
25. Organizational justice and employee commitment: a review of contemporary research

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The literature on organizational justice is concerned with understanding the relation between people's perceptions of fairness and their attitudes and behaviors at work. Commitment has long been an outcome of interest in the study of organizational justice (e.g., Folger and Konovsky, 1989; Lind and Tyler, 1988). Thus, it is not surprising that numerous studies beginning in the 1980s have demonstrated a robust relation between justice perceptions and organizational commitment.

Much of the early research conducted between 1980 and 2000 was guided by two conceptual paradigms. In one stream of research, which we refer to as the 'differential effects paradigm', researchers focused on examining the unique effects of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice perceptions in predicting commitment and other work outcomes. Distributive justice perceptions (e.g., Adams, 1965) refer to people's perceptions of the fairness of outcomes that they receive from the organization, such as their pay. Procedural justice perceptions (e.g., Leventhal, 1980; Lind and Tyler, 1988; Thibaut and Walker, 1975) refer to people's perceptions of the fairness of the procedures by which decisions are made. Interactional justice (e.g., Bies and Moag, 1986) comprises people's perceptions of the quality of information and interpersonal treatment that they receive from agents who make decisions.¹ The differential effects research was summarized in several meta-analyses published in 2001–2002 (e.g., Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001; Viswesvaran and Ones, 2002). Overall, the findings indicated that distributive, procedural, and interactional justice perceptions are each significantly related to employee commitment, although typically procedural justice is most strongly associated with organizational commitment (also see Meyer et al., 2002).

In the other stream of research, investigators were guided by the 'interaction effects paradigm', in which researchers examined the combined effects of information regarding outcomes and information regarding decision processes (with procedural and interactional justice sometimes combined) on employees' support for decisions, authorities, and the organization.² The results of an early meta-analysis (Brockner and Weisenfeld, 1996) indicated that outcome and process information have joint effects, such that fair process mitigates the otherwise adverse effect of receiving unfair or unfavorable outcomes on employee support and commitment. These findings had important practical implications because they suggested that organizations could garner support for unfavorable decisions and maintain employee commitment to the extent that they used fair procedures, explained decision processes, and treated people respectfully: the hallmarks of process fairness.

Between 2001 and 2015, research on justice and commitment has continued to flourish. Many studies have examined separate predictive effects of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice on commitment. For example, researchers have examined the

degree to which there is cross-cultural generalizability of the differential justice–commitment relations (see Li and Cropanzano, 2009, for a meta-analytic review). Similarly, studies continue to examine the process–outcome interaction, identifying factors that heighten, attenuate, or even reverse the beneficial effect of process fairness for assuaging negative reactions to unfavorable outcomes (Bianchi et al., 2015; see Brockner, 2010, for a review). Collectively, we continue to glean many insights regarding employee commitment from both of these lines of research.

Of course, from 2001 onwards, researchers have developed new conceptual paradigms to guide research on justice and commitment. The primary purpose of our chapter is to review three such emergent paradigms, and to summarize their novel contributions to our understanding of the connection between justice and employee commitment.³ In this context, we also discuss the mechanisms by which justice has been theorized to promote commitment. Finally, we consider practical implications that stem from our review. As with the early research, the vast majority of studies conducted after 2001 have focused on predicting affective commitment (Meyer and Allen, 1991; Allen and Meyer, 1990), thus, we confine our review to this form of commitment.⁴

EMERGENT PARADIGMS IN THE STUDY OF JUSTICE AND COMMITMENT

Entity versus Event Justice

As already noted, organizational justice research traditionally focused on examining the unique contributions of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice perceptions in predicting commitment, as well as their joint effects. In addition, for the most part in this research, the outcomes, procedures, and interpersonal treatment pertained to specific events, such as a performance appraisal, a selection or promotion decision, a pay cut, or a lay-off. Around the turn of the millennium, a number of organizational justice researchers began to acknowledge that the focus on the separate effects of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice may not adequately capture employees' experiences of justice. In particular, the traditional approach failed to consider the role of employees' holistic, or global, impressions of justice.

