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# MAKING SENSE OF PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS: HOW HIGH PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS CAN REDUCE OR HEIGHTEN THE INFLUENCE OF OUTCOME FAVORABILITY

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**I consider the interactive effects of procedural fairness and outcome favorability on people's reactions to organizational decisions. When the dependent variable consists of employees' support for decisions, for decision makers, or for organizations, outcome favorability has less influence when procedural fairness is high rather than low. When the dependent variable consists of employees' self-evaluations, however, outcome favorability has more influence when procedural fairness is high rather than low. Explanations, implications, and future research directions are discussed.**

Procedural fairness has attracted a great deal of attention from management scholars. In a wide variety of settings, many determinants of procedural fairness have been shown to influence an assortment of people's work attitudes and behaviors (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, in press; Cropanzano, 1993; Folger & Greenberg, 1985; Greenberg & Cropanzano, 2001; Konovsky, 2000; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Thibaut & Walker, 1975). Theoretical analyses have focused on the underlying motives that help to explain the pervasive effects of procedural fairness (e.g., Folger, 1993; Lind, 2001). For example, some theorists have suggested that people care about procedural fairness because of its implications for tangible outcomes they will receive, both in the short run and the long run (Thibaut & Walker, 1975). This viewpoint is known as the instrumental theory. Proponents posit that people are more likely to believe they will receive their share of favorable outcomes when procedures are relatively fair (e.g., when they are allowed to provide input into the decision process).

Others have suggested that people are influenced by procedural fairness because it addresses more symbolic or social/psychological concerns, such as people's needs for self-esteem, self-identity, and affiliation (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998). One (but not the only) exemplar of this perspective is the group value model (Lind & Tyler, 1988), known more recently as the relational model (Tyler & Lind, 1992), which suggests that people's social/psychological needs are likely to be satisfied when they interact with others who are procedurally fair.

While it is clearly worthwhile to identify the instrumental/economic and social/psychological motives that account for people's reactions to procedural fairness, it is also important to delineate the nature of the sensemaking processes in which people engage in response to procedural fairness information (Weick, 1995). That is, in addition to an explanation of *why* people respond more favorably when procedural fairness is relatively high, it is both theoretically and practically important to know *what* people actually do (e.g., the sensemaking processes they undertake) when they encounter procedural fairness information.

Accordingly, in this paper I delineate several sensemaking processes people engage in as a reaction to the procedural fairness exhibited by their exchange partners in work organizations. To illustrate the generality of the ensuing analysis, I define the term *exchange partners* broadly. Exchange partners could be authority figures, but they need not be (e.g., coworkers at the same level of formal and informal authority also may be exchange partners). Exchange partners could be individuals (e.g., a manager who administers an annual performance appraisal to one of her direct reports), groups (e.g., a review board considering an appeal made by an employee who feels wrongly treated), or organizations (e.g., multiple actors who may be involved in the implementation of a change such as a merger or acquisition).

Attribution theory (e.g., Kelley, 1972) and organizational justice theory (e.g., Folger, 1993) indicate that an important element of sensemaking is for people to determine the reasons for the outcomes of their social exchanges. The meaning of outcomes is shaped by people's judgments of accountability or responsibility (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998). Two key accountability judgments pertain to (1) the self and (2) the exchange partner. People seek to determine how much they are personally responsible for their outcomes of the social exchange, and they also seek to determine how much the exchange partner is responsible for their outcomes.

One determinant of people's attributions of responsibility for their outcomes is information about the exchange partner's procedural fairness. The more the exchange partner is perceived to be procedurally unfair, the more likely people are to see the exchange partner as responsible for their outcomes. Prevailing ethical standards and social norms typically mandate exchange partners to behave in procedurally fair ways toward one another (e.g., Folger & Cropanzano, 1998). Behavior that violates such standards or norms tends to be attributed to something about the actor (Jones & Davis, 1965). This reasoning suggests that people will hold their exchange partner more responsible for his or her behavior—and, by extension, more responsible for the outcomes of the exchange—when the exchange partner exhibits lower procedural fairness. For example, if employees failed to receive a desired promotion because of the other party's use of unfair procedures, then those employees would see the other party as more responsible for their failure to be promoted, relative to if the other party were seen as procedurally fair.

While people use procedural fairness information to make attributions of responsibility for their outcomes, this is not the only sensemaking process elicited by procedural fairness information. Many social exchanges take place in the context of ongoing relationships, especially in organizational settings. Thus, people often do not simply try to make attributions of responsibility for their outcomes. As suggested by fairness heuristic theory (Lind, 1995; Van den Bos, Bruins, Wilke, & Dronkert, 1999), they also use procedural fairness information to determine the nature of their relationships with their exchange partners.

As Lind (2001) recently suggested, two notions are central to fairness heuristic theory: (1) fairness judgments are assumed to serve as a proxy for interpersonal trust in guiding decisions about whether to behave in a cooperative fashion in social situations, and (2) people are assumed to use a variety of cognitive shortcuts to assure that they have a fairness judgment available when they need to make decisions about engaging in cooperative behavior. Van den Bos et al. suggest that "fairness heuristic theory assumes that because ceding authority to another person provides an opportunity for exploitation, people may feel uncertain about their relationship with an authority. Therefore, . . . people want to know whether the authority can be trusted" (1999: 325).

Growing out of the group value (Lind & Tyler, 1988) and relational (Tyler & Lind, 1992) models of procedural fairness, fairness heuristic theory posits that people are mainly interested in determining the nature of their relationship with the other party (in particular, how much to trust the other party) and that they use procedural (and other sources of) fairness information to make inferences about how much to trust the other party. Perceptions of greater fairness lead people to be more trusting of the other party, which, in turn, satisfies their social/psychological needs for esteem, identity, and affiliation.[1]

The present analysis is based on the notions that people use procedural fairness information to (1) evaluate their exchange partner's responsibility, as well as their own responsibility, for the outcomes of the exchange (e.g., Leung, Su, & Morris, in press) and (2) make inferences about the nature of their relationships with social exchange partners—in particular, how much to trust their partners (e.g., Konovsky & Pugh, 1994). My goal is to illustrate *the mutual relationship between recent empirical findings and these sensemaking processes.* On the one hand, the recent empirical findings provide insight into the nature of the sensemaking processes. On the other hand, the various sensemaking processes help to explain the results of many recent stud-

[1] In this analysis I use Mayer and Schoorman's definition of trust: the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party (1995: 712).

ies in the organizational justice literature—in particular, those examining the interactive effect of procedural fairness and outcome favorability on employees' reactions.

Recent studies of the interactive effect of procedural fairness and outcome favorability have included two broad categories of reactions (or dependent variables). One category refers to employees' evaluations of the decision-making environment—that is, their support for (1) the exchange partner's decisions, (2) the exchange partner, or (3) the organization in which the decision was rendered (e.g., organizational commitment). The other category refers to employees' evaluations of themselves (e.g., self-esteem). At first blush, the interactive effects of procedural fairness and outcome favorability on these two categories of dependent variables appear to be contradictory, in that the interactive relationships take different forms. However, I suggest that the sensemaking processes help to reconcile the findings.

