

# **Hypocrisies of Fairness: Towards a More Reflexive Ethical Base in Organizational Justice Research and Practice**

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**ABSTRACT.** Despite becoming one of the most active research areas in organizational behaviour, the field of organizational justice has stayed at a safe distance from moral questions of values, as well as from critical questions regarding the implications of fairness considerations on the *status quo* of power relations in today's organizations. We argue that both organizational justice research and the managerial practices it informs lack reflexivity. This manifests itself in two possible hypocrisies of fairness. Managers may apply organizational justice knowledge but fail to increase the actual levels of fairness in employment relations. Researchers, on the other hand, may claim to promote fairness through their work while actually providing managers with tools that enable or even encourage them to feed the hypocrisy of fairness identified above.

As part of our argument, we identify three types of mechanisms managers may use to influence and manage the formation of fairness perceptions. We consider how the exercise of power is related to the potential application of organizational justice knowledge across individual, interpersonal and social levels. Our approach makes power dynamics and moral implications salient, and questions the purely subjectivist view of justice researchers that deliberately discards normative aspects. The questions opened up by considering alternative mechanisms for creating fairness perceptions have led us to formulate a research agenda for organizational justice research that takes multiple stakeholder interests, power dynamics and ethical implications into account. We believe that the fields of organizational justice and normative justice can benefit from combined research.

**KEY WORDS:** justice, fairness, power, organizational behavior, managerialist research

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## **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

Organizational justice (OJ) has become one of the most active research areas in organizational behavior (Colquitt and Greenberg, 2001, p. 3). The promise that justice researchers make to managers is that “being fair costs little and pays off handsomely” (Brockner, 2006, p. 122). Despite the high levels of activity in the field, justice researchers have rarely asked moral questions or critical questions regarding the implications of fairness considerations on organizational reality.

While outcomes and antecedents of perceived (un-)fair treatment, or reactive justice, have been the focus of a larger body of research in organizations, the proactive creation of fairness or unfairness (proactive fairness) has received little attention in field research up to date (Bies and Tripp, 1995, p. 200). The unfolding of justice or injustice in organizations remains largely a black box. There are many potential routes towards creating fairness perceptions. Managers might, for example, put in place procedures including criteria typically perceived as fair, change their basis for allocation decisions, their information policy, or they might try to impact underlying justice norm choice or referent choice for employees. One way these fairness perceptions are created is through the framing of situations. Frames are offered by key stakeholders, such as union leaders and management. One example is that unions often promote equality as a basis for

distribution, while management promotes merit-based allocations. In short, justice judgments may not only be changed through evaluating actions and events within a particular normative framework of justice, but may change through frames, ideologies, through influencing or replacing the normative framework itself. The way that justice judgments are influenced by ideologies, value judgments and power has received very little attention.

In this paper, we argue that the lack of ethical considerations and critical reflection in organizational justice brings about two dangers, which we term the hypocrisies of organizational justice in research and in practice. Justice researchers who adopt exclusively subjective conceptualizations of organizational justice and tailor their work to the benefit of management may lose sight of the impact of their work in terms of normative justice. Managers in turn may apply OJ theory and findings without increasing or even considering the actual levels of fairness in employment relations.

We argue that a broadening of the focus, the methods, and the theories of organizational justice will be necessary in order to investigate and integrate the different mechanisms that can underlie the shaping of justice judgments and the preventing of reactions to injustice. In turn, such work is expected to significantly expand the scope of the field of organizational justice and enable it to deal with a broader range of questions, stakeholders and real world situations. Certainly, the field of normative ethics could also benefit from such integration, as organizational fairness issues in particular related to process and conduct have rarely been the focus in normative conceptions of justice to date.

Below, we briefly describe and discuss the history of the field and the nature of current OJ research. We point out the implications of the confluence of a social-psychological orientation and the more recent adoption of a managerialist ethos in the OJ field. The shortcomings of the subjectivist conception of justice (fairness) will be demonstrated by juxtaposing it with normative conceptions of justice. Based on this, we briefly outline the benefits of a radical critique of the field and make recommendations for future research. In the following, we describe the dangers of a hypocrisy of justice in managerial practice, and of a hypocrisy of justice in OJ research. Finally we make the argument that not only can organizational justice benefit from the integration of

normative justice theories, but that normative perspectives can also be enriched by drawing on organizational justice.

## **The Nature of Organizational Justice Research**

OJ deals with the role of fairness as a consideration in the workplace (Greenberg, 1990, p. 400), or, more specifically, with employee's perceptions of fairness in their employment relationship (Folger and Cropanzano, 1998). The terms justice and fairness are commonly used interchangeably (see Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001; Sheppard *et al.*, 1992). The field was born in the 1960s, when a few contributions introduced the notion of distributive justice, or the perceived fairness of outcomes (Adams, 1963; Adams, 1965; Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961). Distributive justice was defined as a subjective perception derived from internal considerations, an intrapersonal judgment potentially informed but not determined by external normative frameworks. This subjective conception of justice departed fundamentally from the traditional philosophical perspective that adopted a normative, externally determined view of justice that reflected such characteristics as impartiality, objectivity, and shared standards and norms. Equity was at first seen as the dominant criterion that people used in their fairness judgment process, but later on other subjectively used distribution rules such as equality and need were introduced (Deutsch, 1975). Some studies in game theory and economics have investigated in how far different normative theories are applied by people in their subjective judgments, and a review of these studies has recently been provided by Konow (2003). Konow grouped different distributive fairness norms into three main theoretical streams: 1) equality and need, 2) utilitarianism and welfare economics, 3) equity and desert, and reviewed empirical evidence on the prevalence of the different norms, in particular in lab studies and surveys. Konow summarizes: "Fairness views are best explained by an integrated approach that acknowledges the influence of the three principles of justice, whereby the weight on each is determined by the context" (p. 1190). This is probably the most thorough review of the subjective use of different normative

principles to date. While research found that people may use different norms to judge fairness, little work has been conducted to see when which norm is used, and no published work has attempted to assess the appropriateness of a specific norm in a particular situation from a normative or moral point of view. The subjective conception of justice itself and its implications have not been questioned.

The face of justice research was changed by the arising focus on procedural justice, or the perceived fairness of the procedures used to determine an outcome (Thibaut and Walker, 1975). Similar to distributive justice research, the choice of criteria for procedural fairness has been found to be context-dependent (McFarlin and Sweeney, 2001), but the rationale behind choosing particular criteria of procedural fairness over others has not been the focus of investigations, and ethical implications have not been considered.

