Employee Prioritization or Exploitation?

What Extravagant Perks Say About Organizational Culture in the Modern Workplace

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Looking at novel perks offered by technology companies, we examined the role they play as signals of organizational culture and how this may impact the justification of employee exploitation and mistreatment from a system justification theoretical perspective. To investigate this, we introduced a sample comprising of 291 university students (83.3% Female, M_{age} = 19.35, SD_{age} = 2.38) to a fictitious software firm and one of its employees through promotional media and a series of vignettes. Measures of exploitation justification, interpersonal mistreatment justification, and expectations of perfectionism were taken from participants in two conditions, differentiated by the presence of novel perks offered by the organization. Results from a series of student's t-tests provided no causal evidence to suggest the presence of extravagant perks leads to greater justification of exploitation, mistreatment, or unfair expectations. However, the correlational analysis revealed that the belief that a company is a fun place to work is positively linked to the perceived amount of perks offered and with all key outcomes. These findings suggest that when a person thinks a company is more fun to work at, they are more likely to justify unfair treatment of employees within that company. Further research will need to improve manipulations of perceived perks and fine-tune measures of perceived culture. This contributes to the body of research on non-monetary benefits and provides insight into the complex relationship between modern human resource policies and employee wellbeing in a time where the modern workplace is rapidly changing.

Workplace Modernization

When asked to imagine a prototypical office building from even a few years ago, it's a safe bet that your mind will conjure up an image of grey walls encompassing neatly lined cubicles, each hosting a quiet figure hunched over a computer. Within the last few decades, these grey walls have been swapped for energizing vibrant colours or removed altogether. The drab cubical of the past has been replaced with bean bags, sofas and communal desks available for anyone to come set up their work-provided laptops.

Silicon Valley has proudly carried the torch as vanguards of this new, ideal office culture. Tech giants and start-ups alike lay clustered within Santa Clara Valley. Each year they attract thousands of young computer science graduates and fight to snatch up the cream of the crop. Top talent is enticed with free meal options (Schneider, 2019) and onsite amenities such as laundry services, car maintenance (Nvidia, 2021), and fully equipped gyms (Employee Benefits Details, 2020a). The typical workplace now offers flexible working hours (Employee Benefits Details, 2020b) for employees to come and go as they please from offices designed around fun and collaboration.

The modern technology company has sold itself as a paradise for young, passionate workers, but have these modern perks translated to happier employees? There isn't a clear-cut answer. While information technology companies frequently top the lists of Fortune 100 best companies to work at (Fortune, 2021), the treatment of technology employees has gained attention in the media and academia for the exploitation that has run rampant due to a work culture of extreme hours. In 2006, Dyer-Witherford and Peuter presented a critical analysis of what they titled an overwork epidemic. Since then, the prevalence and impact of overwork have been quantified in several large-scale surveys of employees from technology companies in the

United States and Canada. These results have consistently demonstrated the substantial impact that this overwork culture has on employees: 8.6-hour average workdays (Jorge, 2012); 47 hour work weeks (Saad, 2014); reports of burnout (McCarthy, 2018); or 20% of the sample working overtime at least once or twice a week (Stack Overflow, 2021). The fact that overtime remains commonplace is a point of particular concern as technology workers are now exempt from overtime pay, daily or weekly limits on work hours or mandatory rest periods in both Canada (British Columbia Employment Standards, 2020) and the United States (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019). While the policies and perks implemented by these companies suggest a strong desire to create a fun and inspiring workspace for employees, the outlook on employee workload and mental health begs the question of whether this modernization has contributed to a culture of overwork and exploitation. In the present research, we test the idea that the extravagant perks and amenities prevalent in modern tech companies help employees and observers rationalize instances of exploitation and overwork.

Organizational Culture and the Competing Values Framework

Organizational culture encompasses the shared beliefs, values, assumptions and definitions of character held by members of an organization which lead to the norms and patterns of behaviour that develop (Cameron & Quinn, 2011, Johns & Saks, 2019). It provides members with the unspoken guidelines for how to be accepted by the organization. The Competing Values Framework is a theoretical framework for diagnosing organizational culture and evaluating organizational effectiveness (Quinn, Rohrbaugh, 1983). Throughout the past 40 years, it has become one of the predominantly used models of organizational culture. It has heavily influenced research into the diagnosis and intentional change of culture within an organization (Yu & Wu, 2009). Despite being developed in a North American context, it has been studied

across the globe and found to maintain its validity in countries such as China and Australia (Yu & Wu, 2009, Lamond, 2003). The model itself consists of two dimensions that distinguish the criteria an organization uses to determine its effectiveness. The first relates to how an organization values flexibility versus stability. On one end of the spectrum, there are versatile and pliable organizations that consider themselves effective because they can change and adapt quickly. On the other end are those who value steadiness and durability; they are viewed as effective if they remain stable, predictable and mechanistic over time. The second dimension differentiates organizations based on their internal or external orientation. Organizations that put a greater emphasis on internal orientation place the most value on integration and unity. They focus inwards on their members and strongly value organizational cohesion. Organizations with external orientation, on the other hand, focus outwards. They prioritize their energy on interacting with customers or competing with their competitors and standing out in their industry (Cameron & Quinn, 2011).

The two dimensions of the Competing Values Framework come together to form four quadrants that represent classifications of organizational cultures defined by their values. The four cultures are briefly described as follows (Cameron & Quinn, 2011, Yu & Wu, 2009): Clan culture is both internally focused and flexible. It prioritizes the shared goals and long-term benefit of its members. To do so, it utilizes rich member interaction and aims to act as an extended family. Adhocracy culture shares the flexibility of a clan culture but focuses outward on the market. An organization with an adhocracy culture strives to differentiate itself from the competition and keep ahead. It is characterized by a creative and dynamic workplace that encourages risk-taking amongst members for the sake of creativity and innovation. Market cultures exist at the intersection of external focus and the prioritization of stability and control.

They share the competitive and productive nature of an adhocracy but prioritize acquiring and maintaining a secure customer base and product line instead of innovating and seeking new trends or markets. Lastly, Hierarchies put emphasis on a clear organizational structure with defined responsibilities for each member. The value here is placed on long-term stability and predictability.

Organizational Culture in the High Technology Firms

The technology industry in North America is enormous and incredibly influential economically and politically. Big tech is a term used to refer to the top tech employers in North America; almost all have their headquarters based in Silicon Valley. In 2020 the market cap (the aggregate market value) of Silicon Valley grew to $10.5 trillion, with Apple, Google, Facebook and Tesla making up 47% of that (Sumagaysay, 2021). The technology industry is dominated by a small number of large and powerful companies that compete fiercely to stay ahead of each other's rapid innovation. To do so, technology companies need to be flexible, creative and keenly, externally focused on their customer base and competition. This has been recognized in the literature, with adhocracy culture diagnosed as the most prevalent organizational culture in the industry (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). Market culture values are the second most prevalent given the cultures' external focus, which is shared by adhocracies (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). While flexibility and cohesion are important, the need to maintain an external focus takes precedence, which is why clan culture is typically less associated than adhocracy and market cultures with technology companies. Hierarchies are seen as an anti-culture to big tech, given the slow pace of change that accompanies bureaucracy (Cameron & Quinn, 2011).