Of greater importance, by articulating the mutual relationship between the various sensemaking processes and recent empirical findings, the present analysis has important theoretical and practical implications. At the theoretical level, we stand to gain an increased understanding of people's psychological processes in response to procedural fairness information—processes that influence their work attitudes and behaviors. At the practical level, the juxtaposition of the various sensemaking processes highlights a potential dilemma for managers in work organizations when they try to gain their constituencies' support for decisions yielding unfavorable outcomes. Practitioner-oriented (e.g., Kim & Mauborgne, 1997) as well as scholarly writings (e.g., Folger & Pugh, 2000; Lind & Tyler, 1988) suggest that managers may gain greater support for their decisions, for themselves, and for the organizations they represent by being procedurally fair, especially when the outcomes of the decision are unfavorable (Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996). However, the managerial prescription to be procedurally fair, especially in the face of unfavorable outcomes, is based on employees' tendencies to be either less likely to blame managers for their unfavorable outcomes or more trusting of their managers. The fact that employees also use procedural fairness information to evaluate their personal responsibility for their outcomes suggests that managers who are procedurally fair when implementing unfavorable outcomes may elicit negative self-evaluations in employees (Ployhart, Ryan, & Bennett, 1999; Schroth & Shah, 2000). Thus, managers face a potential dilemma when implementing decisions that yield unfavorable outcomes. On the one hand, greater procedural fairness may lead employees to be more supportive of the decision, the decision maker, or the organization. On the other hand, greater procedural fairness may lower employees' evaluations of themselves.[2]

## OVERVIEW

The subsequent presentation consists of three sections. In the first section I begin with a brief description of two broad categories of factors that have served as independent variables in many studies of exchange relationships between employees and employers: outcome favorability and procedural fairness. I then go on to describe the results of studies in which the interactive effects of outcome favorability and procedural fairness on people's support for decisions, for decision makers, or for the organization have been evaluated. The nature of the interaction effect is that high procedural fairness reduces the effect of outcome favorability on people's support, relative to when procedural fairness is low. Folger and his colleagues originally predicted and established this effect (e.g., Folger, Rosenfield, & Robinson, 1983), and it has been conceptually replicated in more than forty studies (see Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996, for a review).[3] These studies have been reviewed

[2] The potential managerial dilemma posed by being procedurally fair when implementing unfavorable outcomes rests on two assumptions: first, managers wish to elicit employees' support for their decisions, for themselves, or for the organization; second, they do not wish to lower employees' self-evaluations in the process. While the first assumption seems reasonable, the second may not always be warranted. This matter is discussed further in a later section of the article.

[3] As Lind (2001) has pointed out, procedural fairness and outcome favorability do not always interact to influence employees' work attitudes and behaviors. Instead, only main effects have been found in some studies. Thus, the present analysis is more applicable to the results of studies in which procedural fairness and outcome favorability interact than it is to those in which only main effects appear. Nevertheless, the number of studies in which procedural fairness and outcome favorability interact is considerable.

elsewhere, so I focus on more recent theory and research that shed light on the sensemaking processes that account for the interaction effect.

In the second section I describe recent research showing that the interaction between outcome favorability and procedural fairness takes a different form when the dependent variable consists of people's self-evaluations. In this case, high procedural fairness heightens the effect of outcome favorability, relative to when procedural fairness is low. Such findings indicate that people engage in an additional sensemaking process in which they assess the degree to which they are personally responsible for their outcomes. In evaluating Brockner and Wiesenfeld's (1996) review of research on the interactive relationship between outcome favorability and procedural justice, Lind (2001) recently suggested that the conclusion reached by the authors—that high procedural fairness reduces the effect of outcome favorability—was too general. I agree with Lind's suggestion. Indeed, a major goal in this analysis is to discuss when and why procedural fairness and outcome favorability interact with each other and, when they do, whether the interaction effect takes one form rather than the other.

In particular, different sensemaking processes (informed by the receipt of procedural fairness information) can account for the different interactive relationships between procedural fairness and outcome favorability. When people are engaged in the more other-directed processes of trying to determine how much to view the other party as responsible for their outcomes or how much to trust the other party, greater procedural fairness should reduce the impact of outcome favorability on their support for decisions, for decision makers, or for organizations. When people are engaged in the more self-directed process of trying to determine how much they are personally responsible for their outcomes, greater procedural fairness should heighten the influence of outcome favorability on their self-evaluations.

Empirical evidence that people use procedural fairness information for these various sensemaking purposes also is provided by studies not explicitly designed to evaluate the interactive relationships between procedural fairness and outcome favorability (Konovsky & Pugh, 1994; Leung et al., in press; Van den Bos et al., 1999; Van den Bos, Wilke, & Lind, 1998). Because these studies are quite relevant to the present analysis, I present them at appropriate points in the first and second sections.

In the third section of the paper, I offer suggestions for future research, as well as theoretical and managerial implications—all based on people's attempts to make sense of procedural fairness information.

## HOW HIGH PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS REDUCES THE EFFECTS OF OUTCOME FAVORABILITY

In initial theory and research on social interactions and relationships, researchers examined the effects of outcomes. Homans (1961), for example, suggested that people were more committed to exchange partners when the outcomes of their interactions were favorable rather than unfavorable, and Adams (1965) showed that people were more satisfied with their jobs when their exchange partner provided them with outcomes that were fair rather than unfair. Subsequently, organizational and social psychologists focused on the effects of procedural justice—that is, the fairness of the methods used by the exchange partner to plan and implement decisions (Folger & Greenberg, 1985; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Thibaut & Walker, 1975).

Numerous factors influence people's perceptions of procedural fairness. At first, procedural fairness was equated, by Thibaut and Walker (1975), with process control and decision control. Subsequent to Thibaut and Walker's seminal efforts, researchers showed that additional factors influenced people's perceptions of procedural fairness. For example, Leventhal, Karuza, and Fry (1980) identified six determinants of procedural fairness (e.g., consistency and correctability). Bies (1987) suggested that procedural fairness has an interactional component, which refers to the interpersonal behavior of the exchange partner (e.g., whether the exchange partner provided accounts for his or her actions and, more generally, whether the exchange partner treated others with dignity and respect).

Many studies have shown that people's reactions to their social exchanges depend both on outcome favorability and procedural fairness. Across a wide variety of dependent variables, people react more positively when outcomes are relatively favorable rather than unfavorable and when procedures are fair rather than unfair (e.g., Lind & Tyler, 1988).