For example, Cropanzano et al. (2001) argued that employees aggregate their perceptions of the fairness of specific organizational 'events' (for example, a pay cut) to form global judgments of the overall fairness of 'social entities' such as the organization and decision-makers. Thus, Cropanzano et al. differentiated between two objects of employees' justice perceptions: 'specific events' that are evaluated in terms of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice; and 'social entities' who are held accountable for those events, especially managers or supervisors who are viewed as agents of the organization, and the organization itself. Similarly, in their fairness heuristic theory, Lind (2001) and Van den Bos (2001) argued that people are motivated to form overall justice perceptions quickly within their social interactions in an effort to determine whether their interaction partner can be trusted not to exploit or exclude them. To do so, Lind and Van den Bos suggested that people use whatever fairness information is available, whether pertaining to outcomes, procedures, or interpersonal treatment (e.g., Van den Bos et al., 2001).

In line with these ideas, Ambrose and Schminke (2009) validated a six-item measure by which to assess employees' perceptions of overall justice (for example, 'Overall, I'm treated fairly by my organization', 'In general, I can count on my supervisor to be fair').

Since then, growing evidence suggests that examining employees' holistic justice perceptions contributes added value to understanding employee commitment and other work outcomes. For example, several studies have demonstrated that perceptions of overall organizational justice mediate the effects of event distributive, procedural, and interactional justice on employee commitment (e.g., Jones and Martens, 2009; Ambrose and Schminke, 2009; Marzucco et al., 2014). Indeed, a recent justice meta-analysis indicated that entity judgments were a stronger predictor of employee commitment than distributive, procedural, and interactional justice perceptions (Rupp et al., 2014).

Interestingly, researchers also have begun to examine the joint effects of event and entity justice perceptions on commitment. For example, Choi (2008) predicted that employees' entity justice perceptions would moderate event justice perceptions, such that event perceptions would be a stronger predictor of distal work attitudes (commitment) and behaviors (citizenship) when entity justice perceptions are relatively lower. He reasoned that when entity justice perceptions are higher (for example, employees perceive the organization as generally fair), employees would be less sensitive to fairness of specific events. In contrast, when employees have developed low entity justice perceptions (for example, as when they perceive the organization as generally unfair), then they will be more sensitive to the perceived fairness of specific events, and therefore event justice perceptions should be more strongly related to work outcomes.

Choi tested this idea in a study of employee-supervisor dyads in which he assessed employees' perceptions of distributive, procedural, informational, and interpersonal justice in relation to a recent performance appraisal, as well as their perceptions of overall fairness of their supervisor and the organization. He examined the relations of these measures to employee commitment, supervisor trust, and citizenship behavior. In line with the meta-analytic finding noted above, Choi found that employees' perceptions of the organization and of the supervisor as fair entities were stronger predictors of commitment, trust, and citizenship behavior than were event justice perceptions. Moreover, as predicted, entity perceptions moderated event justice perceptions such that event justice perceptions were a weaker predictor of employee support when entity justice perceptions were higher rather than lower. For example, organizational commitment was higher when employees believed that the organization was fair overall, regardless of their perceptions of the procedural justice of the performance appraisal.

In summary, Choi's results suggest that employee commitment is shaped not only by the distributive, procedural, and interactional justice of specific events, but also by employees' global judgments of the fairness of relevant social entities. Consequently, to the extent that employees hold the view that their organization is generally fair, they may be more willing to discount incidents when they feel unfairly treated. In this situation, then, overall fairness may buffer declines in affective commitment, which might otherwise occur.

It is worth noting a conceptual parallel between Choi's findings and the early process-outcome interaction effect (Brockner and Wiesenfeld, 1996). As noted in the introduction, the shape of the traditional process-outcome interaction reveals that employees are more accepting of unfair or unfavorable outcomes to the extent that they perceive

those outcomes to have been allocated via fair processes (procedural and/or interactional justice). Here, we see that employees are more supportive of the organization in the face of a procedurally unfair performance appraisal, the more they perceive the organization to be fair overall (also see Bobocel, 2013, for similar findings on proximal reactions to unfair events).

The concept of overall justice raises other interesting questions for future research. For example, what is the process by which employees update or revise their holistic impressions? Fairness heuristic theory suggests that people ordinarily will use their overall justice perceptions to guide their actions, but it also recognizes that people will revise or update their overall justice perceptions as necessary based on new justice-related experiences (Lind, 2001). Lind suggested that reappraisal will be induced by events that raise fears of exploitation or social exclusion, such as when relationships are new or during times of salient change and uncertainty. Of note, research has demonstrated that there is significant within-person variability in overall justice perceptions over time (Holtz and Harold, 2009), but future research is needed to systematically examine the causes of revision.

