

SAME RULES FOR ALL? A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF JUSTICE JUDGMENTS AND JUSTICE MOTIVES IN WORKPLACE INTERACTIONS WITH CLOSE AND DISTANT MANAGERS AND PEERS

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Abstract

The goal of our study is to identify the rules used to form justice perceptions and the underlying issues at stake in different work relationships. We conducted 33 semi-structured interviews with full time employees in order to let respondents describe fairness incidents in different types of work relationships in their own terms. This seems necessary, as the present fairness motives and rules have been mostly developed in the context of cross-hierarchical distant relationships, and we do not know much about the rules used and the underlying issues at stake in other kinds of work relationships. We find that the relative importance of the traditional instrumental, relational as well as deontic motives, and the use of traditional distributive, procedural, informational and interpersonal justice rules may depend on the hierarchical link between the parties and how close their relationship is. Moreover, some new rules and motives emerge that could improve our understanding of justice at work.

Keywords

Organizational justice, fairness, justice motives, justice rules, friendship, hierarchy

Introduction

Fairness perceptions in the workplace matter – both to the organisation and to the individuals concerned. Individuals who perceive they are being treated unfairly typically suffer from increased stress, anxiety and insomnia (Greenberg, 2006). In their organisation, they tend to exhibit less helping behaviors, perform less well, and show negative reactions (Conlon, Meyer, & Nowakowski, 2005). Therefore it is important to understand why and how employees feel fairly or unfairly treated. Justice researchers have identified specific justice motives and the use of specific justice rules as the basis of justice judgments. Through understanding their use and relative importance in different contexts, and identifying new types of motives and rules, we can better understand, predict and manage fairness in the workplace.

Two traditional models of justice motives have suggested that people care about justice either to assure the favorability of material outcomes – this is the case for the instrumental model of justice (Thibaut & Walker, 1975) – or to derive a sense of belonging and self-worth from it – this is the proposition of what is now called the relational model of justice – (Lind & Tyler, 1988). A third model has emerged recently, and has been named the moral virtues or the deontic model. It contends that people care about justice because they are moral human beings, which means that justice may be an end in itself (Folger, 2001). To our best knowledge, there is no research that has tried to investigate if these three motives have the same importance depending on the context, or if other justice motives do exist. However, the reasons why people care about justice may vary widely depending on the situation (Leventhal, 1980).

Different types of justice rules have been specified for four types of fairness judgments: distributive, procedural, interpersonal, informational fairness. Distributive justice is the judgment of the fairness of outcomes. This judgment is typically made by drawing on one (or a combination) of the allocation norms equity, equality or need (Leventhal, 1980). For procedural justice, six central rules were identified (Leventhal, 1980). These rules are consistency across people and over time, no bias, accuracy (relying on good information), containing mechanisms for correcting wrong decisions, adhering to prevalent conceptions of morality, and “representativeness”, i.e., taking into account opinions of all groups affected. For the third type of justice, Interpersonal justice, the rules identified are respect, sensitivity in personal treatment (Greenberg, 1990), and honesty and avoiding deception (Bies & Moag, 1986). The fourth category is informational justice and focuses on the amount and quality of information provided concerning procedures and outcomes (Colquitt, 2001; Greenberg, 1990). Informational justice research identified the following justice rules: clarity, adequacy, and sincerity of communications regarding a decision (Bies, Shapiro, & Cummings, 1988).

There are some important differences between research on the rules identified for distributive justice (equity, equality and need), and research on the many rules identified for the other dimensions. First, distributive justice judgments imply a trade-off between rules --

an allocator has to choose one rule or a compromise among several -- while other justice types rules are potentially additive ones – all of the criteria could be fulfilled at the same time. Justice researchers have typically operationalised the criteria for procedural, interpersonal and informational justice as additive (see the measure by Colquitt, 2001), such that each criterion has the same weight and the overall justice judgment is the sum of all criteria.

Therefore it may not be surprising that only distributive justice research has systematically investigated the impact of the situation on the type of justice rule chosen. However, we argue that for at least two reasons it is important to also investigate the impact of the situation on the choice of rules for the other dimensions: First, in many situations only a subset of the rules may be sufficient and have as much impact as the whole set (Ambrose & Kulik, 2001). Second, we need systematic research to know whether employees rely on the same rules or on entirely different rules in different kinds of situations. While the existence of different subsets for different situations can help organizations to prioritize resources and time, the potential existence of entirely different rules has consequences that are much more far reaching. Organizations could simply “get it wrong” by following merely the set of rules identified so far.

The research on norm choice in distributive justice has identified the impact of the type of relationship as an important determinant of norm choice (Mills & Clark, 1982). Important dimensions of the type of relationship in the workplace are firstly the relative hierarchical position of the perpetrator in relation to the perceiver of injustice (Mikula, 1986), and secondly the degree of friendship or distance between perpetrator and perceiver (Lerner, 1974).

