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The main purpose of this study was to examine the relationship of organizational justice and interpersonal attraction in survivors' acceptance of co-worker terminations. Four scenarios were tested manipulating high and low levels of the two independent variables (organizational justice and interpersonal attraction) and their effects on the dependent variable (level of acceptance of coworker terminations). Findings indicate justice during the termination process is more important than how much the coworker was liked on the survivors' acceptance of coworker terminations. The practical implication is that organizations must be careful to insure that terminations are done in a just manner in order to engender the acceptance of the surviving workforce.

Key words: *Organizational justice, interpersonal attraction, terminations, coworkers, acceptance.*

CNN Money reported that a staggering 7.9 million jobs are estimated to have been lost as a result of the Great Recession (Isidore, 2010). While it is certainly vital to consider the profound impact on the lives of those who were terminated, it is also important to consider the impact that terminations have on the organizational survivors (Brockner, 1988 and 1992; Jiang & Klein, 2000; Malik, Bibi, & Rahim, 2010). Survivors must first mentally accept these terminations before they can be motivated enough to move forward and help the organization to be successful in the future (Brockner, Grover, & Blonder, 1988; Brockner, *et al.*, 1993; Sadri, 1996). Prior research (Skarlicki & Kulik, 2005) has found that how an organization does layoffs has an important impact on the survivors' perceptions of fairness, organizational commitment and intentions to leave. What if terminated co-workers were viewed as having been unjustly fired? What if personal friends have been let go? What is the impact of these sorts of issues on the survivors' willingness to accept the terminations of their co-workers?

Interpersonal attraction (Byrne, 1971) and organizational justice (Greenburg, 1987) are two constructs which have received strong support in past research, but prior research has yet to examine their concurrent impact in termination situations. For example, assuming a disliked co-worker is unjustly terminated, are the survivors more accepting of this outcome than if a co-worker they liked is terminated under the same unfair circumstances? Conversely, what about situations in which terminations were actually viewed as having been done fairly? Are the survivors more accepting of these termination decisions if someone they dislike has been let go? In other words, what are the effects of both organizational justice and interpersonal attraction on the organizational survivors' willingness to accept the termination of co-workers? These important issues have yet to be examined in prior research and are the contribution of the present study.

ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE

Organizational justice (Greenburg, 1987), is the perception of fairness in organizations and it is considered to be comprised of four components including distributive, procedural, interpersonal and informational justice. The following is a brief summary of the four components of organizational justice. For further details on organizational justice research the reader is encouraged to see literature reviews (Nowakowski & Conlon, 2005; Konovsky, 2000; Greenberg, 1990b) and meta-analyses (Colquitt *et al.*, 2001; Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001).

Distributive justice, based on equity theory (Adams, 1963 & 1965), was the first type of organizational justice identified in the literature. This form of justice is focused on the perceived fairness of outcomes received in a social exchange. Adams suggested that individuals compare the ratio of the outcomes they receive and the inputs required to receive them with the outcomes to inputs ratio of a referent doing similar work. The basic tenet of equity theory is that individuals are motivated to move towards a state of equity in which their ratio is equal to that of their comparison other. If their equity ratio is out of balance, the subject will be motivated to do things to get their ratio into a state of balance. For example, they may attempt to alter the inputs or outcomes of themselves or their referents, mentally justify their situation or eventually decide to leave the organization in order to get a fairer deal.

Procedural justice (Thibaut & Walker, 1975) was the second component of organizational justice to appear in the literature. This component is focused on the perceived fairness of the process used to decide the outcomes rather than the outcomes themselves. Early research was primarily concerned with labor dispute resolution and the amount of control the participants had in both the process and the decision stages. A major finding was that parties are willing to give up control of the decision as long as they have a voice in the process used to reach the decision (Folger, 1977; Lind & Tyler, 1988). The concept of procedural justice was subsequently extended into non-legal contexts such as organizational settings by Leventhal (1980) and Leventhal et al. (1980).

