Bamenda.

### **2.2 Procedure**

Data was collected in the form of a paper-based survey delivered across the campus. Given the spread of faculties, schools and administrative functions in the university of Bamenda and the number of respondents, this phase was spread over a period of three months since the study adopted a repeated cross-sectional survey with a six weeks interval so as to enable the researchers ample time to check and validate the views of the respondents. The issue lies with the nature of talk – conversations unfold soon after an event. Too much temporal separation leaves a researcher open to missing the fundamental intricacies of conversation that occurs and perhaps artificially inflating the links between injustice, needs and talk.

### 2.3 Measures

Employees provided ratings of workplace injustice, anger, relational and meaning justice needs, generalised self-efficacy and talk. The following control variables were used gender, tenure, neuroticism due to the rationale explained below. Given the time constraints involved in employees completing surveys during their working hours, it was important to keep the survey as concise as possible, and the scales short. We reviewed the surveys and reduced the length of two scales: organisation-based self-esteem (measuring relational needs) and generalised self-efficacy (Podsakoff et al., 2003: 879). These scales were perceived as perhaps being received more sensitively than others, given their focus on the 'self'.

In order to counteract Common method bias, two actions were taken with regard to the surveys. First, questions were counterbalanced in order to avoid unduly influencing a respondent's interpretation and response to a measure based solely on its relation to other measures in the survey. Second, we attempted to reduce evaluation apprehension by informing respondents that there were no right or wrong answers and that they should approach each question honestly and candidly. They were also assured that their responses would not be shared with their supervisors or administration.

#### A. Workplace injustice

Workplace injustice was measured using Ambrose and Schminke's (2009) six-item measure of overall justice. Each item was adapted to include the name of the company instead of the word organization. Sample items included, 'Overall, I'm treated fairly by university of Bamenda', 'Usually, the way things work at university of Bamenda is not fair', 'Most of the people who work here would say that they are treated unfairly'. Items were measured on a 5-point scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. ( $\alpha = .89$ ). This variable was reverse scored to reflect the nature of one's injustice experience *Anger*. Anger was measured using three items from the PANAS-X (Watson & Clark, 1994). These were: 'angry', 'hostile' and 'irritable'. Respondents were asked to what extent they felt these emotions at work at this moment. Items were measured on a 5-point scale from 1 = very slightly/not at all to 5 = extremely. ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

#### B. Relational justice needs

A relational justice need was measured using eight-items from Pierce, Gardner, Cummings and Dunham's (1989) organizational-based self-esteem (OBSE) measure. Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the statements at this moment. Sample items included, 'I am taken seriously around here', 'I am important around here', 'I count around here'. Items were measured on a 5-point scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. ( $\alpha = .88$ ).

#### C. Meaning justice need

A meaning justice need was measured using Lambert, Baumeister, Stillman and Finchman's (2012) three-item measure of state meaningfulness. Respondents were asked

to what extent the statements accurately reflected them at this moment. Sample items include, 'My work has a great deal of purpose right now', 'I have a good sense of what makes my work meaningful'. Items were measured on a 5-point scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. ( $\alpha = .91$ ).

#### **D. Emotional talk**

Emotional talk was evaluated using a measure created for this study, as outlined in chapter 4. The four validated items included, 'I let all my negative feelings out' and 'I let off steam'. Respondents were asked to what extent they engaged in talk following their experience of workplace injustice. Items were measured on a 7-point scale from 1 = never to 7 = always. ( $\alpha = .83$ ).

#### **E. Cognition talk**

Cognition talk was evaluated using a measure created for this study. The four validated items included, 'I talked about a possible solution to what I experienced' and 'I talked about actions I can take'. Respondents were asked to what extent they engaged in talk following their experience of workplace injustice. Items were measured on a 7-point scale from 1 = never to 7 = always. ( $\alpha = .86$ ).

