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## CHAPTER 1

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# WANTING IS BELIEVING

## Understanding Psychological Processes in Organizational Justice by Examining Perceptions of Fairness

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A variety of theories have been proposed to explain the robust empirical relationship between procedural fairness they experience at work and their workplace attitudes and behavior. However, relatively little effort has been made to compare and integrate these theories, and empirical tests of the various theories vary to such an extent that comparison among them is difficult. To address this issue, we propose a framework to empirically compare the validity of the different theories and the circumstances under which each may be most relevant. Our framework is based on the assumption that employee perceptions of justice will be influenced by the reasons they care about justice; therefore, the concerns emphasized by the various theories about why justice matters should influence fairness perceptions. By proposing that justice perceptions may have utility for testing theories about why justice matters, we hope to initiate dialog about the concerns that shape procedural justice judgments and about how those concerns may provide a window into testing why employees react so strongly to their justice judgments.

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Organizational justice continues to be a burgeoning topic in the management literature. Originating with social psychological research on relative deprivation (Tyler, Boeckmann, Smith, & Huo, 1997), research on justice in organizations has evolved through a variety of phases. Early applications of social justice research to organizational contexts emphasized the importance employees place on their evaluations of the fairness of the outcomes (distributive justice) they experience in their work organizations (e.g., Greenberg, 1988; Pritchard, Dunnette, & Jorgenson, 1972). This emphasis on distributive justice transformed into an emphasis on procedural justice, and in particular, on evaluations of the fairness of decision making processes. More recent work has highlighted the importance of the fairness or quality of treatment that employees experience.

Whether the focus is on outcomes, decision making processes, or treatment, organizational justice research finds that fairness perceptions have a vital impact on attitudes and behaviors at work. This relationship between fairness and attitudes and behavior is one of the most robust findings in the management literature (e.g., Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001), and continues to fuel researchers' interest in justice in the workplace. One particular trend in organizational justice research—evidenced by the theme of this volume—is a focus on the psychological processes that explain why employees are motivated by their evaluations of the justice experienced in their work organizations. Rather than simply focusing on the phenomena of employee reactions to fairness, this trend represents a desire to understand *why* fairness has such a potent impact on employee attitudes and behavior. A number of theories have been proposed to explain the potent effects of perceived justice, and in particular perceived procedural justice (for recent reviews, see Blader & Tyler, in press; Cropanzano, Byrne, Bobocel, & Rupp, 2001). These theories are similar in that they each aim to identify the psychological processes that shed light on how, when, and why justice concerns are paramount. Beyond this, however, similarities among the theories fade, as each sets forth a unique explanation for why perceived justice influences employee engagement.

While existing theories are all directed at explaining justice processes and have uncovered a variety of mechanisms related to those processes, there has been relatively little research targeted at empirically integrating or comparing the theories. That is, the various theories proposed to explain psychological processes in justice are not particularly unified, and they have been tested and validated using widely differing samples and methodologies. Typically, research on a particular theory sets out to test specific hypotheses generated by that theory. It is far less frequent that the theories are compared empirically. This makes it difficult to compare the

theories and poses a challenge for determining their relative utility. What is needed is a common framework that can be used to directly test and empirically compare the validity of the various theories and the circumstances under which each may be most relevant.

We contend that one such framework for comparing the existing theories can be developed by systematically examining the factors that influence whether, and how, employees perceive justice. Our basic premise is that employees' perceptions of justice will be influenced by the reasons that they care about justice. Therefore, the concerns emphasized by the various theories about why justice matters should influence employees' perceptions of justice. Studying perceptions of fairness may therefore present an innovative approach to testing the validity of various justice theories and the circumstances under which the theories are most likely to operate. In proposing that justice perceptions may have utility for testing theories about why employees react to fairness, we hope to initiate a dialog on the concerns that shape procedural justice perceptions and on how identifying those concerns may provide a window into understanding and testing why justice matters.

Although the framework we present has relevance for studying all types of justice perceptions, we focus here on procedural, rather than on distributive, justice judgments. We do so for several reasons. First, organizational justice research has recently had a particular emphasis on the fairness of organizational decision-making processes and quality of treatment. Therefore, we focus on those justice judgments that are of primary concern in current organizational justice research. Second, there has been a relative paucity of research on procedural justice perceptions, as compared to work on distributive justice perceptions. The modest amount of work that has been conducted on process fairness judgments has either focused on cognitive processes or on delineating specific criteria of fairness (e.g., Ambrose & Kulik, 2001; Blader & Tyler, 2003a, 2003b; Colquitt, 2001; Van den Bos, Vermunt, & Wilke, 1997). Whereas such approaches are valuable, the framework we will present primarily adopts a motivational perspective on the factors that may shape perceptions of procedural justice (see Blader, 2002). Given our focus on procedural justice judgments, we will use the terms procedural justice and justice interchangeably.

Below, we develop a framework for testing the concerns that shape procedural justice judgments. We then delineate specific hypotheses, based on prevalent justice theories, which predict the specific concerns that should influence perceptions of procedural justice, taking the perspective that empirical investigation of these hypotheses represents an innovative approach to examining the validity of these theories about why justice matters. We conclude by discussing some of the implications of this

approach for researchers and practitioners. The framework we develop is presented in Figure 1.1.

### PERCEPTIONS OF FAIRNESS

The perspective we adopt is based on the recognition that the psychology of justice is focused on understanding the content, significance, and consequences of people's fairness *perceptions*. That is, while philosophers are concerned with what normatively constitutes justice (e.g., Rawls, 1971; see Cohen & Greenberg, 1982, for a review), psychologists are instead focused on understanding when justice is perceived, why it is important, and how people react to it. Given that psychologists are concerned with perceptions of justice, it is important to identify the factors that influence whether justice or injustice is perceived. Importantly, many of these factors may have little to do with the characteristics of procedures that employees experience or with other principles of justice.