Some researchers have begun to examine the possible consequences of changes in employees' justice perceptions over time (e.g., Loi et al., 2009; Hausknecht et al., 2011). Especially relevant for the present purposes, Hausknecht et al. (2011) surveyed employees four times over a year and found that trends in justice perceptions explained additional variance in employee commitment over and above end-state justice perceptions.⁵ More specifically, previous improvements in justice perceptions (for example, positive trends) were associated with greater current commitment beyond justice perceptions assessed concurrently. Similarly, previous declines in justice perceptions (for example, negative trends) were associated with lower commitment. These results illustrate that employee commitment is shaped not only by current justice perceptions but also by changes in justice perceptions over time. It will be important for future research to continue to incorporate time into the study of justice and commitment.

Justice Source versus Justice Type

Building on the idea of entity justice, researchers also began to point out that the scales used in research to assess justice perceptions confounded the 'source' of justice with the 'element' of evaluation (e.g., Byrne, 1999; Masterson et al., 2000). For example, procedural justice perceptions typically were measured in reference to the organization, whereas interactional justice perceptions were measured in reference to supervisors. This led some justice researchers to wonder whether the important distinctions in predicting employees' reactions to justice and injustice are the 'sources' rather than the 'types' of justice.

From this recognition grew the 'multi-foci' model of justice, which recognized explicitly that different social entities each have the capacity to deliver outcomes, procedures, and interpersonal treatment, and therefore that each entity can be evaluated in terms of any justice-related information (Rupp and Cropanzano, 2002). Moreover, building on this idea, researchers suggested that employees reciprocate responses toward the particular entity to whom (in)justice is attributed due to social exchange relationships that develop between themselves and the particular entity (for review, see Lavelle et al., 2007).

Rupp and Cropanzano (2002) provided an early test of these ideas in a survey of employee–supervisor dyads. As predicted, they found that organization-emanating justice (procedural and interactional justice attributed to the organization) was significantly related to organization-directed variables (for example, job performance, citizenship behavior directed toward the organization). In contrast, supervisor-emanating justice (procedural and interactional justice attributed to the supervisors) was significantly related to supervisor-directed variables (for example, citizenship behavior directed toward the supervisor). Moreover, in line with their social exchange framework, the researchers demonstrated that these effects were mediated, respectively, by organization-focused relational exchange and supervisory-focused relational exchange.

Of note, Rupp and Cropanzano argued for an interesting ‘cross-foci’ effect in which supervisor-emanating justice would predict organization-directed outcomes. In brief, because supervisors generally are perceived as agents of the organization, supervisor-emanating justice may affect organization-directed variables as well as supervisor-directed variables, albeit less strongly. As predicted, the results showed a cross-foci effect for supervisor-emanating justice but not for organization-emanating justice.⁶

Building on this line of research, Rupp et al. (2014) recently argued that the focus in the literature on the role of the separate justice dimensions (distributive, procedural, interactional) as predictors of work outcomes has led to an underappreciation of the role of the source of justice in reactions. As they point out, between 2000 and 2014, researchers have tended to operationalize justice perceptions as employees’ assessments of the extent to which normative rules (distributive, procedural, informational, interpersonal justice criteria) have been upheld or violated, and have examined the effects of such judgments on attitudes and behaviors. In contrast, they argue that researchers have often neglected the related, but separate, role of accountability judgments; that is, how specific parties or entities such as the organization, supervisors, or co-workers are seen as upholding or violating the normative rules, and the effects of such accountability judgments on attitudes and behaviors.

Rupp et al. (2014) conducted a meta-analysis to compare the predictive validities of type-based justice perceptions (distributive, procedural, interactional) and source-based justice perceptions (supervisor, organization) on several work attitudes and behaviors. Most relevant for our purpose, their results demonstrated that organization-based justice is a better predictor of organizational commitment than are the three justice types (distributive, procedural, interactional). Similarly, supervisor-based justice is a stronger predictor of supervisor commitment than are the three justice types.

Moreover, Rupp et al. (2014) found that justice–outcome relations are stronger when the source of justice aligns with the target of reaction. In other words, organization-based justice is more strongly related to organization-focused commitment than is supervisor-based justice. In contrast, supervisor-based justice is more strongly related to supervisor-focused commitment than is organization-based justice. However, similar to Rupp and Cropanzano (2002), they also predicted and found evidence for cross-foci effects, in which supervisor-based justice predicts organization-focused commitment in addition to supervisor-focused commitment (albeit more weakly), but organization-based justice does not have the same influence across foci (see also Colquitt et al., 2013).