Interactional justice (Bies & Moag, 1986) appeared next in the organizational justice research stream. This type of justice is focused on the interpersonal treatment that organizational members are given by the implementers of decisions. Greenberg (1990a, 1990b, 1993) subsequently made the distinction that two separate forms of interactional justice actually exist – interpersonal and informational. Interpersonal justice is the degree to which people are treated with politeness, dignity, and respect by authorities or third parties involved with executing procedures or determining outcomes. Informational justice is concerned with the explanations provided to people about why procedures were used in a certain way or why outcomes were distributed in a certain fashion.

INTERPERSONAL ATTRACTION

Byrne (1971) originally developed the construct of interpersonal attraction with his reinforcement-affect model of attraction. Interpersonal attraction is essentially how much someone likes or dislikes another individual. It viewed as the binding force between two people. Interpersonal attraction helps to draw people together and resists their separation. It contributes to interpersonal relationships and friendships.

Interpersonal attraction is based, in part, on similarity with the other person. Byrne & Clore (1967) proposed that a target person who possesses similar attitudes is reinforcing because it helps to confirm the legitimacy and accuracy of one's own attitudes. This validation helps to fulfill the need of the perceiver to make a consistent, logical and accurate interpretation of their world (Clore, 1975). Conversely those with dissimilar attitudes cause the perceiver to experience uncertainty regarding one's self and experience unsettling thoughts and emotions.

Subsequent research has shown the similarity-attraction effect (Byrne, 1997) to hold true for a variety of variables including attitudes (Bond, Byrne & Diamond, 1968; Byrne & Blaylock, 1963; Byrne & Clore, 1970), personality traits (Carli, Ganely & Pierce-Otay, 1991; Singh, 1973; Steele & McGlynn, 1979), and physical attractiveness (Hill, Rubin, & Peplau, 1976; Peterson & Miller, 1980; Stevens, Owens & Schaefer, 1990).

Prior research has focused on the role of interpersonal attraction in the selection process rather than in the termination process. Interpersonal attraction has been shown to have a positive effect on interview outcomes and the likelihood of a candidate being selected for hire (Law & Yuen, 2011; Anderson-Gough,

Grey & Robson, 2005; Goldberg, 2005; Phillips & Phillips, 1996; Orpen, 1984; Graves & Powell, 1988; Keenan, 1977; Lamberth & Byne, 1971). Thus the role of interpersonal attraction in the termination process is an area in need of further research.

ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE AND INTERPERSONAL ATTRACTION WITH REGARDS TO TERMINATIONS

There is a large body of research regarding the importance of organizational justice in the termination/layoff process. Brockner & Greenberg (1990) first introduced an organizational justice based model in which survivors evaluate the fairness of layoffs. Subsequent research has shown that the way a company handles terminations has an impact on the survivors' fairness perceptions, organizational commitment and intent to leave (Skarlicki & Kulik, 2005). A recent review of the literature by Datta *et al.* (2010) and meta-analysis of the past three decades of organizational justice research by Van Dierendonck & Jacobs (2012) found general agreement for the proposition that layoffs result in reduced organizational commitment among survivors.

Based on this prior research it would be assumed that subjects' perceptions of organizational justice in terminations will have a significantly positive effect on their acceptance of co-worker terminations. But we propose that the level of interpersonal attraction the subject has with the terminated co-worker may also serve to influence this relationship. Although no prior research has specifically examined interpersonal attraction and its impact on the termination/layoff process, Griffeth, Vecchio & Logan (1989) examined the impact of interpersonal attraction on distributive justice and the reactions of subjects to situations in which they were being overcompensated and undercompensated with respect to their co-workers. They found that the level of interpersonal attraction with the referent interacts with equity perceptions to intensify the subjects' responses to restore equity. More specifically, subjects in over-reward situations were more inclined to take actions to restore equity when they had co-worker referents with which they had higher levels of interpersonal attraction. Conversely they were less inclined to take actions to restore equity when they had lower levels of interpersonal attraction with their comparison other. Apparently people don't mind being over-paid in comparison with someone they don't like, but it does bother them if the co-worker is someone whom they do like. Likewise when subjects were being undercompensated they were less likely to take actions to reduce this inequity if they liked their co-worker as compared to co-workers that they disliked. Workers who were being under-paid with respect to their co-worker are more concerned if they don't like their co-worker, but were more tolerant of an under-reward situation if they liked their co-worker.

