

Coping With Unfair Events Constructively or Destructively: The Effects of Overall Justice and Self–Other Orientation

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Drawing on fairness heuristic theory (Lind, 2001, 2002), it was predicted that how employees cope with an unfair event—whether they are more or less forgiving, and whether they are more or less vengeful—will depend jointly on (a) their perceptions of overall organizational justice and (b) the degree to which they focus on their own interests or on the interests of others. Data were collected in a 2-part field survey of 153 employees who reported their responses to a recent unfair event. Hierarchical regression analyses (controlling possible 3rd variable explanations) revealed the 2 predicted 2-way interactions. Perceptions of overall organizational justice (a) facilitated forgiveness among those with strong other-orientation, and (b) suppressed revenge among those with strong self-concern. Together, the data suggest that perceiving one's organization as a fair entity can shape proximal responses to unfair events, simultaneously facilitating constructive responses in some employees, and suppressing destructive responses in other employees. Theoretically, the findings are consistent with the idea that overall justice fulfills psychological needs that are differentially relevant to employees as a function of their chronic attention to others or to themselves, which in turn enables them to cope with unfair events more beneficially. The data have implications for the study of workplace forgiveness and revenge, as well as more broadly for the literatures on organizational justice and workplace mistreatment.

Keywords: forgiveness and revenge, overall organizational justice, self-concern and other-orientation, entity and event justice, workplace mistreatment

Most employees can easily recall being treated unfairly in the workplace, but people differ in how they respond toward their transgressors. One response that is especially destructive is revenge, defined as an “action taken in response to a perceived harm or wrongdoing by another person that is intended to inflict harm, damage, discomfort, or injury to the party judged responsible” (Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2001, p. 53). Revenge is associated with numerous immediate and long-term negative consequences for both the offender and victim and can escalate conflict rather than reduce it (see Folger & Skarlicki, 1998).

In contrast, forgiveness is arguably the most constructive response to an interpersonal wrong. According to McCullough, Pargament, and Thorensen (2000), “When people forgive, their responses toward (or, in other words, what they think of, feel about, want to do, or actually do to) people who have offended or injured them become more positive and less negative” (p. 9). Forgiveness has been associated with a number of benefits for the victim, such as greater mental well-being (see Toussaint & Webb, 2005) and greater physiological health (e.g., Witvliet, Ludwig, &

Vander Laan, 2001). It also improves the quality of the victim–offender relationship (Karremans & Van Lange, 2004) and even promotes a generalized prosocial orientation that extends beyond the victim–offender relationship (Karremans, Van Lange, & Holland, 2005).

Past research has identified a number of dispositional and contextual variables that predict forgiveness and revenge in response to perceived injustice (for respective reviews, see Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010; Tripp & Bies, 2009). The current research builds on the literature by examining the joint role of two variables not yet considered. First, drawing on Cropanzano, Byrne, Bobocel, and Rupp's (2001) distinction between *event* and *social entity* paradigms in the study of organizational justice, I argue that how people cope with an unfair *event* will be shaped by how fair they perceive the organization to be *as a whole*. Drawing on fairness heuristic theory (Lind, 2001, 2002), overall justice should promote forgiveness, and suppress revenge, because it fulfills people's fundamental needs for social inclusion and personal control. Second, I test this mechanism by examining whether the effect of overall justice on forgiveness and revenge varies as a function of people's chronic attention to themselves or to others, respectively. If overall justice fulfills employees' needs for social inclusion and personal control, then it should promote forgiveness, especially among those who are strongly other-oriented, and, at the same time, it should suppress revenge among those who are strongly self-concerned. Figure 1 depicts the conceptual model guiding the research.

The present research is important for several reasons. First, whereas the study of revenge, retaliation, and other destructive responses to injustice has received considerable attention, rela-

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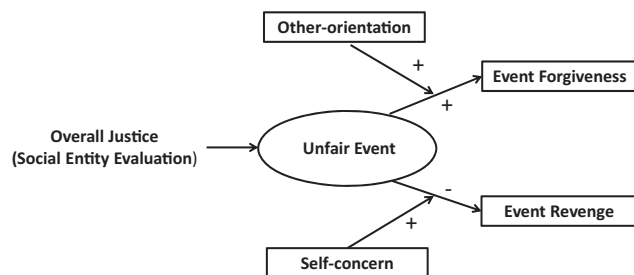


Figure 1. Theoretical model depicting the proposed relations between overall (entity) justice perceptions and reactions to an unfair event, as a function of dispositional other-orientation and dispositional self-concern.

tively less is known about workplace forgiveness (for some exceptions, see Aquino et al., 2001; Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2006; Barclay & Skarlicki, 2008, 2009; Bradfield & Aquino, 1999; Fehr & Gelfand, 2012; Kurzynski, 1998; Tripp, Bies, & Aquino, 2007). Most important, the research advances a novel theoretical framework for predicting when employees will react constructively—such as by forgiving—or destructively—such as by retaliating—following an episode of workplace injustice.

Second, the present study is among the few (e.g., Choi, 2008) to integrate the event and social entity justice paradigms empirically. By considering how employees respond to an unfair event in relation to their global impressions of workplace fairness (an entity justice judgment), investigators will understand justice-related phenomena more precisely than by examining event or entity justice effects in isolation. In reality, employees must make sense of new fairness experiences in the context of previous experiences, which presumably have contributed to a global impression of justice (Greenberg, 2001; Lind, 2001; Shapiro, 2001). Thus, research on the interplay between employees' entity justice and event justice perceptions is needed.