Important and potentially relevant publications from related fields such as political philosophy and industrial relations (e.g., Fox, 1974; Hirschman, 1970; Nozick, 1974; Rawls, 1971) were noted and occasionally used, but none of them significantly influenced the development of the OJ field. In the later part of the 1970s the weight of research activities shifted from a mainly social-psychological area of inquiry, with other areas and disciplines involved along the way (e.g., political philosophy, sociology, law, cognitive psychology, and management), to an integrative part of mainstream organizational behavior. At the same time, Bies and colleagues (Bies, 1986; Bies and Moag, 1986; Bies and Shapiro, 1987; Bies, 1987; Bies *et al.*, 1988; Bies and Shapiro, 1988) proposed a concept extension to procedural justice by identifying the interpersonal component named interactional justice (e.g., Greenberg, 1987). Recent work has again conceptually and empirically separated these dimensions and split of interactional justice into two constituent dimensions named informational justice (referring to explanations and social accounts) and interpersonal justice (referring to respectful consideration and sensitivity) (e.g., Colquitt, 2001). Since its emergence in the 1960s, the field of OJ has retained a strong social-psychological focus, which is reflected in the continuing important role of laboratory-based research, and in the entirely subjective conception of fairness or justice.

Over the last twenty years the field has also oriented itself according to the pragmatic concerns of managers and organizations. We are not the first to point out this managerialist ethos of the OJ field (Bies and Tripp, 1995; 2002). OJ research has been preoccupied with managing employee justice perceptions to counter negative attitudinal and behavioral reactions to managerial actions and organizational systems. Brockner recently described the practical use of organisational justice research and findings for readers of the HBR, and made “the business case for fair process” (Brockner, 2006, p. 123). “Using process fairness, companies could spend a lot less money and still have more satisfied employees” (Brockner, 2006, p. 124).

The research topics that justice scholars choose are generally of immediate relevance for practicing managers. Specific topics include links between justice perceptions and organizationally relevant behavioral and attitudinal reactions (e.g., likelihood of legal action, (Bies and Tyler, 1993); job performance, (Greenberg, 1988); co-operation, (Pfeffer and Langton, 1993); compliance with organizational rules (Greenberg, 1994); perceived stress, (Zohar, 1995); and job satisfaction (Singer, 1993). Other OJ research also focuses on issues with high pragmatic managerial value, such as antecedents of fairness perceptions under managerial control such as pay and other outcomes (see Adams and Freedman, 1976 for a review), voice (Folger, 1977; Thibaut and Walker, 1975), or explanations (Shapiro, 1991). Much work has also appeared that links fairness perceptions to specific issues of fundamental importance to managers, such as conflict management, downsizing, layoffs, organizational change, and human resource practices such as recruitment, selection, and staffing (for an overview see Folger and Cropanzano, 1998). Some recent, more conceptually oriented streams of research include, for example, investigations aimed at advancing current understanding about how fairness judgments are formed and what information is used in this process (e.g., Folger and Cropanzano, 2001; Lind, 2001; Van den Bos *et al.*, 2001). Yet again, this research does not consider moral frameworks and implications.

In fact, the appearance of organizational justice on the center stage of organizational research may well reflect the view that the “object for management control are decreasingly labor power and behavior and increasingly the mindpower and subjectivities of employees.” (Alverson and Deetz, 1996, p. 192). While “[o]rganizational

justice researchers have focused almost exclusively on explaining how the justice concept can serve management interests” (Bies and Tripp, 1995, p. 200), the managerialist perspective guiding organizational justice research has not been conducive to broader, critical, and more multi-faceted insights into fairness and justice as part of organizational dynamics and individual experiences in organizations.

In summary, current OJ research reflects the disciplinary origins of the field as well as particular pragmatic concerns of its practitioner audience. While adding field-based cross-sectional survey research to the laboratory approaches that have marked its beginnings, the historically determined subjective conception of its central variable and the managerialist ethos adopted in the last two decades define a highly homogeneous and largely uncritical field of study. In accepting this status quo of OJ research, however, “justice researchers [...] are falling short of [their] moral responsibility to question how [their] efforts may unwittingly contribute to perpetuating, not ameliorating, injustice in the workplace” (Bies and Tripp, 1995, p. 200).

This is the reason for the challenge inherent in our radical approach to *re-view* the field of OJ research. The absence of critical voices, and what we see as a substantial lack of reflexivity in OJ research and practice, prevents important questions from being asked – questions both about the conduct of OJ research, and about its implications for managerial and organizational practice. Critical and reflexive probes into OJ may surface new questions, including the role of ethics and values in OJ research, the implications of fairness considerations on the *status quo* of power relations in today’s organizations, the choices of research questions and the overarching managerialist research agenda of the field, and the role of research methods in the further development of the field.

Our radical critique of the orientation of current OJ research is not meant to be a rejection of the disciplinary heritage of the field. It is also not a rejection of the importance of addressing the concerns of managerial practitioners, who are important external stakeholders. We see this as appropriate and even necessary to avoid pragmatic irrelevance. However, we believe that the adoption of the purely subjective definition of justice, the lack of references to normative justice conceptions, and the exclusion of multiple stakeholder interests create problems for the research area in a number of ways.

These include (a) what questions are asked, (b) how these questions are answered, and (c) what the impact of the answers presented is.

In the next section, we introduce different views on justice and fairness: Firstly we contrast normative views of justice with the subjective definition of fairness presented above, and then develop alternative views on organizational justice, drawing on a taxonomy of power exercises by Steven Lukes (2005). Finally, we discuss the implications of an unreflected acceptance of historically or externally determined conventions for OJ research and practice

### **Normative views of justice**

The study of justice has been a topic in ethics and philosophy at least since Plato and Socrates, and philosophical and ethical thinking about justice has shaped the way people see the world. Mankind has long tried to answer the question, “what is justice?” Yet the question seems to remain as open as ever, and it seems unsure if a final answer can ever be found (Kelsen, 2000). Justice has been conceptualised in many different ways by philosophers and thinkers: as a natural law based on contracts (Hobbes, 1947), as an instrument for societal order for which no universal standard exists (e.g., Mill, 1940 ), as a consequence of the economic system that is used as a manipulative instrument to preserve and justify a societal order (Marx, 1929), or as a result of historical associations and historical rights (Nozick, 1974). In philosophy, justice has been thought about as an attribute of societal order, as a human virtue, or as an attribute of an act (Kelsen, 2000).

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Ethical theories are often classified into utilitarian, deontic, and virtue ethics approaches. Utilitarianism defines the right action as the one that maximises the overall good “that is, it must maximise good (or minimize bad) from the standpoint of the entire human community” (Donaldson and Werhane, 2002, p. 3).

Deontology, on the other hand, focuses on “the rules and principles that guide actions” (Donaldson and Werhane, 2002) . This includes so-called Kantian Ethics, concerned with duty and universal principles, but also social contract approaches, such as



Rawls' theory of justice where the principles and rules that rational actors would decide on in an ideal situation are used as a benchmark for rightness (Rawls, 1971).

The third stream, Virtue Ethics, is sometimes subsumed under the other theories. Solomon (1992) identifies six central considerations for virtue ethics in organizations: community, excellence, role identity, holism, integrity and judgment. Virtue ethics is concerned with good character, and with taking into account the situation and the specific people involved, giving a role to good judgments as opposed to just following particular rules (which is particularly important in situations of conflicting roles and dilemmas).

Of course, there are many important differentiations of contributions within each of these three streams, which may in turn arrive at different judgments when evaluating the 'fairness' or 'justice' of any act or situation.