Relatively little systematic empirical work has investigated procedural justice perceptions, despite extensive explorations of biases in social justice research more generally (e.g., Bobocel, Son Hing, Davey, Stanley, & Zanna, 1998; Messick & Sentis, 1985; Ross & Sicoly, 1979; Thompson & Loewenstein, 1992; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). However, several justice theorists have noted that procedural justice evaluations are not direct reflections of *reality*. For instance, Greenberg (1989) suggested that individuals will cognitively distort small injustices so that they appear to be just. Further, both Shapiro and Brett (1993) and Lind, Kanfer, and Earley (1990) found that objective characteristics of procedures are less influential in shaping judgments of procedural justice than are subjective evaluations of procedures.

Furthermore, the absence of work on factors that shape process fairness judgments is surprising given the evolution of social justice research. As noted, research on procedural justice has links to research on relative deprivation (Tyler et al., 1997). Relative deprivation research emphasized that people's reactions to—and satisfaction with—their outcomes were a function of their comparison standard, and not purely related to the perceived absolute value of their outcome (Crosby, 1984). This finding contributed to the emphasis on a subjective understanding of reality, or the social constructivist perspective, that has become a hallmark of social psychological research.

Consistent with these origins, considerable attention has been given to concerns that influence distributive justice perceptions. Distributive justice researchers have emphasized that distributive justice evaluations are often made and interpreted according to one's self interest (Walster, Wal-

ster, & Berscheid, 1978). Other work has shown that distributive fairness judgments, such as the selection of distributive norms and perceptions of criteria related to distributive norms (such as evaluations of the value of one's input), are also made in self-serving ways (e.g., Messick, Bloom, Boldizar, & Samuelson, 1985; Messick & Sentis, 1985; Thompson & Loewenstein, 1992).

Most typically, the nature of this self-serving bias is material, such as the maximization of economic outcomes. For instance, Messick and Sentis (1985) suggest that people will perceive distributive fairness according to their expectations of what will most benefit them. People also perceive their inputs and outputs in biased ways, such that they estimate the value of their contributions as greater than would other members of their group or greater than others who are placed in different input/output conditions experimentally (e.g., Ross & Sicoly, 1979; Schlenker & Miller, 1977). Such inferential biases regarding distributive judgments may be especially pronounced in ambiguous situations (Herlocker, Allison, Foubert, & Beggan, 1997; Thompson & Loewenstein, 1992), which provide relatively greater latitude for subjective influences.

Despite evidence for biases in distributive justice judgments, there has been little systematic inquiry into the malleability of procedural justice perceptions and the factors that influence these judgments. We argue that these influences that shape procedural justice perceptions may provide a window into more deep-seated psychological motives regarding justice.

### SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS OF SOCIAL JUDGMENT

How can procedural justice perceptions be investigated as windows into these deep-seated psychological motives? To begin, researchers would need a framework that can help generate specific hypotheses about factors that may influence employees' procedural fairness evaluations. We develop such a framework by drawing on the social psychological literature on motivated reasoning in human judgment.

Motivated reasoning refers to the influence of preferences on inferences, or the way in which motivations shape the conclusions that people draw. Kunda (1990) presents a model of motivated reasoning in which motivation, or any wish, desire or preference related to the outcome of a given reasoning task, influences reasoning via the beliefs and strategies spurred by that motivation. According to Kunda's model, motivations specify the desired conclusion of a given reasoning process, and thereby guide the individual's construction of a justification to support the desired conclusion. In this way, people are more likely to arrive at judg-

ments and conclusions that they prefer to reach. Importantly, these preferred conclusions must be justifiable to the person, and thus the ability of people to reach their desired conclusions is constrained by rationality and plausibility (referred to as a "plausibility factor"), so individuals may not always reach their desired conclusions. While preferences may guide beliefs and conclusions, they do not singly determine them.

A vast amount of research attests to the important effect of preferences on beliefs, especially when those preferences relate to things about oneself or one's group (Greenwald, 1980; Kruglanski, 1989; Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1987; Taylor & Brown, 1988). This work has also been extended to explanations of one's own versus other's successes and failures (Miller & Ross, 1975; Zuckerman, 1979). As noted earlier, researchers have emphasized that the influence of preferences on beliefs is not unconstrained (Ditto & Lopez, 1992; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Trope & Ferguson, 2001; Trope & Liberman, 1996), essentially making the point that inferences are constrained by plausibility or reality. For instance, Sinclair and Kunda (2000) demonstrated that perceptions of female power-holders (e.g., professors) varied as a function of the favorability of the feedback they provided. Females were seen as less competent when they provided subjects with positive feedback, but as incompetent when providing negative feedback. However, perceptions of male power-holders did not vary according to the feedback they gave, indicating that subjects seized on the salient societal stereotype (regarding the competence of females) to justify their biased views only when it was plausible to do so.

The emphasis in the motivated reasoning literature is on preferences related to *particular, or specific, conclusions* and not on preferences regarding the *cognitive processes* used to reach a judgment or conclusion. Preferences for particular conclusions are referred to as *directional motivations* because they influence the actual conclusions drawn. Directional motivations can be contrasted with *nondirectional motivations*, which do not influence the conclusion itself but instead influence the cognitive processes that are used in reaching that conclusion. Given that nondirectional motivations primarily refer to cognitive processing, they can also be referred to as *epistemic motivations* (Kruglanski, 1999). We adopt the distinction between directional and nondirectional motivations in our discussion of influences on procedural justice judgments.