#### **F. Generalised self-efficacy (GSE)**

Self-efficacy was measured using six-items from Chen et al. (2001) generalised self-efficacy measure. Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the statements at this moment. Sample items included, 'I believe I can succeed at anything to which I set my mind', 'Compared to other people, I can do most tasks well' and 'When facing difficult tasks, I am certain that I will accomplish them'. Items were measured on a 5-point scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. ( $\alpha = .88$ ).

#### **G. Gender**

Gender was controlled because in line with popular stereotypes, women are often found to be more prone to talk via sharing their emotions compared to men (Bergmann, 1993) though this has not always been evidenced in research (Rimé, 2009). (gender: 1 = male, 2 = female).

#### **H. Tenure**

Employee tenure was controlled for given that experience within a company may influence the degree to which an employee is able to manage their experience of injustice. For instance, it may affect the degree to which employees engage in emotional versus cognition talk. Research on responses to stress at work cites tenure as moderating an individual's responses, such that knowledge of an organisation's systems and procedures can lead to more adaptive responses (i.e., Parasuraman & Cleek, 1984).

Respondents were asked to report the total length of time they had worked for their company; this information was verified with company records too. (tenure: years).

## **I. Neuroticism**

Neuroticism was controlled because one's propensity to experience negative emotions might make them react more strongly to injustice events, and/or influence the degree and nature of talk they engage in. This is in line with previous research (Aquino et al., 2006) which controlled for the impact of neuroticism on adverse outcomes following injustice. Neuroticism was measured using three-items from the International Personality Pool (2001). Items included "I often feel sad" and "I worry about things". Respondents were asked to what extent they felt these emotions at work at this moment. Items were measured on a 5-point scale from 1 = very slightly/not at all to 5 = extremely. ( $\alpha = .82$ ).

### **2.4 Technics of data analysis**

We tested model 1 with structured equation modelling (SEM) using Amos (Arbukle, 2012) version 21.0. We deployed a fully latent model, whereby all indicators were used to represent all variables. Parameter estimation was set to maximum likelihood (ML, which assumes multivariate normality) which is the automatic setting in Amos. The Hypothesised model was tested using Anderson & Gerbing's (1988) comprehensive two-step analytical strategy. The measurement model was first confirmed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and then SEM was performed on the structural model to estimate the fit of the Hypothesised model to the data.

The significance of indirect effects was assessed using bootstrapping procedures (Shrout & Bolger, 2002), a technique which is central to testing such effects in Amos. Bootstrapping is a non-parametric approach to Hypothesis testing, estimating the standard errors empirically using the available data (Mooney & Duval, 1993). In this procedure, multiple samples are drawn from the original data set and the model is re-estimated on each sample. In line with previous studies (i.e., Ferris, Brown & Heller, 2009), the study set the resampling to 1000 and used the bias corrected percentile method to create 95% confidence intervals.

In order to test moderation effects, the interaction term and the independent variables comprising it (anger, self-efficacy) were modelled as single indicators of latent variables.

These variables were mean-centred and then product terms were created. Mean-centring is important in order to reduce nonessential multicollinearity; in other words, centring minimises relationships between variables and the product terms that are subsequently created (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2013). The product terms were used as single indicators of the latent variables.

## **3. Result interpretations and discussions**

### **3.1 Results**

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics, correlations and scale reliabilities for the variables in this study. Coefficient alphas are shown in parentheses on the diagonal. Table 2 provides a summary of all model fit indexes. Table 3 presents the direct estimates, table

4, the indirect path estimates and table 5 the interaction effects. Figure 2 towards the end of this section, provides a diagrammatic overview of the direct path coefficients for the Hypothesised model (figure 1) of this study.