A normative contribution that may prove particularly useful in organisational contexts is the theory of justice provided by Finnis (1980), as it is not restricted to particular institutions or to an overall societal context. Finnis develops a normative theory of justice that builds on Aristotelian thinking, and as such is closely linked to virtue ethics. For Finnis, the objective of justice is "the flourishing of all members of the community" (p. 174). In order to achieve justice, a number of criteria need to be balanced (including need, capacity and contributions, risk creation, etc). The overriding consideration however is 'practical reasonableness', which takes the particular circumstances of particular people into account. "The requirements of justice, then, are the concrete implications of the basic requirement of practical reasonableness that one is to favour and foster the common good of one's communities" (p. 164).

While justice and morality are not synonymous, justice is often seen as a benchmark for judging the morality of an action or situation. Of course, there may be exceptions, such as when in utilitarian thinking an injustice for one or for a few is judged to be moral when it serves the greater good or justice for many. Yet justice is used as a central consideration when evaluating so-called stakeholder interests in business. Business ethics scholars have pointed out that in organisational contexts the welfare of all stakeholders, not only the stockholders' welfare, is to be considered (Werhane and Freedman, 1999). Philips (1997) refers to the centrality of fairness in this context:

“Whenever persons or groups of persons voluntarily accept the benefits of a mutually beneficial scheme of co-operation requiring sacrifice or contribution on the parts of the participants and there exists the possibility of free-riding, obligations of fairness are created among the participants in the co-operative scheme in proportion to the benefits accepted” (p. 57).

Organizational justice in contrast is defined as *perceived* justice. The fulfillment of normative requirements of a theory of justice does not necessarily mean that justice is also perceived by any or all stakeholders, and in turn, normative injustice does not necessarily result in injustice perceptions. Thus, employees’ (or managers’) fairness perceptions *can* be compatible with ethical and normative fairness, but they may not be. As an employees’ justice judgments change over the time of their employment, such judgments can become more or less compatible with a particular normative fairness standard.

### **A radical view**

In this paper, we develop exemplary alternative views on justice in organizations by drawing on a taxonomy of power exercises from political sociology, developed by Steven Lukes (2005). The first dimension of power exercise identified by Lukes focuses on observable conflict in decision making. Such explicit conflict about decision making reflects the traditional pluralist approach to the exercise of power (see for example Dahl, 1957). Decision-making arenas are open to the participation of any organized group, and the more powerful groups will be able to get their way after open discussion and struggle. The second dimension of power exercise has been added by Bachrach and Baratz (1963) who argue that power is not only exercised in pluralist open discourse, but that it can be exercised in more subtle forms; for example, through agenda setting or preventing groups from raising issues. In this view, not only the issues that are talked about and decided on are an important aspect of power exercise, but also the exclusion of issues that are not considered. There are some directly observable power mechanisms, like force, sanctions,

and manipulation, while other mechanisms are not directly observable, such as preventing others from acting through anticipated reactions, or through sums of incremental decisions. Lukes proposes a third dimension of power mechanisms, according to which power can be used to pre-empt manifest conflict from arising. One form of power is to shape the conception of issues and influencing wants of others. The mechanisms of power now include much 'subtler' forms, such as the creation of social myths and the use of language and symbols. Meaning is socially constructed, including both observable and indirect mechanisms: the less powerful may be manipulated in terms of not recognizing grievances, in their conception of self and group, not realizing who is responsible, not seeing possible alternatives, and not knowing effective strategies.

We apply Lukes' three dimensional framework of power exercise to managerial actions regarding employees' fairness perceptions, and their behavioral and attitudinal responses to unfairness. This leads us to distinguish three categories of managerial actions for managing and creating employee fairness experiences over time. The three categories are entitled '*responding*', '*preventing*' and '*shaping*', and differ with regards to power mechanisms and time frame. Each category implies different challenges for organizational justice research, and poses different questions for organizational practice.

For each of the three categories of fairness mechanisms presented, we will outline implications for research and for managerial practice in turn. We will illustrate aspects of the three dimensions using the example of a firm that makes a significant part of its workforce redundant. Overall, the three mechanisms demonstrate the limitations of a purely subjectivist justice definition.

### *The first dimension*

The first category of managerial actions we present is the one that uses mechanisms that have been recognized, theorized and studied by OJ researchers. These actions (and the researchers studying them unreflexively) take perceptions of justice at face value: if people think they are treated fairly, then they are treated fairly. This category, which we

term ‘responding’, parallels the first dimension of Lukes’ taxonomy of power (Lukes, 2005), assuming observable conflict of interests. In this context, such conflicts arise because managerial decisions that reflect organizational interests may not be perceived as fair by employees. According to this view, conflicts of interest are brought into the open, and the more powerful parties prevail in these open conflicts. If no complaint or grievance is voiced, it is assumed that there are none. Paralleling this, if no concerns about injustice are voiced, justice researchers and practitioners may assume that there is no injustice.

For managerial practitioners, this implies that in order to foster positive fairness perceptions of employees, they need to design outcomes, procedures, and interpersonal treatments according to commonly agreed criteria as identified in fairness research, i.e., organizations are ‘responding’ to a set of required criteria. If management does not fulfill the expectations of justice that employees bring to the workplace, then an open struggle about these issues of fairness is to result. Who prevails in this struggle depends on the relative power distribution between management and employees, but any differences are expected to be out in the open.

In the context of our redundancy example, the company’s employees may perceive distributive injustice (they feel that the redundancies are undeserved), procedural injustice (they feel the procedures for deciding on redundancies are unjust and biased), and informational injustice (they feel that they have not been given sufficient and timely information). In this case, the employees remaining after the layoffs (survivors) are expected to respond or even retaliate through negative attitudinal and behavioral reactions, and laid off employees are likely to file wrongful termination lawsuits. The only way for the company to avoid these reactions is to fulfill particular requirements of justice:

Distributive justice perceptions could either be improved through changing the redundancy conditions or even abandoning the redundancy plan. They could also be improved either through procedural or informational fairness. The so-called ‘fair process effect’ (Folger and Cropanzano, 1998) is the finding that under fair process conditions (e.g., consistent, representative, unbiased procedures) even unfavourable outcomes could be perceived as fair (Van den Bos *et al.*, 1998). Bies and Shapiro (1987) also found that

people with negative outcomes were more likely to accept a procedure as fair when an explanation was offered, an effect which could be termed a 'fair information effect'. Thus, overall fairness perceptions for both survivors and terminated employees can only be improved through responding to a set of criteria that employees perceive to be fair.

Management may, of course, respond to employees' fairness criteria by just going through the motions, or 'ticking the right boxes'. Thus, while responding through fulfilling the criteria improves overall fairness perceptions, it does not necessarily imply a particularly morally astute organization. Responding does not rely on the moral judgments of managers or the organization. Brockner (2006) also uses the example of companies downsizing. During layoffs company B may spend a lot less on severance packages than company A, but because company B's managers explain the reasons for the layoffs properly and also express regret and offer sincere apologies, company B is likely to face less wrongful termination lawsuits. Brockner calls this the 'business case for fair process' (p. 123). It can even be argued that the conscious management of fairness criteria can be used in an amoral or even immoral way. MacCoun (2005) refers to the 'fair process effect' and states that knowledge about this effect may enable decision makers to improve fairness perceptions without any costly outcome concessions. People's "poignant desire for voice and dignity ... [leaves them] potentially vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation by those who control resources and the processes for distributing them." (MacCoun, 2005, p. 193).