Since interpersonal attraction with co-workers appears to affect the acceptance of over-payment and under-payment situations it logically should have an impact on termination situations as well. The termination of a disliked co-worker should be more easily accepted by the subject than the termination of a well-liked co-worker. More specifically, if a disliked co-worker is terminated in a just manner the subject should be inclined to view this termination more favorably and more easily accept the decision.

H1: Subjects will experience the highest levels of acceptance when a co-worker with which the subject has low interpersonal attraction is terminated with a high perceived level of organizational justice.

Conversely, the lowest level of acceptance on the part of the subject would logically be experienced when a liked co-worker is terminated in an unjust manner.

H2: Subjects will experience the lowest levels of acceptance when a co-worker with which the subject has high interpersonal attraction is terminated with a low perceived level of organizational justice.

Since we know from prior research that justice perceptions are influenced by the level of attraction they have with their co-worker it also seems logical to expect that when a well-liked co-worker is terminated in a just manner that the subjects will have the second highest level of acceptance.

H3: Subjects will experience the second highest level of acceptance when a co-worker with which the subject has high interpersonal attraction is terminated with a high perceived level of organizational justice.

Conversely, when a co-worker who is not well-liked is terminated in an unjust manner the acceptance levels of the subject should be relatively low because justice is not present, but not as low as when a friend has been terminated in an unjust manner.

H4: Subjects will experience the second lowest levels of acceptance when a co-worker with which the subject has low interpersonal attraction is terminated with a low perceived level of organizational justice.

DESIGN AND METHOD

A research study was designed to test these hypotheses. Participants for this study consisted of 278 juniors and seniors in a southeastern United States AACSB accredited business school. Of the 278 students surveyed, 276 reported demographic information. The respondents' average age was 23.5 years with a standard deviation of 4.67 years. The sample was comprised of 39.6% women. Respondents reported 5.76 years working experience on average.

MEASURES

The two independent variables in the study were (1) interpersonal attraction and (2) organizational justice, which yielded a 2 x 2 factorial design. To manipulate these two variables, we created four different termination scenarios. See Appendix 1 for an example of the scenario used to manipulate the independent variables in which the example scenario casts a situation in which a subject is asked to imagine himself or herself working with a person named Bob for whom they like (high interpersonal attraction) and who was fired with high organizational justice. We adapted items from Colquitt (2001) to insure that all four components of organizational justice were included. For example, "fired with just cause" refers to distributive justice; "considered his viewpoint" and "suppressed his personal biases" accounted for procedural justice; "treated with kindness and consideration" and "showed concern for Bob's rights" addressed interpersonal justice; and "dealt with in a truthful manner" concerns informational justice. Other scenarios were designed with the subject having low interpersonal attraction for Bob and for Bob being fired without just cause (low organizational justice). We manipulated interpersonal attraction by stating that you either liked or disliked the terminated co-worker.

The dependent variable in the study was respondent's level of acceptance with the termination. Therefore an acceptance survey including eight questions was developed by the authors. Level of acceptance was measured using a five-item Likert scale (see Appendix 1). Cronbach's alpha for the instrument was 0.84.

RESULTS

The study had one variable that was intervally scaled. This variable was the dependent variable, level of survivor acceptance with the termination. Factorial conditions were dummy coded (0, 1) for regression analysis purposes. Table 1 shows the levels of acceptance for each of the factorial cells as well as the, range, standard deviations, and number of respondents for each of the four factorial cells.