In summary, Rupp et al.’s (2014) findings demonstrate that investigators can understand more about the relation between justice and employee commitment (and other

outcomes) by considering not only employees' perceptions of whether normative rules (distributive, procedural, informational, interpersonal justice criteria) have been upheld or violated, but also the identifiable parties whom employees hold accountable for upholding or violating those normative rules. In addition, their data suggest that: (1) employees direct their positive responses to the entity to whom they attribute fair treatment (cf. Colquitt et al., 2013); and (2) supervisor entity justice has an important role in shaping reactions directed toward multiple sources. It is interesting to note that source-matching effects have been shown to be stronger in national cultures that emphasize individuality, femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and low power distance (Shao et al., 2013).

Group-Level versus Individual-Level Justice

Thus far, we have discussed the role of individuals' perceptions of justice in shaping their commitment. Around the turn of the millennium, justice researchers also began to examine the effect of group-level justice (typically operationalized as the aggregate of individual-level justice⁷) perceptions on employee commitment. Naumann and Bennett (2000; also see Mossholder et al., 1998, p. 882) used the term 'justice climate' to refer to 'a group-level cognition about how a work group as a whole is treated' (for a review and alternative definitions, see Li and Cropanzano, 2009). Similarly to individual-level justice perceptions, researchers have demonstrated a positive relation between justice climate and individuals' affective commitment using cross-level analyses.

For example, in an early study involving 4539 employees in 783 departments and 97 hotel properties, Simons and Roberson (2003) found unique paths between justice and commitment at both the individual and department levels of analysis. Roberson and Colquitt (2005) developed a model describing how shared perceptions of justice emerge in teams, and how such shared perceptions influence attachment to the team and team effectiveness. Liao and Rupp (2005) examined the associations between four justice climates and individual-level commitment (as well as satisfaction and citizenship behavior) after controlling for corresponding individual-level justice perceptions. More recently, Ohana (2014) examined the effects of justice climate using a data set from 1496 companies included in the 2004 Workplace Employment Relationships Survey. The results demonstrated that justice climate (procedural, interpersonal, and informational) explains additional variance in individual employee commitment beyond individual-level justice perceptions, providing further support for group-level effects.

Researchers have also examined the cross-level interaction of justice climate and individual-level justice perceptions in the prediction of employee commitment. Mayer et al. (2007) argued that climate may serve as a boundary for individual-level justice perceptions, in that group-level justice perceptions should attenuate the relation between individual-level justice and employee commitment. When employees are members of a group that perceives an unfair climate, reactions to individual experiences should be unfavorable regardless of how employees are treated individually. For example, if employees experience fair treatment personally, they conclude that people are not treated equally and there is a potential for unfairness in the future; if they experience unfairness personally, they externalize the experience as the (negative) norm. In contrast, within a group that perceives a fair climate, individuals' commitment should be more strongly related to their personal experiences. For example, if they experience fair treatment personally,

this should increase commitment because both the group and the individual are treated fairly; if they are treated unfairly, this should be particularly detrimental because it suggests that they could have been treated better and are valued relatively less than others. As predicted, Mayer et al. (2007) found that justice climate (procedural, interpersonal, and informational) moderated the effect of individual-level justice perceptions in predicting commitment, such that the relations between individual-level justice perceptions and commitment were stronger for employees within groups who perceived the climate to be fair.

In summary, research on justice climate demonstrates that employee commitment is developed not solely as a function of individual's personal experiences, but also as a function of the group context in which these experiences are embedded. Indeed, employees' personal experiences may have little impact on commitment within an unfair climate.

Summary

We have reviewed three paradigms that have emerged in justice research between 2001 and 2015, which provide novel insights into the relation between justice and employee commitment. In particular, the research on entity and multi-foci justice reveals that, in addition to evaluating the fairness of events, employees also form holistic impressions of the fairness of important social entities (for example, managers, organization as a whole) and these impressions have independent explanatory power beyond event perceptions. In fact, positive global impressions of fairness may offset declines in commitment that might otherwise occur when employees experience an unfair event. The research on entity and multi-foci justice is also important because it helps to explain how employees may become committed to different parties with whom they interact. Similarly, research on justice climate reveals the added value of considering group-level justice perceptions in the prediction of individual-level commitment. Indeed, individual-level perceptions of fairness may have little impact on employee commitment when, as a group, employees generally feel unfairly treated.