In this paper, we expand on these differences and investigate the use of all justice rules (not only distributive ones) and the underlying justice issues at stake in different types of relationships. This is a novel contribution, because the organizational justice literature has so far focused on cross-hierarchical relationships, and implicitly mainly on detached relationships rather than friendships at work (Colquitt, Greenberg & Scott, 2005). This focus may limit the generalizeability of justice findings, because research has shown that other kinds of relationships than distant hierarchical ones are also important in organizations. For instance, friendship networks appear to be systems for making decisions, mobilizing resources and transmitting information (Lincoln & Miller, 1979).

To summarize, in this paper we investigate whether the instrumental, relational and deontic motives and the distributive, procedural, interpersonal and informational justice rules are universal across interactions in different types of work relationships. The three central objectives of this study are:

- Finding out whether the motives and rules that we know are really used in different types of situations.
- Investigating which motives and subsets of justice rules become salient in different relationships.

-Identifying whether there are new or additional motives and rules that are specifically used to assess the justice of certain types of situations.

Like Bies and Moag (1986), and Hollensbe, Khazanchi and Masterson (2008) who identified the rules underlying the perception of (un)fair treatment at work by using a qualitative approach, we use qualitative research to identify which motives and rules are characteristic of different work situations, with the aim of developing propositions for future research.

Theory

We review two characteristics of a situation as important determinants of the issues at stake and the choice of justice rules used by employees at work: First, the closeness of the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator of the injustice, second the hierarchical link between the two parties.

The closeness of the relationship with the source of injustice

Distributive justice research shows that the type of relationship has an impact on the choice of the norm that will be used to assess the fairness of an allocation decision. Lerner (1974) and Leventhal (1980), for instance, proposed that while friendship may elicit the rule of equality, family members are likely to elicit the rule of need. Similarly, Mills and Clark (1982) proposed that communal relationships (including family, romantic partners, close friends) distribute benefits according to need, while in exchange relationships reciprocity or direct exchange of benefits is expected. Besides, Fiske (1991) has proposed four fundamental relational models: Market Pricing organizes social transactions with reference to calculations of cost and benefits. Authority Ranking organizes relationships that are hierarchically ordered. The Equality Matching model concerns relationships with reference to their degree of balance or imbalance (this is manifested for instance in turn-taking). Finally, the communal sharing model organizes relationships in terms of collective belonging or solidarity. Each of these models of relationships uses a different rule of distributive justice, respectively equity, status, equality and need. The majority of distributive justice research in work contexts has measured the degree to which the allocation conformed to equity as an allocation norm (see for example the popular justice measure by Colquitt, 2001). Equity is indeed the rule that may be most useful for organizations that depend on their markets to survive (and thus have to follow the market pricing model). However, other kinds of models coexist in firms. Other norms may be chosen especially in interactions with peers or work friends.

In two studies, Wiesenfeld, Blader and Fortin found that the type of relationship also alters judgments of *procedural justice* (Wiesenfeld, Blader, & Fortin, 2006). They found that the same situations and procedures were judged in different ways when respondents felt positively vs. negatively about the person involved. Typically, when one feels positive toward a colleague, then a procedure taking this colleague's needs into account instead of following the regular procedure may be judged as fair, while the same treatment could be judged as unfair for a colleague towards whom one feels negatively or indifferent. The reverse effects were found for the choice of procedures that disadvantaged the colleague.

Given these findings, it seems likely that the type of relationship will be an important determinant of the norm chosen to make judgments for all four dimensions of justice. Yet, in the justice literature, the focus has been on the impact of fairness perceptions on the relationship, rather than on the impact of the relationship on justice judgments. For instance, the fairness of interactions has been investigated as antecedent of relationship quality, which was operationalised as leader member exchange (LMX) and perceived organisational support (POS) or trust (Masterson, Lewis-McClellan, Goldman, & Taylor, 2000; Tekleab, Takeuchi, & Taylor, 2005).

Exchange research has established that exchanges may alter the nature of a relationship and that relationships in turn may alter the nature of exchanges (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005, p.886). In reality, the nature of the relationship and justice judgments related to individual exchanges are likely to be intertwined in a complex way over time (Dietz & Fortin, in press). By conceptualising the type of relationship as an antecedent of justice judgments, new aspects of justice processes over time could be explained.

In this study, we conceptualize relationships as “the interpersonal attachments that result from a series of interdependent exchanges” (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005, p.886). Because of our focus on organizational behavior, we will differentiate between two kinds of *work* relationships: *social exchange* and *economic exchange* (Organ & Konovsky, 1989). Social exchanges entail unspecified obligations and “engender feelings of personal obligations, gratitude, and trust; purely economic exchange as such does not” (Blau, 1964, p. 94).

