

# Culture Signaling at Work: System Justification in High Tech

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## Research Summary

When an outsider thinks a company is more fun to work at, they are more likely to justify unfair treatment of employees within that company

## Theoretical Foundations

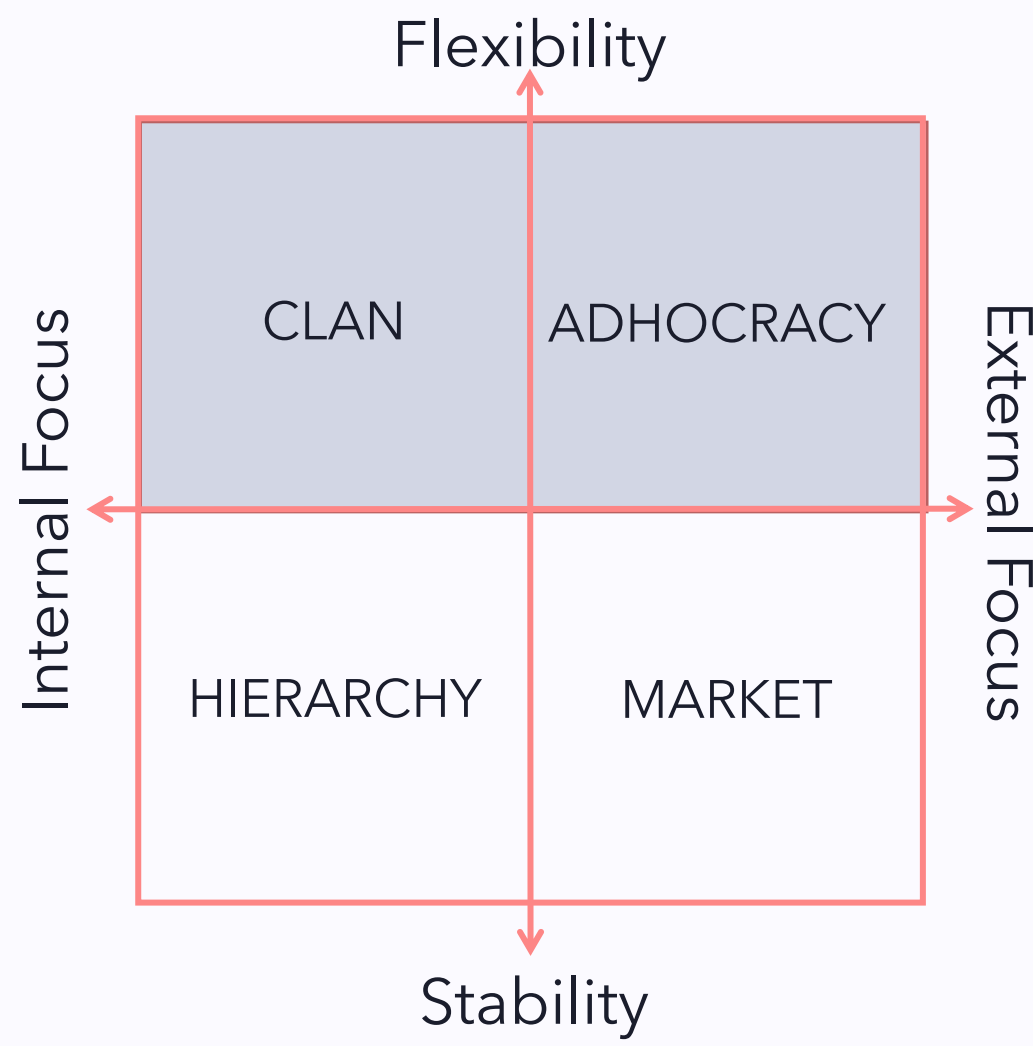
### Organizational Culture

Shared beliefs, values and assumptions  
Determine the norms and patterns of behaviour that develop in an organizations (Johns & Saks, 2020)

### The Competing Values Framework

Measures where an organizations values lay along two dimensions to diagnose its primary culture as one of four styles.

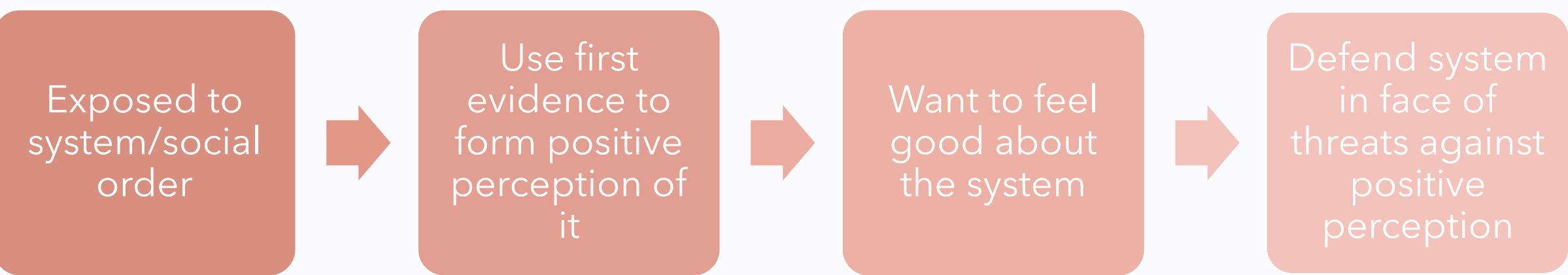
Clan culture is focused on its employee's well-being, while Adhocracy culture prioritizes flexibility and rapid innovation to stay ahead of the competition.



### System Justification

The social and psychological tendency to defend the status quo

### System Justification Theory



## Research Question

When people see the novel perks offered at modern technology companies, do they use this as evidence that the company prioritizes its employee's well-being and ignore instances of employee exploitation (e.g., unpaid overtime) as they challenge this positive perception?