WHY DOES JUSTICE FOSTER COMMITMENT?

Two theoretical frameworks are frequently utilized to explain why fair treatment fosters employee commitment. In this section, we briefly review the history and main tenets of each framework, and highlight some of the relevant research.

Relational and Identity-Based Explanation

Lind and Tyler (1988) were among the first to theorize about the connection between justice and organizational commitment in their group-value model of procedural justice, and later in the relational model of authority (Tyler and Lind, 1992). Prior to this time, distributive and procedural justice research (Adams, 1965; Leventhal, 1980; Thibaut and Walker, 1975) was rooted in a view of people as self-interested and primarily concerned with maximizing material outcomes in their interactions with others. Under this view, people desire fair distributions and procedures because fairness has instrumental value

for obtaining favorable outcomes in the long term (for a review, see Bobocel and Gosse, 2015).

In contrast, Lind and Tyler argued that people care about procedures not only for their instrumental value vis-à-vis material outcomes but also (and often more so) because fair procedures convey information about whether people are valued members of the group. Drawing on social identity theory (e.g., Tajfel and Turner, 1979), Lind and Tyler argued that people's views of the self are shaped by their experiences in the groups to which they belong. Similarly, the relational model argued that procedures are interpreted as reflecting basic values of the group; thus procedures convey information regarding people's relationship with the group and the authority enacting the procedure. Therefore, common to these approaches – broadly referred to as relational models – is the idea that employees become attached to groups which treat them fairly, because fair treatment communicates that they are valued and worthy group members.⁸

In recent years, Tyler and Blader advanced another relational framework, the group engagement model, to explain cooperation in groups (Tyler and Blader, 2003). The group engagement model is broader in scope and elaborates on the process by which procedural justice leads to psychological engagement with the group and to cooperative behavior. In brief, the model suggests that procedural fairness shapes key identity-related judgments. Namely, it signals whether the group has high status (which leads to feelings of pride) and whether one has high status within the group (which leads to feelings of respect). Pride and respect promote merging of the self with the group (that is, identification), which in turn affects whether individuals develop supportive attitudes and engage in cooperative behaviors (Tyler and Blader, 2003).

Of note is that, as with the earlier models, the group engagement model recognizes that outcome favorability and distributive justice perceptions can also shape people's attitudes and behaviors toward the group. The model contends, however, that judgments about material resources have an indirect effect on attitudes and behaviors via their influence on social identity assessments. As the authors state: 'to the extent that having more resources in a group leads people to feel better about their identity with the group, they will engage themselves more in that group' (Tyler and Blader, 2003, p. 355).

Historically, the relational models of procedural justice have stimulated a vast amount of research linking justice to organizational commitment. Indeed, one of the first studies to demonstrate the differential effects of procedural and distributive justice on employee commitment was theoretically grounded in the group-value model (Folger and Konovsky, 1989). Lind and Tyler (1988) argued that procedural justice perceptions should be most relevant in the formation of people's general attitudes (such as commitment and trust) toward groups, whereas distributive justice perceptions should be a more relevant predictor of people's reactions to specific outcomes (such as satisfaction with one's pay). As noted earlier, the differential effects paradigm guided research for many years between the 1980s and 2000, and indeed continues to do so (e.g., Camerman et al., 2007; Hausknecht et al., 2011).

After 2000, many studies offered support for relational models by testing theoretically derived moderation effects. For example, Brockner et al. (2005) demonstrated that the positive effect of procedural justice on cooperation and on positive affect is strengthened among people for whom social identity is especially important (stronger interdependent self-construal), a prediction that follows from the relational models. Similarly, Johnson

and Chang (2008) found that procedural justice is more strongly associated with organizational commitment among people who more highly identify with the organization.

More recent research has focused on examining the mediating role of social identity in the relation between procedural justice and group-related attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Blader and Tyler, 2009; De Cremer et al., 2005). For example, Michel et al. (2010) drew on the group engagement model to predict that procedural justice during an organizational change would enhance commitment to the change via increased organizational identification. The authors conducted a longitudinal study of academic staff at a German university undergoing major restructuring. As expected, they found that procedural justice perceptions predicted employees' affective commitment to the change initially and six months later via enhanced identification with the organization.