Both directional and nondirectional (i.e., epistemic) motivations are likely to have a large influence on people's procedural justice judgments. Directional motivations will operate as people's preferences to perceive procedural justice or injustice; these preferences should, in turn, influence people's actual procedural justice judgments. Nondirectional motivations will operate as influences on the cognitive processes that underlie the formation of justice judgments. By influencing how people form procedural

justice judgments, these latter motivations should likewise exert an influence on the nature of the procedural judgments that people make.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESSES IN PROCEDURAL JUSTICE JUDGMENTS

Motivated reasoning research and related work on epistemic motivations together suggest a framework for systematically investigating influences on procedural justice perceptions and the motives they may reflect. This framework provides a way to test various theories about why justice matters, because the reasons that people react to justice should manifest themselves as influences on their justice judgments.

The challenge to utilizing this framework is to identify the sources of motivation, that is, the considerations that influence either directional motivations for particular conclusions about justice or nondirectional motivations to process justice information in particular ways. What provokes people to want to perceive procedural justice or injustice? What provokes them to want to process procedural justice-related information in particular ways? We take the perspective that the concerns emphasized by the theories about why people care about justice should dictate motivations or preferences to see justice in particular ways or to process justice information in particular ways.

As such, we can consider a variety of justice theories from the perspective of how they may influence the directional and epistemic motivations that shape justice judgments. Evidence that the concerns stipulated by each theory actually do shape procedural justice evaluations would thus provide support for a theory; the absence of such an influence may begin to suggest issues or problems regarding the concerns raised by a particular theory. This line of investigation thus provides an opportunity to test the validity and applicability of various justice theories. Further, it provides a systematic approach to studying and understanding the factors that influence whether employees actually perceive justice or injustice in their organizations.

Below, we review several major justice theories about why people care about fairness, and generate hypotheses that flow from each regarding the concerns that should influence people's justice judgments. Some of these theories predict an influence on preferred justice judgments (i.e., a directional motivational influence) and others predict an influence on how justice judgments are made (i.e., a nondirectional or epistemic motivational influence). In all cases, however, testable hypotheses about subjectivity in justice judgments can be generated by identifying the primary concerns raised by each theory.

### Outcome-Oriented Theories of Procedural Justice

A number of procedural justice theories emphasize the link between procedural justice information and the interpretation, evaluation, and expectation of outcomes. These theories all implicitly or explicitly suggest that people react to procedural justice because of the relationship between procedures and outcomes. They argue that procedural justice affects how people judge and react to outcomes (i.e., how they "make sense" of their outcomes, Brockner, 2002), and as such, that procedural justice resolves ambiguity regarding outcomes (cf. Van den Bos & Lind, 2002). On the basis of this sense-making activity, procedures help address important questions people may have regarding outcomes (e.g., Did I cause this outcome? Can I expect this outcome in the future? Do I deserve this outcome?). Several streams of research reviewed below support this function of procedures.

In particular, fairness heuristic theory (e.g., Van den Bos & Lind, 2002), instrumental models of procedural justice (e.g., Thibaut & Walker, 1975), and attributional approaches to procedural justice (e.g., Gilliland, 1994; Ployhart & Ryan, 1997; Schroth & Shah, 2000) all emphasize the utility of procedures for evaluating outcomes. These theories are discussed below.

A focus on procedural justice perceptions raises the question of whether a reciprocal influence between procedures and outcomes is present. That is, do outcomes (and thus the motivations linked to them) influence procedural justice judgments, just as procedural justice has the capability to influence how outcomes are evaluated? Can the insights of these outcome-oriented theories of procedural justice be extended to suggest that preferences to perceive outcomes in particular ways may serve as a motivational influence on procedural justice judgments? Despite a lack of systematic investigation and theorizing on this question, there is at least some evidence to suggest that outcomes can and do influence procedural justice judgments.

The notion that people evaluate procedures as a function of the outcomes those procedures produce has been advocated by some justice theorists. Lind and Tyler (1988) argued that causality between outcomes and procedural fairness judgments is reciprocal, and Folger (1987, 1996) proposed an expectancy-value understanding of procedural inferences, whereby procedural fairness is inferred when the expected value of outcomes associated with a procedure is generally seen as either positive or fair. Cropanzano et al. (2001) likewise suggest that outcome elements affect perceptions of procedural justice, and therefore groups may be able to foster feelings of procedural justice by changing outcome elements. All of these perspectives suggest that procedural judgments will be colored by

the outcomes associated with those procedures. Notably, this suggestion stands in contrast to some earlier perspectives, which argued that outcomes exert little influence on procedures (Walker, Lind, & Thibaut, 1979).

Below, we consider some specific outcome-oriented theories of procedural justice, and for each we identify psychological concerns that can be hypothesized to shape evaluations of process fairness.

#### *Instrumental Theories*

A number of influential justice theorists, including Thibaut and Walker, have linked the psychological processes related to justice to the concerns that people have regarding outcomes that they receive from their groups. People's interest in procedural justice is said by these theorists to be related to their desire to receive valued outcomes. Typically, fair outcomes are valued (Thibaut & Walker, 1975), consistent with the idea that people prefer distributive fairness to being unfairly benefited (e.g., Greenberg, 1988; Pritchard, Dunnette, & Jorgenson, 1972). Such outcomes are considered to be more likely to the extent that the procedures leading to them are fair; procedures are thus regarded as *instrumental* to the receipt of fair outcomes. People therefore react to procedural justice because they regard it as a factor in their receipt of fair outcomes.