These findings are consistent with the body of research on the management style of technology companies. For several years there has been a strong focus on the importance of organizational agility within tech companies. This is defined as an organization's ability to sense changes in their environment and responding to them efficiently and effectively (Felipe, Roldan, Leal-Rodriguez, 2017). It is seen as a critical antecedent for a company's performance and is best aligned with adhocracy culture (Felipe et al., 2017). While both clan cultures and adhocracy cultures provide the flexibility required for the agile workflow that has become so popular in tech companies, adhocracy cultures have shown a stronger positive relationship with organizational agility in a large sample of Spanish tech companies than clan culture (Felipe et al., 2017). These findings suggest that the deep focus on internal aspects of a clan culture leads to a relaxation of the external vigilance required for the rapid response to changes in the environment that is so crucial to organizational agility.

How Perks Signal and Influence Organizational Culture

The modern tech workplace offers its employees considerable perks. These novel perks extend beyond the typical offerings for an employee into amenities and programs that encourage employees to spend their working hours and their leisure time in the office. Collaborative workspaces , free restaurants and cafes are all on site to encourage the rich member interaction that remains a hallmark of clan cultures. Flexible working hours, free laundry services, smoothie bars and onsite gyms signal that the organization prioritizes the wellbeing and long-term benefit of its members. Games rooms and flex hours create a laid-back and flexible environment. These perks clearly align with each of the core values and goals prioritized in a clan culture and signal

to both observers and members that the organization holds a strong internal focus. They act as symbols of an organization's desire to treat their employees like family (Sun, 2016).

While information about perks offered by technology companies shapes how observers perceive them, it also works to shape the organizational culture within by creating norms. Norms are the social patterns within a group that govern the behaviour of its members and influence what behaviour members approve or disapprove of (Morris, Hong, Chiu & Liu, 2015). Information that describes the behaviour of members within a group is called a descriptive norm, and it has been shown to have a powerful influence on the behaviour of new members (Cialdini, 2007). When organizations put these perks in place, they establish norms for new employees to follow. The presence of pubs and gyms at work could lead to norms of employees grabbing dinner after work or slipping in a gym break throughout the day. This can be a very positive thing when the norms result in healthy behaviours; however, there have been concerns raised over some of the potentially unhealthy behaviours that may develop. One such concern is that bringing these facilities into the workplace has effectively eliminated the need for employees to leave the building and actively encourages long workdays (Lyons, 2019). When a gym is in the office, this reduces the need to go elsewhere to exercise. On-site pubs and cafes may prompt employees to stay at work for dinner with friends, and then work for a few more hours afterwards since they are already in the building. While organizations may seek to use these amenities to promote a fun and engaging workplace, they have the added effect of keeping work in sight and in mind for their employees from sunrise to well after sunset.

It is possible that, in addition to shaping norms of staying at the office, perks play another role in pushing employees to meet unhealthy expectations. The norm of reciprocity is a principle

of human behaviour where, when someone is given something, they want to repay the giver (Zlatev & Rogers, 2020). The perks made available to employees act as a supposed unconditional gift that they have the option of not using. Then, when leadership within an organization lays out its goals and makes requests of their employees, this evokes a novel case of reciprocity called returnable reciprocity. Returnable reciprocity is when the gift an individual receives can be returned or not used, thus removing the initial benefit to the recipient (Zlatev & Rogers, 2020). While it may seem that the option to return a gift would negate the desire to return the favour, research has found that the use of returnable gifts actually results in greater compliance with reciprocity norms by increasing the motivation to return the favour. Gyms, games rooms and flexible working hours can all be made available to an employee who then knows they have the option available to use or ignore them. This, in theory, would result in greater social pressure being placed on employees to adjust their behaviour to meet the demands of their leadership at work, such as working 50 to 70+ hours a week during the crunch periods before product launches (International Game Developers Association, 2017).

These perks are often seen by the employees and outside observers as signals of a cool and laid-back work culture. They are then used to form initial perceptions of the organization as one who is fun and cares about its employees as though they are family. This positive perception of the organization remains in the mind of outside observers. Meanwhile, the presence of these perks prompts the development of norms within the organizations. These may encourage positive outcomes such as social interaction and good health habits but could also result in normative behaviour such as working long hours or feeling obligated to meet the demands of leadership whether those demands are reasonable or not. System justification theory would suggest that observers will be more likely to justify instances of employee exploitation or mistreatment

should they observe this within an organization for which they based their initial perception on the presence of extravagant perks (Jost, Banaji & Nosek, 2004).

System Justification

System justification is the social and psychological tendency to defend the status quo (Friesen, Laurin, Shepherd, Gaucher & Kay, 2018). System Justification theory states that when a person is exposed to a system or social order, they use the first evidence provided to establish their perception of the system and from then on want to feel good about it (Friesen et al., 2018). They then aim to bolster the status quo and defend the system in the face of any threat to their perception (Friesen et al., 2018). This desire to defend the system may even override a desire to protect individual and collective interests (Jost et al., 2004).

A series of studies by Kim, Campbell, Shepherd and Kay (2019) looked at the tendency to justify the exploitation of employees in industries where they are expected to be driven by a passion for their work. They found that when a fictitious employee was presumed to be passionate about their work, observers consider unfair treatment towards the employee as more legitimate. Two mechanisms behind this phenomenon were identified. First, there was an assumption that passionate workers would want to do extra work if given a chance simply because they were passionate. Second, there was an underlying belief that work was its own reward to passionate workers and thus didn't require further compensation. This set of studies involved the observer's understanding of its employee's passion for their work, but this same system of justifying unfair treatment may apply to a perception of employees being in a caring workplace that makes working fun (Kim et al., 2019). Both involve some mechanism by which an observer may consider an employee to be compensated for their work in ways that justify

unfair treatment. Because these instances get justified, they don't get corrected, and issues within the industry persist.

The term justified reflects the process an observer undergoes while evaluating a social interaction based on the outcome for each party and determining whether or not they consider the situation's outcome fair and just (Lind & Tyler, 1988). This is a very subjective process. The group value model of procedural justice suggests that many of our attitudes and beliefs about what is fair are instilled through socialization. In a self-interest model of procedural justice, people prioritize maximizing personal gain project this priority onto both parties of the observed interaction (Lind & Tyler, 1988). Based on the understanding that both models carry merit, it is likely that our understanding of fairness is influenced both by our social experiences as well as our understanding of what each party got out of the interaction. This process is also heavily influenced by the party's perception of the procedures within the organization involved. Should the procedures for determining how employees are treated seem standardized, they are perceived as more fair (Kaiser, Major, Jurcevic, Dover, Brady & Shapiro, 2013). This perception has also been shown to be vulnerable to the effect of structures within the organization that signal an illusory sense of fairness (Kaiser et al., 2013). It stands to reason that signals of a caring organizational culture may have similar influences on an individual's perception of procedural fairness within an organization.

Additionally, the decision may lean in favour of an organization (or representative of such) should the situation involve unfair treatment towards a vulnerable member of the system. This comes from an interaction between our motivation to rationalize the status quo (as a product of system justification) and a desire to re-establish a sense of order in the face of uncertainty as declared by Compensatory Control Theory (Kay, Whitson, Gaucher & Galinsky, 2009). When

the member is treated unfairly, this acts as a threat to the legitimacy of that system. While it was previously discussed that system justification may lead to a bolstering of the positive perception of the organization, there may be another effect. When an instance of injustice is observed, people lean on compensatory beliefs that restore their sense of justice. These beliefs are used to find evidence that could suggest the victim is being compensated in some other way that makes up for the unfair treatment (Kay, Jost, Mandisodza, Sherman, Petrocelli & Johnson, 2007). This would suggest that when an observer is asked to evaluate the fairness of a situation where an employee is being treated unfairly within an company they have a positive perception of, they will seek out alternative interpretations of the event to suggest that the employee's treatment is either fair or at least made up for in other ways.