As shown in table 1, the zero-order correlations are all within a moderate range and provide preliminary insights into the Hypothesised antecedent relationships. Overall injustice was significantly correlated with anger ( $r = .53, p < .01$ ), and significantly negatively correlated with a relational need ( $r = -.50, p < .01$ ) and a meaning need ( $r = -.42, p < .01$ ). Anger was significantly correlated with emotion talk ( $r = .39, p < .01$ ) and self-efficacy ( $r = -.21, p < .01$ ). A relational need was significantly correlated with anger ( $r = -.42, p < .01$ ), as was a meaning need ( $r = -.42, p < .01$ ).

### 3.1.1 Descriptive statistics, correlations and reliabilities

**Table 1:** Descriptive statistics, correlations and reliabilities<sup>a</sup>

Variable	Mean.	SD.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Gender (1=male, 2=female)	1.08	.26										
2 Tenure (years)	7.94	7.33	-.01									
3 Neuroticism	2.38	.94	.10	.09	(.82)							
4 Overall injustice	2.76	.87	-.06	-.04	.38**	(.89)						
5 Anger	2.13	1.21	-.04	-.02	.52**	.53**	(.90)					
6 Relational need (OBSE)	3.25	.82	.23**	-.02	-.30**	-.50**	-.42**	(.88)				
7 Meaning need	3.41	.97	.09	-.01	-.29**	-.42**	-.42**	.46**	(.91)			
8 Emotional talk <sup>b</sup>	2.71	1.41	.01	.17*	.42**	.29**	.39**	-.09	-.07	(.83)		
9 Cognition talk <sup>b</sup>	3.17	1.47	-.05	.05	.15*	.04	.09	.12	.01	.55**	(.86)	
10 Generalised self-efficacy	3.89	.76	.12	-.03	-.17*	.11	-.21**	.35**	.23**	-.14	.14	(.88)

a  $n = 166$ . Internal reliabilities (alpha coefficients) for the overall constructs are given in parentheses on the diagonal  
 b Emotion talk and cognition talk were measured on a 7-point scale  
 \*\*  $p < .01$   
 \*  $p < .05$

### 3.1.2 Results of model fit

As shown in table 2, the measurement model results indicated a very good fit to the data ( $\chi^2 [df = 470] = 778.336, CFI = .92, IFI = .92, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .07$ ). These results provided further evidence that examination of the structural model is justified. Paths were then added to create the structural model, as depicted in Figure 1.

**Table 2:** Summary of model fit indices

	X2	df	Δ X2/df	SRMR	IFI	CFI	RMSEA
Measurement Model	778.336	470	-	.07	.92	.92	.06
Hypothesised Structural Model (controls)	978.421	601	-	.09	.90	.88	.06
Independence Model	-	-	-	-	.00	.00	.225
Hypothesised Structural Model (no controls)	865.804	510	112.617/91	.08	.92	.92	.06

In line with prior recommendations (Becker, 2005; Antonakis, Bendahan, Jacquart & Lalive, 2010), SEM for two structural models was run, one with and one without the control variables (gender, tenure and neuroticism). A structural model with controls provided a good fit to the data ( $X^2$  [df = 601] = 978.421, CFI = .88, IFI = .90, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .09), but it was not significantly better than the Hypothesised model without controls. Importantly, none of the predicted paths for the controls was significant except for neuroticism which was associated with emotion talk ( $\beta = .45$ ,  $p < .01$ ). However, this result had no bearing on the significance of any other paths, and did not make a difference to the model fit.

In the interests of parsimony and in accordance with recommendations, I ruled out the control variables as a potential explanation of our phenomenon of interest. A structural model without controls, provided a very good fit to the data ( $X^2$  [df = 510] = 865.804, CFI = .92, IFI = .92, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .08).