An important special case of social exchange relationships are friendships. In an experimental study, Austin compared the allocation norms chosen among college roommates versus strangers (Austin, 1977). The study was conducted in pairs of either friends or strangers, and the relative task performance of the other was either higher or lower. Participants then had to distribute an amount of money between themselves and the friend or stranger. It was found that college roommates had a preference for equality, in both low-and high performance conditions. Strangers on the other hand were sensitive to either high or low task performance. When their own performance was lower, then they chose mostly equality or a compromise between equality and equity. When their own performance was higher, then they chose mostly merit (where it was to their own advantage), and sometimes a compromise. A problem with this study is that participants of course knew that they would interact again

with their roommate, but not with the stranger. Thus, it is not clear whether this study is really about the difference that friendship makes, or about the difference that the continuity of the relationship makes. The role of friendship for fairness judgments and fairness decisions remains to be further investigated.

The relative hierarchical position of the source of injustice

Organizational justice research has typically concentrated on procedural and distributive justice experienced from the organization as a whole, and on interpersonal and informational justice experienced from one's supervisor (Colquitt and Shaw, 2005). Measures also use specific rules in this context (Colquitt, 2001). Thus, the dimensions have been confounded with different sources of justice. But more recently, scholars have criticized this confounding of justice source and justice type. For example, both supervisor and the organization can be a source of all justice dimensions (Masterson et al, 2000). There are many potential sources of fairness in organizational contexts, including manager, customers, and peers (colleagues).

Although bosses are the source of many injustice experiences (74% of the incidents collected by Mikula, 1986), in many work contexts, colleagues are also an important source of fairness perceptions (Liao & Rupp, 2005), but it is not clear whether the construct of organizational justice as it is currently operationalized will remain valid outside of hierarchical relationships (Colquitt, Greenberg & Scott, 2005). In fact, in many contexts only some of the justice dimensions may apply to peers (Ambrose and Schminke, 2007). However, with flatter structures and more work autonomy for individual experts, the role of peers becomes increasingly important (Carson et al 2007).

There have been few investigations of peer fairness. For example, Li, Cropanzano and Benson (2007) found that undergraduate team members differentiated between fairness of peers versus fairness of authority figures, and that distributive, procedural and interpersonal justice from peers loaded on different factors. But we know very little about how peer fairness perceptions are actually formed. More research is needed to find out how justice perceptions regarding peers or colleagues differ from cross-hierarchical justice perceptions, and whether different justice rules are used to judge treatment from managers versus colleagues.

In summary, research has not addressed whether people choose different rules or have different motives when making judgments of distributive, procedural, interpersonal and informational justice situations in different types of work relationships. This is the gap we plan to address. The central research question for this study is:

Which issues are at stake and which fairness rules do people choose in different types of work relationships to make judgments of distributive, procedural, interpersonal and informational fairness?

We will investigate the following sub-questions:

Do the issues at stake and the choice of known justice rules differ between close and distant relationships, and between relationships with managers and peers?

Which subsets of issues and justice rules become salient in different relationships?

Are there new or additional issues at stake or rules that are used to assess the justice of certain types of situations?

The study will depart from people's actual experiences, in the context of real workplace relationships. Lewicki, Wiethoff, & Tomlinson (2005) pointed out that the organizational justice literature neglects social setting. The research will address this need and contribute to integrating the relationship context into organizational justice theory. The proposed conceptualisation of types of relationships as an antecedent of justice motives and judgments should provide a novel view on the concept of justice judgments.

Methods

Our objective was to gain new insights into the issues at stake and the use of different rules when people form justice judgments in organisational contexts. Therefore a largely qualitative methodology was chosen, which would also allow the emergence of new issues and justice rules. Furthermore, we wanted to focus on specific events in real organisational life. Therefore, the method took the form of the recall or critical incident method, which has been employed in the justice literature in a few instances (e.g., to explore components of procedural justice (Greenberg, 1986), and to investigate fairness evaluations of critical feedback (Leung, Su, & Morris, 2001)). This method relies on real workplace experiences rather than generalities, interpretation, or conclusions. Thus it can provide more reliable information about cognitive processes than other types of semi-structured or unstructured interviews (Bitner, Booms, & Mohr, 1994; Ericsson & Simon, 1980). Yet recall studies produce rich information and produce more external validity than lab studies, as actual behaviour may be different from responses to hypothetical situations. Why questions and rich data of actual experiences of justice are still rare in the field of organisational justice, as pointed out by several justice scholars (Cropanzano, Byrne, Bobocel, & Rupp, 2001; Pogson, Bott, Ramakrishnan, & Levy, 2003). A downside of recall studies is that there is a lot of potential noise – there are a lot of confounds when people are recalling and reporting on specific incidents.

The sample that we present in this paper consists of 33 full time employees who work in different industries. Most of the participants took part in executive education programmes that the authors were involved in. This group is ideal because they have extensive work place experience, and therefore will be able to recall sufficient work related incidents. There was a wide range of different professions from different industries (banking, social work, consultancy, IT, customer service work, teaching, retail), further contributing to the external validity of the results. Participation was on a fully voluntary basis. Each participant received either a lunch voucher or an amazon voucher.