TABLE 1
RANGES, MEANS, AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF ACCEPTANCE LEVEL

		Interpersonal Attractiveness	
		Low	High
Organizational Justice	Low	Range of response = 5 – 25 Mean = 11.30 Standard deviation = 4.01 N = 64	Range of response = 5 – 17 Mean = 7.76 Standard deviation = 2.55 N = 85
	High	Range of response = 9 – 24 Mean = 16.21 Standard deviation = 3.29 N = 61	Range of response = 7 – 21 Mean = 12.76 Standard deviation = 3.41 N = 67

Table 2 shows the Regression coefficients for all the variables. Interpersonal attraction and organizational justice are both related to the dependent variable (acceptance) at significant levels ($P < 0.001$). Hypothesis 1 was supported by the data; that is, the highest level of termination acceptance (acceptance = 16.21) occurs in the joint condition of low interpersonal attraction and high procedural justice. Hypothesis 2 was also supported; that is, the lowest level of acceptance occurred under conditions of high interpersonal attraction and low organizational justice (acceptance = 7.76). Hypothesis 3 states that survivors will experience the second highest level of acceptance when a co-worker with a high level of interpersonal attraction is terminated with a high perceived level of organizational justice. This hypothesis was also supported (acceptance = 12.76). Hypothesis 4 was supported by the data; that is the second lowest level of acceptance was held in conditions of low organizational justice and low interpersonal attraction (acceptance = 11.30).

Of particular interest is a comparison of the conditions of high interpersonal attraction and high organizational justice with low interpersonal attraction and low organizational justice. In simple language – which is preferred: your friend is fired fairly or your enemy is fired without justice? As shown in the previous paragraph, subjects had a mean acceptance level of 12.76 for the high attraction/high justice condition and a mean acceptance level of 11.30 for the low attraction/low justice condition. An independent samples t-test analysis for difference of means was conducted to see if the mean acceptance values were significantly different from each other. A Levene's test for equality variances was insignificant and therefore a t-test assuming equal variances was calculated. The means were significantly different from each other ($t = 2.254$, $df = 129$, $p < 0.05$). Therefore, our data suggested that subjects were less satisfied with having an enemy fired with injustice than with a friend fired with justice.

TABLE 2 REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS AND SIGNIFICANCE LEVELS OF EFFECTS COEFFICIENTS[A]

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
I	Beta	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	14.93	.463		32.25	P < .001
Justice	7.54	.522	.615	14.45	P < .001
Attractiveness	-4.03	.523	-.328	-7.71	P < .001

a. Dependent Variable = Acceptance; N = 278

DISCUSSION

"Every man is to be respected as an absolute end in himself; and it is a crime against the dignity that belongs to him as a human being, to use him as a mere means for some external purpose." This quote attributed to 18th century philosopher Immanuel Kant (Billington, 2003, p. 101) upholds that all individuals are deserving of just treatment. Indeed the value of fairness (e.g., impartiality, a just process) is a common universal value evident in corporate codes of conduct, codes of ethics, and business ethics literature worldwide (Schwartz, 2005). Our findings reveal that subjects were least accepting of situations in which persons were treated unjustly when being terminated. Yet despite the ubiquity of justice as an espoused value in business, little is known about how individuals view justice in situations involving enmity toward a coworker. A principle finding was that subjects were less accepting of a disliked coworker being fired without justice than when a likable coworker was terminated with justice. Interpersonal attraction is characterized by positive affect and behaviors towards others that draw people together (Byrne, 1971). Yet interestingly, subjects in the current study, despite conditions of negative affect, were seemingly not pleased when coworkers were perceived as being treating unfairly.

These results have implications for organizations and more specifically, managers involved in terminations or layoffs. Employees can experience negative psychological effects based on their perception and evaluation of how employees are let go. The perception that processes are unfair or that employees are being exploited frequently leads to cynicism among employees, a negative attitude characterized by the distrust of management (Andersson, 1996), that can then spread throughout the workforce (Wilkerson, Author, & Davis, 2008). In regards to layoffs, perceptions of justice are vital to maintain the commitment levels of the surviving employees (Van Dierendonck & Jacobs, 2012). The current findings indicate that employees desire fairness for not only those persons that are "liked" but also those coworkers that are "disliked". Hence, managers would be wise to attend to Kant's admonition and to ensure that all employees, even so called "bad-apples", are treated with justice during the termination process. Termination policies and procedures can be instituted to create a fair process. For example, documented evidence that focuses on the behaviors or performance evaluations that warrant termination can reduce subjectivity and bias. Managers should focus on performance related facts and not personalities. Providing the subject employee with a voice or appeal mechanism is effective in reducing perceptions of injustice. For offensives not meriting immediate dismal, organizations may wish to consider use of progressive discipline procedures that becomes more stringent over the course of time.