### 3.1.3 Results of hypotheses

Hypotheses 1-3 predicted direct and main effects between workplace injustice and anger, a relational need and a meaning need. These are displayed in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Hypothesised direct effects (regression weights)<sup>a</sup>

Predictor Variable	Dependent Variable	$\beta$	S.E.
Overall Injustice → Anger	.57**	.13	.46
Overall Injustice → Relational Need	-.47**	.07	-.57
Overall Injustice → Meaning Need	-.58**	.08	-.52
Relational Need → Anger	-.20	.13	-.13
Meaning Need → Anger	-.19*	.09	-.17
Meaning Need → Anger	.53**	.11	.45
Anger → Emotional Talk	-.29*	.11	-.21
Anger → Cognition Talk			

<sup>a</sup> N = 166; \*\*p < 0.01; \* p < 0.05

Hypothesis 1 predicted a positive relationship between injustice and anger. This Hypothesis was supported ( $\beta = .57$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Hypothesis 2 predicted a negative relationship between injustice and a relational need. This Hypothesis was supported ( $\beta =$

-0.47,  $p < .01$ ). Hypothesis 3 predicted a negative relationship between injustice and a meaning need. This Hypothesis was supported ( $\beta = -.58, p < .01$ ).

Hypotheses 4-7 predicted indirect effects, and these are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Hypothesised indirect effects (regression weights) <sup>a</sup>

Predictor Variable – Mediator – Dependent Variable	$\beta$	Standardized $\beta$
Overall Injustice → Anger → Emotional Talk	.40**	.28
Overall Injustice → Anger → Cognition Talk	.10	.06
Relational Need → Anger → Emotional Talk	-.38**	-.22
Relational Need → Anger → Cognition Talk	-.09	-.04
Meaning Need → Anger → Emotional Talk	-.28**	-.22
Meaning Need → Anger → Cognition Talk	-.07	-.05

<sup>a</sup> N = 166; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$

Hypotheses 4 and 5 predicted indirect effects of injustice on emotion and cognition talk via anger respectively. Hypothesis 4 (indirect effect on emotion talk) was supported ( $\beta = .40, p < .01$ ). Hypothesis 5 (indirect effect on cognition talk) was not supported ( $\beta = .10, p = \text{NS}$ ).

Hypotheses 6 and 7 focused on the indirect effects of a relational need on talk via anger. Hypothesis 6 (indirect effect on emotion talk) ( $\beta = -.38, p < .01$ ) was supported. Hypothesis 7 (indirect effect on cognition talk) ( $\beta = -.09, p = \text{ns}$ ) was not supported.

Hypotheses 8-9 focused on the indirect effects of a meaning need on talk via anger. Hypothesis 8 (indirect effect on emotion talk) was supported ( $\beta = -.28, p < .01$ ). Hypothesis 9 (indirect effect on cognition talk) was not supported ( $\beta = -.07, p = \text{ns}$ ).

Hypothesis 10 predicted an interaction effect; such that self-efficacy was posited as moderating the relationship between anger and cognition talk. This is presented in Table 5. This Hypothesis was not supported ( $\beta = .08, p = \text{ns}$ ).