Exploitation in the Technology Firms

Fairness-based accounts of exploitation state that exploitation occurs when an individual is insufficiently compensated for the work they are asked to perform (Zwolinski, 2012). The concept of exploitation itself is subjective in that multiple observers of an event could have varying beliefs as to whether the treatment of a worker was exploitative or not depending on their understanding of the term, interpretation of event and belief of what is fair (Shelby, 2002). As such, an argument could be made that employees are not being exploited when being asked to work more hours either directly or indirectly (through work objectives and deadlines that require more hours of work to be completed on time), with the operative word being 'asked,' if an employee is simply asked to carry out this behaviour, then would that not imply they have the option of saying no? In the context of a workplace, there is an inevitable power imbalance between the employee and the organization's representative (likely a team lead or manager) who is making the request. This power imbalance and the multitude of potential negative outcomes

that an employee may worry about effectively give a request the same psychological weight as an order (Kim et al., 2019). The same could be said for the expectation placed on employees to shoulder mistreatment from their superiors. Should they fear negative repercussions, this creates a psychological barrier to raising their complaints or seeking fair treatment. To ensure that our study captures the aspects of a fairness-based act of exploitation, we followed Kim et al.'s (2019) method of clearly communicating to participants that our employee in question was not offered extra compensation for any of the additional work or roles he was asked to take on.

Hypotheses

System justification theory suggests that when someone sees an organization that offers extravagant perks, they use this information to form a positive perception of the organization as one that is fun, laid-back and prioritizes employee wellbeing. After that perception is formed, they will be strongly motivated to defend it in the face of contradictory evidence. In the context of Silicon Valley, the issues of overwork and employee exploitation are constructs that challenge the initial image of the company. When encountered, the observer will justify what they saw in order to protect their positive perception of the organization. Should this be the case, it could help explain why these issues of unfairly compensated overtime and exploitation remain despite the increasing number of calls to address the problem (Gewirtz, 2017, Griffith, 2019). To investigate the impact of the presence of novel perks within an organization on the bolstering of positive perceptions of tech organizations in the face of conflicting information, we plan to explore the following three hypotheses. First, observers who encounter an organization with the novel perks seen in Silicon Valley will rate instances of exploitation as more justified than participants who encounter a version of the organization without novel perks. Our second

hypothesis is that participants who encounter the organization with novel perks will rate instances of mistreatment as more justified than participants who encounter the version of the organization without novel perks. Lastly, we predict that participants who encounter the organization with novel perks will consider higher expectations than industry norms as more acceptable than participants who encounter the organization without novel perks.

Methods

Sample

Participants were 291 (M_{age} = 19.35, SD_{age} = 2.38) undergraduate students enrolled at Brock University. The sample was recruited on Brock's online platform, SONA, and compensated with class credit. Five participants were excluded from the analyses after failing one or more of the attention check measures. An additional twelve participants were excluded for leaving the majority of the survey blank, and one participant was excluded for not answering either item in the manipulation check. Thus, only 291 participants were included in the reported analyses. Of the remaining sample, 67% were under the age of 20, with only 2.4% over the age of 25. The vast majority of the sample was female (83.8%), with one non-binary participant and the remainder identifying as male (15.8%). The majority also identified as White/Caucasian/European (64.6%), Asian (12.7%) or Black/African-American (6.5%). Participants were asked which department of Brock they belonged to, and the sample mostly studied Social Sciences (35.2%), Health Sciences (29.3%) and Education (22.4%). It is of note that only 5.1% of the sample consisted of students studying Mathematics and Science.

Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned into one of two conditions that differed based on the presence of the extravagant perks common for tech companies in the experimental condition and

lack thereof in the control condition. All participants encountered the same initial introduction that described a fictitious employee named John who worked as a software developer at a company called CCM. Next, participants in the control condition were shown an online brochure displaying the employee benefits available to members within CCM. These can be seen in Appendix A. They describe a generic set of benefits, including prescription drug coverage, vision and dental coverage, and mental health benefits. Members of the experimental condition were provided with an online brochure containing a set of benefits that included the following perks: several free meal options such as onsite cafes, a staff games room, an onsite gym, and an employee nap room. This brochure can also be seen in Appendix A. Participants in both conditions then completed the set of measures for our three key dependent variables as well as a variety of exploratory measures.

Key Outcome Measures

Exploitation Justification. After learning about CCM, participants completed two items designed to measure the degree to which they justified exploitative behaviour being carried out towards John. The inter-item correlation was significant but not sufficient for aggregation (r = 0.28, $p < .001$).

Both items presented the participant with a vignette describing an instance of exploitation from leadership at CCM before asking them to rate, on a 7-point Likert scale from "1" (*strongly disagree)* to "7" *(strongly agree*), the degree to which they believed the leader's behaviour was reasonable (e.g., "A manager at CCM is sick, and no one from management can fill in. John is asked to take over the manager's duties until they come back so things can continue moving smoothly." "CCM is behaving reasonably in asking John to take over these duties temporarily without compensation.") Both items can be seen in full in Appendix B.

Expectations of Perfectionism. Two items were then used to assess the degree to which participants supported employees of CCM being held standards of perfectionism. These were not significantly correlated (r = -.01, p = 0.92). As such, they were also analyzed independently instead of being aggregated into an overall score.

As with the items assessing exploitation justification and mistreatment justification, vignettes describing an instance of a leader at CCM exhibiting expectations of perfectionism towards employees were shown to participants. For example, the following vignette was presented in item 1 of the measure:

> John finds that every time he submits work, it is sent back for revisions. Even when his code works, it will be sent back and not considered organized or formatted well enough. John goes in to talk with his team lead and asks why his work is never good enough when it has always been acceptable at his previous places of work. John's team lead tells him that the standard for employees is higher at CCM than at other companies. While he understands John's frustration and thinks John is a great employee, he will need to raise his standards even more if he wants to fit in here.

Next, participants were presented with the statement "it is fair that CCM holds its employee's to higher standards than the rest of the industry," and asked to rate on a 7-point Likert scale from "1" (*strongly disagree)* to "7" *(strongly agree*) how strongly they agreed. Both items can be seen in full in Appendix B.

Mistreatment Justification. The last key outcome to be assessed was the degree to which participants justified observed instances of mistreatment from CCM's leadership towards John. As with the items measuring exploitation justification, the two items measuring

mistreatment justification were significantly correlated ($r = 0.33$, $p < .001$) but analyzed independently due to the correlation only being of medium size.

Both items presented the participant with a vignette describing an instance of interpersonal mistreatment from leadership at CCM. One such question is as follows:

> John has been with CCM for several years and risen to the ranks of a senior developer with a team of junior developers working underneath him on an important project. Things are going well until the core software that CCM produces and distributes goes down. The error is quickly found and corrected, but CCM still received several customer complaints while the bug was being fixed. After it comes to light that John was the one who wrote the code that caused the error, he is verbally reprimanded then sent back to work. However, this error embarrassed John's team lead, and they start to only give John tasks suitable for a newly hired junior developer to make a point.

After reading this vignette, participants were then presented with the following statement: "The team leader's response to John's error is understandable" and asked to rate, on a 7-point Likert scale from "1" (*strongly disagree)* to "7" *(strongly agree*), the degree to which agreed with it. Both items can be seen in full in Appendix B.