Perhaps more intriguing than the main effects of outcome favorability and procedural fairness is that the two often interact to influence people's work attitudes and behaviors (Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996; Folger et al., 1983). Specifically, outcome favorability is less strongly related to people's support for decisions, for decision makers, or for organizations when procedural fairness is high rather than low. For example, Schaubroeck, May, and Brown (1994) studied employees' organizational commitment in response to a pay freeze and found that the economic hardship associated with the pay freeze (outcome favorability) had less of an impact on employees' organizational commitment when procedural fairness was relatively high. Studies conducted subsequent to the Brockner and Wiesenfeld (1996) review have continued to provide confirmatory evidence (Garonzik, Brockner, & Siegel, 2000; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997).

### Explanatory Mechanism I: The Judgment of Responsibility

At least two sensemaking processes may explain why high procedural fairness reduces the effect of outcome favorability on people's support for decisions, for decision makers, or for organizations. One process refers to people's attempts to determine the degree to which their exchange partner is responsible or accountable for their outcomes. The more people see the other party as responsible for unfavorable outcomes (i.e., the more people blame the other party), the more likely they are to feel resentful toward the other party. Feelings of resentment should be manifested in the form of low levels of support for the decision, for the decision maker, or for the organization. In contrast, the more people see the other party as responsible for favorable outcomes (i.e., the more people give credit to the other party), the more likely they are to feel appreciative of the other party. Feelings of appreciation should be manifested in the form of high levels of support for the decision, the decision maker, or the organization.

Procedural fairness information, in turn, influences the extent to which the partner will be seen as responsible for people's outcomes. Consider the case in which outcomes are unfavorable. Unfavorable outcomes accompanied by unfair procedures make the exchange partner much more blameworthy than when unfavorable outcomes are accompanied by fair procedures. According to referent cognitions theory (Folger, 1986) and, more recently, fairness theory (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998), unfair procedures lead people to believe that their outcomes would have been more favorable, if only the procedures had been more fair (as they could have and should have been). Thus, people will blame their unfavorable outcomes on the other party's use of unfair procedures and, as a consequence, will feel resentful toward the other party. High procedural fairness makes it more difficult for people to believe that their outcomes would have been more favorable, making them less likely to blame and feel resentful toward the other party. In short, when outcomes are unfavorable, procedural fairness should be (1) *inversely* related to attributions of responsibility (blame) and resentment toward the other party and (2) *positively* related to people's support for the decision, for the decision maker, or for the organization.

While people also should be more likely to perceive a procedurally unfair (than fair) exchange partner as responsible for favorable outcomes, the relationship between procedural fairness and attributions of responsibility to the other party (in this case credit, rather than blame) may be less pronounced, at least relative to when outcomes are unfavorable. This is due to the self-serving bias in people's attributional tendencies, designed to protect self-esteem in the face of unfavorable outcomes and enhance self-esteem in the case of favorable outcomes (e.g., Zuckerman, 1979). By saying that their exchange partner's unfair procedures were responsible for their favorable outcomes, people may be downplaying their personal responsibility. In downplaying their personal responsibility for favorable outcomes, people reduce their opportunity to experience self-enhancement.

Whereas the inverse relationship between procedural fairness and people's tendencies to hold the other party accountable for their outcomes may be more pronounced when outcomes are unfavorable rather than favorable, the general tendency for high procedural fairness to reduce the other party's responsibility for their outcomes can account for the interactive effect of outcome favorability and procedural fairness on people's support for decisions, for decision makers, or for organizations. Specifically, the effect of outcome favorability on people's support should be lower when procedural fairness is high rather than low.

### Explanatory Mechanism II: The Judgment of Trustworthiness

A second sensemaking process that also may explain the interactive effect of procedural fairness and outcome favorability on people's support for decisions/decision makers/organizations is based on the premise that people use procedural fairness information to make inferences about their relationship with the other party—in particular, how much to trust the other party (Lind, 1995, 2001). In fact, the results of several recent studies suggest that it is not procedural fairness per se that interacts with outcome favorability to influence employees' support; rather, it is the degree of trust elicited by procedural fairness that interacts with outcome favorability to influence employees' support (Brockner, Siegel, Daly, Tyler, & Martin, 1997). When trust in the exchange partner (due to procedural fairness) is high, employees' support is less influenced by outcome favorability, relative to when trust in the exchange partner is low.

Why might this be the case? Note that the outcome refers to an event that has recently transpired. Moreover, the outcome factor in most studies refers to a tangible entity, such as being selected versus rejected for a coveted position (Gilliland, 1994; Van den Bos et al., 1999) or suffering economically more versus less as a result of a pay freeze (Schaubroeck et al., 1994). Trust influences people's perceptions along two dimensions—(1) the time frame through which people view the exchange relationship and (2) the "currency" of exchange in the relationship—that may explain why outcome favorability has less of an impact on people's support when trust is relatively high.

**Time frame.** In most exchange relationships people care about the outcomes they receive in the present, as well as the outcomes that they can reasonably expect to receive in the future. When people trust their exchange partner, they are likely to feel reassured about the favorability of their future outcomes. As a result, they may assign less importance to, and hence be less influenced by, the favorability of their current outcomes. However, when people do not trust their exchange partner, their beliefs about their future outcomes are uncertain at best and unfavorable at worst. This may lead them to assign greater significance to their current outcomes, thereby heightening the impact of those outcomes.

**Currency of exchange.** In most exchange relationships people care about both the tangible economic outcomes that they receive (whether they stand to gain or lose in a material way), as well as the intangible symbolic outcomes (whether they are respected by the other party, which, in turn, may influence feelings of self-worth). In exchange relationships characterized by high levels of trust, both parties may believe that they are receiving favorable intangible outcomes. Trusting relationships symbolize to people that they are held in high regard by the other party, or at least more so than when trust is low (Kramer & Tyler, 1995). If trust is high, people may define the relationship as more communal or relational, meaning that they will assign relatively more importance to intangible outcomes or less importance to tangible outcomes (Lind, 2001). In other words, if trust is high, people should be less affected by the favorability of current, tangible outcomes.

However, when people do not trust the other party, they may define the relationship as more transactional, in which they assign less importance to intangible outcomes and more importance to tangible outcomes. If trust is low, people should be more influenced by the favorability of their current, tangible outcomes. Lind offers a similar line of reasoning, in which he suggests that high procedural fairness "leads to a shift from responding to a social situation in terms of immediate self-interest . . . to responding to social situations as a member of the larger social entity." In the latter case "there is far less concern with . . . the individual material payoffs associated with any given behavior" (2001: 67).

In summary, the procedural fairness of an exchange partner influences perceivers' trust in the exchange partner. Trust, in turn, influences the perceivers' judgment of the time frame and currency of exchange in ways that lead to an interactive effect of trust and outcome favorability on perceivers' support for decisions, for decision makers, or for organizations. The notions that procedural fairness influences trust, which, in turn, interacts with outcome favorability, receive support from studies in which two different investigative strategies were used. In one instance researchers evaluated whether trust had a *mediating* influence on the interactive relationship between procedural fairness and outcome favorability, whereas in the other they tested whether certain factors had a *moderating* influence on the interactive relationship between procedural fairness and outcome favorability.