**Table 5:** Hypothesis interaction effects <sup>a</sup>

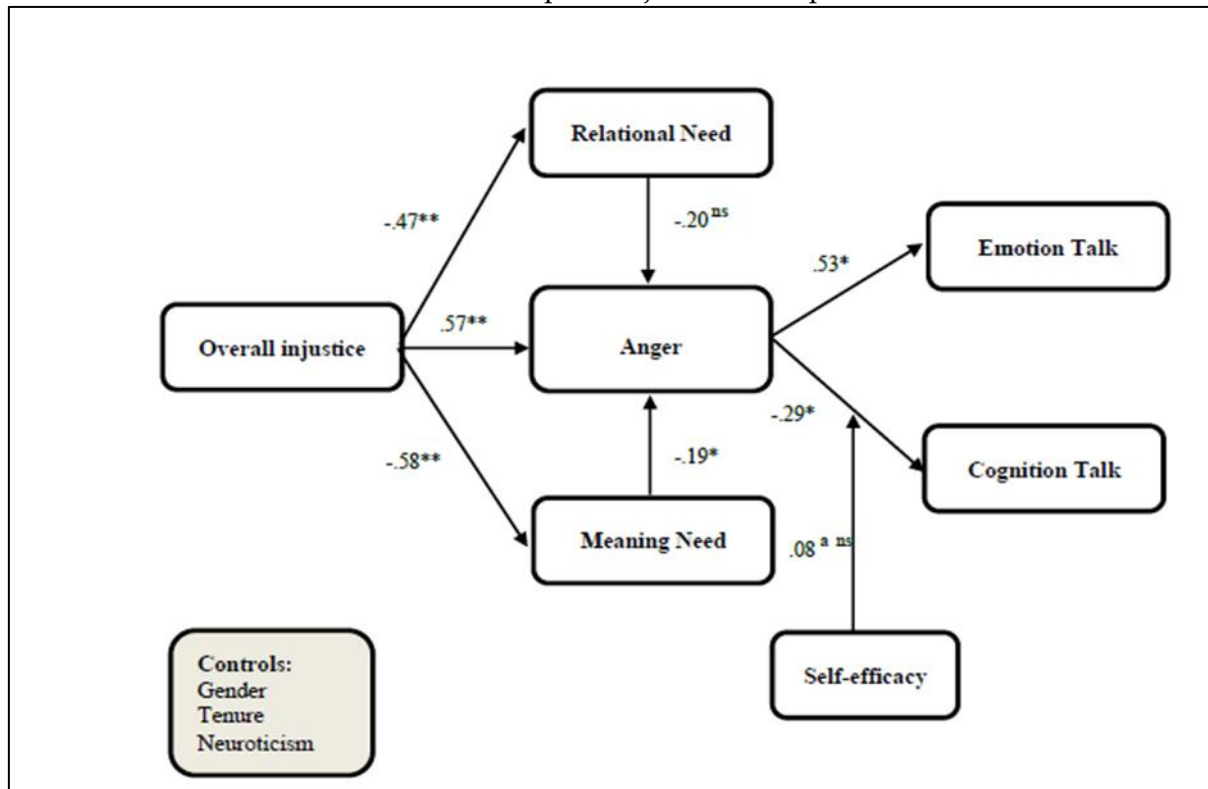
	$\beta$	S.E.	Standardized $\beta$
Anger → Cognition Talk (main effect)	.19	.19	.19
Generalised self-efficacy → Cognition Talk (main effect)	.08†	.13	.05
Interaction effect	.42	.24	.16

<sup>a</sup> N = 166; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ;

Figure 2 below provides a summary of the direct path coefficients for the Hypothesised model.



**Figure 2:** Schematic Hypothesis model of the antecedents of talk in the context of workplace injustice, with path coefficients