Manipulation Check. To assess the effectiveness of our manipulation, participants completed two items designed to measure the degree to which they perceived CCM to be providing its employees with perks. The first item asked participants to agree to the following statement on a 7-point Likert scale from "1" (*strongly disagree)* to "7" *(strongly agree*): "From the description of CCM, I got the sense that they provide employees with considerable perks." An additional item measured the degree to which participants believed CCM was a fun place to work. The item presented the statement, "CCM seems like a fun place to work." Participants

were asked to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with that statement on a 7-point Likert scale from "1" (*strongly disagree)* to "7" *(strongly agree*). This was analyzed separately from the manipulation check measure.

Attention Check. To ensure that participants were attentive, they were asked to answer two questions about the content they encountered. The first question they were asked was, "what was the name of the employee that you read about at the start of the study?" To this, they were asked to choose between "Jane," "John," "Mark," and "Mary," with John being the correct answer. They were then asked a section question: "What was the name of the company you read about at the start of the study?" There were also four options to choose from, which were "CCM," "GGC," "AOM," and "SPS." "CCM" was the correct answer. If a participant failed to answer either question correctly, they were excluded from the study. Both items can be seen in Appendix B. All other exploratory items can be seen in Appendix C.

Results

Manipulation check

Our first step was testing whether or not our manipulation was successful. To test this, a student's t-test was performed on the quantitative measure of participants' perception of perks at CCM. On average, participants in the experimental condition had the sense that CCM provided their employees with a similar amount of perks (M = 4.36, SD = 1.58) to those in the control condition (M = 4.23, SD = 1.65). This difference was not significant, $t(288) = -0.64$, p =.52, 95% *CI* [-0.49, 0.25], d = -0.08, see Figure D1). This analysis suggested that the manipulation was not successful.

Next, we explored participants' perceptions of whether CCM's had a fun work culture. A students t-test revealed that participants in the experimental condition (M = 2.69, SD = 1.50)

agreed significantly more with the statement that CCM was a fun place to work than participants within the control condition (M = 2.29, SD = 1.24), (t(280) = -2.49, p < .05 , 95% CI [-0.72, -0.08], d = -0.29, see Table D2).

Exploitation justification

Despite the manipulation having no significant effect, we still proceeded with testing for differences between conditions in the three dependent variables central to our hypotheses. The first factor to be tested was exploitation justification. Student's t-tests for both items showed that participants presented with a scenario in which the employer provided additional perks did not justify more exploitation of a fictional employee than those presented with a scenario in which no additional perks were mentioned. There was no significant difference in participants justification of John being given more responsibilities for no extra compensation, (Control: M = 3.52, SD = 1.46, Experimental: M = 3.71, SD = 1.43, as seen in figure D2), (t(289) = 0.28, p =.27, 95% CI [-0.52, 0.14], d = -0.13). Additionally, participants in both conditions showed similar attitudes towards John being asked to take over his manager's duties without compensation while they are sick, (Control: M = 3.37, SD = 1,43, Experimental: M = 3.11, SD = 1.46, as seen in figure D3), (t(289) = 1.63, p =.10, 95% CI [-0.06, 0.61], d = 0.19).

Expectations of Perfectionism

Next, we tested for difference between conditions in the level of perfection expected from John. Similar to the justification of exploitation, participants in the experimental condition did not hold greater expectations than those in the control condition. Participants show similar levels of agreement that it was fair to expect John to exceed his defined job expectations to receive good performance reviews (Control: M = 3.34, SD = 1.66, Experimental: M = 3.28, SD = 1.65, as

seen in figure D4), ($t(289) = 0.33$, $p = 0.74$, 95% *CI* [-0.31, 0.44], $d = 0.04$). There was also no significant difference in how fair participants found it that CCM held its employees to higher standards than the rest of the industry (Control: $M = 4.26$, $SD = 1.49$, Experimental: $M = 4.47$, $SD = 1.41$), (as seen in figure D5, $t(288) = -1.24$, $p = 0.22$, 95% *CI* [-0.54, 0.12], $d = -0.15$).

Mistreatment Justification

The last of the key outcome variable to be tested was mistreatment justification. It showed similar results. Participants in the experimental condition did not show greater justification of mistreatment towards John than participants in the control condition. Participants of either condition responded similarly to an instance where John made an error and was unfairly punished by his supervisor (Control: $M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.43$, Experimental: $M = 2.74$, $SD = 1.33$, as seen in figure D6), ($t(287) = 0.63$, $p = 0.53$, 95% *CI* [-0.22, 0.42], $d = 0.07$. Similarly, there was no significant difference in the degree to which participants felt it was understandable for John's supervisor to openly scold John for refusing to cancel a long-planned vacation due to a work deadline (Control: $M = 2.23$, $SD = 1.36$, Experimental: $M = 2.25$, $SD = 1.52$, as seen in figure D7), ($t(286) = -0.15$, $p = 0.88$, 95% *CI* [-0.39, 0.31], $d = -0.02$).

Correlational analysis

After investigating the key outcome variables, we had established that our method of manipulating and/or measuring the perception of CCM's culture based on perks was ineffective. The first item of the manipulation measure had participants rate how strongly they agreed with the statement that CCM provided its employees with considerable perks 7-point Likert scale. While this did not differ between conditions, it did provide an individual measure of each participant's perception of perks that could be correlated with the perceptions of CCM and

attitudes towards John. In addition, the significant difference in how fun participants thought CCM was between conditions provided insight into how their perception of the organization's culture may have changed in response to the perks. With this in mind, a correlational analysis was performed on the quantitative manipulation check, perception of CCM as a fun workplace and the three key outcome variables. Relationships between the perceptions of perks and perception of CCM as a fun workplace may provide insight into the involvement of perks in forming perceptions of organizational culture. The correlational analysis of these two measures and our three key outcome variables can inform us as to whether the perception of CCM's culture is related to negative outcomes relating to the justification of unfair treatment towards employees despite the ineffective manipulation.

The only item that was significantly correlated with the belief that CCM offered considerable perks was the second item in the expectations of perfectionism measure ($r = .26$, $p < .001$). Interestingly, the opposite was seen when analyzing the relationship between perception of fun and all key outcomes. The more fun a participant considered CCM to be, the more likely they were to justify John being given more responsibilities for no extra compensation ($r = .20$, $p < .01$); John being asked to take over his manager's duties temporarily without compensation ($r = .25$, $p < .001$); John being unfairly punished after he made an error ($r = .12$, $p < .05$); John being openly scolded by his supervisor in front of peers for an unfair reason ($r = .32$, $p < .001$); and, John being expected to exceed his defined job expectations ($r = .20$, $p < .01$). All results can be seen in table D3.

Discussion

In this study, we set out to investigate the role extravagant perks, like employee gyms, play on the perception of an organization's culture and the response of observers when that

perception is threatened. The Competing Values Framework provided an understanding of the four styles of organizational culture, which are distinguished by an internal or external focus and a prioritization of flexibility or stability (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). Research suggested that adhocracy culture was the dominant culture in technology companies due to the need for rapid innovation and an external focus in an intensely competitive market (Felipe et al., 2017). The perks provided, however, signalled to observers that the companies prioritized an internal focus on their employees' wellbeing, which is more aligned with clan culture values (Sun, 2016). In addition to acting as signals, these perks act to shape the norms within the organization; however, the misalignment between these perks and the companies core needs may result in norms being shaped that are unhealthy to employees, such as working overtime for no compensation (Cialdini, 2007; Lyons, 2019). Another way that these perks may influence employee behaviour is by inciting reciprocity norms in that they act as a gift provided by the company, and it has been well-documented that people feel obligated to return such favours (Zlatev & Rogers, 2020) despite the fact that these perks are actually a non-monetary form of compensation they have already earned (Marshall, 2003).