Data collection

Participants were given a participant information sheet, and were told that this was a study about fairness experiences at work. Then they were asked to think of one unjust incident that had happened to them personally at work. The respondents were divided into four groups, and were asked to remember an incident where they were treated unfairly by a close colleague, distant colleague, close superior or distant superior respectively. Thus, the four conditions are arranged in a two by two matrix along the dimensions of a) relative hierarchical position (superior or peer) and b) closeness (close or distant relationship).

Specifically, we asked respondents to “recall an incident where you were treated unfairly by a superior (a peer/colleague) at work.”, and to think of an incident where they were treated unfairly by “a superior (peer/colleague) with whom they had a rather distant (close) relationship. Your relationship with this person may have changed after the incident or not. »

Respondents were then given some time to think of an incident, and when they were ready we asked them to tell us about the incident.

We then used the following list of follow-up questions (some of these questions may already have been made redundant by the incident description, in this case we did not ask them).

- Who was involved?
- What happened?
- When did it happen?
- What was your job/your work role at the time of the incident?
- How did you react?
- Why do you say that it was unfair?
- How could it have been made fair?
- Would you say there is a rule that was not respected and that made you think “this is unfair!”
- What was at stake?
- What did you lose?
- Was it important for you?
- How would you describe your relationship with X AT THE TIME when the unfairness occurred
- Did the relationship change through the incident?
- Would the experience have been different if the person would have been your boss / colleague / subordinate / customer?

- Would the experience have been different if the person would have been your friend / not your friend?

Where we felt it was necessary, we also probed responses to elicit more detailed answers.

In some cases, participants told a fairness incident that actually responded to a category different from the one they were asked to remember. In most of these cases, participants chose to tell a story about a distant superior. In the current set, we therefore have 7 incidents with close superiors, 14 incidents with distant superiors, 7 incidents with close colleagues and 5 incidents with distant colleagues.¹

All of the recalled incidents and interviews were tape recorded and then fully transcribed.

The transcripts were content analyzed by the authors along the two dimensions of underlying issues and justice rules. Each of the two coding trees firstly differentiated between the different dimensions either of justice motives or of justice rules, drawing on categorizations of fairness norms already established in the literature. However, further codes were developed on the basis of the data to account for other possible types of motives and rules that arose out of the interviews.

The three following questions: “Why do you say that it was unfair?” “How could it have been made fair?” “Would you say there is a rule that was not respected and that made you think “this is unfair!”” were particularly important for identifying the rules that the subjects used to form their fairness judgments.

The three following questions: “What was at stake?” “What did you lose?” “What was important for you?” were asked to help us identify the issues at stake, thus making us able to understand the motivations of the subjects to care about this injustice.

¹ After the incident descriptions, participants completed a questionnaire that asked about their reactions to each incident, which included validated and published measures of their justice perceptions, their relationship with the perpetrator, their relationship with their employer, and asked them to indicate the importance of several different fairness issues for the incident that they had thought of. This data is not reported in the current working paper, but will be included in later versions of the paper.

Our analysis focuses on patterns among the types of injustice incidents in the four cells (distant colleague or supervisor, and close colleague or supervisor). Specifically, we identify the types of issues that are at stake for respondents, and the justice rules that they use.

Issues at stake

The issues that emerged from the data as being at stake in the injustice experiences that were described by participants were categorised into seven main types of motives. Three of the seven types have usually been conceptualized by justice researchers as being the traditional motives for which people are interested in justice: material goods (such as money and time off) are viewed by the instrumental model of justice as the main motivation for justice (Thibaut & Walker, 1975), relational benefits (recognition and pride) are seen by the relational models of justice as the central motivation for justice (Lind & Tyler, 1988), and the deontic motive (Folger, 2001), according to which people appreciate justice as an end in itself (for example working in an ethical organisation).

Our analysis shows that among our respondents, there are four other issues at stake as well. First, injustices prevent them from doing their work properly. Justice is thus important for doing one's job properly. For example, our respondents pointed out that they want to "be useful" or "use their competencies", and when someone at work is unfair to them, then this prevents them from being able to fulfil their work goals. Second, injustice prevents them from finding an intrinsic interest in their jobs. In this sense, justice is linked to being "motivated". Third, injustice seems to impede people's development. Respondents point out that under conditions of justice they can grow professionally (they want to "develop", to find an "interesting new type of work" and are motivated by "future promotional opportunities"). Finally, they say that injustice is a risk to their health and well-being. Justice on the other hand makes them able to be "spontaneous" at work, to feel sane and experience emotional well-being. Thus, this data suggests that people may have several additional reasons for caring about justice, and for reacting negatively to injustice. It remains to be investigated whether these are reasons that generally motivate a preference for justice, or whether they are just secondary effects next to the three motives identified previously by the literature.