Traditional OJ research that remains within this first paradigm of 'responding' assumes a set of fairness criteria that is similar across employees and organizations. Based on this assumption, the perceived fairness of outcomes, procedures, and treatment implies the presence of a commonly agreed set of fairness criteria.

Statistical/quantitative and experimental research is appropriate to answer most of the questions involved, such as which dimension of fairness perceptions appears to be linked to which reactions, and whether there are interaction effects. Also, a relatively short-term observation is likely to provide insights into the processes involved as people argue openly about outcomes and procedures, and remain within stable reference systems of norms about fairness. The traditional cross-sectional survey methods employed in management research and the laboratory-based approaches common in social psychology

suffice to investigate most issues that arise within this mindset. Critical aspects do not generally find attention in this context.

However, even within this paradigm the field of organizational justice could (but currently does not) address questions regarding ethical decision making and different stakeholders (Hosmer and Kiewitz, 2005). Hosmer and Kiewitz point out this void, and call for research in organizational justice to be applied to all stakeholders, rather than just to the current employees of the firm. They link business ethics and organizational justice by arguing that objective fairness determinants (from the side of the manager) can be related to subjective fairness perceptions and consequently to reactions. “In short, the authors propose a normative stakeholder theory of the firm, based upon ethical principles, that will have testable descriptive hypotheses derived from the behavioural constructs” (p. 67). Taking this proposition further, justice researchers may engage in action research where they develop objective fairness criteria together with practicing managers, in order to solve business problems in a way that is conforming to objective fairness determinants and is perceived to be fair by all involved. In general, justice research concerned with dynamics in this first dimension may investigate in how far moral judgments are involved in responding activities, and which moral frameworks are used by the different stakeholders judging these activities.

### *Second dimension*

The second group of mechanisms will be termed ‘*preventing*’ and corresponds to Lukes’ second dimension of power exercise. This second dimension argues that power is not only exercised in pluralist open discourse, but that it can be exercised in more subtle forms; for example, through agenda setting or preventing groups from raising issues (Bachrach and Baratz, 1963). Options and alternatives that reflect the needs of non-participants might be suppressed. If issues are prevented from arising, then actors are prevented from acting. In terms of justice mechanisms in organizations, power differentials may prevent individuals from reacting negatively to outcomes, procedures, and treatment they perceive as unfair. For example, employees may fear negative

reactions from their supervisor or negative consequences for their career if they are seen to be voicing concerns of injustice. Less powerful members in an organization may have no impact on the agenda, and may not be able or willing to raise their concerns about fairness. In fact, employees may not even know how or with whom they could voice their concerns. All this is particularly relevant as fairness judgments are fundamentally influenced by social information about or received from relevant comparison others.

In this view, not only the issues that are talked about and decided on are an important aspect for justice research, but also those which issues are not talked about. The predominant beliefs, values and rules of the games benefit only some. There are some directly observable power mechanisms, like force, sanctions, and manipulation, while other mechanisms are not directly observable, such as preventing others from acting through anticipated reactions, or through sums of incremental decisions. Thus, some of the mechanisms of preventing may be detected in questionnaires, while others would most likely go unnoticed.

This second type of mechanisms also has important implications for practitioners. If outcomes, procedures, and treatment do not correspond to the fairness criteria typically identified in traditional justice research, but the power mechanisms of ‘preventing’ are in place, then although employees are likely to perceive the treatment as unfair, they will not exhibit (m)any of the negative attitudinal or behavioral reactions the justice literature would suggest. Some covert negative attitudes may still result from the negative justice perceptions, but strong pressures, fears or norms may prevent these from ever being voiced or leading to negative behaviors in individuals, and may thus not be communicated to others. Social ‘injustice contagion’ is thus less likely to happen as an outcome of more subtle exercise of organizational and managerial power and control.

In our redundancy example, the survivors may experience unfairness, and the laid off people may also feel very unfairly treated, but for different reasons they may not exhibit negative behaviours. Various processes can conceivably prevent the survivors from behavioral responses to the perceived injustice, and could also prevent redundant employees from filing a wrongful termination claim. They may also fear that filing a claim could give them a negative reputation and make future employment less likely. If in the run-up to their actual termination their concerns about the unfairness of the

redundancies have not been discussed with their colleagues, the option of filing wrongful termination claims or other reactions to their layoff may not come to their minds, may be less likely because of less verbal rehearsal, and relevant knowledge about options and procedures for such reactions (e.g., how to file such a claim) may not have been distributed as widely. Similarly, survivors may be afraid of reprimands or even of losing their job if they are retaliating. Many tactics can conceivably be used in such ‘preventing’ attempts, such as tabooization of discussions about layoffs, social isolation of the targeted employees, rumour and innuendo about their performance (to provide simple, ready made interpretations about why they have been let go), and many others.

The possibility of power differentials preventing individuals from reacting to unfair treatment has been mentioned on the sideline of early justice literature. Cropanzano and Rupp noticed that: “individuals often endure injustice because other options are closed to them” (2002, p. 257), and also pointed out that a lack of power and a lack of skill prevent action. Leventhal and his colleagues touch on the role of power distributions for agenda setting when they observe that although procedures are generally less salient than distributions, the awareness of procedures will be heightened if influential members are dissatisfied with distributions (Leventhal *et al.*, 1980). Thus, procedural fairness concerns are added to the agenda and discussed only if changing them would benefit powerful members. Interesting in this context are also findings indicating that injustice along a number of dimensions is necessary for negative behavioral reactions to occur, as opposed to attitudinal reactions only. Cropanzano and colleagues (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2001) present findings proposing that already either procedural or interactional justice may be sufficient to reduce retaliatory behaviors resulting from perceived distributive injustice, while both need be present to mitigate the effects on attitudes – people appear to be more reluctant to express their feelings of injustice behaviorally, which may point towards internalized preventing mechanisms.

Two issues are worth considering from a normative viewpoint: firstly, as in the context of responding, in the preventing context employees and managers may make different justice judgments. Which of these two justice judgments is more appropriate with reference to a particular normative framework is left open for now. Of course, any of the groups may make an uninformed and self-serving judgment.



Secondly, there is a moral implication of the mechanism of preventing itself, which could be seen as either fair or unfair. Is it just to prevent people from reacting to perceived unfairness? Again it may depend on the framework employed. Drawing for example on the justice framework developed by Finnis, for whom the objective of justice is “the flourishing of all members of the community” (Finnis, 1980, p. 174), we could imagine different scenarios: Imagine the company would go bankrupt without the redundancies, and the job loss for 10% means that 90% can remain in employment. If in this situation a number of employees intend to retaliate in a way that would severely harm the company, the overriding consideration of ‘practical reasonableness’ may require prudent management to prevent these employees from acting. However, a different situation where employees have justified concerns and are prevented from voicing them through unproportional measures is also imaginable – and in this case the preventing mechanisms cannot be said to be fair. The treatment of the employees who are made redundant (beyond their statutory rights) may be seen as a commutative justice issue. For commutative justice, the question is to be asked “of what is fitting, fair, or just as between the parties to the relationship” (Finnis, 1980, p. 178).