Finally, the study extends prior research and theory on the roles of dispositional self-concern and other-orientation as moderators (SCOOM) of the effects of work attributes (De Dreu & Nauta, 2009). As is explained more in the next sections, whereas the SCOOM model predicts that self-concern and other-orientation moderate the effects of different work attributes (individual-level and group-level, respectively), the present analysis suggests that some work attributes (e.g., perceived overall justice) are psychologically relevant both to individuals with strong self-concern and to individuals with strong other-orientation, albeit for different reasons. As a result, self-concern and other-orientation will sometimes interact with the same work attribute but will diverge in what they predict (e.g., revenge vs. forgiveness).

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Overall Organizational Justice and Reactions to Unfair Events

Over the last 3 decades, research has demonstrated the beneficial effects of employees' perceptions of fairness for a variety of work attitudes and behaviors (for meta-analyses, see Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001). Much of this research has focused on demonstrating the

unique relations between different facets, or dimensions, of justice evaluation (distributive, procedural, informational, interpersonal) and a range of outcome variables. Recently, Ambrose and Schminke (2009; also see Ambrose & Arnaud, 2005; Colquitt & Shaw, 2005) have brought researchers' attention to the value of also studying employees' perceptions of overall justice—that is, their holistic judgments of the fairness of their organization. In two studies, Ambrose and Schminke demonstrated that overall justice judgments mediate the effect of justice facets (distributive, procedural, interactional) on a number of outcomes, both self-reported and supervisory-rated (also see Jones & Martens, 2009; Kim & Leung, 2007). In summary, research supports the idea that people form overall justice judgments, and that overall justice is a proximal predictor of employee attitudes and behaviors.

Of course, employees' perceptions of overall justice should predict not only distal work attitudes and behavior but also proximal reactions to concrete *episodes* of unfairness on the job. The current distinction between the concepts of overall justice and unfair events is drawn from that made by Cropanzano et al. (2001) between two paradigms in the study of organizational justice. In brief, they argued that some justice research adopts an *event paradigm*, in which the focus is on the fairness of specific events (e.g., promotions, policy implementation). In contrast, other research adopts a *social entity paradigm*, in which the focus is on perceptions of the fairness of a social entity, such as a supervisor or the organization as a whole. Cropanzano et al.'s conceptualization of organizational entity justice judgments is operationalized by Ambrose and Schminke's (2009) measure of overall justice perceptions.

Only recently have researchers begun to examine the interaction between the event and social entity paradigms. For example, Choi (2008) predicted and found that employees' event justice perceptions are a stronger predictor of distal work attitudes and behaviors when overall (entity) justice perceptions are lower rather than higher. I build on this line of inquiry by examining whether overall (entity) justice perceptions shape proximal reactions (forgiveness and revenge) to an unfair event. Below, I draw on fairness heuristic theory to shed light on how and why overall justice perceptions might shape employees' reactions to an unfair event.

Using Fairness Heuristic Theory to Link Overall Justice to Forgiveness and Revenge

Incorporating prior seminal research on distributive, procedural, and interactional justice, Lind (2001, 2002) argued that fairness is important because it has the capacity to address two fundamental concerns in social relationships: whether one will be personally exploited or socially excluded by his or her relationship partner.¹

¹ It is important to note that several contemporary justice theories recognize the role of these concerns, although the present article focuses on fairness heuristic theory. For example, the group engagement model of procedural justice (e.g., Tyler & Blader, 2003) similarly draws on the prior justice literature and argues that people care about justice because of concerns regarding outcomes and concerns regarding social standing or relational value. Indeed, in attempting to integrate several justice theories, Cropanzano et al. (2001) proposed a multiple needs model of justice that recognizes that justice can fulfill a number of psychological needs or motives, for example, those relating to control/autonomy, belongingness, positive self-regard, and meaningful existence.

From this central premise, Lind (2001, 2002) derived two propositions. The first is that people are motivated to form overall fairness judgments quickly within a social interaction, using whatever fairness information is available (e.g., distributive, procedural, or interpersonal aspects). Second, once people have formed a global judgment of fairness (overall justice), they will ordinarily use this impression (consciously or nonconsciously) as a heuristic device to decide how to behave in a social situation—which Lind referred to as being in “use mode.” If people perceive their organization as just overall, this will guide them to respond to new situations cooperatively rather than defensively, whereas the converse will be true if they hold the view that their organization is generally unjust. In this way, Lind conceptualized overall justice as a “pivotal” cognition—it is a heuristic that people ordinarily use to guide their actions (Lind, 2001, 2002).

Of course, fairness heuristic theory also recognizes that people will at times revise or update their overall justice perceptions on the basis of new experiences, what Lind (2001, 2002) termed “judgment” mode. In contrast to use mode in which people use overall justice as a heuristic to guide their actions, in judgment mode people carefully weigh new information and reformulate their overall impression as necessary. Lind argued that judgment mode will be induced by “phase-shifting” events, which he defined as major events that raise fears of exploitation or exclusion—such as when relationships are new or during times of salient change and uncertainty.

Lind’s (2001, 2002) ideas regarding use and judgment mode are consistent with basic social-cognitive research demonstrating that people minimize effortful cognitive processing, instead relying on cognitive shortcuts in decision making and social judgment (Fiske & Taylor, 1984). Only when people are motivated, and have the ability to do so, will they engage in effortful and deliberative information processing (for review, see Kunda, 1999). Similarly, Lind suggested that rather than continuously re-evaluating overall justice, employees will generally remain in use mode, in which they use overall justice as a heuristic to guide their actions. The two primary propositions of fairness heuristic theory have received good empirical support (e.g., Jones & Skarlicki, 2005; Lind, Kray, & Thompson, 2001; van den Bos, Vermunt, & Wilke, 1997; van den Bos, Wilke, Lind, & Vermunt, 1998), although little research has examined systematically what it is about phase-shifting events (e.g., surprise, severity) that stimulates judgment mode.