What our design allows to identify is that the relative importance of these issues may vary depending of the kind of work relationship that the respondent has with the source of injustice. The relational outcomes consisting of taking self-confidence from the pride of belonging to the group is the most often quoted issue, and occurs frequently in all four conditions. This might be due to the two main dimensions of this concept, the one linked to the pride of being included in the workgroup (which includes colleagues), the other in relation to the pride of being a full-fledged member of the organization (as recognized by bosses). Being able to do one's job properly is the second most frequently mentioned benefit threatened by injustice. It appears to be seen as relatively more important when the relationship regards distant colleagues. This might be due to the fact that interactions with

distant colleagues are mainly professional and thus do not relate to other dimensions than the joint fulfilling of working task. Being motivated by or interested in one's job, and receiving material outcomes are respectively the third and fourth most important issues quoted. In our small sample, they only (for motivation) or mainly (for material outcomes) depend on the justice experienced in a relationship with a boss, whatever his or her closeness, and don't appear when relations with colleagues are at stake. This is consistent with the fact that managers are typically the ones to allocate material outcomes at work, and it depends largely on managers whether they give subordinates job autonomy. Growing in the job is an outcome mainly linked to the justice of the relation with a close boss, it is moderately linked to the relationship with a distant boss or with a close colleague and doesn't appear at all as being important in a relationship with distant colleagues. It seems that mainly the close manager helps the employee to master his or her job and helps him or her to get promoted. Regarding the two last issues, they are more rarely quoted and in our sample are specific to the kind of relationship involved. Working in an ethical organization was only named as important motive when distant relationships were concerned. This might be due to the fact that employees do not have any other information to be reassured about the actions of people with whom they do not share close bonds. Finally, we found personal well-being at work as an underlying issue only in close relationships with colleagues. Only fair colleagues may be able to make people be themselves, spontaneous and at ease at work. Of course, these findings are based on very small numbers, and therefore no generalisations can be drawn at this stage.

Table 1: Emergent justice issues at stake for different work relationships

	Close relationship	Distant relationship
Boss as perpetrator	<p><i>N=7, issues quoted: (24) 100%</i></p> <p><i>Being able to do the job properly (4) 17%</i> <i>Gaining money and time off (3) 12%</i> <i>Gaining recognition and pride (8) 33%</i> <i>Finding interest and satisfaction in the job (4) 17%</i> <i>Growing in the job (5) 21%</i> <i>Gaining personal well being (0) 0%</i> <i>Working in an ethical organization (0) 0%</i></p>	<p><i>N=14, issues quoted: (48)</i></p> <p><i>Being able to do the job properly (6) 12%</i> <i>Gaining money and time off (6) 12%</i> <i>Gaining recognition and pride (23) 49%</i> <i>Finding interest and satisfaction in the job (7) 15%</i> <i>Growing in the job (4) 8%</i> <i>Gaining personal well being (0) 0%</i> <i>Working in an ethical organization (2) 4%</i></p>
Colleague as perpetrator	<p><i>N=7, issues quoted: (26)</i></p> <p><i>Being able to do the job properly (6) 23%</i> <i>Gaining money and time off (1) 4%</i> <i>Gaining recognition and pride (13) 50%</i> <i>Finding interest and satisfaction in the job (0) 0%</i> <i>Growing in the job (2) 8%</i> <i>Gaining personal well being (4) 15%</i> <i>Working in an ethical organization (0) 0%</i></p>	<p><i>N=5, issues quoted: (16)</i></p> <p><i>Being able to do the job properly (8) 50%</i> <i>Gaining money and time off (1) 6%</i> <i>Gaining recognition and pride (6) 38%</i> <i>Finding interest and satisfaction in the job (0) 0%</i> <i>Growing in the job (0) 0%</i> <i>Gaining personal well being (0) 0%</i> <i>Working in an ethical organization (1) 6%</i></p>

Justice rules

The majority of the justice rules that our participants quoted have already been identified by justice researchers. In this respect, our study provides further evidence for the validity of the four dimensional conceptualization of justice. In particular interpersonal justice and informational justice (Colquitt, 2001) rules are mentioned.

Beyond the previous dimensions, we find three phenomena worth noting. First, the relative importance of the previously identified justice rules appears to depend on the kind of relationship with the perpetrator of injustice. Second, some new rules appear, especially in non-hierarchical types of relationships (the relationship with colleagues), which previous research has not deeply investigated. Third, we identified one new rule that cannot be categorised into one of the four traditional justice types. In this study, this new rule seems important for participants and we raise the question whether it may imply the creation of a new justice type.