Organisational justice research does not consider either the normative base of the perceptions of the different stakeholders, nor the righteousness or even existence of preventing mechanisms. In this second category of ‘preventing’, people are cooperating, although they perceive unfairness. (This is not to say whether these individual judgments of unfairness actually comply with a particular ethical framework). An in-depth discussion of the different issues involved, both in the differing judgments between employees and management and other stakeholders (as discussed above in the section on responding), could be complemented by investigations of and reflections on the power mechanisms that are likely to modify people’s reactions to any perceived fairness or unfairness. This work may lead to a fruitful cross-fertilization between the fields of business ethics and organizational justice.

Acknowledging the existence of the mechanism of ‘preventing’ next to the mechanism of ‘responding’ poses significant challenges for both the agenda and the approaches used in organizational justice research. Qualitative data is needed in order to unveil not only which decisions are made, but also which decisions are avoided. In order

to investigate specific mechanisms of power use in fairness contexts, lab studies could be designed to show for example under which circumstances the more powerful (i.e., management) take which moral considerations into account when dealing with the less powerful (i.e., employees) (see e.g., Kipnis, 1972; Overbeck and Park, 2001). Furthermore, longitudinal studies appear to be necessary, as agenda control mechanisms typically involve a timeframe that is somewhat longer than the making of a distinct decision. Both attitudinal and behavioral reactions should be considered, as these may underlie different mechanisms. OJ research will need to consider employing research approaches that will provide opportunities to reveal the otherwise hidden elements of ‘preventing’ dynamics.

### *Third dimension*

The third mechanism, ‘*shaping*’, involves managerial activities aimed at shaping employees’ understanding of what is fair and the way they conceptualize fairness. This parallels Lukes’ third dimension of power mechanisms, according to which one form of power is to shape the conception of issues and influencing wants of others. By necessity these mechanisms are much ‘subtler’ and include the creation of social myths, the use of language and symbols, and even non-verbal suggestions. Meaning is socially constructed through both observable and implicit, indirect mechanisms. The less powerful may be manipulated in terms of not recognizing grievances, in their conception of self and group, not realizing who is responsible, not seeing possible alternatives, and not knowing effective strategies for clarifying their own thinking and for taking action.

With respect to fairness perceptions, this implies that employees’ understanding and perceptions of justice might be shaped in such a way as to make them perceive the treatment they receive as fair, even if this treatment does not correspond to the fairness criteria identified typically in other settings, to fairness criteria that independent outsiders would have, or to the criteria posited by a particular normative system. For example, socialization mechanisms might result in the adoption of values and fairness expectations

that align with managerial mindframes. Leventhal, *et al.*, (1980) noted that many members do not understand complex social systems and that procedures (once established) are often not even recognized. For example, employees may learn that it is the norm that management makes decisions without asking employees for their opinions, or that overtime is not paid for. Usually the mechanisms of shaping are expected to span longer time frames than the more straight forward mechanisms of responding. In addition, these mechanisms may be of an even more subtle nature than the preventing mechanism discussed above.

Managers can influence justice perceptions and resulting reactions of employees through shaping. The avenue of shaping mechanisms results in a much larger scope of action for companies, who could, for example, establish fairness rules that benefit productivity and are cost saving, while still preserving their positive image as a fair employer. A critical reading of modern HRM strategies and procedures could easily lead to such conclusions. Positive fairness perceptions are likely to result in the same positive attitudinal and behavioral responses that we would expect in the case where the organization fulfils the original fairness requirements perceived by an independent outsider. From a purely economic perspective, this may look like an appealing option to organizations.

One of the mechanisms could for example be to promote the choice of certain allocation norms, and a company might be interested in paying according to the equity principle rather than according to equality, in order to increase productivity (in fact, this is the predominant distribution rule in most companies, although some public sector and/or heavily unionized organizations are exceptions to this). The preferences of allocation norms differ between cultures (Greenberg, 2001), and organizational culture is likely to have a significant influence on which norms are considered appropriate in any specific organizational setting (e.g., equality, equity, need).

Another shaping mechanism is mentioned by Kulik (1992). Managers can improve the justice perceptions of individuals through influencing their choice of referents. By proposing comparison others that make the employees' situation look advantageous, employees might perceive a higher degree of fairness. A manager might try to invoke specific favorable comparisons ('we are all getting so much more than three

years ago'), while fending off unfavorable comparisons (e.g., 'you cannot compare yourselves to employees at competitor Y that are paid and treated better because their situation is too different from ours').

In our redundancy example, employees may have come to learn that redundancies are 'normal' practice, even when the company is recording record profits. Lower level employees may feel that it is not their place to be involved in this kind of decisions, and that management can of course not share sensitive information with them. They may believe that everything that happens is for the greater good for the company and thus ultimately for themselves, even if there is the risk that they are the ones that will be let go. Even when receiving undeserved negative outcomes that have been determined through biased procedures and not being given any information, they may not perceive this as an injustice. Or, alternatively, employees may have come to realize that the organization is under very serious pressure, and that there is really no other way to avoid bankruptcy than to lay some employees off, and that the outmost has been done to compensate these employees. This example underlines that shaping may be used in very different ways and circumstances.

This third category proposes that it is possible to evoke perceptions of fairness, without actually having to comply with generally accepted or shared standards of fairness, even those that employees might originally have had when they joined the organization. This option has not been discussed in research on organizational justice. Studies have concentrated on perceptions of fairness and attitudinal outcomes – apparently taking normative frameworks as a given across organizational settings, and assuming that the way positive fairness perceptions were created was not ambiguous or ambivalent.

From a normative ethical perspective, different issues are involved here than in the previous categories of responding and preventing: Now both managers and employees subscribe to the same fairness norms, but it is not clear whether these norms are actually more or less aligned with any particular normative fairness standard that employees may have had before they joined the organisation. It is possible that managers open the eyes of employees to recognize valid issues and to understand the context of corporate decisions better, in order to then make a more appropriate assessment of

fairness than before. However, it has been noted that managerial morality is often purely geared towards preserving institutional power, and that power holders may believe themselves 'exempt from common morality' (Kipnis, 1972, p. 34). Thus, it is also possible that managers themselves subscribe to a purely instrumental normative framework, with little reference to morality, and that they pass this framework on to employees.

Acknowledging framing effects stresses the responsibility that rests with managers as potential norm setters. Recent claims that the moral reasoning skills and moral development of business students may actually decrease rather than improve (see e.g., Pfeffer and Fong, 2002) is no good news in this context. At the same time, it is important to recognize that managers are not as privileged and powerful in setting norms as they are in determining rules and procedures. Informal and intangible aspects of organizations such as culture and norms are determined by many factors, not just managers. OJ research has so far implicitly assumed that it is factors common across organizational settings (such as national culture) that influences such norms and interpretation frames, but other sources of influence may be at work (including bottom-up influences controlled or affected by employees).