It has been well recognized that, when the situation permits people to do so, they prefer to evaluate outcome distributions that favor them as fair. In the service of this effort, procedural evaluations may be distorted in ways that allow them to feel that positive outcomes are fair and deserved, whereas negative outcomes are unfair and undeserved. This distortion is useful, because (un)fair processes are associated in people's minds with (un)fair outcomes. By engaging in this distortion, people satisfy their justice motive, or their desire to achieve and experience justice (Tyler et al., 1997), which leads them to feel deserving of the outcomes they receive. This serves people's material self-interest insofar as these biased judgments allow the justice concerns to be reconciled more easily with self-interested motivations. In other words, because of the association between procedural fairness and distributive fairness, favorable outcomes may lead to biased perceptions of process fairness, as people strive to view themselves as deserving of favorable outcomes.

This understanding of the instrumental theories of procedural justice leads to a specific directional motivation prediction: Motivations linked to self-interest and to the fulfillment of one's justice motive will lead to a positive correlation between outcome favorability and perceived procedural justice. Concerns related to self-interest and the justice motive should thus determine whether a positive association between outcome favorability and procedural justice emerges.

Skitka's (2002) research on "moral mandates" provides direct evidence of the influence that preferences for particular outcomes may have on procedural justice evaluations. By comparing pre- and post-outcome procedural justice judgments, Skitka has found that people revise their procedural justice evaluations when morally-mandated outcomes, outcomes for which perceivers have a strong *a priori* sense of fairness, are not achieved. This "revision effect" emerges as people try to explain what they regard as an unfair outcome about something that is important to them; it does not emerge if respondents fail to have a prior moral mandate regarding the outcome or if their moral mandates are achieved.

Skitka's pre-post design provides compelling evidence that procedural justice evaluations are shaped by whether preferred outcomes are achieved or not. Individuals become motivated to revise their procedural justice judgments as they strive to explain what they regard as unfair or undesirable outcomes about issues that are highly meaningful to them.

This research confirms that procedural justice evaluations may be distorted in the effort to maintain and support particular preferred views regarding outcomes. Furthermore, it leads to the additional prediction that motivations linked to individuals' moral or psychological outcome-related imperatives (and thus to attitude strength) will lead to a directional influence on justice judgments, in the form of a positive correlation between perceived outcome (un)fairness and perceived procedural (in)justice.

### *Social Exchange Theories*

Social exchange approaches (e.g., Foa & Foa, 1974; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996) to understanding procedural justice argue that employees react to perceived procedural justice because process fairness is regarded as a benefit (from the organization) deserving of reciprocation. Social exchange theory focuses on the mutual give-and-take relationship that operates between employees and their supervisors or organizations. According to these theories, the medium of the exchange can be but need not necessarily be economic in nature (for a discussion of this issue, see Montada, 1996; Tyler & Blader, 2000, p. 199). Regardless of the medium, this approach emphasizes that the give-and-take represents the glue that binds the parties of the exchange together. Support for the social exchange approach comes from research that demonstrates that the impact of justice perceptions on employee cooperation is mediated by social exchange variables, such as leader-member exchange and perceived organizational support (e.g., Cropanzano & Prehar, 1999; Konovsky & Pugh, 1994; Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, & Taylor, 2000; Moorman, Niehoff, & Organ, 1993; Rupp & Cropanzano, 2002).

Given that social exchange theory emphasizes the long-term exchange of benefits in relationships, and not just one-shot interactions, it may be the case that people will be motivated to perceive procedural fairness in relationships in which they are satisfied with the overall exchange of resources. That is, in order to support their continued engagement in exchange relationships that meet their overall criteria for whether the exchange is a valued one, they may be motivated to regard the justice they experience from their organizations in positive terms. Cognitive dissonance theories would likewise predict that when individuals persist at engaging in social exchange relationships with organizations, they will be motivated to regard particular aspects of that relationship in positive terms, to bring their attitudes into line with observations of their own behavior. This perspective would therefore imply that motivations linked to employees' social exchange concerns may lead to a positive correlation between perceptions of the quality of social exchange relationships and perceived process fairness.

### *Attributional Models of Procedural Justice*

An emerging stream of procedural justice research recognizes procedural evaluations as tantamount to attributional judgments regarding outcomes (e.g., Gilliland, 1994; Ployhart & Ryan, 1997; Schroth & Shah, 2000; Van den Bos, Bruins, Wilke, & Dronkert, 1999). This *attributional model* addresses the link between procedures and outcome causality, with procedures regarded as indicating whether outcomes resulted from internal or external causes. These causal inferences have huge implications on how people react to outcomes and on the impact of outcomes on the self, and as such the attributional model contributes an additional perspective on why people react to perceived procedural justice.

In a demonstration of the relevance of procedures for making causal attributions, Gilliland (1994) found that self-efficacy was higher among those receiving a negative outcome through an unfair process as compared to those receiving the same outcome through a fair process. Schroth and Shah (2000) found across three studies that self-esteem was negatively affected when negative outcomes were matched with fair procedures or when positive outcomes were matched with unfair procedures. Both results indicate that procedures guided reactions to (and sense-making regarding) outcomes; outcomes were understood with regard to the fairness of the procedures they were associated with. Similar findings were detected by Van den Bos, Bruins, Wilke, and Dronkert (1999), who also hypothesized that the experience of negative outcomes spurs attributional processes, and that inferring fairness in such situations can have deleterious consequences. Converging on these findings, Holmvall and Bobocel (2004) found that participants' self-construals influenced their

reactions to fair treatment. Consistent with attribution theory, the researchers found that the more participants define the self in terms of their individual achievement—that is, the stronger the activation of participants' independent self construal—the more negatively they reacted to the receipt of an unfavorable outcome via fair procedures.