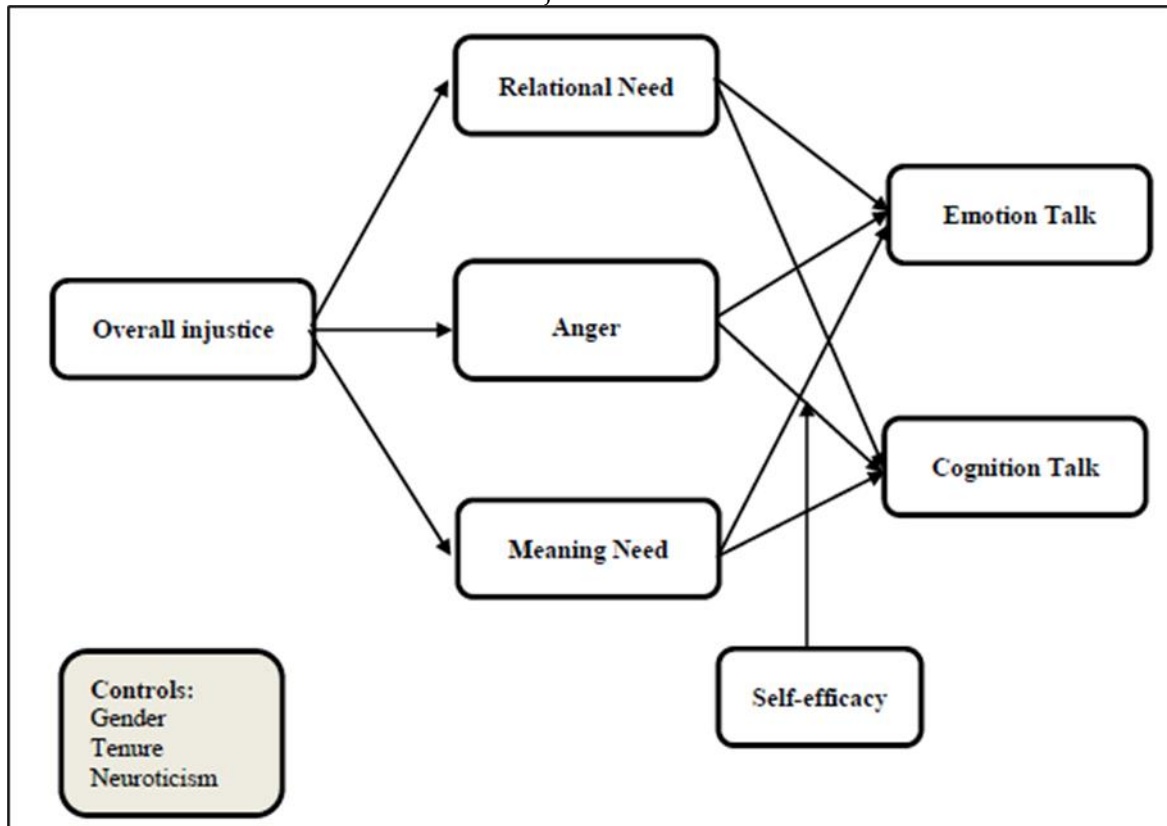


**Note:** Path coefficients are unstandardized. \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; ns=not significant; <sup>a</sup> Interaction effect

### 3.1.4 Alternative SEM model

In the alternative SEM model, represented in figure 2, there are direct paths from the justice needs (relational and virtue/meaning) to both emotion and cognition talk, circumventing anger. It is expected that it is less likely to fit the data but is nevertheless plausible. The alternative model was also run with control variables present in the structural model. This allowed for a robust comparison to the Hypothesised mediated structural model. It provided a poor-adequate fit to the data ( $X^2 [df = 412] = 727.903$ , CFI = .89, IFI = .89, RMSEA = .07, SRMR = .1), but these were not significantly better than the Hypothesised mediated model. Importantly, none of the paths from relational or meaning needs to either emotion or cognition talk were significant. This result allows the ruling out of this alternative model as an explanation of the phenomenon under investigation.

**Figure 3:** Alternative plausible model, with direct paths from relational and virtue justice needs to both forms of talk



### 3.2 Discussion

The present study has sought to find answers to the question: what triggers victims of unfairness to engage in talk? The findings from this study provide a number of fresh and novel insights in response to this question. There are five sets of findings arising from the present study, and each will be discussed in turn: a) corroborating evidence for the presence of talk in an injustice context, b) injustice leads to anger and a breakdown in relational and meaning justice needs, c) anger is the lynchpin connecting injustice with talk, d) no results of significance were found connecting thwarted relational needs with anger, and finally e) no results of significance were found for the moderating impact of self-efficacy.

#### A. Injustice leads to anger and a breakdown in relational and meaning justice needs

In turning to the primary investigations of this study, the first set of findings from the present study demonstrate three specific outputs following a victim's experience of a justice violation. These outputs pertain to anger, as well as thwarted relational and meaning justice needs.