Social Exchange-Based Explanation

The connection between justice and employee reactions is also often interpreted from the perspective of social exchange theory. Although there are important nuances to social exchange theory as a conceptual framework, in general it describes how relationships develop based on the exchange of resources (for a review, see Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Blau (1964) distinguished two types of exchange relationships. Economic exchange relationships are those in which the parties specify precisely the benefits offered by one party and the obligations to be borne by the other party, usually within an explicit time frame. Such agreements can be enforced by a contract and therefore do not depend on trust between parties.

In contrast, social exchange relationships are those in which benefits and obligations are diffuse and unspecified, and which therefore depend on trust and long-term commitment between the parties involved. Trust and commitment from both parties are needed to ensure that reciprocation of benefits will occur in the long term. According to the social exchange perspective, then, employees reciprocate fair treatment with commitment and other responses that benefit the organization because of a social exchange relationship that develops between employees and the organization.

Organ (1988) was among the first to draw on the social exchange perspective to interpret the relation between justice and citizenship behavior; therefore much of the early research in this vein was conducted in this context (e.g., Organ and Konovsky, 1989; Moorman, 1991). However, as noted in the previous section, around 2000, justice researchers turned to social exchange theory to explain multi-foci justice effects on employee attitudes and behaviors more broadly (see Masterson et al., 2000; Rupp and Cropanzano, 2002). As noted earlier, researchers suggested that employees reciprocate fair treatment which they attribute to different entities (for example, supervisors, co-workers, organization) with responses that are targeted toward the entity via multi-foci social exchange relationships (Rupp and Cropanzano, 2002).

Since this time, many studies have examined the idea that justice induces a high-quality social exchange relationship with the source of justice, which in turn predicts affective commitment. Researchers have operationalized the social exchange relationship in different ways (for reviews, see Colquitt et al., 2014; Cropanzano and Byrne, 2000). Most often, perceptions of organizational support (POS) (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and organizational trust are used as indicators of social exchange quality when the source of

justice is the organization. Leader–member exchange (LMX) (Gerstner and Day, 1997) and supervisor trust are used as indicators when the source of justice is the organization.

For example, in a study of commitment among contingent workers, Liden et al. (2003) argued that employees form social exchange relationships with both the temporary organization and their employment agency. Thus, they predicted (and found) that foci-specific POS mediated the relations between foci-specific procedural justice perceptions and foci-specific commitments. Similarly, in a sample of temporary workers in Belgium, Camerman et al. (2007) found that POS mediated the relation between procedural justice and affective commitment to employees' current organization, whereas trust in one's staffing agent mediated the relation between informational justice and affective commitment to the staffing agency (also see Rhee et al., 2011). In related research, Arshad and Sparrow (2010) found among downsizing survivors in Malaysia that procedural unfairness had an adverse effect on affective commitment because employees perceived that the organization had failed to meet their obligations.

In other studies, affective commitment is itself conceptualized as the indicator of the quality of social exchange relationship; thus, researchers have examined the role of affective commitment in mediating the relation between justice and other work outcomes, such as job performance and citizenship behaviors. The results of two recent justice meta-analyses support the idea that affective commitment plays a mediating role in justice–work outcome relations, therefore supporting the potency of the social exchange framework more generally (Colquitt et al., 2013; Rupp et al., 2014).

Summary

We have reviewed two theoretical frameworks that are typically used to explain the relation between justice and commitment. The identity-based explanation argues that employees become committed to groups and authorities that treat them fairly because fairness (especially process fairness) communicates that they are valued members of the group, which leads to identification with the source of justice. The social exchange-based explanation argues that employees become committed to organizations in which they are treated fairly because of a positive social exchange relationship that develops between employees and the organization. Under this account, fairness is perceived as a benefit, which employees feel obliged to repay, and which they expect to continue receiving in the future. Although these explanations are often conceptualized as separate processes connecting justice to work outcomes (e.g., Moorman and Byrne, 2005; Tyler and Blader, 2003), in general little research has sought to distinguish them empirically. Thus, consensus is lacking as to whether they represent separate processes that both occur, or are alternative interpretations of the relation between justice and commitment.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Altogether, a large volume of research has accumulated between 1980 and 2015, which indicates that organizational justice is an important driver of employee commitment. This research has many practical implications. A key implication of the early research within the differential effects paradigm is that, to enact fairness and promote affective