Therefore, according to fairness heuristic theory, at any given point in time, employees’ perceptions of overall (entity) justice should ordinarily shape their response to unfair events. Some existing research supports this general idea. In particular, Aquino et al. (2006) predicted and found that procedural justice climate moderated the effects of organizational variables on respondents’ reactions to an interpersonal offense. For example, among victims of lower status than the offender, revenge was more pronounced when the procedural justice climate was low, and forgiveness was more pronounced when the procedural justice climate was high. Aquino et al. argued that when employees perceive organizational procedures as unfair, they may seek revenge as the only perceived means of restoring justice. Drawing on this line of research, Tripp et al. (2007) developed a vigilante model of justice in which they argued that procedural justice climate is one factor that moderates how employees cope with injustice.

Given that employees’ perceptions of procedural justice climate are associated with, and in fact can serve as input into, perceptions of overall justice (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009), Aquino et al.’s (2006) findings and Tripp et al.’s (2007) vigilante model of justice corroborate the present expectations regarding overall justice. Also in line with the present predictions, Ambrose and Schminke (2009) observed a negative relation between perceptions of overall justice and employee deviance, although deviance was not in reference to a specific unfair event. Drawing on fairness heuristic theory and these prior findings, I predicted the following:

Hypothesis 1: There will be a significant positive relation between overall (entity) justice and forgiveness, such that employees will be more forgiving of the perpetrator of an unfair event the greater their perceptions of overall justice.

Hypothesis 2: There will be a significant negative relation between overall (entity) justice and revenge, such that employees will be less vengeful following an unfair event the greater their perceptions of overall justice.

How Does Overall Justice Influence Forgiveness and Revenge?

As noted earlier, according to fairness heuristic theory, when people believe they are generally treated fairly within a social context, fundamental concerns about personal exploitation and social exclusion are minimized. With such fundamental concerns assuaged, Lind (2001) argued that people have greater cognitive and emotional capacity to cope with daily challenges. Thus, whether people respond to new challenges in an open and cooperative fashion, or instead in a defensive and self-interested manner, is shaped by their overall justice perceptions.

From fairness heuristic theory then, overall justice might promote interpersonally constructive responses, such as forgiveness, and suppress defensive responses, such as revenge, following an episode of unfairness because of its capacity to fulfill employees’ needs for social inclusion and personal control. If this is true, then the predicted effects of overall justice on forgiveness and revenge (Hypotheses 1 and 2) should be particularly strong among people who are especially attentive to cues concerning social inclusion/exclusion and personal control/exploitation, respectively.

In recent research, De Dreu and Nauta (2009) distinguished between employees who are chronically self-concerned in the workplace and those who are chronically other-oriented. Drawing on previous research (e.g., De Dreu & Carnevale, 2003; De Dreu, Nijstad, & Van Knippenberg, 2008), they proposed that stronger self-concern biases people to focus their information processing on self-serving cues in the workplace, and stronger other-orientation focuses them on group-related cues. Consequently, different cues in the work environment should be influential in shaping employees’ work-related cognitions, motivations, and behaviors. Specifically, greater self-concern increases attention to self-related information such as personal attributes; personal preferences, states, and needs; and individual outcomes and achievement. In contrast, greater other-orientation increases attention to other-related information such as group and organizational characteristics, collaborative inputs and outcomes, and joint success. Similar to related research on the self (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991), self-concern and other-orientation are conceptualized as orthogonal dimensions.

In the present research, I utilize De Dreu and Nauta's (2009) framework to test the proposed mechanism through which overall justice promotes forgiveness and suppresses revenge. First, consider forgiveness. One goal of forgiveness is to restore the victim's relationship with the offender (McCullough, Bellah, Kilpatrick, & Johnson, 2001). Thus, it follows that the positive relation between overall justice and forgiveness (Hypothesis 1) will be stronger for employees who are chronically attentive to relational information (strongly other-oriented) and weaker among those who are less other-oriented. More important, this interaction would elucidate mechanism: If other-orientation moderates the positive relation between overall justice and forgiveness, this supports the idea that overall justice promotes forgiveness by assuaging relational concerns, given that such concerns are especially salient to strongly other-oriented individuals.

Second, consider revenge. Revenge is a defensive response aimed at restoring the victim's personal power and control (Vidmar, 2001). Thus, it follows that the negative relation between overall justice and revenge (Hypothesis 2) will be stronger for employees who are chronically attentive to personal attributes and individual achievement (strongly self-concerned) and weaker among those who are less self-concerned. Again crucial, if self-concern moderates the negative relation between overall justice and revenge, this supports the idea that overall justice suppresses revenge by assuaging concerns regarding personal exploitation, given that such concerns are especially salient to strongly self-concerned individuals.

Together, both moderation effects would support the present theory that *overall justice* promotes forgiveness and suppresses revenge following an *unfair event*, because employees' needs for social inclusion and personal control are fulfilled, which enables them to respond more cooperatively and less defensively. Therefore, I predicted the following two-way interactions:

Hypothesis 3: Employees' perceptions of overall justice and their level of other-orientation will interact to predict event forgiveness. The positive relation between overall justice and forgiveness of an unfair event (Hypothesis 1) will be strengthened among employees with stronger other-orientation and will be attenuated among those with weaker other-orientation.

Hypothesis 4: Employees' perceptions of overall justice and their level of self-concern will interact to predict event revenge. The negative relation between overall justice and revenge for an unfair event (Hypothesis 2) will be strengthened among employees with stronger self-concern and will be attenuated among those with weaker self-concern.