Informational and interpersonal justice rules

Regarding informational justice, the traditional rules of candidness, proper explanations and timely information emerge. Interestingly, the customisation of managers' communication to individual subordinates' needs did not appear as a rule although it is usually used in informational justice scales (Colquitt, 2001). We noticed that explanations were an important justice rule mostly when the source is the superior and especially when the superior has a close relationship with the participant. Explanations as a reason for injustice are named much more rarely in situations with a distant boss and almost never with a colleague. By contrast, being honest and sincere seems to be a universal expectation – it may not be dependent upon the kind of relationship. A new rule has emerged in this category, regarding listening to one's concerns or requests. In our sample, it only appeared in relationships with distant colleagues to whom maybe the employee has to give explanations without having any means (nor hierarchy or friendship) to oblige the colleague to listen to him or her.

Regarding interpersonal justice, the usual rules of respect, politeness and not using inappropriate remarks have emerged. However, they seem to be used mainly in the context of distant others, either bosses or colleagues. Politeness may not be such a problem in close relationships. Two new rules also emerge here: firstly "respecting one's word" and secondly "not manipulating people". Although they are not used in measures of justice, they have already been identified by researchers, respectively by Bies (2005) and Greenberg (2006). These rules came up especially in situations related to one's superior (either close or distant). This is plausibly a sign of the asymmetry of power that may allow a boss to manipulate subordinates, or not to keep his or her word. A further rule emerging from the data is being empathetic and supportive. Being empathetic is not usually seen as a justice rule, although empathy has been shown to be linked with interpersonal justice (Patient & Skarlicki, in press). Being empathetic and supportive seems to be a characteristic rule of very close relationships.

Maybe this kind of behaviour is simply not expected in distant relationship, and its lack is thus not perceived as rule transgression. Previous research, focusing largely on distant relationship, would therefore not have picked this up. Last, confidentiality emerged as a further rule. Although this rule has already been identified by Bies, 2005, it is not included in the mainstream operationalisations of interpersonal justice. We only found this rule in situations that involved close colleagues who maybe have confidential information about the employee.

Table 2: Emergent informational and interpersonal justice rules for different work relationships

	Close relationship	Distant relationship
Boss as perpetrator	<p><i>N=7, rules quoted: (18) 100%</i></p> <p><u>Informational justice</u> <i>Giving proper information and explanations (6)</i> <i>Timeliness (1)</i> <i>Being honest and sincere (2)</i> <i>Listening and being open-minded (0)</i></p> <p><u>Interpersonal justice</u> <i>Being empathetic and supportive (3)</i> <i>Showing respect and politeness (1)</i> <i>Refraining from improper remarks or comments (1)</i> <i>Respecting one's word (3)</i> <i>Not manipulating people (1)</i> <i>Respecting confidentiality (0)</i></p>	<p><i>N=14, rules quoted: (16)</i></p> <p><u>Informational justice</u> <i>Giving proper information and explanations (3)</i> <i>Timeliness (1)</i> <i>Being honest and sincere (1)</i> <i>Listening and being open-minded (0)</i></p> <p><u>Interpersonal justice</u> <i>Being empathetic and supportive (1)</i> <i>Showing respect and politeness (2)</i> <i>Refraining from improper remarks or comments (4)</i> <i>Respecting one's word (2)</i> <i>Not manipulating people (2)</i> <i>Respecting confidentiality (0)</i></p>
Colleague as perpetrator	<p><i>N=7, rules quoted: (8)</i></p> <p><u>Informational justice</u> <i>Giving proper information and explanations (1)</i> <i>Timeliness (0)</i> <i>Being honest and sincere (3)</i> <i>Listening and being open-minded (0)</i></p> <p><u>Interpersonal justice</u> <i>Being empathetic and supportive (2)</i> <i>Showing respect and politeness (0)</i> <i>Refraining from improper remarks or comments (0)</i> <i>Respecting one's word (1)</i> <i>Not manipulating people (0)</i> <i>Respecting confidentiality (1)</i></p>	<p><i>N=5, rules quoted: (8)</i></p> <p><u>Informational justice</u> <i>Giving proper information and explanations (0)</i> <i>Timeliness (0)</i> <i>Being honest and sincere (2)</i> <i>Listening and being open-minded (1)</i></p> <p><u>Interpersonal justice</u> <i>Being empathetic and supportive (0)</i> <i>Showing respect and politeness (3)</i> <i>Refraining from improper remarks or comments (2)</i> <i>Respecting one's word (0)</i> <i>Not manipulating people (0)</i> <i>Respecting confidentiality (0)</i></p>

Procedural, distributive and other justice rules

As expected, the central procedural justice rules that the literature has identified were found in the interviews, especially when the employee talks about his or her relationship with a distant boss, (and to a lower extent when he or she talks about a relationship with a close boss), which is the canonical type of relationship on which the justice literature has been mostly based. Voice, accurate information, no bias, consistency and possibility to appeal

appear also to be important procedural justice rules. Noticeably ethicality in decision-making did not emerge as a procedural justice rule from our sample. Two interesting rules have emerged that have not been identified as justice rules so far. Both rules regard the gap between a procedure and the way a manager applies it. The first rule holds that managers should apply the procedures as they exist and not deviate from them. They should stick to the formal procedures as they are written. The second rule is the exact opposite from the former one: managers should be flexible and take the specific context into account when implementing a procedure. However, the contradiction may only be apparent as a manager has always at the same time to respect a procedure and to apply it to the context. Finally, a last rule has emerged in the close colleague context: this rule requires that problems should be analyzed and decisions should be made together. This is a special view of procedural justice in which the employee asks to have more than voice in the decision: he or she wants to participate fully in the decision, which becomes understandable on the background of the lack of hierarchical distance in colleague relationships.