While organizational justice was a salient concern for subjects in this current study, one forward looking research question is whether individual differences affect the degree of acceptance regarding how others are treated. Future studies, especially comparing college students with older adults, are worthwhile due to possible population differences. First, college students are believed to be more compliant with

perceived expectations (Seers, 1986), which may have been evident in the scenarios. There is however, also growing evidence indicating that the personalities of younger generations (i.e., Generation Y or Millennials) are shifting toward higher levels of individualism and narcissism (Twenge & Campbell, 2008). Thus, it seems plausible that age or personality variables may be factors affecting the degree to which a person desires justice for others.

An additional avenue for future studies is what role, if any, do the various individual types of justice play in affecting the acceptance of coworker terminations. The current study used a broad operationalization of organizational justice that incorporated elements of each of the four types of justice. Though the dimensions are typically correlated, there is evidence that procedural, interpersonal, informational and distributive justice are distinct forms and though often correlated, each may contribute unique predictive variance (Colquitt et al., 2001). Additional studies may wish to consider the similarities and differences in the dimensions of justice as it pertains to acceptance of coworker terminations.

Since one of the primary findings of this research was that organizational justice was more salient than interpersonal attraction to the survivors of terminations an interesting follow-up study might consider why survivors view justice as paramount to attraction. Could it be that they view unjust terminations of coworkers as a personal threat? Could the possibility that they someday might personally be subjected to this sort of injustice trump their feelings of attraction for coworkers? Rather than viewing the terminated coworkers who are not liked as "good riddance" perhaps it is viewed as "but for the grace of God it could happen to me"?

The current study should be considered in light of possible limitations. Our experiment was conducted using a student sample, which poses generalizability limitations. The benefit of our design is that is allows for conditions to be finely manipulated; however, generalizability would be enhanced with non-student samples. Data were collected at a single point in time via self-report questionnaires and thus common method variance is also a possible concern. Though this method is generally considered appropriate for measuring the internal states of individuals (Spector, 1994), internal validity could be enhanced by conducting assessments at different points in time.

In conclusion, the current study considers the role of interpersonal attraction in the context of coworker terminations. Fairness is often espoused as a desired means of decision making in the workplace; however, little is known about how employees view fairness when dealing with liked versus disliked peers. Though subjects were least satisfied when liked peers were mistreated in the termination process, the current findings indicate that a desire for fair procedures and processes extends even to others not well liked. Future researchers are encouraged to conduct additional studies that consider the generalizability and scope of these findings.

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APPENDIX 1: SAMPLE SCENARIO WITH HIGH INTERPERSONAL ATTRACTION AND HIGH JUSTICE

Please think about an actual person that you really like.

Imagine this person is your co-worker named, Bob. You have very positive feelings about Bob; that is, you really like him. Bob definitely has the skills to be a good worker.

You found out today that Bob was terminated yesterday afternoon. Upon investigation you found out that Bob was fired with just cause. Bob's boss did consider his viewpoint during the termination process. Moreover, the boss suppressed his personal biases about Bob. Bob was treated with kindness and consideration during the process. The boss showed concern for Bob's rights as an employee. Bob's boss dealt with him in a truthful manner.

Remember, Bob is a person you really like.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Moderately Disagree	3 Neither Agree Nor Disagree	4 Moderately Agree	5 Strongly Agree

For each of the following items please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree.

1. _____ I would be happy about what happened.
2. _____ I would want to look for another job.
3. _____ I would feel more committed to the company.
4. _____ I would like my boss better.
5. _____ I would feel like I work for an unfair company.
6. _____ I would respect Bob's boss more.
7. _____ I feel like Bob got what he deserved.
8. _____ I have mixed emotions about this.