Of note, De Dreu and Nauta (2009) argued that self-concern and other-orientation should moderate the effect of individual-level work attributes and group-level attributes, respectively, on work outcomes. In line with this idea, they found that other-orientation, but not self-concern, moderated the relation between perceived justice climate (which they conceptualized as a group-level attribute) and prosocial behavior. Whereas Hypothesis 3 in the present research is consistent with De Dreu and Nauta's analysis, Hypothesis 4 extends it. Thus, I suggest that overall justice is psychologically relevant not only to employees who are strongly other-oriented but also to those who are strongly self-concerned, for different reasons. Given that none of the criteria examined in De

Dreu and Nauta's research assessed possible destructive attitudes or behaviors, their research did not allow for the possibility that overall justice can mitigate destructive behavior among self-concerned individuals.

Method

Participants

Participants were members of an online, world-wide panel community provided by Toluna (www.toluna-group.com), a survey and market research company. Panelists respond to surveys in exchange for cash rewards provided by Toluna. I restricted participation to people living in the United States and working full-time in non-managerial positions in a variety of industries and job types. A random subset (400 panelists) of this group was invited to participate in a two-part, online survey on work attitudes, hosted by Toluna. A total of 355 participants completed the Time 1 survey. Of these, 153 (78 women, 75 men) responded at Time 2 (43%). Seventy-five percent of this group had a college degree or higher. Average age was 42.40 years ($SD = 10.72$), and employees had a mean tenure of 73.70 months ($SD = 66.24$).

The group of 153 responders did not differ significantly from the larger group of 355 on the Time 1 variables: gender, age, tenure, education, social desirability, overall justice, self-concern, and other-orientation.² This helps to rule out the possibility of self-selection bias.

Procedure

At Time 1, employees completed measures to assess the demographics, predictors, and social desirability motivation, which was included as a control variable in the analyses.

Two weeks later (Time 2), participants were asked to recall a recent incident where they were treated unfairly in their current workplace. They were asked to "visualize in your mind, in detail, the specific events that occurred and the interactions you may have had with the person(s) who treated you unfairly" and "to describe the event as precisely as possible." After providing their narrative, they responded to the Time 2 measures.

Measures: Time 1. All measures at both times were assessed on 5-point scales, with higher numbers indicating more of the construct, unless otherwise noted.

Perceptions of overall justice. Ambrose and Schminke's (2009) six-item measure of overall justice was used. Example items are "Overall, I'm treated fairly by my organization," and "Most of the people who work here would say they are often untreated unfairly (R)."

Self-concern and other-orientation. De Dreu and Nauta's (2009) six-item measure assessed dispositional orientation. Example items are, respectively, "At work . . . I am concerned about my own needs and interests, . . . my personal goals and aspirations are important to me," and "At work . . . I am concerned about the needs and interests of others such as my colleagues, . . . the goals and aspirations of colleagues are important to me."

Social desirability. Strahan and Gerbasi's (1972) 10-item short-form of the Marlowe-Crowne Scale was used. Example

² These data are available from the author on request.

items are “You are always willing to admit it when you make a mistake,” and “You always try to practice what you preach.” This form has been validated in student and adult samples (e.g., Fraboni & Cooper, 1989; Loo & Loewen, 2004), and, consistent with those findings, the measure showed acceptable reliability and unidimensionality here.

Measures: Time 2.

Description of the event. Employees were asked to recall a specific unfair event, but they did not recall the same type of event (e.g., performance evaluation; see Choi, 2008). Thus, an assistant content coded the events (blind to the hypotheses) and sorted them into six distinct categories. Table 1 presents the categories of contexts together with their frequencies.

In addition, the narratives typically described a combination of distributive, procedural, and interactional injustices, rather than a single dimension. Two additional research assistants were provided with the definition and examples of each construct from the literature (Colquitt, Greenberg, & Zapata-Phelan, 2005) to guide their coding. They independently coded each event as to whether it referred to each facet (for all dimensions, 0 = no, 1 = yes). Agreement between raters for each dimension was high ($r_s = .94, .91, .97$, for distributive, procedural, and interactional injustice, respectively; all $p_s < .001$). Disagreements were discussed and recoded. The majority of narratives (83%) described a distributive injustice ($N = 127/153$); 46% contained a procedural injustice ($N = 70/153$), and 25% contained an interactional injustice ($N = 38/153$).

Offender status. The offender was identified as follows: same-sex supervisor (47%), opposite-sex supervisor (22%), same-sex coworker (17%), opposite-sex coworker (6%), and other (8%).

Event unfairness. To assess whether participants described an event that they perceived as globally unfair, they rated the extent to which it was “unfair” and “undeserved.”

Offense severity. Following Aquino et al. (2006), perceived severity was assessed as follows: “How severe would you rate the event?”

Forgiveness and revenge. McCullough and Hoyt’s (2002) Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Scale was used. To reduce survey length, a subset of eight items was selected, four items for each construct. Two example forgiveness items are “Following the event, have you . . . forgiven the offender for what he/she did?” and “. . . shown goodwill toward the offender, even though his/her actions hurt you?” Two example revenge items are “. . . gotten even with the offender?” and “. . . wanted to see the

offender hurt and miserable?” Principal components analysis with varimax rotation confirmed a two-factor solution, with the forgiveness items loading on a first factor and the revenge items on a second factor (eigenvalues = 2.671 and 2.251, respectively; percentage of variance after rotation = 32.53 and 28.99, respectively).

Negative affectivity. To control for the propensity to perceive or respond to events negatively, negative affectivity was assessed with relevant items from the Positive and Negative Affectivity Schedule (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Participants indicated the degree to which, in general, they felt distressed, upset, hostile, irritable, and angry.

Results

Preliminary Results

As shown in Table 2, participants reported the event as unfair ($M = 4.43, SD = 0.67$) and severe ($M = 4.07, SD = 0.93$). The unfairness and severity items were significantly intercorrelated (item $r_s > .58$), so a composite was created to reduce the number of covariates.