In all of the preceding work, procedures impact variables such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and outcome fairness in a manner that indicates that people use procedures to make attributions regarding outcome causality. Therefore, research on causal attributions may shed light on whether people may be motivated to perceive procedural fairness or unfairness.

A well replicated motive in the attributional literature is the tendency to make egocentric attributions for causality of outcomes (e.g., Miller & Ross, 1975; Zuckerman, 1979), whereby people tend to take credit and see themselves as the causes of positive outcomes but dissociate themselves from negative outcomes, seeing those negative outcomes as being caused by factors external to themselves (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). By engaging in these biased attributional processes, people are able to protect themselves from the potential psychological setbacks of negative events but are also able to take advantage of the psychological benefits of positive events.

The attributional function of procedures leads to the prediction that attributional motivations to dissociate oneself from negative outcomes and to take credit for positive outcomes will serve as a directional motivation on the perception of procedural justice or injustice, such that there will be a positive correlation between outcome favorability/positivity and procedural fairness. Variables linked to attributional processing and bias, such as the self-relevance of the outcome, should direct the occurrence of this directional influence on procedural justice judgments. Thus, while the pattern of effects on perceived process fairness is quite similar to that emanating from instrumental justice theories discussed earlier, the antecedent conditions and motivations will vary between the two approaches. Whereas instrumental models emphasize resource and economic concerns, attributional models emphasize self-esteem related concerns.

Research by Crocker and Major (1989) indirectly confirms a self-protective attributional bias in procedural justice evaluations. These researchers have found that minority group members often attribute negative feedback to discrimination (an explanation that implicitly conveys procedural injustice), because utilization of this external attribution inoculates their self-esteem from internalizing negative self-relevant information. Importantly, attributions to discrimination (i.e., procedural unfairness) in these studies were made only when such an explanation was plausible and the true nature of decision making was ambiguous.

Closely related (for the purposes of the current analysis) to an attributional understanding of procedural justice is fairness theory (Folger &

Cropanzano, 2001). Fairness theory explores the factors people consider when evaluating whether an experience was fair or unfair. In particular, it focuses on accountability judgments, describing the process people undergo as they attempt to determine whether they have been the victim of a negative event that could have been avoided and that should not have occurred to them. This process of determining accountability is, in many respects, tantamount to causal attributions for negative events. To the extent that people want to externalize the cause of a negative event or want to see the event as (unfairly) inflicted on them, fairness theory might predict that they will demonstrate many of the same directional motivations as they would based on an attributional perspective of procedural justice. The similarities between the two approaches lead them to predict very similar patterns regarding the factors that shape perceptions of procedural fairness.

#### *Fairness Heuristic Theory*

Fairness heuristic theory (for reviews, see Lind, 2001; Van den Bos & Lind, 2002) proposes that procedural information is utilized for making sense of outcomes given that people often lack adequate information for making outcome judgments. In other words, the theory argues that process judgments have heuristic value for making inferences about outcomes. This proposition has received extensive and compelling empirical support (e.g., Van den Bos, Lind, Vermunt, & Wilke, 1997; Van den Bos, Wilke, Lind, & Vermunt, 1998). It is noteworthy that the theory argues that outcomes may likewise have heuristic value for making sense of procedures, but that typically it is outcome information that is particularly deficient in the work organization (Van den Bos et al., 1997).

Why are people interested in making sense of outcomes and procedures? The theory argues that people are concerned with making sense of these variables because they are often in situations in which they must cede to authority, which in turn leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and rejection. This vulnerability motivates individuals to try to better understand group authorities and to make sense of their relationships with those authorities. Procedural fairness is one important cue (or heuristic) that they use in their attempt to determine whether group authorities will exploit or reject them.

If people focus on fairness evaluations out of a genuine concern over potential exploitation, it may be inferred that they will be highly motivated to ensure that those evaluations are accurate, in case they risk actual exploitation. This perspective predicts no particular directional motivations because an accurate conclusion is the goal rather than a particular preferred conclusion. However, the motivation to make accurate procedural justice judgments may have large implications for how people use

and process procedural fairness information. For instance, does an accuracy motive increase the amount of procedural information needed to make a justice judgment? Does it increase the extent to which that information is cognitively processed? Is people's confidence in their judgments affected by their drive for accuracy? Do people seek information more actively when they are concerned with accuracy? And are directional motivations attenuated by the drive for accuracy? These are all important research questions that flow from a consideration of the insights of fairness heuristic theory.

### Summary

The aforementioned theories share a common focus on the linkages between procedures and outcomes. However, the reasons for the linkage vary among theories: to regard valued outcomes as deserved, to maintain the continued exchange of valued outcomes, to explain outcome causality, and to help make sense of outcomes in the service of understanding the trustworthiness of group authorities. As such, each theory suggests different psychological motivations and antecedent conditions that will influence perceptions of procedural justice. Most critically, different patterns of influence on justice judgments are predicted by the various theories.

To help understand the various potential influences on procedural justice judgments, and the differences among them, consider the example of an employment promotion decision. The foregoing discussion suggests that employees will be directionally motivated to perceive processes (such as their performance review) as fair when the processes are associated with positive outcomes such as a valued promotion, but as unfair when they are associated with negative outcomes such as no promotion or a smaller-than-expected promotion. This pattern may be linked to two distinct (but not wholly unrelated) psychological motives: instrumental (economic) motives and attributional (self-esteem) motives. For the employee who receives a large promotion, inferences that the procedure was fair enable him or her to feel good about one's self for earning such a favorable outcome. These inferences also enable the employee to benefit from the monetary aspects of the promotion without feeling any guilt, because the inferences imply that the rewards are deserved. For the employee who received a smaller-than-expected promotion, inferences that the procedure was unfair enable him or her to deflect the negative self-relevant information and thereby protect the self-esteem. Likewise, the employee may potentially feel that he or she is being unfairly deprived of deserved economic benefits. In addition, motivations for cognitive consistency with the valence of the broader social exchange relationship within which the promotion decision occurs should impact the perception of justice or injustice.