The second issue to consider here from a normative standpoint is whether it is right to influence – some might say manipulate – employees in this way. Here, the intervention is not taking place in terms of preventing an action (as in the preventing mechanism), but is taking place earlier, in people's minds. To draw on Finnis' framework on justice again, one needs to take the overall good of all involved into account. Shaping mechanisms can result in employees perceiving the situation as fair, and this perception may have positive outcomes for the organization and in some cases even for the employee (e.g., less stress and more job satisfaction). However, the gap between actual (normative) justice and perceived justice can be widened through shaping mechanisms. This gap could bring about a number of potential problems for the organization. Attracting new staff, for example, may be difficult for an organization that has moved far away from conventional fairness norms, and clients may be alienated. Also, the gap may ultimately work to the disadvantage of the conforming employees themselves, who may accept normatively unfair treatments or outcomes following shaping mechanisms.

However, in some cases shaping may take a purely benevolent form, such as providing a valid perspective and improved understanding of the situation.

Taking the shaping category of fairness formation into account would require more critical investigations into how fairness perceptions are actually created, and what role short and long-term processes instigated by managers have on employees' fairness judgments. Assessing divergent judgments compared to similar respondents not exposed to such shaping attempts (e.g., comparable employees from other organizations), or longitudinal investigations into fairness judgment changes over time could provide useful insights into this matter.

The investigation of mechanisms implied by preventing and shaping mechanisms of justice would require the field of organizational justice to depart from its typical research paradigms. Cropanzano, *et al.*, (2001) categorize existing fairness research into two paradigms: The 'event paradigm' investigates individual reactions to a certain fairness-related event, mainly through experimental research. The other paradigm, entitled 'social entity paradigm', typically investigates the reactions of groups, people and organizations in different fairness situations through field studies, using correlational statistical analysis. There are very few studies investigating reactions to fairness longitudinally (Ambrose and Cropanzano, 2003). Yet in order to include pre-empting and shaping mechanisms in future investigations, researchers need to explore issues such as the creation of fairness perceptions and reactions over time. The development of organizational justice and the underlying perceptual processes over time have rarely been the main focus of efforts in empirical research (although some theoretical contributions have been made), with notably the exception of some contributions in cognitive psychology, which explored individual level perceptions more closely (e.g., Lind, 2001). The lack of longitudinal studies poses severe limitations, as for example changes in internal fairness norms or of external referent standards cannot be captured (Cropanzano and Greenberg, 1997) and no conclusions can be drawn about causality in cross-sectional, single-source designs. Further, qualitative investigations are needed in order to tackle some of the resulting research questions that have not been asked so far (e.g., uncovering the way in which power can influence internal justice norms and shared justice ideologies).

One step towards the inclusion of the non-traditional mechanisms of fairness creation may be the involvement of additional disciplinary perspectives (e.g., sociology, ethics) and deliberately employing different, possibly multiple methodological approaches. The disciplinary background of organizational justice researchers is likely to have contributed to the focus on quantitative and quasi-experimental methods to the exclusion of qualitative and emic research.

New justice theories may be developed in order to deal with the mechanisms implied by preventing and shaping processes. Up to now, theories trying to explain how fairness perceptions are formed have mostly taken a social psychology or cognitive psychology approach and have implicitly been limited to large degrees of organizational stability or short time frames. The theories developed have granted valuable insights into the psychology and cognitions involved in making fairness judgments, and these 'process theories' have explained different potential routes along which individuals make fairness judgments. On the one side of the continuum, careful evaluation of all information leads to deliberate fairness judgments, while on the other side a quick judgment relying on information that is readily available is labeled automatic processing (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2001),

How fairness judgments are formed in larger social contexts and over larger time spans or in times of significant organizational change is not being addressed by these theories. The strong individual-level focus of process theories in organizational justice has also pronounced the gap between what has been termed proactive research (how decision makers take fairness criteria into account) and reactive research (how the receivers of decisions or treatment make fairness judgments and react). Greenberg and Wiethoff's work provides an example to bridge this gap, albeit at an individual level of analysis (Greenberg and Wiethoff, 2001). Decision maker and receiver differ mainly with respect to their power positions, yet their perceptions, attitudes and behavior are likely to be closely intertwined in social contexts. Not only are the powerless bound by the powerful, but the powerful are also bound by the powerless in terms of the obligations associated with their role (Hamilton and Biggart, 1985). The perceivers' (i.e., employees') justice perceptions and judgments may also shape the justice related

framework that an employer will use. At present, typical OJ research designs and tools do not appropriately account for such interactions.

Watson presents a rare contribution that focuses on the shaping aspect of fairness creation (Watson, 2003) and points out that “[r]esearch on perceptions of fairness is complicated by the ways in which powerful alliances (e.g., change agents) control and disseminate ideas, norms and values – ideology – that encourage others to understand and interpret changes through management’s preferred cognitive frame of reference.” (p. 155). Watson investigates ways in which ideological discourse constructs perceptions of fairness, legitimacy and defensibility in change situations. His analysis suggests that leaders use numerous strategies to shape employees’ perceptions of fairness in the best of managerial interests. However, while his concise analysis of managerial discourse in change situations provides insights into the techniques that management uses, it cannot answer the degree of the influence the ideology has on employees, the degree to which fairness perceptions are shaped by the discourse intended to do so, and the degree to which the ideological discourse of leaders results in cooperation by employees.

Watson’s study of managerial discourse is a first step towards our understanding of shaping mechanisms, but in order to achieve a fuller picture, we need to investigate the discourse of both people whose perceptions are shaped and the discourse that is intended to shape perceptions. Particularly promising in this context are insights that studies combining qualitative and longitudinal data could grant. Repeated measures and designs of fairness perceptions and outcomes alone are not sufficient, as they cannot distinguish the mechanisms of the first category, “responding”, from the mechanism of the third category, ‘shaping’.<sup>2</sup>

The category of ‘shaping’ is made invisible in purely subjectivist definitions of organizational justice. Employees, who have been ‘shaped’ to agree with managerial norms of justice will exhibit positive fairness judgments. The purely subjectivist definition of justice clearly has limitations and cannot differentiate between very different settings: fairness perceptions achieved through shaping and fairness perceptions achieved through responding. Again, future researchers may wish to draw on ethical and sociological perspectives to fill this void. When drawing on normative perspectives, then differences between pre-shaping and post-shaping frameworks become clear. The justice



judgment standards used may conform more or less to a particular normative framework after the shaping process took place. What may be required is not simply the scientific study of justice which “provides a non-ideological tool for studying the malevolent as well as the benevolent aspects of fair treatment” (MacCoun, 2005, p. 193), but possible value-sensitive, multi-perspective approaches that contrast the implications of managerialist and alternative ideologies. A value-driven debate may add value and insight to supposedly value-free scientific investigations.