Although they are independent constructs, self-concern and other-orientation were significantly correlated ($r = .44, p < .01$). This is consistent with past research (e.g., De Dreu & Nauta, 2009) and indicates that in the present sample the measures share 19% of the variance. In line with the current conceptual model, forgiveness and revenge were non-significantly correlated ($r = -.07$). Finally, the zero-order correlations supported Hypotheses 1 and 2 in that overall justice was significantly related to forgiveness (positively) and revenge (negatively).

Control Variables

The analyses controlled a number of variables known to predict forgiveness or revenge. These are age and tenure (Aquino et al., 2001), offender status (Aquino et al., 2006), and participant gender (e.g., Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002). In addition, given that the current goal was to examine predictors of reactions to unfair events, I controlled for variation in perceived event unfairness and severity. Finally, I controlled for variation due to event context and whether the event involved distributive, procedural, or interactional injustice.

Importantly, social desirability motivation and negative affectivity (assessed with the predictors and criteria, respectively) were

Table 1
Context of the Unfair Event and Frequencies

Context	Definition	Frequency
Performance-related	Situations in which the employee received a performance reprimand, was blamed for a work error, received a poor evaluation, or a coworker/supervisor took credit for their work	40
Workload/working conditions	Situations in which the employee was forced to do extra work, did not have necessary materials and resources, or worked in unsafe conditions	33
Work atmosphere	Situations in which the target felt threatened, falsely accused, discriminated against due to gender, race, or age	26
Compensation-related	Situations in which the employee received unfair benefits, bonuses, pay or salary	23
Promotion-related	Situations in which the employee was denied an award or promotion or was demoted	20
Layoff or reassignment	Situations in which the employee was laid off or fired, or forced to move to a different department	6
Other	Did not fit into the above categories	5

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Overall justice	3.05	0.95	(.91)													
2. Self-concern	3.99	0.74	.11	(.80)												
3. Other-orientation	3.65	0.86	.03	.44**	(.89)											
4. Forgiveness	2.68	0.91	.25**	.03	.15*	(.82)										
5. Revenge	2.11	0.87	-.25**	.06	-.06	-.07	(.76)									
6. Gender	0.48	0.50	-.10	.07	-.13	-.13	.30**	—								
7. Age (years)	42.40	10.72	-.10	-.09	.06	-.06	-.19*	.08	—							
8. Tenure (months)	79.57	78.96	-.08	.03	.02	-.13	-.01	.01	.40**	—						
9. Severity/unfairness	4.33	0.67	-.28**	.05	.05	-.33**	.11	.03	.26*	.13	(.76)					
10. Social desirability	3.47	0.57	.08	-.09	.13	-.01	-.16*	-.22**	.12	-.03	.08	(.70)				
11. Negative affectivity	3.13	1.12	-.25**	.18*	.17*	-.17*	.29**	.22*	-.04	.03	.37**	-.05	(.91)			
12. Distributive injustice	0.83	0.38	.07	.04	.13	-.06	-.14	-.08	.12	.07	.07	.19*	.02	(.97)		
13. Procedural injustice	0.46	0.50	.05	.07	.12	-.07	-.09	-.14	-.07	-.07	.21**	.23**	.05	.20*	(.95)	
14. Interactional injustice	0.25	0.53	-.01	-.02	-.02	-.06	-.05	.02	-.03	-.06	-.03	-.03	-.08	-.18*	-.09	(.95)

Note. *N* ranges from 145 to 153 due to missing data. Continuous measures are on 1–5 point scales; higher scores reflect more of the construct. Cronbach's alpha reliabilities (for multi-item scales) are on the diagonal. Participant gender was dummy-coded: females = 0, males = 1. Injustice dimensions were coded: no = 0, yes = 1. Categorically coded variables (offender status, event context) are not included in the matrix.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

controlled to rule out additional third variable explanations, including common method variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). The results are the same whether the non-significant control variables are retained or a trimmed model is used, but the full model is presented for completeness.

Tests of Hypotheses 1 and 3: Does Overall Justice Facilitate Forgiveness, Especially Among Those With Stronger Other-Orientation?

To test Hypotheses 1 and 3, a hierarchical regression was conducted with forgiveness as the criterion. In Step 1, the following control variables were entered: participant gender, age, tenure, offense severity/unfairness, offender status, social desirability motivation, and negative affectivity; then, the following qualitatively-coded variables were entered: event context, and distributive, procedural, and interactional injustice. As noted in Table 3, these variables predicted forgiveness significantly, accounting for 20% of the variance. On examination, perceptions of the event severity/unfairness were significantly negatively related to forgiveness ($B = -.48, p < .01$).

The focal predictors—perceptions of overall justice, self-concern, and other-orientation—were mean centered and entered together in Step 2. Together they accounted for a significant increment in variance explained ($\Delta R^2 = 8\%$). In support of Hypothesis 1, there was a significant, unique positive relation between overall justice and forgiveness ($B = .23, p < .01$). In addition, other-orientation significantly predicted greater forgiveness ($B = .18, p < .05$).

In Step 3, the two 2-way interactions of interest were entered (following De Dreu & Nauta, 2009). As expected, the results revealed a significant increase in R^2 (4%). Consistent with Hypothesis 3, there was a significant interaction between overall justice and other-orientation ($B = .21, p < .01$). Following Aiken and West (1991), the interaction was plotted in Figure 2, and simple slopes were tested for significance (Dawson & Richter, 2006).³ As predicted, the positive association between overall

justice and forgiveness was heightened for employees with stronger other-orientation ($t = 3.55, p < .01$); for those with weaker other-orientation, there was no effect of overall justice on forgiveness ($t = 0.00, ns$).

Tests of Hypotheses 2 and 4: Does Overall Justice Suppress Revenge, Especially Among Those With Stronger Self-Concern?