Regarding distributive justice rules, not surprisingly, equity emerges as the major rule, especially in relationships involving bosses. According to our participants, material as well as relational rewards (and also punishments) should be based on contribution, either in the form of competencies, performance or responsibilities, depending on the context. Equality emerges for a special issue: the right to grow professionally. Indeed, for many of the interviewees, everybody at work should benefit from opportunities for personal and professional development. Finally, need appears only in the case of an employee talking about a situation with a close colleague. The case concerned help that was expected from the colleague because the interviewee was having difficult times.

A last rule has emerged from the interviews that cannot be categorised into one of the four traditional types of justice. This rule seems more global and does not relate to a specific allocation, nor decision or social interaction. This rule consists of “handling one’s job properly”. The types of issues that we coded into this category include showing “professionalism”, “taking all the responsibilities of the job”, or “quitting the job when the person is not able to handle her responsibilities”. This rule seems to be pervasive and was quoted in all four conditions. It seems that for the interviewed employees, having colleagues and bosses who do their jobs right, whatever the relationship with them, is an important rule of fairness. This rule may be linked to what Sheppard and colleagues named “systemic justice” (Sheppard, Lewicki & Minton, 1992).

Table 3: Emergent procedural, distributive and systemic justice rules for different work relationships

	Close relationship	Distant relationship
Boss as perpetrator	<p><i>N=7, rules quoted: (14)</i></p> <p><u>Procedural justice</u> <i>Voice for those involved (0)</i> <i>Decision based on right information (2)</i> <i>Consistency (1)</i> <i>No bias (0)</i> <i>Respecting the procedure (0)</i> <i>Flexibility in the application of the procedure (0)</i> <i>Possibility to appeal the decision (1)</i> <i>The decision should be made together (2)</i></p> <p><u>Distributive justice</u> <i>Equity (5)</i> <i>Equality (1)</i> <i>Need (0)</i></p> <p><u>Other</u> <i>Handling one's role properly (2)</i></p>	<p><i>N=14, rules quoted: (29)</i></p> <p><u>Procedural justice</u> <i>Voice for those involved (1)</i> <i>Decision based on right information (2)</i> <i>Consistency (2)</i> <i>No bias (3)</i> <i>Respecting the procedure (3)</i> <i>Flexibility in the application of the procedure (2)</i> <i>Possibility to appeal the decision (0)</i> <i>The decision should be made together (0)</i></p> <p><u>Distributive justice</u> <i>Equity (8)</i> <i>Equality (3)</i> <i>Need (0)</i></p> <p><u>Other</u> <i>Handling one's role properly (5)</i></p>
Colleague as perpetrator	<p><i>N=7, rules quoted: (11)</i></p> <p><u>Procedural justice</u> <i>Voice for those involved (0)</i> <i>Decision based on right information (0)</i> <i>Consistency (1)</i> <i>No bias (0)</i> <i>Respecting the procedure (0)</i> <i>Flexibility in the application of the procedure (0)</i> <i>Possibility to appeal the decision (1)</i> <i>The decision should be made together (2)</i></p> <p><u>Distributive justice</u> <i>Equity (1)</i> <i>Equality (0)</i> <i>Need (3)</i></p> <p><u>Other</u> <i>Handling one's role properly (3)</i></p>	<p><i>N=5, rules quoted: (6) 100%</i></p> <p><u>Procedural justice</u> <i>Voice for those involved (0)</i> <i>Decision based on right information (0)</i> <i>Consistency (0)</i> <i>No bias (1)</i> <i>Respecting the procedure (0)</i> <i>Flexibility in the application of the procedure (0)</i> <i>Possibility to appeal the decision (0)</i> <i>The decision should be made together (0)</i></p> <p><u>Distributive justice</u> <i>Equity (1)</i> <i>Equality (0)</i> <i>Need (0)</i></p> <p><u>Other</u> <i>Handling one's role properly (4)</i></p>

Discussion

Our study uses qualitative data to investigate justice issues in real life social settings. Specifically, we differentiated between a) the degree of friendship or distance between perpetrator and perceiver, and b) between injustice from managers versus injustice from colleagues. Up to date we know very little about how non-hierarchical fairness perceptions are formed. The vast majority of the organisational justice literature has so far focused on cross-hierarchical, detached work relationships, although other kinds of relationships have important implications at work and give rise to justice judgments.