### **Interrelation of the different justice mechanisms**

The three types of mechanisms have been outlined separately above for reasons of clarity. However, in organizational reality they are likely to be closely intertwined. Gaventa (1980) describes how both power and powerlessness are relatively accumulative, e.g., when people suffer many defeats (1<sup>st</sup> dimension) they may cease to challenge and as an adaptive response to the continual defeat first withdraw (2<sup>nd</sup> dimension) or lower their demands and finally internalize the values of the powerful (3<sup>rd</sup> dimension).

In terms of justice and fairness mechanisms, employees may initially try and resist treatment that they perceive to be unfair. The employer could counter this either by responding to the employees' views of unfairness by fulfilling employees' expectations, or they might alternatively prevent employees from exhibiting negative reactions and from voicing their concerns (preventing). While the preventing mechanisms on the side of the organization are preventing only behaviors in the short term, they are likely to change mindframes in the longer run, and employees may come to simply accept the new reality (shaping). In effect, this could result in expectations that are fully in line with the treatment and outcomes that are in management's interest, thus 'responding' may become a very viable option for the organization. With the 'organizationally shaped' employees, responding is likely to be less costly and aligned with managerial interests. In short, today's shaping experiences are likely to determine tomorrow's responding patterns.

Time is an important factor to consider when comparing the mechanisms. While responding mechanisms may happen in the spur of a moment, through a simple managerial decision (e.g. giving a pay rise, providing information, etc.), the other mechanisms are likely to span larger timeframes. Preventing employees from acting on the negative and retaliatory feelings that have been shown to result from perceptions of injustice, will need careful monitoring, controlling and design of that need to be integrated in the organization's processes and structures. Shaping in turn requires mechanisms of socialization and of providing people with work experiences and new views of thinking. The difficulty and time requirements of this process are likely to depend in part on individual differences, but also on the alignment of the propagated views with society's norms. Figure 1 provides an overview of the interrelations between, and typical timeframes of, the different mechanisms.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

The radical views on justice and fairness presented above point out the lack of reflexivity employed by OJ researchers, and the way in which organizational practitioners may employ justice research purely as a managerialist tool. We argue that such a lack of reflexivity may lead to hypocrisies for both research and practice.

### **The hypocrisies of organizational justice research and practice**

The subjective definition used in organizational justice research is a perceptual one and could give rise to a hypocrisy of justice, where justice research does not recognize or address its moral responsibilities.

Secondly, the managerialist ethos of justice research has offered accessible tools to managers, which may enable them to benefit from positive behaviors resulting from employees' fairness perceptions, while avoiding the costs of actually considering ethical

or normative fairness. We describe this effect as the hypocrisy of organizational justice in practice.

### *OJ research and the 'Hypocrisy of Justice'*

As discussed in the beginning of this paper, the ideological underpinning adopted by the OJ field is pro-management rather than employee-centered (Bies and Tripp, 2002). This orientation transpires for example in the choice of outcomes and situations investigated. Even though there may be a significant overlap in the situations, outcomes and antecedents of justice that are of interest to different stakeholders, there are no reasons to believe that managers and employees will have identical interests. On the contrary, evidence proposes that they have often very divergent interests. Unlike managers representing their organizations, employees may not profit directly from increased commitment or work effort, a situation that may well be reversed regarding the benefits of for example decreased anxiety. The questions opened up through considering preventing and shaping mechanisms, namely issues of status and power, are likely to be as relevant for employees as they are for managers, but are likely to be experienced fundamentally different from an employee perspective. As outlined above, the gap between normative fairness and perceived fairness can also create numerous problems for employers in the longer term. Future research might also consider the role of organizational justice for other stakeholders, and in society overall (as proposed by Hosmer and Kiewitz, 2005). Ethical considerations and related issues of social justice and power distributions have so far not featured in mainstream OJ research. Similarly, alternative justice norms and referents, comparisons to other cultures and other times in history have rarely featured.

Bies and Tripp accuse justice researchers of not assuming the moral responsibility to ask whether organizational justice findings may in fact be used to perpetuate injustice in the workplace (Bies and Tripp, 1995; Bies and Tripp, 2001). OJ researchers appear to content themselves largely by assuming that their findings will serve for the better, without demonstrating or testing this assumption. Paterson, Green and Cary claim that organizational justice findings will “help maintain employee and organizational well-

being.” (Paterson *et al.*, 2002, p. 406), while Greenberg assumes that better training of managers in applying organizational justice frameworks will achieve increased moral fairness (Greenberg, 2001). There is little evidence to support such claims, and hardly any research into the effects that OJ research findings have on organizational and managerial practice. Does justice research help to promote values and change? Simply communicating fairness research findings to managers may not actually lead to increased fairness for employees. In the worst case, the dissemination of OJ frameworks and findings may unwittingly create just the opposite effect.

Future research in organizational justice that considers and reflects on its role and impact in society would undoubtedly enrich the field. It remains to be seen whether findings from OJ research are used for window dressing and impression management purposes, or whether they will benefit all stakeholders involved. Justice researchers could try to take an active role in promoting their findings to be used for the maximum societal benefit.

The normative dimension of justice requires further reflection. The subjective conception of justice has obvious value, but the limitations this restricted approach has on the field need to be addressed. Similarly, the role of values in OJ research deserves substantial consideration. Ignoring the implications of adopting this purely subjective view may cloud recognition of non-intended results of OJ research in practice. Thus, OJ researchers may commit the fallacy of expecting their research to contribute to improved justice in organizations while in fact enabling the exploitation of employees under the guise of this venerated objective. A lack of reflexivity by OJ researchers can thus enable the hypocrisy of fairness of practitioners, as described below.

### *Hypocrisy of organizational justice in practice*

Managers are socialized, trained, and rewarded to act in accordance with organizational goals, and in their pursuit of these goals may adopt a distinctly uncritical, pro-organizational frame of mind which we have referred to above as a managerialist approach. Within a managerialist mindset, fairness considerations and organizational

justice frameworks are simply tools for influencing and controlling employee behavior in organizationally desired ways. Thus, from a managerialist perspective the motive to be fair takes on a purely instrumental character rather than serving as a normative value (see Greenberg and Cohen, 1982). As long as managers are trained and rewarded for effectiveness, not moral rectitude, they will be most concerned with the utility of fairness-oriented behaviors rather than their righteousness.

However, for some managers OJ research may provide the business rationale that they feel they need in order to bring forward their moral concerns (Bird and Waters, 1989). Similarly, for OJ researchers that deliberately or inadvertently adopt the managerialist ethos, the objective is to provide insights valuable for furthering managerial control in pursuit of organizational goals. Such concerns, along with an emphasis on scientific respectability, counter the potential concerns about the researchers' (and the research's) ethical accountability (Fernandez-Dols, 2002).

In current OJ research it appears to be sufficient for managers to look fair rather than attempt to actually be fair from a normative vantage point. This does not preclude that managers can use OJ frameworks and research findings benignly, by responding to employees' expectations regarding fairness in the workplace, or even more constructively by engaging employees in such a dialogue. However, OJ frameworks and research findings can be, and we believe often are, used exploitatively. For example, OJ research findings may simply provide guidance for managerial impression management. In particular, OJ contributions that provide insights into how employees make their fairness judgments may be useful for managers by helping to avoid any substantial – and possibly costly – changes to the objects of employees' unfairness perceptions, and instead facilitate a manipulation of perceptions and mindframes.