A parallel analysis was conducted on revenge to test Hypotheses 2 and 4. As shown in Table 4, in Step 1 the control variables were entered. As a group, these accounted for significant variance ($R^2 = .22$). As can be seen, more vengeance was observed for men ($B = .45, p < .01$) and for younger employees ($B = -.02, \beta = -.27, p < .01$) and among those with stronger negative affectivity ($B = .14, p < .05$). In Step 2, the mean centered focal predictors were entered—perceptions of overall justice, self-concern, and other-orientation. Consistent with Hypothesis 2 and in line with the zero-order correlations, overall justice was significantly negatively related to revenge ($B = -.17, p < .05$), although Step 2 did not account for a significant increase in variance.

Step 3 contains the focal interaction terms, which accounted for a significant increase in the variance from Step 2 ($\Delta R^2 = 4\%$). Consistent with Hypothesis 4, there was a significant interaction between overall justice and self-concern ($B = -.19, p < .05$). As shown in Figure 3, and consistent with Hypothesis 4, there was a negative relation between overall justice and revenge but only among those who were self-concerned ($t = -3.30, p < .01$). Put differently, overall justice suppressed revenge among those who were strongly self-concerned. For those with weaker self-concern, there was no effect of overall justice on revenge ($t = 0.65, ns$).

³ Thanks are extended to J. Dawson for his online Excel worksheet at <http://www.jeremydawson.co.uk/slopes.htm>.

Table 3
Unstandardized Coefficients for the Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Forgiveness

Predictor	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	B	SE B	B	SE B	B	SE B
Gender	-.28	.15	-.21	.15	-.17	.15
Age	.01	.01	-.01	.01	.01	.01
Tenure (months)	-.01	.01	-.01	.01	-.11	.13
Event severity/unfairness	-.48**	.12	-.37**	.12	-.38**	.12
Offender status/gender	-.06	.06	-.10	.06	-.09	.06
Social desirability	-.08	.13	-.09	.13	-.07	.13
Negative affectivity	-.03	.07	-.04	.07	-.04	.07
Event context	-.01	.04	-.01	.04	-.02	.04
Event distributive injustice	-.12	.21	-.17	.20	-.12	.19
Event procedural injustice	-.09	.15	-.11	.15	-.09	.15
Event interactional injustice	-.22	.17	-.23	.17	-.15	.16
Overall justice (OJ)			.23**	.08	.21**	.08
Self-concern			.03	.11	.09	.11
Other-orientation			.18*	.09	.21**	.08
OJ × Self-Concern					.03	.10
OJ × Other-Orientation					.21**	.09
R ²	.20*		.28**		.32**	
ΔR ²			.08**		.04*	
ΔF	3.08		4.92		3.98	

Note. All variables were mean centered. As recommended by Aiken and West (1991), unstandardized coefficients are presented when interaction terms are included in the model.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Discussion

The present framework integrates the literatures on organizational justice, dispositional self–other orientation, forgiveness, and revenge to provide a new understanding of employees' proximal responses to episodes of unfair treatment, illuminating when and why employees may forgive their transgressor or seek revenge.

The findings suggest that employees' responses to an episode of unfair treatment will ordinarily be guided by their perceptions of the organization as just overall. Indeed, the findings indicate that overall justice can have two distinct effects in guiding employees' responses to unfair events. On the one hand, overall justice can promote the display of constructive interpersonal responses aimed

at restoring one's relationship with the transgressor, such as forgiveness. On the other hand, it can simultaneously suppress the display of destructive interpersonal strategies, such as revenge. Critically, which of these two effects is stimulated by overall justice will depend on whether employees chronically attend to group functioning and others' needs, or to individual achievement and personal needs.

Whereas much of the past research on proximal reactions to workplace mistreatment has focused on demonstrating negative responses (e.g., retaliation), the present model offers a more nuanced understanding of how employees may cope with episodes of unfair treatment or related forms of mistreatment, allowing for the possibility of constructive interpersonal responses as well as destructive responses (see also Aquino et al., 2006; Tripp et al., 2007). Moreover, it supports the Trait × Situation interactionist perspective advocated by Tripp et al. (2007) by demonstrating that employees' responses to unjust events are a function of both context and disposition. Finally, the present model highlights the conceptual distinction between constructive and destructive coping strategies, such as forgiveness and revenge, given that the associations between overall justice and response were differentially moderated. Thus, the findings argue against the common practice of combining scores on forgiveness and revenge into a single composite (even though they may be correlated at the empirical level), as doing so could mask theoretically meaningful differences. More generally, the model suggests that factors that promote constructive responses (e.g., forgiveness) to unjust events or related forms of mistreatment may not necessarily reduce destructive responses (e.g., revenge) and vice versa.

The present research also sheds light on why overall justice shapes reactions to unfair events. As noted earlier, Lind (2001, 2002) argued that when employees have an overall impression that they are treated fairly within their organization, they have the

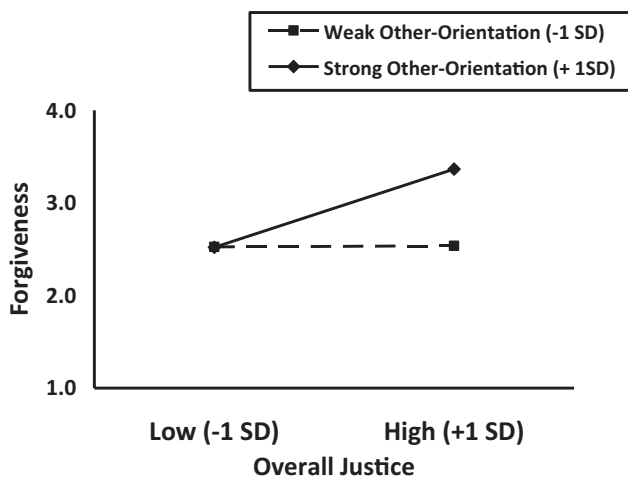


Figure 2. The interaction between overall justice and other-orientation on forgiveness.