**Tests of mediation.** Employees' reactions to their exchanges with their employers were assessed in three different field settings (Brockner et al., 1997). In one site employees indicated the extent to which they supported their supervisor. In the other two studies employees rated their organizational commitment in the face of a significant organizational change (relocation in one setting, job layoffs in the other). In all three studies participants were required to indicate the favorability of their outcomes. For example, outcome favorability in the relocation setting was operationalized on the basis of whether the reason for the relocation was organizational growth versus decline (outcomes tending to be more favorable in the former than in the latter instance). An additional independent variable in all three settings was participants' ratings of procedural fairness. Furthermore, all three studies included a measure of participants' trust in their managers.

All three studies replicated the results of previously reviewed studies (Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996), in which outcome favorability was shown to be much less strongly related to employees' support for the decision maker or the organization when procedural fairness was relatively high. Subsequent analyses also examined the interactive effect of outcome favorability and trust on the same dependent measures. As expected, in all three settings the relationship between outcome favorability and employees' support was significantly less pronounced when trust was high rather than low.

To evaluate whether it was trust rather than procedural fairness per se that interacted with outcome favorability, the researchers conducted mediation analyses. Indeed, in all three studies the results suggested that it was the trust elicited by procedural fairness, and not procedural fairness per se, that interacted with outcome favorability to influence participants' support for their supervisor or for the organization.

Further evidence that people use procedural fairness information to determine how much to trust the other party comes from studies not designed to evaluate the interactive relationship between procedural fairness and outcome favorability. For example, Konovsky and Pugh (1994) showed that the relationship between procedural fairness and organizational citizenship behavior (Moorman, 1991) is *mediated* by trust. In a second study, in which the interpersonal fairness of a supervisor was experimentally manipulated, Leung et al. (in press) found that trust in the supervisor was greater when he was more interpersonally fair. Also, in a series of studies by Van den Bos et al. (1998), the researchers found that in the absence of information about the authority's trustworthiness, people's satisfaction with the outcomes of a decision was influenced by procedural fairness; the greater the procedural fairness, the more satisfied they were with their outcomes. However, when participants already had information about the authority's trustworthiness, they no longer had the need to (and, indeed, did not) use procedural fairness information to evaluate their satisfaction with the outcomes.

**Tests of moderation.** The studies reviewed above suggest that people use procedural fairness information to make inferences about their relationship with the other party—in particular, how much to trust the other party. Trust, in turn, influences people's support for decision makers and organizations, either as a main effect (Konovsky & Pugh, 1994) or in interaction with outcome favorability (Brockner et al., 1997). The assumption underlying these findings is that participants deem it important to determine the nature of their relationship with the other party—that is, how much to trust the other party.

A corollary of this assumption is that the more people believe it important to determine the extent to which the other party can be trusted, the more likely they are to engage in the sensemaking process that causes high procedural fairness to reduce the impact of outcome favorability on people's support for decisions, for decision makers, or for organizations. That is, the importance people assign to the process of determining how much to trust the other party should moderate the interactive effect of outcome favorability and procedural fairness. The greater the importance people assign to the trust inference process, the more likely it is that high procedural fairness will minimize the impact of outcome favorability.

While people generally may assign importance to the process of determining how much to trust the other party, the degree of importance people assign to this inference process is itself a variable. Differences between national cultures, in turn, are one possible proxy for the degree of importance people assign to the process of determining the nature of their relationship with the other party, such as how much to trust the other. The values and norms in collectivistic cultures induce their members to develop interdependent self-construals, which emphasize

> the fundamental connectedness of human beings to each other.... Experiencing interdependence entails seeing oneself as part of an encompassing social relationship and recognizing that one's behavior is determined, contingent on, and, to a large extent organized by what the actor perceives to be the thoughts, feelings, and actions of *others* in the relationship (Markus & Kitayama, 1991: 227).

In contrast, in individualistic cultures people develop self-construals that are more independent, in which there is a faith

> in the inherent separateness of distinct persons.... Achieving the cultural goal of independence requires construing oneself as an individual whose behavior is organized and made meaningful primarily by reference to one's own internal repertoire of thoughts, feelings, and actions, rather than by reference to the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991: 226).

Given the distinction between interdependent versus independent self-construals, it is likely that people raised in cultures emphasizing the former assign greater significance to their social exchanges and relationships. As Markus and Kitayama suggest, "Although people everywhere must maintain some relatedness with others, an appreciation and a need for people will be more important for those with an interdependent self than for those with an independent self" (1991: 229). Therefore, it stands to reason that people from cultures emphasizing interdependent self-construals will assign greater importance to the process of making inferences about the nature of their relationship with other parties (e.g., how much to trust those parties), relative to their counterparts from cultures that promote more independent self-construals.

The above reasoning indicates that cultural differences in self-construal should moderate the interactive effect of procedural fairness and outcome favorability on people's support for decisions, for decision makers, or for organizations. Assigning more importance to their social exchanges and relationships and, by extension, to the process of determining how much to trust the other parties in those exchanges and relationships, people from cultures fostering more interdependent self-construals should be more likely to exhibit the interactive relationship between procedural fairness and outcome favorability. Specifically, the tendency for high procedural fairness to reduce the relationship between outcome favorability and people's support for decisions, for decision makers, or for organizations should be stronger when people's cultural upbringing promotes more interdependent forms of self-construal. In fact, this hypothesis was confirmed in a recent series of studies (Brockner, Chen, Mannix, Leung, & Skarlicki, 2000).

## HOW HIGH PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS HEIGHTENS THE EFFECTS OF OUTCOME FAVORABILITY

Taken together, prior theory and research suggest that two processes may account for the interactive relationship between procedural fairness and outcome favorability: (1) people's use of procedural fairness information to determine their exchange partner's level of responsibility for their outcomes and (2) people's use of procedural fairness information to make inferences about how much to trust their exchange partner. However, these may not be the only sensemaking processes elicited by exposure to procedural fairness information. This possibility is suggested by the results of recent studies showing that high procedural fairness may heighten (rather than reduce) the influence of outcome favorability on dependent variables consisting of a *self*-evaluation.

For example, in an experiment by Schroth and Shah (2000: Study 1), participants received either favorable or unfavorable outcome feedback about their performance on an exam that measured their managerial potential. Half of the participants were led to believe that the procedures used to determine their performance were fair, whereas the other half were informed that the procedures were unfair. People's temporary evaluation of themselves, known as state self-esteem (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991), was the dependent variable. While state self-esteem was higher when performance feedback was favorable rather than unfavorable, this tendency was significantly stronger when procedural fairness was high rather than low. Conceptually analogous findings have been reported in a spate of recent studies, including four conducted by Brockner et al. (2001) and two others by Schroth and Shah (2000), and in studies by Gilliland (1994), Ployhart and Ryan (1998), and Ployhart et al. (1999).

The fact that high procedural fairness magnified the effect of outcome favorability on self-evaluations suggests that people also use procedural fairness information to make attributions of personal responsibility for their outcomes. Theory and research on achievement motivation have indicated that outcomes for which people see themselves as more personally responsible have more influence on people's self-evaluations, relative to outcomes for which they feel less personally responsible (Weiner, 1985).