How can the instrumental, social exchange, and attributional motivations, which all yield similar patterns of influence, be teased apart? Although the pattern of influence resulting from these motivations may be similar, the factors that spur more or less activation of each motivation will be different. For instance, the relevance of the outcome for one's self concept should affect the influence of attributionally-oriented motivation but not material motivation. If the outcome is in a domain with which the individual strongly identifies—leading the outcome to influence self-esteem—the individual may be especially concerned with defensive attributional processing. Similarly, the absolute value of the material stakes of an outcome should affect self-interest based motivation, but not attributional motivation (presuming that the greater monetary stakes do not also convey significant information about the self concept). In other words, different contexts, as well as different personality characteristics, should give rise to different motivations that will influence procedural justice judgments. The recognition that the same pattern of effects may in fact be due to different fundamental concerns highlights the value and utility of our approach, namely, that procedural justice evaluations may provide a window into the psychological processes underlying the psychology of fairness.

Nondirectional motivations may also operate in the above context. Specifically, for those individuals who are attempting to determine the trustworthiness of organizational authorities, the goal will not be to construe procedures one way or another, but rather to evaluate procedures accurately. The implications of an accuracy motivation may include individuals taking more time to deliberate over available information, setting a higher threshold for reaching a judgment, and being less confident in their ultimate judgment.

### RELATIONAL JUSTICE THEORIES

Extensive research has shown that attention to procedural fairness in organizational contexts is not exclusively or even primarily related to an outcome sense-making function. Research indicates that procedural justice judgments also resolve ambiguity and impact sense making about the social self. Specifically, the group value model of procedural justice (Lind & Tyler, 1988), the relational model of authority (Tyler & Lind, 1992), and the group engagement model (Tyler & Blader, 2000, 2003a, 2003b) emphasize that people look to group procedures to make sense of their social identities, since procedures convey information about one's relationship with their group. Fairness conveys a positive relationship with the group, while unfairness conveys the opposite message.



A large body of work confirms that people care about procedural justice for relational reasons and draw inferences about their social identities from process fairness information (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler, 1989, 1994; Tyler & Blader, 2000, 2003a, 2003b; Tyler, DeGoey, & Smith, 1996; Tyler & Lind, 1992). Specifically, these identity inferences include assessments of one's standing in the group (respect) and assessments of the standing of one's group (pride). Consistent with the relational approach, research shows that perceptions of process fairness have positive associations with social self-esteem (Koper, Van Knippenberg, Bouhujs, Vermunt, & Wilke, 1993; Smith, Tyler, Huo, Ortiz, & Lind, 1998; Tyler, DeGoey, & Smith, 1996; cf. Schroth & Shah, 2000). Therefore, inferences about procedural justice help individuals make sense of their social identities and help them evaluate whether their belongingness needs (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) are being met (DeCremer & Blader, 2004). Evidence indicates that the link between procedural inferences and group members' attitudes and behaviors is mediated by these social identity judgments (Blader & Tyler, in press; Tyler & Blader, 2000, 2003a, 2003b; Tyler, DeGoey, & Smith, 1996).

The finding that procedural inferences are linked to feelings about the self because of their significance for people's social identities suggests that preferences or motivations to have positive social self-esteem and a positive social identity may influence those inferences. Attempts to fulfill the fundamental drive to belong through group memberships may also lead indicators of inclusion, such as procedural justice, to be viewed in biased ways that satisfy that drive (Blader, 2002).

For whom will these motivations be most important and active? Individuals who are highly identified with their groups are those who define themselves in terms of their group (i.e., self and group become cognitively intermingled); as such, the group plays an important role in how these individuals think and feel about themselves. Thus, high-identification individuals should be particularly motivated to receive the positive social identity information that is communicated by procedural fairness. Process fairness provides them with information that they can use to construct a positive sense of self, information coming from a group that is central to that sense of self. Furthermore, given that people are motivated to see themselves as fair (Messick et al., 1985), the intermingling of self and group may likewise lead them to want to see their groups as fair as they strive to maintain a positive image of the group.

Consistent with this line of reasoning, research shows that highly identified individuals display the strongest negative reactions to perceptions of procedural injustice (e.g., Brockner, Tyler, & Cooper-Schneider, 1992; Wiesenfeld, Brockner, & Thibault, 2000). Similarly, consistent with relational theories of justice, Holmvall and Bobocel (2004) found that the

more participants defined the self in terms of their interconnectedness with others—that is, the stronger the activation of participants' interdependent self construal—the more positively they reacted to procedural justice. These research findings confirm that high identification individuals and individuals who define the self concept in terms of their relationships with others react more strongly to procedural justice information. Hence, these individuals may be particularly motivated to perceive procedural justice in ways that are consistent with their preferences.

How might these social identity-based motivations reflect themselves in people's procedural justice judgments? These motivations will likely be manifested as a tendency among those who are strongly identified with the group to perceive relatively more procedural fairness than those who are less strongly identified. That is, those individuals who draw a stronger sense of their social identity from the group should be motivated to perceive greater procedural fairness, and it can be predicted that they will demonstrate a tendency towards more positive procedural fairness judgments. Perceiving the group's processes as fair satisfies their motives by reassuring them about their inclusion in the group and the desirability of the group (*respect* and *pride*, respectively; Tyler & Blader, 2000; Tyler, DeGoey, & Smith, 1996). Importantly, research confirms this hypothesized pattern of influence on procedural justice evaluations (Blader, 2002).