Table 4
Unstandardized Coefficients for the Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Revenge

Predictor	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>
Gender	.45**	.14	.43**	.14	.41**	.14
Age	-.02**	.01	-.02**	.01	-.02**	.01
Tenure (months)	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01
Event severity/unfairness	.16	.11	.10	.12	.11	.11
Offender status/gender	.01	.05	.02	.05	.01	.05
Social desirability	-.05	.13	-.06	.12	-.03	.12
Negative affectivity	.14*	.07	.12	.07	.13	.07
Event context	.01	.04	-.01	.04	-.01	.04
Event distributive injustice	-.19	.19	-.17	.19	-.18	.18
Event procedural injustice	-.12	.14	-.11	.14	-.09	.14
Event interactional injustice	-.14	.16	-.13	.16	-.17	.15
Overall justice (OJ)			-.17*	.08	-.14	.08
Self-concern			.02	.18	-.02	.10
Other-orientation			-.01	.08	-.04	-.09
OJ × Self-Concern					-.19*	.10
OJ × Other-Orientation					-.06	.09
<i>R</i> ²	.22**		.25**		.29**	
ΔR^2			.03		.04*	
ΔF	3.60		1.66		3.72	

Note. All variables were mean centered. As recommended by Aiken and West (1991), unstandardized coefficients are presented when interaction terms are included in the model.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

cognitive and motivational capacity to behave cooperatively because more fundamental fears of being personally exploited or socially excluded are minimized. Although I did not measure perceptions of exploitation and social exclusion in the present study, the moderation findings illuminate a mechanism that is consistent with Lind's reasoning. Recall that employees with strong self-concern are especially attentive to cues concerning personal control, and those with strong other-orientation are attentive to cues concerning social inclusion. Therefore, the findings that dispositional self-other orientation differentially moderated the effects of overall justice on the criteria align with the idea that

overall justice promotes forgiveness and suppresses revenge because of its capacity to fulfill needs for social inclusion and personal control.

Taken as a whole, the present research suggests that it may be fruitful to conceptualize overall justice more broadly as providing employees with important self-resources (e.g., perceived control and certainty, social identity, self-worth) that buffer them against resource depletion in the aftermath of an unjust event. With resource depletion assuaged by overall justice perceptions, employees have greater self-regulatory capacity to engage in constructive interpersonal strategies aimed at restoring the relationship, as well as to suppress defensive responses which may ultimately harm the relationship. However, whether overall justice stimulates a restorative orientation, a retributive orientation, or both, will depend on other factors.

In contrast, within a workplace that is perceived as unjust overall, key personal resources will be chronically comprised. As a result, employees who perceive their workplace as unjust overall will cope poorly with new threats because they are already in a state of resource depletion. Such employees will be less able to respond in ways that could restore their relationship with the transgressor, and more likely to respond in ways that ultimately further harm it. Although the present study examined the moderating roles of dispositional self-concern and other-orientation in the relation between overall justice and event response, it is likely that there are other related individual differences, as well as relevant situational factors, that would play a similar role.

Interestingly, researchers have long argued that workplace mistreatment can lead to anti-social behavior because it depletes important self-resources, which impairs people's ability to self-regulate their cognitions, emotions, and behavior (e.g., Aquino & Douglas, 2003; Ferris, Spence, Brown, & Heller, 2012; Lian,

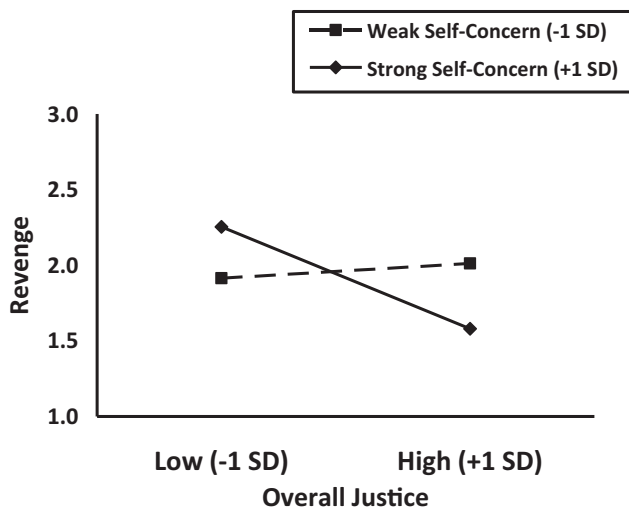


Figure 3. The interaction between overall justice and self-concern on revenge.

Ferris, & Brown, 2012; Thau, Aquino, & Poortvliet, 2007; Thau & Mitchell, 2010; Zdaniuk & Bobocel, 2012). In contrast, the idea that engaging in workplace forgiveness also requires self-regulatory capacity has not been systematically examined. The present model suggests that both the ability to refrain from revenge and the ability to forgive as a response to an unfair event will depend on the availability of self-resources, which are chronically compromised within an organization that is perceived as unjust overall.

More generally, the present model adds to the growing chorus of voices arguing for the value of examining employees' holistic perceptions of organizational justice (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009). Whereas the indirect facet approach to the study of organizational justice (e.g., Colquitt et al., 2001) clearly remains important, the concept of overall justice perceptions enables researchers to investigate new questions. It may also allow for greater integration among various justice theories that have offered different reasons for why justice matters. For example, perceiving one's workplace as just overall may, for different people and at different times, fulfill the desire for control over outcomes (e.g., Thibaut & Walker, 1975), provide a sense of group identity and positive self-regard (e.g., Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & Blader, 2003; Tyler & Lind, 1992), reduce uncertainty (e.g., van den Bos & Lind, 2002), fulfill a fundamental need to believe in a just world (Lerner, 1977, 2002), and be valued as an end in itself (e.g., Bies, 2001; Folger, 2001; Folger, Cropanzano, & Goldman, 2005).