Procedural fairness, in turn, has been conceptually linked to people's tendencies to see themselves as personally responsible for their outcomes: the more procedurally fair the exchange partner is, the more likely people are to see themselves as personally responsible for their outcomes. Outcomes resulting from or associated with fair procedures are likely to be seen as *deserved* (i.e., "fair and square"). Perceptions of deservingness suggest to people that it was something about themselves (e.g., their attitudes, dispositions, or behaviors) that led to the outcomes they received (Folger, 1987; Mark & Folger, 1984).

Moreover, several recent studies provide empirical evidence that people make more personal attributions for their outcomes when procedural fairness is high rather than low (Brockner et al., 2001; Leung et al., in press; Van den Bos et al., 1999). For example, Leung et al. conducted both a laboratory experiment and field study in which participants received negative feedback about their performance from a supervisor. Some participants perceived the supervisor's method of delivering the negative feedback to be interpersonally (interactionally) and/or procedurally fair, whereas others did not. For example, in the study manipulating interactional fairness, in the fair condition the supervisor paid careful attention to the participants' ideas, showed respect to participants, and was supportive, even though he did not like the participants' ideas. In the unfair condition the supervisor frequently interrupted participants and clearly did not take their ideas seriously. All participants were then asked to indicate the extent to which their supervisor's negative feedback was due to something about themselves. Higher interpersonal fairness on the part of supervisors induced participants to make more personal (self) attributions for the supervisor's negative feedback.

In addition to the fact that procedural fairness influences people's tendencies to see themselves as more personally responsible for their outcomes, other recent findings show that the relationship between procedural fairness and attributions of personal responsibility accounts for the interactive effect of procedural fairness and outcome favorability on people's self-evaluations. The various determinants of procedural fairness (hereafter referred to as procedural elements) differ in how much they causally affect the outcomes of a decision (Greenberg, 1993). Procedural elements based on the structure of a decision are likely to be perceived as having a causal effect on the outcomes. For example, people are apt to believe that their outcomes could have been determined by such structural aspects as whether they were allowed to have input into the decision-making process (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Thibaut & Walker, 1975) or whether the decisions were made on the basis of accurate information (Leventhal et al., 1980).

Other procedural elements—most notably, interactional justice (Bies, 1987)—have less of a causal impact on outcomes. Consider, for example, the component of interactional justice which refers to whether the parties affected by a decision were treated with dignity and respect during the implementation of the decision process. Although such interpersonal treatment affects people's perceptions of fairness, it does not *cause* their outcomes; it merely *accompanies* them. Consequently, people should be less apt to perceive their outcomes to be causally determined by the interpersonal behavior of the decision implementers (e.g., whether they were treated with dignity and respect) than by the structural aspects of the decision-making process (e.g., whether the decision was based upon accurate information).

If people use procedural fairness information to make attributions of responsibility for their outcomes, they should do so more in response to procedural elements that are, in fact, causally linked to their outcomes. This reasoning suggests that procedural elements that have more of a causal effect on outcomes should be more likely to moderate the relationship between outcome favorability and self-evaluations, relative to procedural elements that are less causally related to the outcomes. Consistent with this reasoning, Brockner et al. (2001) found that the tendency for outcome favorability to have more of an effect on self-evaluations when procedural fairness is high was stronger when the procedural element consisted of information accuracy, rather than interactional justice.

In another study Brockner et al. used a different investigative strategy to evaluate whether the relationship between procedural fairness and personal attributions of responsibility accounts for the interactive effect of procedural fairness and outcome favorability on self-evaluations (Brockner et al., 2001). In this study all participants rated their self-esteem after completing a series of tests designed to measure their managerial potential. Independent variables included outcome favorability (participants were given feedback that they had either high potential or low potential) and perceptions of the fairness of the procedures used to make judgments of their potential. In addition, participants indicated the extent to which personal factors (their ability and effort) were responsible for their performance feedback. Procedural fairness and outcome favorability interacted to influence participants' self-esteem; the tendency for outcome favorability to influence self-esteem was greater when procedural fairness was relatively high. Personal attributions and outcome favorability also interacted to influence participants' self-esteem; the tendency for outcome favorability to influence self-esteem was greater when participants made more personal attributions for their outcomes. Of greater importance, mediational analyses revealed that it was not procedural fairness per se that interacted with outcome favorability to influence self-esteem. Rather, it was their tendency to make personal attributions (elicited by procedural fairness) that interacted with outcome favorability to influence self-esteem.

Across many studies we now have evidence of two different interactive relationships between procedural fairness and outcome favorability. When the dependent variable consists of employees' support for decisions, for decision makers, or for organizations, high procedural fairness reduces the influence of outcome favorability. In contrast, when the dependent variable consists of an evaluation of the self (e.g., self-esteem), high procedural fairness heightens the influence of outcome favorability. Evidence suggests that the two interaction effects reflect conceptually distinct sensemaking processes in response to procedural fairness information.

There is, however, at least one alternative explanation of the two interaction effects. Because they were obtained in different research settings, it is possible that one or more of the many differences between studies (e.g., the types of settings, the nature of the participants, and the operationalizations of the independent and dependent variables) were responsible for the two different interaction effects, rather than differences in the sensemaking processes. One way to examine this alternative explanation is to evaluate whether the two interaction effects can arise in the same research setting. If both interaction effects emerge in the same research setting, they obviously cannot be an artifact of between-study differences.

This reasoning was recently tested in a study in which participants rated their employer's procedural fairness, as well as the favorability of the rewards they received for working for their employer (Brockner et al., 2001). Dependent variables consisted of support for the organization (organizational commitment) and an evaluation of the self (self-ratings of job performance). Both dependent variables yielded a significant interaction between procedural fairness and outcome favorability. However, the nature of the interaction differed. The positive relationship between outcome favorability and organizational commitment was weaker when procedural fairness was high rather than low. Furthermore, the positive relationship between outcome favorability and self-rated job performance was stronger when procedural fairness was high rather than low. Ployhart et al. (1999) obtained conceptually similar results in a recent study. Thus, the joint presence of the two interactive relationships between procedural fairness and outcome favorability in the same settings suggests that the results of previous studies are not simply an artifact of between-study differences.

## DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In summary, two sensemaking processes may explain why high procedural fairness reduces the impact of outcome favorability on employees' support for decisions, for decision makers, or for organizations. In one case people use procedural fairness information to evaluate the extent to which their exchange partner is responsible for their outcomes; in the other case people use procedural fairness information to evaluate the nature of their relationship with their exchange partner—in particular, how much to trust the partner. Moreover, a third sensemaking process may explain why high procedural fairness heightens the effect of outcome favorability on employees' self-evaluations (in which people use procedural fairness information to determine how much they are personally responsible for their outcomes).