Our description of what is typically at stake in these different types of justice situation shows some interesting differences, but also some commonalities. Relational benefits (self-confidence and pride) were central underlying issues in all types of relationship condition. In hierarchical relationships (with a boss), issues of motivation and interesting work became more salient. With distant colleagues, one of the most important issues appeared to be able to do the job properly. Thus, even in a non-hierarchical and distant relationship, there are issues at stake that could provide important motives for justice – both for the individual and the organisation! If the unfair treatment from colleagues prevents people from doing their job properly, then this is of course an area that also deserves managerial attention.

Different issues seem to be at stake in unfairness from distant versus close perpetrators. *Distant relationships* at work seem to be the context in which injustices threaten the perception of working in an ethical organization. Typically people know distant colleagues and bosses less well than close relations, and therefore probably see them more as agents of the organisation rather than as individuals. Thus, their actions may reflect on the ethicality of the organisation more strongly than the actions of friends. Also, when people do not share close bonds at work, then they may need the reassurance of believing in the organisation's overall ethicality, and an injustice threatens this reassurance. On the other hand, it is only in *close relationships with colleagues* that personal well-being at work seems to be at stake. Fair treatment by close colleagues could have important benefits for employees' mental well-being and happiness. Thus, perceived fairness in close and distant work relationships seems to have very important but different functions, and future research on these important differences may also change under understanding of justice motives.

Future research is needed to investigate the nature of some of the underlying justice issues identified in our study. It is not clear whether or how the issues of “doing one's job properly”, “finding intrinsic interest in one's work”, “being able to develop personally” and “personal health and well-being” should be subsumed under the existing taxonomy of motives (instrumental, relational, deontic). Certainly there is an instrumental aspect to all of these motives, but the instrumentality is much wider than what is typically described as benefit in

the instrumental model (mainly monetary interest). Some of the reasons named here refer much more to a dimension of personal meaning, which seems to be different from monetary interest.

The second aim of our analysis was to identify the rules that people choose to make justice judgments in different types of relationships. We found confirmation for most of the well-established justice rules in the literature, but we noticed that some rules were more important in one type of relationship than another, and we also noticed the occurrence of additional rules:

In the area of informational justice for example, the rules of honesty and sincerity appear to be universal, but the rule of explanations is used mainly with bosses, not with colleagues. In Interpersonal justice on the other hand, the rules of respect, politeness and not using inappropriate remarks emerge mainly in the context of distant relationships. Thus, the measurement items that we currently use to measure interpersonal and informational justice (including for example explanations and politeness) are tailored for distant cross-hierarchical relationships and may be less relevant for close or non-hierarchical relationships.

A number of new rules emerged. In the area of interpersonal justice, we found the rules of “respecting one’s word” and “not manipulating people” (mainly managers) and “being empathetic and supportive” (close relationships). Two interesting rules have also emerged in procedural justice, regarding the gap between a procedure and the way a manager applies it. Sometimes managers are expected to strictly follow procedures, in other cases they are expected to be flexible in the use of procedures. More research needs to be done to understand whether these seemingly contrary standards are driven merely by self-interest, or whether there are other important contingency factors that determine a preference for either strict rule obedience or flexible rule interpretation. Finally, a new procedural rule emerged in the close colleague context, namely that problems should be analyzed and decisions should be made together. All these rules are not reflected in typical operationalisations of organisational justice, and further research is needed to determine when exactly they will become important.

Finally, we found various rules that referred to doing your job properly. Interestingly, this type of rule emerged in all four conditions. To some extent, this issue can be addressed in practice through setting clear codes of conduct and creating a professional and constructive work atmosphere and culture.

This study provides new insights into why employees feel unfairly treated and how they form their justice judgment in the workplace. Understanding employees’ motivations and the rules that they choose to judge fairness can help organizations to improve fairness perceptions. Our data suggests that motivation and rule choice may also depend on the type of relationship that the perceiver of injustice has with the perpetrator. In this study, we include relationship contexts not typically investigated in the justice literature: colleagues as well as managers, and close as well as distant work relationships. Some interesting differences in

justice issues and justice norm choice between these groups have been found among the respondents of this study.

We hope that future research will investigate these issues further, with the aim of making organizational justice findings applicable to an even wider work context. Specifically, we hope that future studies can broaden their investigation of justice to include colleagues rather than managers only, and to take great care in considering which specific justice norms should be included in which context. While the development of validated and reliable measures of justice has done much to advance the field, the sole reliance on the narrow set of antecedents in these measures may prevent some important advances in understanding different contexts. Further qualitative work is needed to further investigate the issues presented here, and to possibly unearth additional issues. Of course, a necessary next step will be the rigorous quantitative testing of some of the relationships found in our (and others') qualitative work.

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