Uncompensated extra work is exploitative (Zwolinski, 2012) and that, alongside unfair treatment (Kim et al., 2019), has been well documented in technology firms (International Game Developers Association, 2017; Jorge, 2012; McCarthy, 2018; Saad, 2014; Stack Overflow, 2021). Despite this, calls to address the issue are met with harsh critique as 50+ hour work weeks are rebranded as "hustle culture" or "rise and grind" (Gewirtz, 2017, Griffith, 2019). Two theories that may provide explanations for this are system justification and compensatory control theory. System justification theory would suggest that observers shape their perception of the companies using the extravagant perks they see as evidence that employees are cared for, and

work is fun (Friesen et al., 2018). Instances of exploitation or mistreatment of employees pose threats to their initial image of the organization, so they justify what they've seen (Jost et al., 2004). Compensatory Control theory informs us as to the mechanism by which this justification occurs. People rely on compensatory beliefs to restore their sense of justice and, as such, seek evidence to suggest that the unfair treatment they have observed is, in fact, fair or was made up for in another way (Kay et al., 2007; Kay et al., 2009). We predicted that the presence of extravagant perks within an organization would lead to an increase in justification from observers in the face of (H1) employee exploitation, (H2) mistreatment, and (H3) expectations of perfectionism.

Analysis of our manipulation checks revealed no significant difference between conditions, which strongly suggests that the manipulation itself was ineffective. As such, we cannot say anything causal about the impact of extravagant perks on the justification of exploitation, mistreatment or unfair expectations on employees. Correlational findings were much more promising. Additionally, the perception that CCM was a fun place to work was both significantly different between conditions and strongly correlated to both the perception that CCM offered many perks and the majority of items measuring the justification of unfair treatment or expectations put on John. The perception of CCM as a fun place aligns with a clan culture. This supports our overarching belief that when an organization is perceived as having a clan culture, observers are more likely to justify instances of unfair treatment within the organization and have higher expectations of the employees within the company.

This study had several limitations, but this was the second of a series of studies that will be performed as we break into this new area of research and try to develop new reliable and valid measures for both the independent variable and several of the dependent variables. The first and

most crucial limitation was the ineffectiveness of our manipulation. This meant we were unable to say anything conclusive about a causal relationship between any factors. This may have been because the delivery of our perk information through the brochure was too subtle. It could have also been because using vignettes, or small stories as measures for the outcomes was too subtle, open to interpretation, or lacked construct validity. A more direct approach could be used to make sure that participants notice and understand the presence of clan culture perks and the fact that CCM provides perks above the norm for North America. One such approach could be to state explicitly that CCM's approach is unique or present the information in the form of a news article discussing how unique and fun the organization seems.

In addition to the subtle manipulation, the delivery of our quantitative manipulation check may also have presented a limitation to the study in its potential lack of construct validity. The statement presented to participants was, "from the description of CCM, I got the sense that they provide employees with considerable perks." This statement does not specifically reference a belief that the perks indicate that CCM holds the values of clan culture; more so, it could be interpreted as a statement claiming that CCM offers a large volume of perks. Both the control condition and experimental condition presented participants with brochures describing benefits such as mental health benefits and dental; these could easily be considered considerable perks, especially when they haven't been primed with the understanding that certain companies provide much more than that (i.e. not educated on the types of perks made available in Silicon Valley). The validity of this measure could be improved by rewording it to focus on the perception of organizational culture that the perks evoke as opposed to just their presence. Items could ask participants how much they think CCM prioritizes its employees (to measure internal focus) and what the perks offered by CCM make them think of the company.

Next, the sample was not reflective of the intended population of working adults in the field of computer science. When compared to this population, our sample was primarily female, younger in age, and mostly educated in fields other than computer science or mathematics. This younger sample likely lacked career experience and, as such, may not have developed an understanding of norms for benefits and perks across industries. This could have influenced how they interpreted the information they were provided about CCM's perks and benefits, as it may not have been noteworthy or impactful. The sample may have also lacked exposure to clan organizational culture due to the lack of work experience. As such, participants might not have associated the presence of clan culture signals with the positive employee outcomes, such as reduced employee stress related to clan cultures. It would be good to test this on a sample that is more representative of the intended population. To do so, Mechanical Turk could be used to access employed adults, and Stack Overflow could be used to reach students and employees in computer science. It would be ideal to study managers to understand the implications of their perception of the organization on their attitudes towards the treatment of their subordinates.

Lastly, correlational studies could be used to further test relationships between clan culture signals and negative employee outcomes while an effective experimental manipulation is being developed. One such method could be to have participants diagnose a company for its organizational culture based on the Competing Values Framework before responding to the same set of outcome measures.

While the findings from this study were inconclusive, they did suggest an existing relationship between an individual's perception of an organization's culture in response to signals and their attitudes towards the treatment of an employee within that organization. These, and future findings, can inform organizations of the importance of clearly defining their culture.

Doing so can help them better meet the needs of their employees and address mental health issues in their workforce. These findings also add to the body of literature on organizational culture as it speaks to the impact of culture signalling. Should future studies show that misleading signals of culture do result in the justification of exploitation within an organization, this will provide crucial insight for policymakers and organizations fighting employee exploitation. The findings also contribute to the research on workplace perks as this has largely focused on the benefits of perks in the workplace while leaving a gap in the literature regarding potential negative outcomes. Regardless of intentionality, if negative outcomes are associated with certain benefits or amenities, it is best that management experts have a full picture that can inform their decisions while consulting with organizations and educating the next generation of business owners. Most importantly, this research may help inform the public on how to accurately identify the culture of a prospective workplace so they might better choose somewhere to work that will match their values and meet their needs.

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Appendix A

Materials

Introduction to CCM, seen by participants of both conditions.

"You are about to encounter information about a company called CCM, please read it over carefully because we will be asking you questions about it later."

"John works as a software developer for a San Francisco based tech company called CCM.

He lives close to the headquarters, with a 20-minute commute to work. John primarily works on developing software used by companies for managing inventory and employee records. John is a talented programmer, enjoys his job, and gets along with his colleagues.

CCM was founded in 2016 and employs close to 100 people. CCM pays John a standard salary for his position and location of residence.

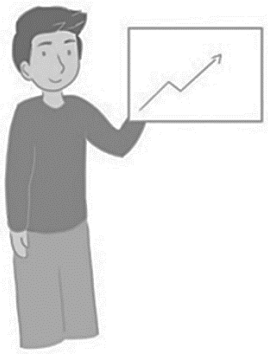
The following two pages briefly describe some of the perks and benefits offered to employees of CCM. Please take to time to look through both pages of this packet, it should only take a few minutes."

First page of promotional material displaying CCM perks, seen in both conditions.

What makes CCM a great place to work?

Discounted stock and product

Purchase company stock at a discounted price each quarter



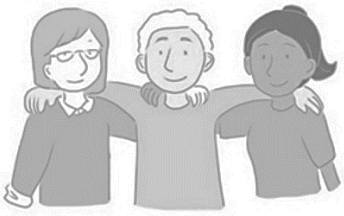
Disability Insurance

Short-term: Provides up to 26 weeks of full income continuation

Long-term: Provides 50% of pay, before-tax income

Vacation Pay

CCM offers a vacation plan based on years of service beginning with 3 weeks per 12 month period



CCM 401(k) Plus Plan

Choose from three ways to build your retirement fund as CCM matches the annual contribution automatically deducted from your income

Second page of promotional material displaying CCM perks, seen in control condition.