In future conceptual and empirical work scholars need to (1) compare and contrast the various sensemaking processes that account for the interactive relationships between procedural fairness and outcome favorability, (2) evaluate whether other factors besides the nature of the dependent variable influence the form of the interactive relationship between procedural fairness and outcome favorability, and (3) clarify more precisely the nature of the interactive effect of procedural fairness and outcome favorability on employees' self-evaluations. In elaborating each of these matters, I also consider several important theoretical and practical considerations.

### Comparing and Contrasting the Sensemaking Processes

Of the two processes that can explain why high procedural fairness reduces the effect of outcome favorability on employees' support for decisions/decision makers/organizations, the one concerning people's use of procedural fairness information to make judgments of the exchange partner's responsibility for their outcomes may be somewhat less complex, relative to the one concerning people's use of procedural fairness information to make inferences about their relationship with their exchange partner. In the latter it is assumed that people assign importance to their relationship with the exchange partner. No such assumption is necessary in the former process. Indeed, some of the studies in which high procedural fairness reduced the impact of outcome favorability were conducted under one-shot laboratory conditions, where participants probably assigned little significance to their relationship with their exchange partner (Folger & Martin, 1986; Folger et al., 1983). In short, the use of procedural fairness information to make relational inferences (e.g., concerning trust) may not be necessary to produce the interaction effect in which high procedural fairness reduces the impact of outcome favorability on people's support for decisions, for decision makers, or for organizations.

Nevertheless, both theory (e.g., Lind, 2001) and research (e.g., Brockner et al., 2000; Brockner et al., 1997) indicate that people's use of procedural fairness information to make inferences about how much to trust the exchange partner is sufficient to produce the interaction effect in which high procedural fairness reduces the impact of outcome favorability. People's trust concerns also may explain why this interaction effect frequently is found in studies conducted in organizational settings (Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996). The "shadow of the future" often looms large in social exchanges in the workplace. Employees care not only about immediate transactions with their exchange partners but also about the implications of those transactions for the future. Thus, for both instrumental and symbolic reasons, people are motivated to make relational inferences about their social exchanges in the workplace. The tendency to do so, alone or in combination with the proclivity to evaluate the responsibility of their exchange partner for their outcomes, helps to explain why high procedural fairness reduces the impact of outcome favorability.

In future research scholars also need to consider the relationship between the sensemaking processes in which people use procedural fairness information to determine the extent to which they and/or their exchange partner are responsible for their outcomes. On the one hand, it is tempting to say that these two attributional judgments are simply opposite sides of the same coin. After all, the more people see themselves as personally responsible for their outcomes, the less they should see their exchange partner as responsible for their outcomes (and vice versa). Thus, the perception that procedures are more fair may lead people at once to see themselves as more responsible and their exchange partner as less responsible for their outcomes. One advantage of this viewpoint is parsimony: the same process could explain why high procedural fairness both heightens the effect of outcome favorability on self-evaluations and reduces the effect of outcome favorability on people's support for decisions, for decision makers, or for organizations.

On the other hand, further research is needed to evaluate this possibility. For one thing, the assumption that internal and external attributions of responsibility are inversely related has not always withstood empirical scrutiny; the two judgments tend to be more orthogonal than attribution theorists originally believed (e.g., Amabile, Hill, Hennessey, & Tighe, 1994). If the tendency to make more internal attributions for one's outcomes is not strongly inversely related to the tendency to see the other party as responsible for one's outcomes, then the two attribution (of responsibility) processes may be independent of one another. That is, people may use procedural fairness information to make separate inferences about the responsibility of their exchange partner and their personal level of responsibility for their outcomes.

In summary, the two different forms of the interactive effects of procedural fairness and outcome favorability may be explained by multiple sensemaking processes in which procedural fairness information is used to make inferences about (1) the responsibility of the exchange partner and the self for one's outcomes and (2) the degree of trust in the relationship. Rather than viewing these as mutually exclusive processes, in which one is pitted against the other, in future research efforts scholars may be better served by viewing each process as having more or less influence, depending upon situational and dispositional factors. That is, certain conditions may stimulate people to assign responsibility for their outcomes. Other circumstances may induce people to determine the nature of their relationships, such as how much to trust the other party.

Future researchers should explore the antecedents of these sensemaking processes. The conditions that elicit people's needs to assess their own and the other party's responsibility for their outcomes should help specify (1) when procedural fairness and outcome favorability will interact and (2) the form of the interactive relationship. For example, research on attributional instigation (the study of when people ask why) has shown that the importance and unexpectedness of outcomes influence the extent to which people are motivated to assign responsibility for their outcomes (e.g., Wong & Weiner, 1981). The more outcomes are important or unexpected, the more people will be likely to try to understand why they occurred (Brockner, DeWitt, Grover, & Reed, 1990; Van den Bos et al., 1999). This reasoning suggests that the importance or unexpectedness of the outcomes may moderate the interactive relationships between procedural fairness and outcome favorability. When the outcome is more important or more unexpected, people should be more likely to engage in the process of trying to determine how much they and/or the other party were responsible for their outcomes. Thus, when outcomes are more important or more unexpected, high procedural fairness may be especially likely to (1) reduce the effect of outcome favorability on people's support for decisions, for decision makers, or for organizations and (2) heighten the effect of outcome favorability on their self-evaluations.

A different set of conditions may influence people's tendencies to make inferences about the nature of their relationships with their exchange partner, such as how much to trust their partner. The process of making relational inferences should be more salient when people's social orientation stresses their interdependence on (rather than independence from) others. When people have more of an interdependent orientation, high procedural fairness also may be especially likely to reduce the impact of outcome favorability on their support for decisions, for decision makers, or for organizations. (Unlike in the preceding paragraph, however, the mediating factor may not be the extent to which they perceive their exchange partner as responsible for their outcomes but, rather, the extent to which they view their exchange partner as trustworthy.) Results consistent with this reasoning already have been obtained in studies evaluating the moderating impact of cross-cultural differences in interdependent versus independent self-construal on the interactive relationship between procedural fairness and outcome favorability (Brockner et al., 2000).

Note, however, that national culture is only one of many factors that may serve as a proxy for the tendency to maintain more of an interdependent than independent orientation toward others. For example, gender also may be a relevant factor (with women expected to be more interdependent/less independent than men), as might individual-difference psychological variables, such as the need for affiliation (McClelland, 1961) or interpersonal orientation (Swap & Rubin, 1983). In addition to these individual-difference variables, situational factors may influence people's interdependent and independent orientations toward others. For example, conditions that promote high group cohesion, such as the presence of a common threat or enemy (Janis, 1982) or the anticipation of future interaction, could enhance people's sense of interdependence toward fellow group members.