Moreover, the research highlights the important distinction between entity (overall) justice judgments and event justice judgments (Cropanzano et al., 2001) and adds to a small number of studies examining their interplay (e.g., Choi, 2008). It is noteworthy that, in the present study, employees' reactions to an unfair event were aligned with their overall justice perceptions, but clearly this will not always be the case. For example, victims may seek revenge for an unfair event that is particularly egregious, even though they perceive the organization as just overall. Moreover, in such situations, victims may recalibrate their overall justice judgments. Indeed, recent research has demonstrated that overall justice perceptions change over time (Hausknecht, Sturman, & Roberson, 2011; Holtz & Harold, 2009; Jones & Martens, 2009; Kim & Leung, 2007; Loi, Yang, & Diefendorff, 2009). As outlined earlier, fairness heuristic theory recognizes that people move between use mode—reacting to new situations through the lens of their overall justice heuristic—and judgment mode—revising overall justice on the basis of new experiences. An important avenue for future research will be to better understand the factors and processes that trigger revision of overall justice judgments.

Finally, the present framework supports and extends De Dreu and Nauta's (2009) SCOOM hypothesis. As noted earlier, De Dreu and Nauta argued that self-concern and other-orientation moderate the effects of individual-level and group-level work attributes, respectively. The findings here suggest that some workplace attributes (e.g., overall justice) may not be categorized easily as either group-level or individual-level, because they are psychologically relevant both to individuals with strong self-concern and to individuals with strong other-orientation. As a result, in some cases, self-concern and other-orientation may be better distinguished by the nature of the outcomes they predict (as in the present research), rather than the nature of the work attribute with which they interact. Self-concern should be most relevant for predicting ego-

focused outcomes (such as seeking revenge for an unfair event), whereas other-orientation should be most relevant for predicting group-level or other-focused outcomes (such as event forgiveness).

Limitations

There are limitations to the present research. Foremost among these, the data are correlational, which limits conclusions regarding causality. Although causality is not clear, I took several steps to strengthen internal validity (e.g., temporal separation of predictors and criteria, covariates). Alternative explanations are also less likely given that overall justice and dispositional orientations interacted, and further that *different* orientations were relevant for different criteria.

A second limitation is that the data are dependent on participant recall. Although retrospective measures have possible problems, this technique is commonly used in field research on forgiveness and revenge given the nature of the phenomena (e.g., Aquino et al., 2001, 2006). Moreover, there are different weaknesses associated with alternative methods such as vignettes. Prior social-cognitive research indicates that recall for negative life events is superior relative to that for positive events (e.g., Bluck & Li, 2001; for review, see Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001) and, unlike for positive memories, people show good recall for central information when recounting negative events (Berntsen, 2002).

Third, this study examined only two possible responses to an unfair event (arguably the most restorative and the most destructive), but future research should examine additional responses. Aquino et al. (2006) argued that victims may sometimes overcome the negative emotions that characterize forgiveness but refrain from reconciliation (i.e., acts of goodwill). Similarly, employees may engage in reconciliation-like behaviors but maintain negative emotions toward the offender (see Tripp & Bies, 2009). As noted in the Method section, I drew on McCullough et al.'s (2000) conceptualization of forgiveness, which includes an intrapersonal (e.g., release of negative emotion) component and an interpersonal (e.g., engage in acts of goodwill) component. Although the data supported this conceptualization, research that measures these components more broadly, and that allows for alternative responses, will undoubtedly yield important insights.

Fourth, in the present research, the unfair events varied in terms of context (e.g., pay-related, promotion-related), and it was not possible to categorize the events as strictly involving distributive, procedural, or interactional elements, owing to the natural covariation among these facets. Therefore, future research may wish to examine whether the effects demonstrated here differ as a function of event context or injustice dimension. At the same time, the wide variation here has virtues, representing as it does the breadth and depth of employee experience.

Practical Implications

To date, researchers have not examined whether and, if so, how employees' global justice perceptions are associated with forgiveness or revenge following an episode of unfairness (however, for related research on procedural justice climate, see Aquino et al., 2006; Tripp et al., 2007). The present findings suggest that organizational authorities, by their own fair treatment of the workforce,

may facilitate forgiveness and suppress revenge among employees when transgressions inevitably occur. Importantly, although overall justice perceptions may not facilitate forgiveness in all employees—namely, those who are strongly self-concerned—it can suppress revenge tendencies among the latter individuals. The implication is that organizations should make fairness a part of “who they are,” to foster a reputation as a fair social entity. This may provide employees with valuable personal resources to help them to cope constructively when unfair events occur.

Of interest, it may be possible for organizations to create a work environment that promotes other-orientation among employees regardless of their dispositional tendencies, and in turn to accentuate forgiveness as a coping strategy. Recall that self-concern and other-orientation are orthogonal constructs, and much related research on the self has demonstrated that people can shift orientations, even though one orientation may be more developed (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Which orientation is most accessible in working memory at any given moment, and therefore which influences behavior most strongly, is determined by situational cues (Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991). Especially relevant to the workplace, research suggests that transformational leadership may increase the accessibility of people’s other-orientation because of the emphasis on collective identity (Paul, Costley, Howell, Dorfman, & Trafimow, 2001). Thus, it may be possible for organizations to create a “forgiveness culture” by adopting work practices that make salient people’s relational interdependence (Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000).

Conclusion

The present research indicates that overall (entity) justice perceptions shape employees’ reactions to unfair events, facilitating forgiveness among some employees (other-oriented) and suppressing revenge among other employees (self-concerned). Thus, overall justice perceptions may provide employees with important personal resources that help them to cope with unfair events in ways that are more beneficial, both for themselves and for others.

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