Additional coverage

Prescription Drug Benefits

CCM's benefits package provides coverage for both non-specialty and specialty prescription medication. You may obtain up to a 30-day supply of medications from preferred pharmacies or a 90-day supply from select pharmacy mail services.

Vision

CCM's vision plan covers annual eye exams and eyewear.

Dental

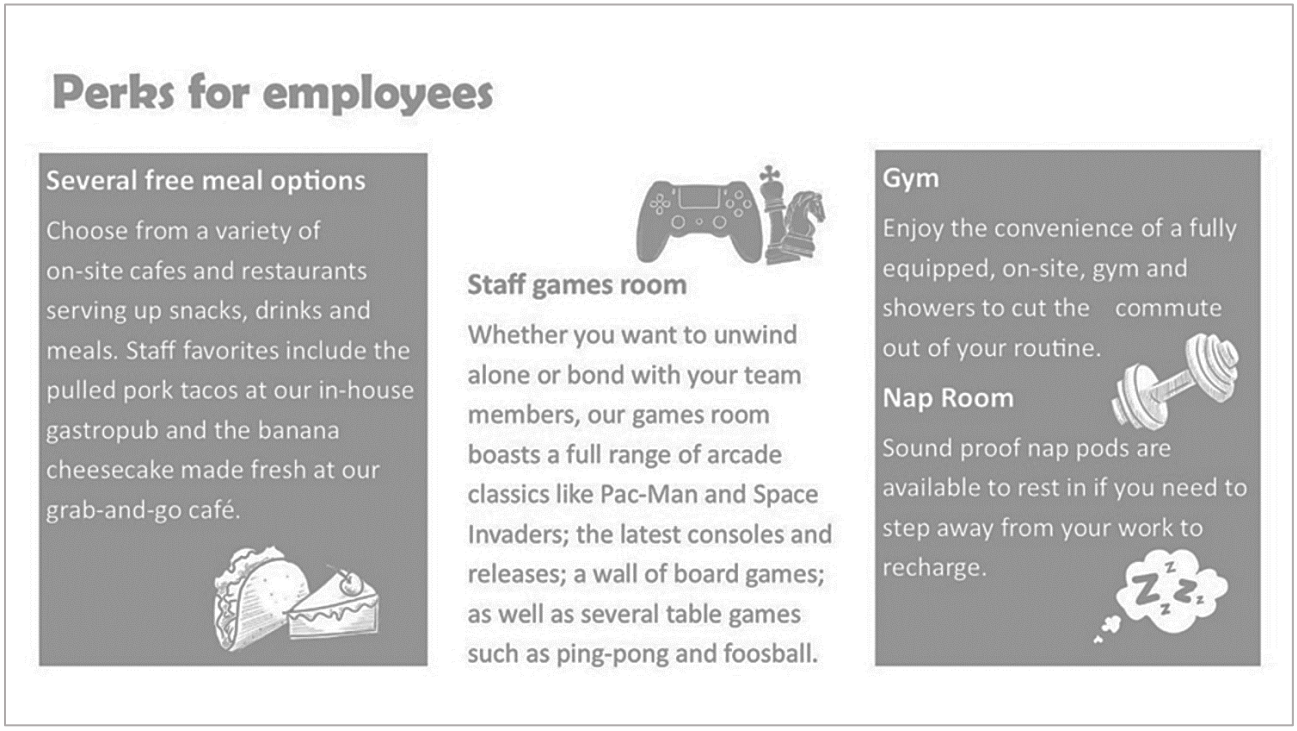
CCM's dental plan offers full coverage for preventative and diagnostic care as well as partial coverage for basic treatments such as fillings.

Mental Health Benefits

Full coverage: access to short-term counselling for a variety of life events

Partial reimbursement: a network of licensed psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers and long-term counselling services.

Second page of promotional material displaying CCM perks, seen in control condition.



Appendix B

Measures for Independent Variable and Key Outcomes

Exploitation Justification

(1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 7 = *Strongly Agree*)

Please indicate how reasonable you think CCM's actions are in the following contexts.

1. CCM is on a tight budget right now due to the economic recession. The organization needs to save money wherever they can. In response to this financial pressure, John's responsibilities increase without an offer of additional compensation.

   CCM is reasonable for not giving John a raise given the circumstances.
2. A manager at CCM is sick, and no one from management can fill in. John is asked to take over the manager's duties until they come back so things can continue moving smoothly.

   CCM is behaving reasonably in asking John to take over these duties temporarily without compensation.

Expectations of Perfectionism

(1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 7 = *Strongly Agree*)

1. After two months of working at CCM, John attends a scheduled performance review with this team lead. His lead congratulates John on meeting all of his deadlines successfully since joining the team. However, he then marks John's performance as slightly below expectations. When John asks why he received this review, his lead explains how there is

a culture amongst CCM employees of exceeding expectations. To stand out and receive positive reviews, John would need to think about taking on extra projects or submitting his work before their deadlines.

It is fair to expect John to go above and beyond his defined job expectations in order to receive positive performance reviews.

2. John finds that every time he submits work, it is sent back for revisions. Even when his code works, it will be sent back and not considered organized or formatted well enough. John goes in to talk with his team lead and asks why his work is never good enough when it has always been acceptable at his previous places of work. John's team lead tells him that the standard for employees is higher at CCM than at other companies. While he understands John's frustration and thinks John is a great employee, he will need to raise his standards even more if he wants to fit in here.

It is fair that CCM holds its employee's to higher standards than the rest of the industry.

Mistreatment Justification

(1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 7 = *Strongly Agree*)

Please read the following series of interactions between John and his colleagues or superiors at CCM before rating how much you agree with the behaviour exhibited by John's superiors.

1. John has been with CCM for several years and risen to the ranks of a senior developer with a team of junior developers working underneath him on an important project. Things are going well until the core software that CCM produces and distributes goes down. The

error is quickly found and corrected, but CCM still received several customer complaints while the bug was being fixed. After it comes to light that John was the one who wrote the code that caused the error, he is verbally reprimanded then sent back to work. However, this error embarrassed John's team lead, and they start to only give John tasks suitable for a newly hired junior developer to make a point.

The team lead's response to John's error is understandable

2. CCM has been struggling with a project, and everyone has been working day and night to make sure it gets completed by its deadline in 3 weeks. John booked the week before the project is due off several months prior, long before this deadline was set, to attend a family event. As his vacation draws closer, John's supervisor begins to ask John repeatedly if he can reschedule his vacation until after the deadline. When John refuses, his supervisor becomes upset with him. John's supervisor makes several remarks in front of others about how the team will suffer due to John's refusal to be a "team player." He brings up how his coworkers will be put under more stress because of John's decision.

It is understandable for John's team lead to be outwardly upset with John for refusing to reschedule his time off.

Manipulation Check

1. From the description of CCM, I got the sense that they provide employees with considerable perks. (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 7 = *Strongly Agree*)
2. Please briefly summarize your impression of CCM as a company.