Evidence that having more of an interdependent orientation makes it more likely for high procedural fairness to reduce the effect of outcome favorability is provided by recent studies conducted by Kwong and Leung (2000). The authors examined people's reactions to several exchange partners (a person with whom they had had a dispute, in Study 1, and their employers, who had just instituted a salary freeze or cut, in Study 2). In addition to measuring procedural fairness and outcome favorability, Kwong and Leung assessed participants' perceptions of the closeness of their prior relationship with the exchange partner. The perceived closeness of the prior relationship is a likely proxy for interdependence: the greater the closeness, the greater the interdependence. The dependent variable in Study 1 was how happy participants were with the resolution of the dispute, and in Study 2 it consisted of employees' work effort and turnover intention. The results of both studies showed that the closeness of the prior relationship moderated the interactive relationship between procedural fairness and outcome favorability. That is, the tendency for high procedural fairness to reduce the effect of outcome favorability was stronger when people described their prior relationship as close rather than distant.

### Moderating Influences Other Than the Nature of the Dependent Variable

Whereas previous research clearly has shown that the nature of the dependent variable dictates whether high procedural fairness will reduce versus heighten the impact of outcome favorability, future research should evaluate whether other factors may moderate the nature of the interactive relationship between procedural fairness and outcome favorability. For one thing, people's support for decisions/decision makers/organizations, on the one hand, and their evaluations of the self, on the other, may be related. For example, the latter sometimes may depend upon the former. Social identity theory suggests that people with negative appraisals of their social systems may evaluate themselves more harshly because of their choice to be a part of, or remain in, such a system (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

In a related vein, some of the work attitudes and behaviors that have served as dependent variables in past research may reflect people's support for decisions/decision makers/organizations *and* their evaluations of themselves. For example, in several studies the dependent variable consisted of people's feelings about the outcomes of a decision process (Van den Bos et al., 1999: Experiment 1) or their willingness to protest a decision (Van den Bos et al., 1999: Experiment 3). On the one hand, these measures seem to tap people's degree of support for the decisions. Lower support for the decision should manifest itself in more negative feelings about the outcomes of a decision process and more of a desire to protest the decision. On the other hand, these measures may be influenced by people's self-evaluations. The more people feel badly about themselves as a result of a decision, the more likely they will be to have negative feelings about the outcomes of the decision process and the more willing they should be to protest the decision.

If certain dependent variables have the potential to reflect people's support for decisions/decision makers/organizations as well as their evaluations of themselves, then the form of the interactive relationship between procedural fairness and outcome favorability should depend upon the relative salience of the various sensemaking processes elicited by procedural fairness information. When the salient sensemaking process is (1) to evaluate the extent to which the exchange partner is responsible for one's outcomes or (2) to determine the nature of the relationship—in particular, how much to trust the exchange partner—the "support" aspect of the dependent variable may be emphasized in people's minds. If so, high procedural fairness may be expected to reduce the influence of outcome favorability. However, when the salient concern is to evaluate one's personal level of responsibility for one's outcomes, then the "self-evaluative" aspect of the dependent variable may be emphasized. If so, high procedural fairness may be expected to heighten the influence of outcome favorability.

One way to test the above reasoning is to examine the form of the interactive relationship between procedural fairness and outcome favorability under different conditions, in which the salience of the various sensemaking concerns varies. Previously, we considered various antecedents of the different sensemaking processes elicited by procedural fairness information. Thus, factors that heightened people's concerns for making inferences about how much to trust their exchange partners were expected to strengthen the interaction effect in which high procedural fairness reduced the effect of outcome favorability on people's support. Furthermore, factors that heightened people's concerns for determining their level of personal responsibility for their outcomes were expected to magnify the interaction effect in which high procedural fairness heightened the effect of outcome favorability on self-evaluations.

An additional hypothesis may now be set forth: for dependent variables having the potential to reflect people's support for decisions/decision makers/organizations, *as well as* their self-evaluations, the form of the interaction between procedural fairness and outcome favorability will depend upon the relative salience of the various sensemaking processes. The results of the recent study by Van den Bos et al. (1999: Experiment 3) are consistent with this hypothesis.

In this study all participants received unfavorable outcomes (negative feedback about how well they had performed on a task). Half were told that the procedures used to generate the feedback were fair, whereas the remaining half were told that the procedures were unfair. Moreover, self-evaluative concerns were varied; some participants were given instructions strongly emphasizing that their performance would be evaluated, whereas others were given instructions that made little mention of the fact that their performance would be evaluated. The dependent variable consisted of their desire to protest the negative feedback that they had received.

Van den Bos et al. hypothesized that the strong self-evaluative context would make salient people's need to determine the extent to which they were personally responsible for their feedback. Consistent with this reasoning, they found that the positive relationship between procedural fairness and the tendency to make personal attributions for unfavorable outcomes was heightened even further when self-evaluative concerns were relatively high. Moreover, procedural fairness interacted with the self-evaluative nature of the context to influence participants' desire to protest their feedback. Greater procedural fairness led to more of a desire to protest the feedback only when self-evaluative concerns were high. Although the dependent variable seems to reflect people's support for the decision, it may well have been influenced by how people were feeling about themselves. How people were feeling about themselves, in turn, was influenced by the extent to which they viewed themselves as personally responsible for their (unfavorable) outcomes.

### Toward Greater Specificity of the Interaction Effect on Measures of Self-Evaluation

Future research also needs to specify further the nature of the interactive effect of procedural fairness and outcome favorability on people's self-evaluations. As suggested throughout, high procedural fairness typically heightens the effect of outcome favorability on self-evaluations. To state the interaction effect differently, the relationship between procedural fairness and self-evaluations is significantly more positive when outcomes are favorable rather than unfavorable. In spite of these commonalities, the nature of the interaction effect has not been entirely consistent across studies. Specifically, when outcomes are unfavorable, the absolute (not relative) relationship between procedural fairness and self-evaluations has varied across studies. In some instances procedural fairness is significantly *inversely* related to self-evaluations (Brockner et al., 2001; Schroth & Shah, 2000). However, on other occasions the relationship between procedural fairness and self-evaluations is not significant when outcomes are unfavorable (Brockner et al., 2001).

Put differently, the positive relationship between procedural fairness and self-esteem when outcomes are favorable is more pervasive than the inverse relationship between the two when outcomes are unfavorable. In future research scholars need to examine why this is so. One possible explanation stems from the facts that (1) procedural fairness is positively related to people's tendencies to see themselves as personally responsible for their outcomes (e.g., Van den Bos et al., 1999), and (2) people's attributions of responsibility for their outcomes are influenced by self-serving motivations (Zuckerman, 1979). When outcomes are favorable, these processes are synchronous. The tendency to see oneself as more personally responsible for favorable outcomes when procedural fairness is relatively high enables people to experience self-enhancement. However, when outcomes are unfavorable, these processes are incongruent. On the one hand, greater procedural fairness leads people to see themselves as more personally responsible for their outcomes. On the other hand, the perception of greater personal responsibility for unfavorable outcomes engenders more negative self-evaluations.