In summary, motivations related to constructing and maintaining a positive social identity are hypothesized to create a directional preference to perceive procedural justice, and thus are expected to be a determinant of how people judge procedural justice. This pattern is expected to occur primarily among individuals who are (or who wish to be) strongly identified with the group and who draw a strong sense of themselves from the group. Determining whether these factors actually influence perceived procedural justice provides an innovative mechanism for testing relational justice theories.

To clarify the predicted nature of these effects on procedural justice judgments, we can again return to the example of the employee facing a promotion decision. If an employee is highly identified with his or her organization, then inferring procedural injustice in a promotion decision may be a psychologically painful experience. However, inferences of procedural fairness would reinforce that he or she is valued by the organization and that the organization is one to be proud of. In so doing, procedural fairness inferences can reinforce an overall sense of a positive social identity vis-à-vis the organization. On the other hand, if the employee is not identified with the organization, then the social identity implications of process fairness may have less impact and thus preferences to perceive justice would be attenuated.

### PERCEIVED CONTROL AND THE BELIEF IN A JUST WORLD

Although not explicitly the subject of much recent research attention in the organizational literature, procedural justice judgments also influence individuals' sense of perceived control. Unfair processes suggest that decision making—and the outcomes associated with it—are indiscriminate and beyond an individual's control. Fair processes convey the opposite message; they suggest a heightened sense of personal control. Because maintaining a high sense of perceived control is a *fundamental* psychological concern (Bandura, 1986; Brehm & Brehm, 1981; Langer, 1975; Rotter, 1966), the implications of procedural information on one's sense of perceived control may spur strong directional motivations to perceive fairness.

Several streams of research support the link between procedural justice and perceived control. For instance, Thibaut and Walker's (1975) concept of *process control* equated procedural justice with procedural characteristics that fostered a sense of perceived control. The current focus in justice research on voice as an operationalization of procedural justice maintains an orientation on a procedural characteristic that is linked to perceived control. More direct support of the link between procedural justice and perceived control comes from Lerner's (1980) *just world* research. This line of research stresses that individuals are motivated to perceive the world as fair, and links that desire to a motivation to see the world as a predictable place in which people get what they deserve (thereby protecting their sense of perceived control). Belief in a just world research has focused predominantly on the influence of this motivation on distributive justice judgments, and in particular on the tendency to regard victims as deserving of their negative situation. This leaves open the issue of whether the desire to perceive personal control may bias procedural justice judgments.

Importantly, research outside the justice arena also indicates that the drive to maintain perceptions of control may bias social judgment. For instance, research by Ruggiero and Taylor (1995, 1997) indicates that people interpret negative feedback with a motivation to maintain perceived control, despite the potential cost to their self-esteem associated with internal attributions for the feedback. Ruggiero and Taylor's research demonstrates that competing motivations may create conflicting forms of bias. In this case, control motivations appear to prevail over ego-protective attributional motives.

The influence that procedural justice judgments have on perceptions of control suggests that the drive to have a high sense of control may influence justice judgments and reactions. The role of perceived control as a psychological process underlying justice has not received much

exploration in the organizational literature. Nevertheless, it potentially indicates another concern or motivation that may shape perceived procedural justice. As individuals strive to develop and maintain a strong sense of perceived control, they may be more motivated to perceive procedural fairness, as opposed to unfairness. This suggests that when control-related motivations are active, bias in favor of perceiving procedural justice can be expected.

### MODERATORS

A number of justice theories have been discussed, and the concerns emphasized by each have been highlighted. For each theory, we have indicated the potential influence these concerns may have on perceived procedural justice, and we have advanced the argument that empirically investigating whether these concerns actually do shape procedural fairness evaluations provides a useful mechanism for studying psychological processes in justice judgments and for better understanding the range and source of influences on justice judgments.

As indicated earlier, our approach grows out of the framework suggested by research on motivated reasoning, which argues that preferences for particular conclusions will guide inferences. The motivated reasoning framework makes a second important point: the link between preferences and inferences will be constrained by plausibility, so individuals will only reach preferred conclusions when those conclusions can plausibly be defended. Earlier, we referred to this as a plausibility factor. Therefore, the predictions that we have generated in the previous sections regarding the influence that various psychological concerns will have on justice judgments will be constrained, or moderated, by reality or plausibility.

The next challenge is to identify specific variables or factors that will act as plausibility constraints on the hypothesized influences. Some of the research we have cited earlier, as well as some additional justice research, begins to suggest several variables that may act as moderators (or *plausibility constraints*) of the various motivational influences on justice judgments that we have hypothesized.

For instance, Daly and Tripp (1996) tested the hypothesis that outcome fairness influences procedural justice inferences more when people have little information about decision procedures. In both a laboratory study and a survey, they found a stronger influence of outcome information on procedural justice when procedural information was lacking. These results were confirmed in a study by Van den Bos (1999), which demonstrated stronger outcome effects on procedural justice perceptions when

no information about or reference to voice was mentioned, as opposed to when voice was either explicitly allowed or disallowed.

More generally, ambiguity regarding elements of procedures should foster a relatively greater influence of motivated reasoning processes on procedural inferences, since ambiguity breeds conditions less constrained by reality (see also Van den Bos, Lind, Vermunt, & Wilke, 1997; Van den Bos, Vermunt, & Wilke, 1997). Conversely, the more definitively fair or unfair a procedure is (i.e., the less ambiguity there is about the procedural elements), the less influence motivations will be able to exert on judgment. Ambiguity, in turn, may be linked to an absence of information, to extremity of information, or to conflicting information.