A common finding in the justice literature is that the experience of unfairness is an emotionally charged one (Bies & Tripp, 1996; Folger & Skarlicki, 1998). This result supported this notion by showing that anger is a prime emotion that emerges when a victim experience injustice. This finding corroborates a well-established trajectory of

justice research which both theoretically and empirically emphasises the emotionally arousing capacity of workplace unfairness. Indeed, theoretically, fairness theory (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998) is drawn on to provide an insight into the counterfactual thought process a victim of injustice engages in, in deciding upon the fairness of a situation. Empirically, a host of studies draw on affective events theory (AET; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) in order to explain how a workplace violation triggers the emotional reaction of anger (Weiss et al., 1999; Barclay et al., 2005). In addition to corroborating this research, the present study extends it too by delineating anger as a response in the context of talk.

### **B. Anger is the lynchpin connecting injustice to talk**

Continuing with the primary investigations of this study, the second set of findings sought to uncover answers to the question: what triggers a victim to engage in talk? Findings demonstrate that anger is the catalyst for talk. In other words, anger is the primary driver of talk; it is anger which mediates the path from injustice to talk; it is also anger which mediates the paths from both thwarted relational and meaning needs to talk. we can conclude that what the results of this study point to are that victims of injustice share their experiences with significant others by engaging in a talk which is reflective of both an off-loading of their emotions, as well as an attempt to interpret their experience and find some kind of a solution to move on. As the AET (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) elaborates, workplace events trigger engagement in behaviours: engagement in the talk is thus the outcome of a victim's unjust experience. What is interesting, however, is the impact of anger on emotion and cognition talk respectively. Though direct links between anger and both types of talk were not hypothesised per se, nor their direction, it is clear that whilst anger has a positive relationship with emotion talk, it has a negative relationship with cognition talk. These findings are a direct reflection of the circumstances at the University of Bamenda as discovered by the researchers. In other words, though both types of talk are engaged in, the presence of anger leads to increased levels of emotion talk and lesser levels of cognition talk.

It is plausible to argue that given that the affective experience underlying anger and emotion talk is essentially similar, in the sense that both are characterised by a strong negative emotion, this congruence between both is what drives their positive association. Thus, anger leads naturally to talk which expresses one's pent-up frustrations. On the other hand, cognition talk embodies attempts at rationally trying to make sense of a situation, reframe it, and find meaning in it as well as a possible solution – activities that are more likely to occur in the presence of lessened anger. This finding similarly merits future consideration, and particularly to ascertain whether other variables may explain when and who may be more likely to engage in cognition talk. This point is elaborated on under 'future research' below.

Overall, the important role played by the emotion of anger provides impetus to both justice and talk literatures. On the one hand, the finding that anger acts as a lynchpin connecting injustice to talk not only demonstrates an alternative outlet for victim reactions in the context of injustice (in comparison to 'dark side' behavioural responses),

but provides merit to recent calls for a greater focus on affect within the justice literature (Colquitt, 2013). This study shows that an unfavourable justice judgement triggers anger which in turn triggers talk. The focus on affect is made even more prominent given that such recent calls in the justice literature further argue that research integrating justice and affect should explore whether emotions mediate justice effects in the presence of cognitive mediators (ibid). The model guiding the present research does just that. The relational and meaning oriented justice needs (Cropanzano et al., 2001) are cognitive representations of desired individual outcomes. This study shows that the negative emotion of anger connects the indirect effect of justice needs and talk.