Of course, the extent to which attributions of responsibility are self-serving may vary, depending upon situational or dispositional factors. For example, people who have suffered a blow to their self-esteem *prior to* receiving their current outcome (or people who are chronically low in self-esteem) may have more of a need to enhance or protect themselves (Jones, 1973). This reasoning suggests the following possibility, to be investigated in future research. Conditions that elicit more of a self-serving attributional bias should lead to greater asymmetry in the relationship between procedural fairness and self-evaluations in response to favorable outcomes versus unfavorable outcomes. That is, under conditions that prompt more of a self-serving attributional bias, the positive relationship between procedural fairness and self-evaluations when outcomes are favorable will be stronger than the inverse relationship between procedural fairness and self-evaluations when outcomes are unfavorable.

It is also practically important to delineate whether procedural fairness will be significantly inversely related to self-evaluations when outcomes are unfavorable. On the one hand, managers who are procedurally fair when making the "tough choices" (i.e., those yielding unfavorable outcomes) may elicit from their recipients greater support for the decision, for themselves, or for the organization. On the other hand, the same procedural fairness may cause recipients to feel worse about themselves. Thus, when outcomes are unfavorable, procedural fairness simultaneously may be positively related to employees' support for decisions/decision makers/organizations and negatively related to employees' self-evaluations. By knowing when the latter relationship is significant, managers may be alerted to the possibility that good intentions on their part (being procedurally fair) may introduce some unwanted side effects (a reduction in employees' self-evaluations). If so, managers may need to take additional action to counteract the latter possibility, such as making an extra effort to treat people with dignity and respect (i.e., being interactionally fair) when implementing the unfavorable outcome (Bies, 1987).

Another way to help people deal with negative self-evaluations is to have them take part in activities that are inherently self-restorative. For example, self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988) implies that layoffs have an adverse effect on survivors' work attitudes and behaviors, in part by threatening survivors' self-integrity (Brockner & Lee, 1995). An important component of self-integrity threat is the experience of reduced self-evaluations. If so, then one way to offset the negative impact of layoffs on survivors is by having survivors engage in activities that are self-affirming. Recent research supports this proposition (Wiesenfeld, Brockner, & Martin, 1999). In this study the negative effect of a layoff on people's self-evaluations was eliminated when participants subsequently were encouraged to contemplate values that were personally meaningful to them. Another recent study (Spreitzer & Mishra, 2000) shows that the negative effect of a layoff on survivors' organizational commitment was eliminated among the survivors who felt that their work subsequent to the layoff was empowering. Measures of empowerment included "I am confident about my ability to do my job" and "My impact on what happens in my department is large." It is not much of a stretch to suggest that greater empowerment elicited more positive self-evaluations.

Of course, the above reasoning assumes that managers who are procedurally fair when implementing unfavorable outcomes prefer to elicit employees' support for the system *without* simultaneously lowering employees' self-evaluations. However, as suggested earlier (see footnote 2), there may be circumstances in which it is necessary for managers to act in ways that reduce their employees' self-evaluations, at least temporarily. For example, suppose a manager were delivering an unfavorable performance appraisal to a subordinate, in which the manager wished to motivate the subordinate to change. In this instance, the manager should communicate how the procedures used to determine the appraisal were fair (e.g., based on highly accurate information [e.g., Leventhal et al., 1980]). High procedural fairness should lead the subordinate to take more personal responsibility for the unfavorable appraisal—that is, to take the appraisal more seriously. This, in turn, is *precisely* what the manager may wish to do, even if doing so is temporarily damaging to the recipient's self-evaluation.[4] Thus, when outcomes are unfavorable, future researchers need to do more than determine the conditions under which higher procedural fairness will engender lower employee self-evaluations. We also need to analyze the conditions under which the reduction in self-evaluations elicited by high procedural fairness is dysfunctional or functional to the employee, to the organization, or both.

### Additional Implications

In addition to accounting for the interactive relationships between procedural fairness and outcome favorability, the sensemaking processes discussed herein have important implications for organizational justice theory. In fairness heuristic theory (e.g., Lind, 2001) the sensemaking processes initiated by people's exposure to procedural fairness information are also considered. Perhaps because fairness heuristic theory emanated from a relational model of procedural fairness, its focus is mainly on how people use procedural fairness information to make inferences about the nature of their relationship with the other party. Fairness heuristic theory further indicates that people's relational inferences, in turn, influence important psychological constructs, such as their self-esteem or self-identity. While I agree that people can use procedural fairness information to make inferences about their relationship with the other party, which, in turn, may influence their self-esteem, the present analysis suggests that people *also* may use procedural fairness information to make inferences that affect their self-esteem via processes that are *independent* of relational considerations.

Consider the interactive relationship between procedural fairness and outcome favorability in which high procedural fairness heightens the effect of outcome favorability on self-evaluations. This interaction effect reflects people's use of procedural fairness information to make attributions about how much they were personally responsible for their outcomes. Fairness heuristic theory suggests that people use procedural fairness information to make inferences about their relationships with others; procedural fairness information informs people of others' trustworthiness and neutrality, as well as an individual's standing in the eyes of others.

While not disagreeing with this reasoning, I believe that people's use of procedural fairness information to determine their personal responsibility for their outcomes *also* may be undertaken for nonrelational purposes. That is, like the relational theorists, I believe that people are vigilant about the implications of procedural fairness information for their self-worth. However, unlike the relational theorists, I do not believe that people rely only on the relational information suggested by the other party's procedural fairness to make judgments of their self-worth.

Consider a nonsocial, task performance situation in which relational concerns are minimal. Even when relational concerns are minimal, people still may wish to determine the extent to which they are personally responsible for their performance (outcomes). The more they see themselves as personally responsible for their outcomes, the better they will feel about themselves when their outcomes are favorable, and

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[4] I thank one of the reviewers for providing this example.

the worse they will feel about themselves when their outcomes are unfavorable.

In short, consistent with fairness heuristic theory, the present viewpoint suggests that people use procedural fairness information in ways that influence how they feel about themselves. However, unlike fairness heuristic theory, *the mediating process may not involve people's inferences about their relationship with another party.* Procedural fairness may moderate the effect of outcome favorability on people's self-evaluations simply because procedural fairness influences the extent to which people see themselves as personally responsible for their outcomes (Mark & Folger, 1984; Van den Bos et al., 1999).

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Many studies previously reviewed (Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996) showed that procedural fairness and outcome favorability interact to influence people's support for decisions, for decision makers, or for organizations such that high procedural fairness reduces the impact of outcome favorability. Conceptual and empirical work conducted subsequent to the presentation of this oft-replicated interaction effect help to explain when and why it occurs (Brockner et al., 1997; Folger & Cropanzano, 1998; Lind, 2001; Van den Bos et al., 1998). Although this interaction effect has been found on numerous occasions, it now may be viewed as part of a larger story, in which high procedural fairness also may heighten the influence of outcome favorability on self-evaluations. By focusing on the multiple sense-making processes elicited by procedural fairness information, I have attempted to reconcile what may at first appear to be conflicting findings. Furthermore, suggested avenues for future research promise to build even further on the theoretical and practical implications of the present analysis.

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