commitment, organizations should strive to distribute outcomes fairly, make decisions using fair procedures, explain decision procedures, and treat recipients with sensitivity and respect. Moreover, the early research on the process–outcome interaction implies that, even when a decision outcome is unfavorable or unfair, organizations can maintain employee commitment by ensuring that employees perceive procedural and interactional justice. Indeed, between 2000–2015, many studies have demonstrated the efficacy of process fairness for maintaining employee commitment in the context of organizational downsizing (see Van Dierendonck and Jacobs, 2012, for a meta-analytic review), and organization change more generally (e.g., Marzucco et al., 2014; Michel et al., 2010).

These recommendations remain applicable today but, unsurprisingly, the more recent research indicates that there is more to the story. For example, as noted earlier, recent research indicates that in addition to judging the distributive, procedural, and interactional justice of events, employees are forming holistic impressions of the fairness of their supervisors and the organization as a whole, and these global judgments are influential over and above event fairness perceptions. Thus, although employees are clearly motivated to assess the fairness of events, they are also motivated to judge the fairness of those who are deemed to be responsible for those events; assessments that have independent downstream consequences. Given the importance of these latter justice judgments for predicting employee commitment, supervisors and organizations thus should strive to ensure that they are viewed as fair entities in the eyes of employees.

Interestingly, scholars have long argued that being fair is not necessarily sufficient for appearing fair, and that organizations should both enact fairness and proactively promote an image of fairness (Greenberg, 1990). For example, organizations could highlight past successful fair actions and policies (for example, successful organizational restructuring, employee performance awards) in internal employee communications, press releases, and advertising to promote an image of fairness. Managers could similarly highlight past efforts undertaken to uphold event fairness (for example, performance evaluation or resource allocation decisions) in discussions with employees or in company newsletters. These mechanisms could also be used to proactively communicate managers' fairness values, intentions, and goals. For example, organizational agents could use the success of past fairness-related events to garner support for new decisions. Note that these actions may simultaneously foster a climate of fairness. As reviewed earlier, the relation between the event fairness perceptions and employee commitment is stronger in the context of a workgroup in which everyone feels fairly treated.

Clearly, such efforts must be supplementary to actually enacting fairness. Nevertheless, given the importance of holistic perceptions of justice in the prediction of employee commitment, it seems important for managers and organizations to both enact fairness (by upholding normative justice rules when making decisions) and be perceived as fair, if they are to maximize employee commitment.

NOTES

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1. In the contemporary literature, researchers sometimes use a four-factor model of justice (see Colquitt et al., 2001) in which the interactional justice construct is divided into ‘informational’ and ‘interpersonal’ justice to reflect information-sharing and respectful treatment, respectively. For our purposes in the present chapter, we use the broader and more common label of interactional justice, but note distinctions as needed.
2. In the early research, researchers often did not distinguish procedural and interactional justice as separate constructs, considering them instead to be related aspects of process fairness.
3. For reviews of the traditional paradigms, see Colquitt et al. (2005) and Bobocel and Gosse (2015).
4. A limited number of studies have included measures of normative and continuance commitment. In general, like affective commitment, justice is moderately positively related to normative commitment (e.g., Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001; Meyer et al., 2002; Rupp et al., 2014). The relation between justice and continuance commitment is inconsistent, with some early evidence suggesting a negative relation (e.g., Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001) but more recent evidence demonstrating no significant association (e.g., Rupp et al., 2014). More research is needed to establish theory and empirical evidence regarding how justice may relate to other dimensions of commitment.
5. Note that although Hausknecht and colleagues grounded their predictions in fairness heuristic theory, justice was assessed in terms of components rather than as overall justice.
6. Although not described earlier, Choi (2008) also found the same source–target matching effects, and the same cross-foci effect.
7. Researchers typically compute intra-class correlations to ensure significant within-group agreement and between-group differences before conducting cross-level analyses (e.g., Naumann and Bennett, 2000). Hence, climate estimates reflect valence of shared perceptions rather than strength of climate.
8. Lind and Tyler (1988) recognized the importance of both the structure of decision procedures (for example, whether input is solicited) and the manner in which authorities treat recipients (for example, respect) as determinants of process fairness perceptions, but they did not view these elements as fundamentally different. Thus, in research deriving from the relational and identity models, procedural justice is typically operationalized broadly to include both elements.

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