We contend that managerial training and socialization may make managers particularly susceptible to the managerialist ethos, which is continuously reinforced through appropriate organizational reward systems. Managers have often been described as reward-driven and self-interested (Friedman, 1962). This tendency is further reinforced by the type of input managers receive from OJ researchers. Specifically, if fairness is framed purely as a subjective notion, moral and ethical issues related to justice may not even be considered.

Managers may feel that they are serving the higher ideals of justice simply by restoring perceptions of fairness through any of the strategies and means discussed above. Managers who act like this abdicate the moral responsibility some would argue they have because of their privileged, more powerful position in organizations. This is where a lack of reflexivity on the part of managers can contribute to the hypocrisy of fairness.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper we have identified three types of mechanisms managers may use to influence and manage the formation of fairness perceptions. This taxonomy integrates the dimensions of power mechanisms, and spans individual- and social-level dynamics. We proposed that the investigation of the different dimensions promises additional insight and theoretical underpinning in processes underlying fairness judgments, and can add significantly to the development of OJ theory and research. Our approach makes power dynamics and moral implications salient, and questions the purely subjectivist view of justice researchers that deliberately discards normative aspects.

The questions opened up by considering alternative mechanisms for creating fairness perceptions are also of interest for research taking a more critical perspective. Justice judgments alone do not enable the direct comparison of two different settings. Only in combination with understanding the underlying mechanisms that have created justice perceptions in different settings can we really get a clear sense if and how employees' as well as other stakeholders' interests can be served.

Empirical research will be necessary to validate and further refine the propositions presented above. Particularly, qualitative and longitudinal research is needed to complement extant organizational justice research. Given the central role of social interaction and power mechanisms in the workplace, the new avenues of research resulting from radical perspectives on OJ have the potential to open up research on OJ to new conceptions, new research questions, and the use of more varied methodologies. It would also aid more considered prescriptions along with substantial challenges regarding

the moral and ethical aspects of applying such prescriptions. Different normative conceptions of justice can and should be compared to subjective judgments of justice in context.

Recognizing the danger for OJ research brought about by a narrow and unreflected conception of justice, and by a managerialist bias in formulating its research questions, is an important first step in addressing the shortcomings of the field, as identified in this paper. We believe that increased reflexivity can be a useful response by researchers to the danger of committing the hypocrisy of organizational justice in research. Similarly, increased reflexivity by managers, including a look at their internal moral compass, can prevent them from committing the hypocrisy of organizational justice in practice.

Both practitioners and researchers need to take responsibility for their own part in bringing about fairness and justice in organizations. We believe that this can be further helped by *joint* considerations of how the link between research and practice can improve the reality of justice in the workplace, and by reference to normative and ethical conceptions of justice.

Finally, we propose that an integration of the fields of organizational justice and normative justice can also bring benefits to ethical and moral theory. Organizational justice encourages thought about organizational level phenomena (rather than societal level), and in particular to consider the viewpoints of central participants in the process. Moreover, our exposition above points to the exciting opportunity to combine subjectivist and normative conceptions of justice in more comprehensive investigations of justice in organizational settings. Utilitarian and deontic perspectives have largely ignored the details of context and process, which appear to be so important to participants. We believe that the fields of organizational justice and normative justice can benefit from research that explicitly takes them both into account.

**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> A previous version of this paper was originally presented at the IESE Business School, University of Navarra, for the 14th International Symposium on Ethics, Business and Society: "Towards a Comprehensive Integration of Ethics Into Management: Problems and Prospects". May 18-19, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Shaping implies structural variance, or beta and gamma change: Structural invariance is the degree of continuity in the nature of the phenomenon (Taris, 2000). Armenakis (1988) discussed the difficulty of distinguishing between three types of variations: firstly measure changes on the same scale (alpha change); secondly to measure changes in a scale (recalibration of reality or beta change); and thirdly to detect changes of meaning – the concept has been re-defined (gamma change).

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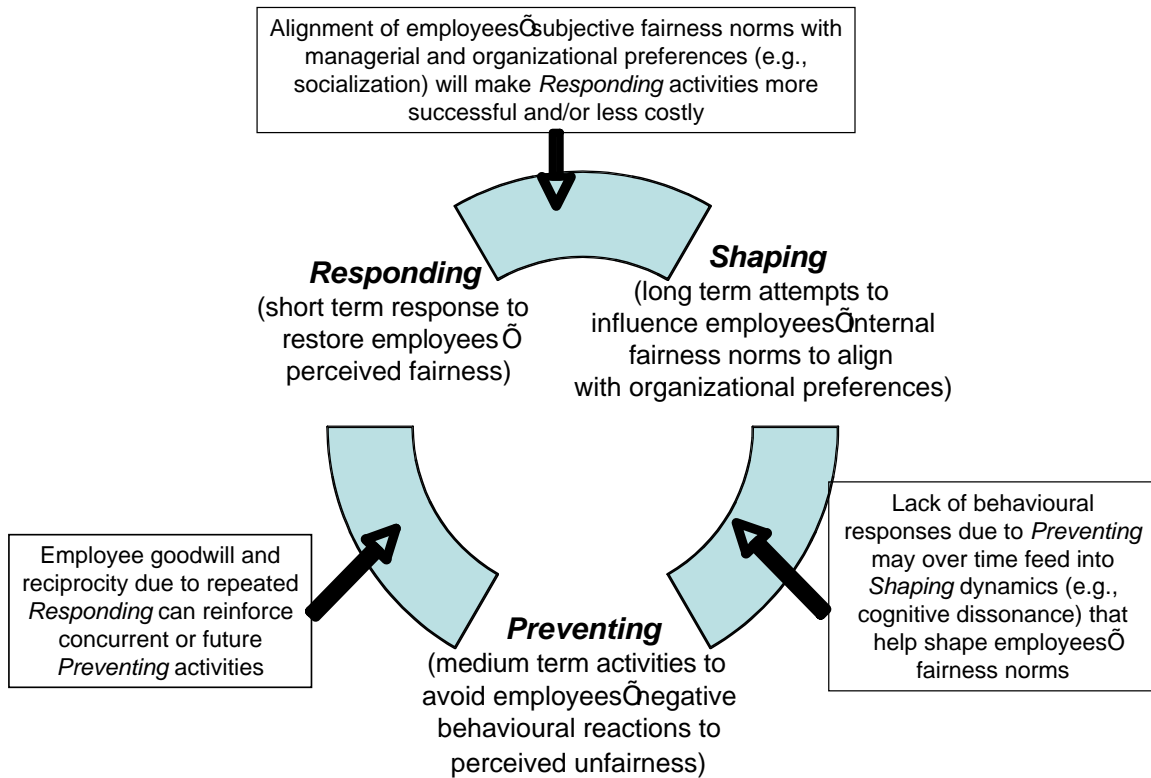


Figure 1: The Manipulation Cycle. A model of managerial fairness activities over time.