### **C. No results of significance for an association between a thwarted relational need and anger**

The findings revealed that a thwarted relational need did not lead a victim of injustice to engage in anger. This finding is perplexing since research evidences that our sense of self is one of our most valued possessions signifying our value, dignity and respect. When our sense of self is threatened, it renders upon us a state of deep distress, which can lead to anger as an expressive outlet for the harm felt (Tedeschi et al., 1974; Bies & Tripp, 1996). However, perhaps an alternative explanation can be offered here. It may be that a breakdown in one's relational need (that is a thwarting of their self-esteem) actually leads to self-conscious emotions (inward-focused), such as shame or embarrassment (Lazarus, 1991). Such emotions act by making individuals very sensitive to others' reactions towards them. Whilst a breakdown in relational needs is indeed associated with perceived harm to one's sense of self, given that people possess a view of themselves as 'sacred', it may well be that this state of distress is too difficult for individuals to be outwardly emotional about. In other words, they perceive a sense of shame or embarrassment, stemming perhaps from their belief that they should have been able to avoid whatever it is that they experienced at work. This in turn may lead to inward, rather than outward focused emotional expression. So, contrary to my prediction, this state of affairs may actually inhibit the expression of anger, as by engaging in anger, one may perceive an even greater sense of disappointment about themselves; the act of not engaging in anger may actually be a strategy of protecting one's sense of self from further harm. This theoretical explanation merits future investigation.

### **D. No results of significance for the moderating impact of self-efficacy**

Additionally, no support was found for the predicted moderation effect of self-efficacy on cognition talk. Though higher efficacious individuals were predicted as being more likely to engage in cognition talk, since they are less likely to be affected by environmental influences, such as their experience of injustice, this was not supported. This is perplexing since it is lower efficacious individuals who, because they are more reluctant to abandon their anger, are perhaps less likely to engage in cognition talk. One explanation might be regarding the measure of this construct (Chen et al., 2001). It includes such questions as "I believe I can succeed at anything to which I set my mind" and "Compared to other

people, I can do most tasks well”, questions that perhaps invite greater social desirability in responses, such that the sample of participants were more likely to agree than disagree with such statements in order to be viewed more favourably (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). Although the properties of the construct produced satisfactory reliability and confirmatory factor analysis results, there might not have been as much variability in response as would be expected from a general population.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Taken together, empirical evidence from this study corroborates findings in this study namely, that victims do engage in talk in the context of their unfair experiences. Injustice was found to trigger anger, as well as thwart relational and meaning oriented justice needs. A significant finding of this study was that the conditions under which victims of injustice engage in talk is driven by the negative emotion of anger; it is anger which connects injustice with talk, as well as relational and meaning needs with talk. Given this understanding, and in fulfilling the research aims of this study in shedding light on whether talk operates as a recovery mechanism.

##### **4.1 Research limitations**

It should be noted, however, that the present study is perhaps best assessed by cross-sectional design rather than separating predictor and criterion variables over separate time periods. The separation of predictor and criterion variables is problematic since it would invite an even greater amount of retrospective bias. The issue lies with the nature of talk – conversations unfold soon after an event. Too much temporal separation leaves a researcher open to missing the fundamental intricacies of conversation that occurs and perhaps artificially inflating the links between injustice, needs and talk.

##### **4.2 Suggestions for future research**

This study contributes to a nascent area of enquiry and clearly, more research is needed to expand our understanding of the conditions under which victims of injustice engage in talk following their experience. A primary area for future research is to delve deeper into the discrepancy of findings for cognition talk between the first and second-time point of data. We can ask whether time has a bearing on when victims will engage in cognition talk, particularly following what they perceive to be a severely emotional injustice encounter. No study of talk, to my knowledge, has considered the temporal and unfolding nature of talk in this regard, but tangential evidence for its merits can be gleaned from a study on coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985) which makes an interesting point about the dynamics that unfold in a person-environment relationship under conditions of stress. Specifically, close to one’s experience of an acutely unpleasant event there is greater attributional ambiguity as individuals search for a sense of clarity about what has happened; as an event unfolds it carries less attributional ambiguity, given that more information is sought and the significance of an encounter becomes clearer. It is

difficult to have explored this notion in the present study since it relied on retrospective accounts of injustice and talk, where perhaps the emotionally laden memory of a victim's experience was more salient. However, this idea may be best suited to study through an experienced sampling methodology (diary study). This approach would avoid problems inherent in retrospective bias (as evident in the present study), allowing me to capture engagement in talk as and when it occurs in 'real time' on a daily basis.

### **Conflict of interest statement**

The authors certify that they have NO affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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