Attention Check

1. In this survey you read a short description of a software developer and their place of work. Please briefly write about what you remember from that short description that appeared that the start of the study.
2. What was the name of the employee that you read about at the start of the study? (*Jane, John, Mark, Mary*)
3. What was the name of the company you read about at the start of the study? (*CCM, GGC, AOM, SPS)*

Appendix C

Measures for Exploratory Perceptions of CCM and Attitudes Towards John

Likelihood that John is Expected to Volunteer for Extra Work

(1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 7 = *Strongly Agree*)

Please indicate how reasonable you think CCM's actions are in the following contexts.

1. John has a project that needs to be completed by Monday, and it's Friday. To get the job done on time, he will need to work through the weekend. He mentions this to his manager, who simply reminds him of how important this project is and says to do whatever he needs to do.

   It is fair that John's manager expects him to work through the weekend for no extra pay to get his project done on time.

2. John finds himself needing to work more than 40 hours a week to keep up with his workload despite being an employee of average skill and time management. He goes to his manager to discuss how he feels that he is working more hours than he is compensated for. In response, his manager suggested a few techniques for getting more efficient and tells John that it's up to him to get the work done in however long it takes him.

   It is reasonable that John is expected to work over 40 hours if he is unable to get his work done quickly enough.

Belief that Work at CCM is a Reward in and of Itself

(1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 7 = *Strongly Agree*)

Please answer the following questions using the response options provided.

1. John's enjoyment of his work acts as handsome compensation at CCM.
2. CCM is providing John with opportunities to enjoy his work.

Belief that CCM Cares about its Employees Well Being

(1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 7 = *Strongly Agree*)

Please answer the following questions using the response options provided.

1. CCM seems like an organization that values John's wellbeing.

Belief that CCM is a Fun Place to Work

(1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 7 = *Strongly Agree*)

Please answer the following questions using the response options provided.

1. CCM seems like a fun place to work.

Belief that CCM is a Competitive Career Outcome

(1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 7 = *Strongly Agree*)

Please rate how likely is that the following statements are accurate

1. It seems like CCM is a highly desirable employer in their field.
2. It is warranted that there are very high standards you need to meet to be considered for a promotion at CCM.

Expectations of Company First Mentalilty from John

(1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 7 = *Strongly Agree*)

Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.

1. It is reasonable to expect John to put CCM's needs ahead of his own.

Expectations of Loyalty to CMM from John

(1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 7 = *Strongly Agree*)

Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.

1. It is reasonable to expect John to be loyal to CCM and remain employed there for the next several years.

Expectations of Gratitude Towards CMM from John

(1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 7 = *Strongly Agree*)

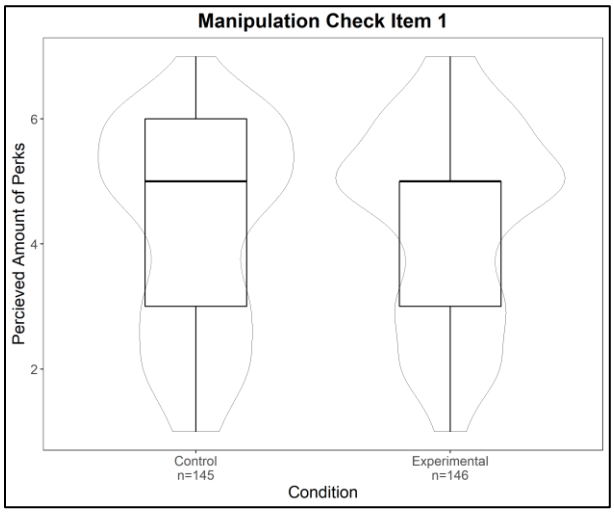
Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.

1. John should be grateful to have his job at CCM.

Appendix D

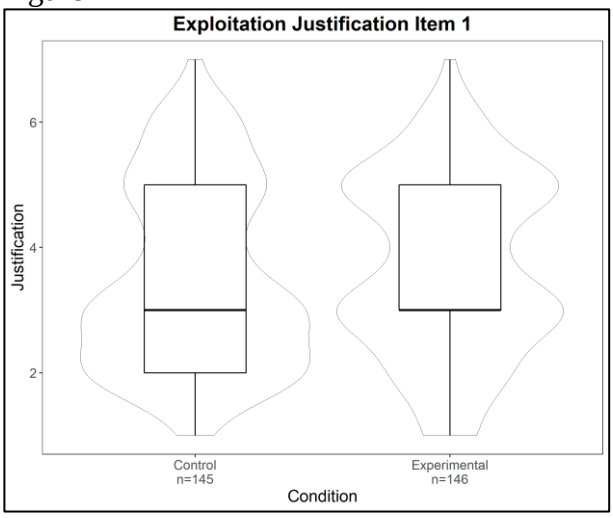
Results: Figures and Tables

Figure D1



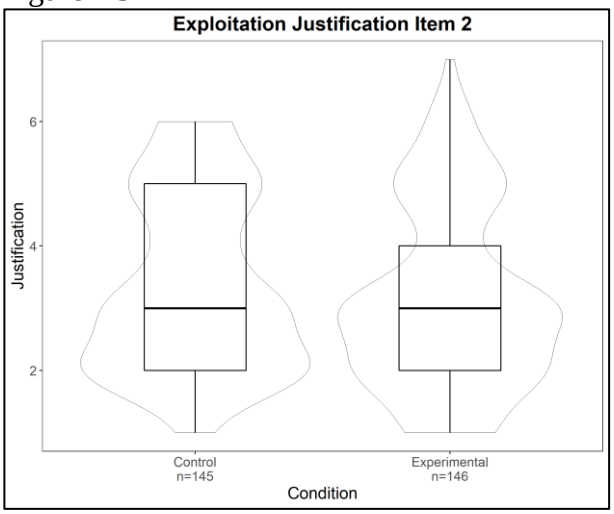
Note. A visualization of the spread and distribution of the perceived amount of perks offered by CMM between the control and experimental condition for item 1 of the manipulation check

Figure D2



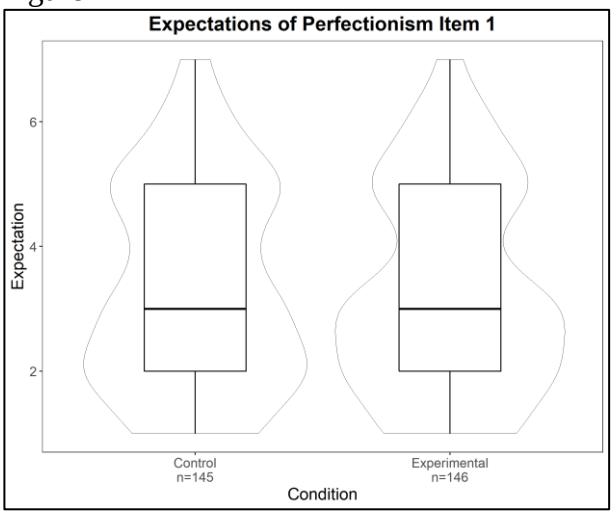
Note. A visualization of the spread and distribution of justification of exploitation between the control and experimental condition for item 1

Figure D3



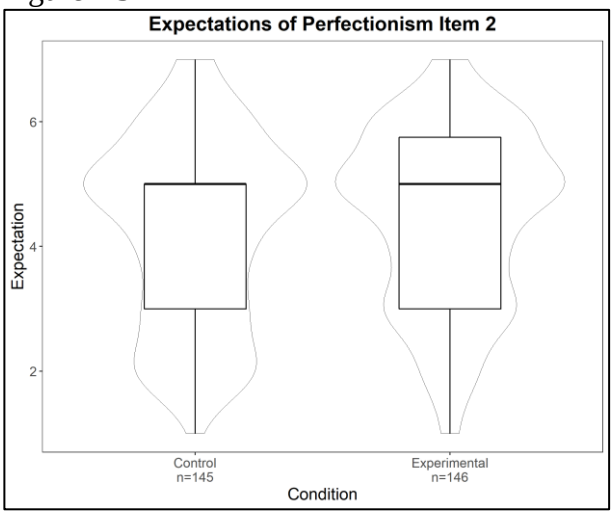
Note. A visualization of the spread and distribution of justification of exploitation between the control and experimental condition for item 2