Ambiguity is not the only condition potentially fostering motivated construal of procedural justice. For instance, procedures and/or decision making may be highly complex and motivated reasoning processes may lead different individuals to emphasize different aspects of those complex procedures. That is, procedural complexity may also provide an opportunity for motivations to take hold and foster a differential weighting or emphasis on particular aspects of procedures, according to the form of one's motivations.

The prevalence of moderating conditions, such as procedural ambiguity or complexity, in organizations should not be underestimated. There is often wide variation in the amount, type, and quality of decision-making information that is available to employees. Employees are often—and perhaps typically—not fully informed of the processes that lead to many of the outcomes they experience, such as promotion decisions, raises, and the distribution of work assignments. Similarly, we as academics often learn of journal reviews, grant applications, and tenure decisions without adequate information to objectively judge the process fairness underlying those outcomes. In such situations, there is heightened opportunity for motivated interpretation of procedural justice. Thus, groups that desire the engagement of their members via a procedural justice strategy would benefit by making information regarding procedures readily available. By doing so, they can attenuate the possible influence of motivation on procedural judgments.

## CONCLUSION

We have proposed what we regard as an innovative approach to studying psychological processes in justice by outlining a framework that systematically investigates subjectivity in justice judgments. This framework, presented in Figure 1.1, develops from the premise that the concerns raised by various justice theories should reflect themselves in peoples' justice

evaluations (summarized in Table 1.1). Therefore, those theories can be tested and compared by determining the extent to which, and the circumstances under which, these concerns actually do influence perceived justice. Not only does this framework provide a systematic approach to studying and comparing various approaches to psychological processes in justice, but also it has the additional benefit of lending insight into the antecedents of how and when employees will perceive justice. Whereas previous research has typically investigated how the concerns raised by various justice theories moderate the effects of procedural justice, we propose a novel approach in which these concerns reflect themselves in the construal of justice itself.

Relatively little work has investigated subjectivity in procedural justice judgments. Interestingly, however, a parallel literature (reviewed earlier) has developed on subjectivity in distributive justice evaluations. This disparity may seem strange, and we can only conjecture about its source. Procedural justice research grew out of work on distributive justice, or the fairness of outcome distributions. Due to self-serving biases in the construal of distributive justice described earlier, the prospects of distributive justice as a mechanism to nurture employee cooperation were poor. It was the hope of procedural justice researchers that phenomena such as the fair process effect might more successfully achieve those same goals (Tyler et al., 1997). This hope, in turn, may have derived from the expectation that self-serving biases would primarily manifest themselves with regard to out-

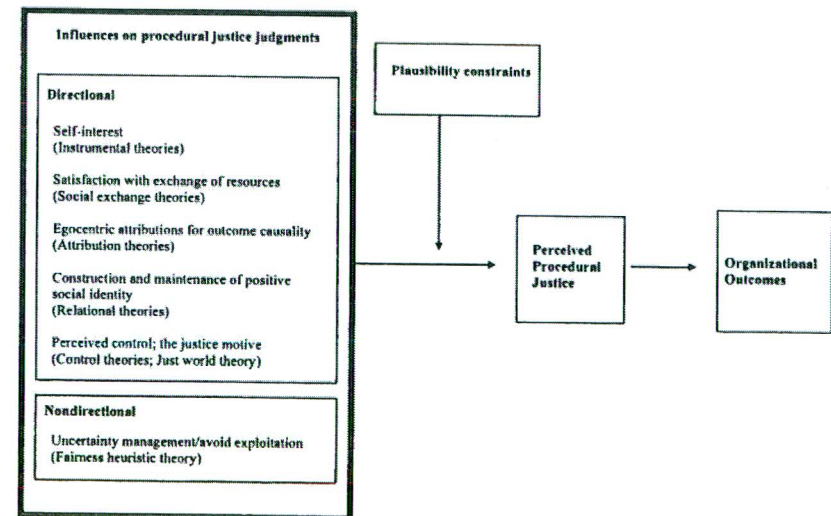


Figure 1.1. The procedural justice judgment process.

**Table 1.1. Predictions Regarding Procedural Justice Perceptions, Based on Major Procedural Justice Theories**

Theory	Concerns Linked to Procedural Justice	Preferences Regarding Procedural Justice Perceptions
Instrumental theories	Achieving favorable/fair outcomes	Positive correlation between outcome evaluation and procedural justice
Social exchange theory	Maintaining beneficial exchange of resources	Positive correlation between social exchange variables and procedural justice
Attributional models of procedural justice and fairness theory	Causality of outcomes	Positive correlation between outcome evaluation and procedural justice
Fairness heuristic theory	Risk of exploitation and authorities' trustworthiness	Accuracy
Relational models	Inter and intragroup status	Preference for procedural justice when identification with the organization is strong
Perceived control/Just world theory	Locus of control and predictability	Preference for procedural justice when concerns about perceived control are strong

comes, an expectation that may have led researchers away from considering how process fairness judgments may also be influenced by alternative factors. The framework we propose, however, suggests that a variety of other forces may impinge on the perception of process fairness.

Does this suggest that the prospects of procedural justice as a mechanism for fostering employee cooperation are unpromising? Not at all. As is made explicit in our model, the factors that may influence justice judgments are subject to plausibility constraints. When procedures are definitive, transparent, and appropriately implemented, process fairness judgments will converge, and opportunities for organizations to develop and capitalize on procedural justice-based strategies for managing employees and for gaining their cooperation will be more likely to be successful.

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