Figure D4



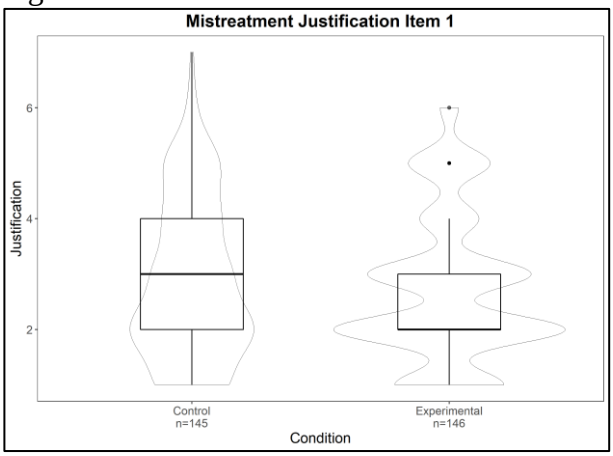
Note. A visualization of the spread and distribution of expectations of perfectionism between the control and experimental condition for item 1

Figure D5



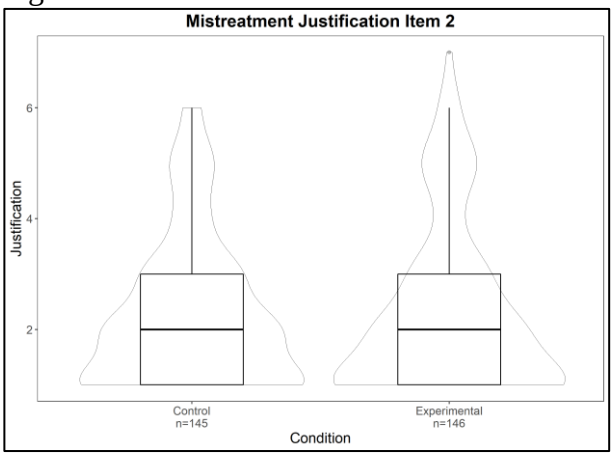
Note. A visualization of the spread and distribution of expectations of perfectionism between the control and experimental condition for item 2

Figure D6



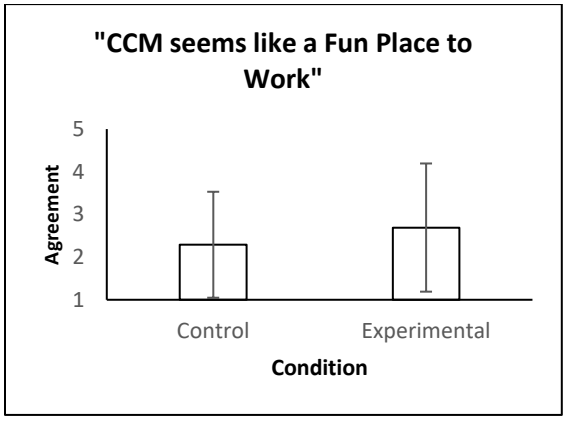
Note. A visualization of the spread and distribution of justification of mistreatment between the control and experimental condition for item 1

Figure D7



Note. A visualization of the spread and distribution of justification of mistreatment between the control and experimental condition for item 2

Figure D8



Note. A depiction of the means and standard deviations of degree to which participants agreed with the statement that CCM seemed like a fun place to work in the control condition and experimental condition.

Table D1

Summary of Students t-tests, mean and standard deviations for each condition, confidence intervals and Cohen's d measures of effect size for differences of expectations for negative outcomes: extra work, expected number of hours worked, belief that work is it's own reward, expectations of company-first attitude, loyalty and gratitude, and perception that CCM is a competitive employer in the industry between control and experimental conditions.

					95% CI		
	df	T-Statistic (p)	Ctrl M(SD)	Exp M(SD)	Lower	Upper	Cohen's d
Extra Work 1	289	.74 (.459)	3.35(1.67)	3.21(1.7)	-0.242	0.535	0.09
Extra Work 2	289	.28 (.781)	3.32(1.53)	3.27(1.54)	-0.304	0.404	0.03
Work Hours 1	**288**	**2.07 (.039)***	**39.73(5.39)**	**38.37(5.81)**	**-0.323**	**2.935**	**0.24**
Work Hours 2	289	0.07 (.941)	43.87(11.7)	43.77(11.63)	-2.590	2.793	0.01
Work as a Reward 1	289	-0.08 (.939)	3.33(1.3)	3.34(1.27)	-0.307	0.284	0.01
Work as a Reward 2	288	-1.09 (.275)	3.11(1.4)	3.29(1.48)	-0.516	0.147	-0.13
Company First	284	-.95 (.340)	2.25(1.18)	2.39(1.36)	-0.435	0.151	-0.11
Loyalty	289	0.27 (.789)	3.14(1.46)	3.19(1.52)	-0.391	0.298	-0.03
Gratitude	287	-.75 (.454)	3.79(1.21)	3.90(1.31)	-0.402	0.180	-0.09
Competitive 2	284	-.55 (.582)	5.55(1.41)	5.63(1.23)	-0.390	0.220	-0.06

Note. ** $p < .01$ level. * $p < .05$ level.

Table D2

Summary of Students t-tests, mean and standard deviations for each condition, confidence intervals and Cohen's d measures of effect size for differences of expectations for perceptions of clan culture: between control and experimental conditions.

	df	T-Statistic (p)	Ctrl M(SD)	Exp M(SD)	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	Cohen's d
Well-Being	289	-.16 (.873)	2.39(1.32)	2.42(1.31)	-0.328	0.279	-0.02
Fun	**280**	**-2.49 (.013)***	**2.29(1.24)**	**2.69(1.50)**	**-0.720**	**-0.084**	**-0.29**
Competitive 1	289	0.21 (.837)	3.72(1.61)	3.68(1.62)	-0.334	0.412	0.02

Note. ** $p < .01$ level. * $p < .05$ level.

Table D3

Summary of correlations (significance) across manipulation check, perception of CCM as fun and all key outcomes.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Manipulation	-							
2. Exploitation 1	.01	-						
3. Exploitation 2	.08	**.26*** **	-					
4. Mistreatment 1	-.02	.09	**.18****	-				
5. Mistreatment 2	.03	.09	**.18****	**.35*** **	-			
6. Perfectionism 1	.04	**.13***	.28	**.21*** **	**.25*** **	-		
7. Perfectionism 2	**.26*** **	.06	**.04***	-.04	.05	.02	-	
8. Co is Fun Place	**.30*** **	**.20****	**.25*** **	**.12***	**.32*** **	**.20****	.06	-

Note. $^{\dagger}p < .10$, $*p < .05$ level, $** p < .01$ level, $*** p < .001$ level.

Manipulation = Manipulation Check, Exploitation = Exploitation Justification, Mistreatment = Mistreatment Justification, Perfectionism = Expectations of Perfectionism, Co is Fun Place = Perception of Fun Workplace