## Hypotheses

<b>H1</b>	Presence of clan culture perks	↑ Justification of Exploitation
<b>H2</b>	Presence of clan culture perks	↑ Justification of Mistreatment
<b>H3</b>	Presence of clan culture perks	↑ Expectations of Perfectionism

## Key Variable Definitions

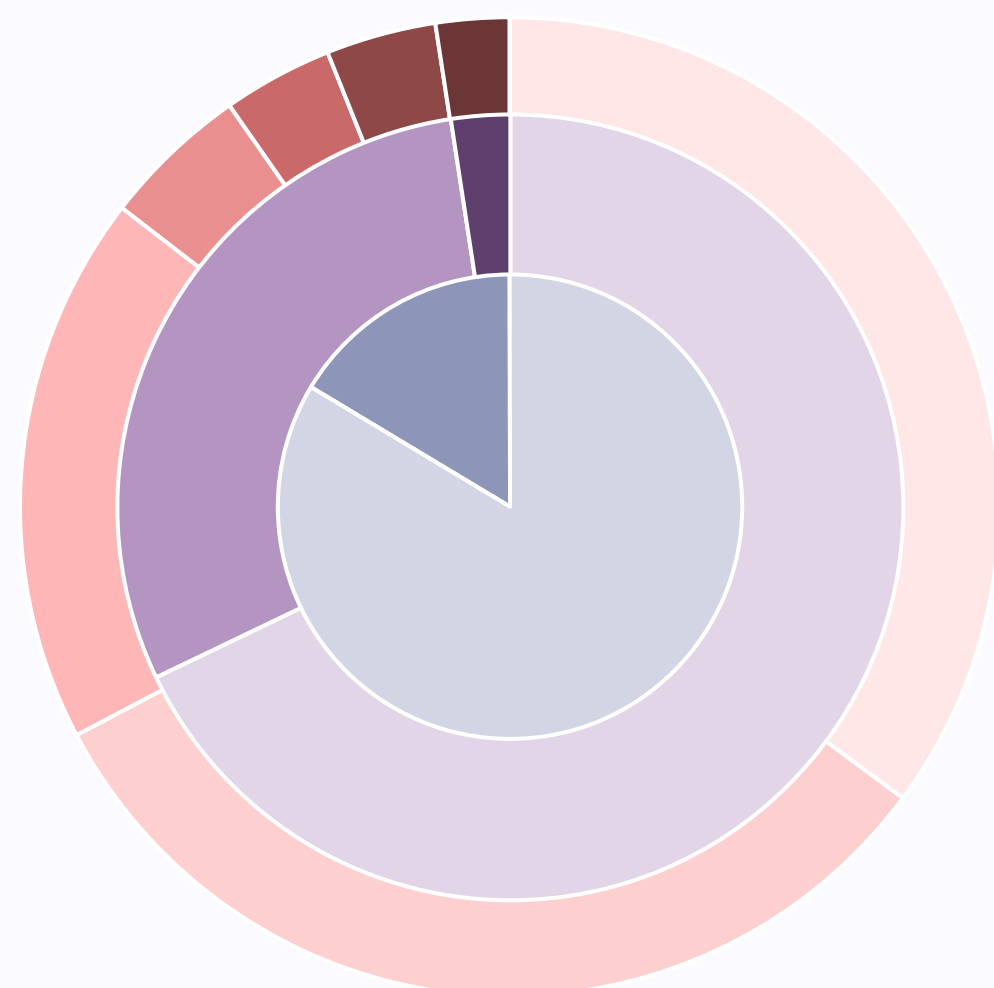
<b>IV</b>	<b>Clan culture perk :</b> A perk offered by a company that is novel and fun (e.g., staff gym)
<b>DV</b>	<b>Exploitation :</b> Unfairly compensated tasks and/or beyond job scope <b>Mistreatment :</b> Unfair or demeaning treatment from superior <b>Perfectionism :</b> Unreasonably high work standards

## Sample

165 Brock University students ( $M_{age} = 19.36$ ,  $SD_{age} = 1.99$ , 82.6% Female), were recruited over SONA and compensated with class credit. The majority of this sample studied Social Science (35%) and Health Science (32%).

Control: n=82  
Experimental: n=83

Social Sciences (35%)
Health Sciences (32%)
Education (18%)
Mathematics and Science (5%)
>20 years old (69%)
20-25 years old (31%)
Female (83%)
Male (17%)



## Methodology

Introduce Participants to a fake tech company and employee

*"John works as a software developer for a San Francisco based tech company called CCM as a software developer..."*  
*"The following two pages briefly describe some of the perks and benefits offered to employees of CCM..."*

Participants in the control condition are taught about the company's standard employee benefits (e.g., dental) while those in the experimental condition are shown that the company provides its employees with exciting perks such as an in-house pub, a games room, an on-site staff gym and an employee nap room.

### Control

#### 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.

### Experimental

#### Perks for employees

**Several free meal options**  
Choose from a variety of on-site cafes and restaurants serving up snacks, drinks and meals. Staff favorites include the pulled pork tacos at our in-house gastropub and the banana cheesecake made fresh at our grab-and-go café.



**Staff games room**  
Whether you want to unwind alone or bond with your team members, our games room boasts a full range of arcade classics like Pac-Man and Space Invaders; the latest consoles and releases; a wall of board games; as well as several table games such as ping-pong and football.

**Gym**  
Enjoy the convenience of a fully equipped, on-site, gym and showers to cut the commute out of your routine.  
**Nap Room**  
Sound proof nap pods are available to rest in if you need to step away from your work to recharge.

Stories involving employee mistreatment at the company are presented

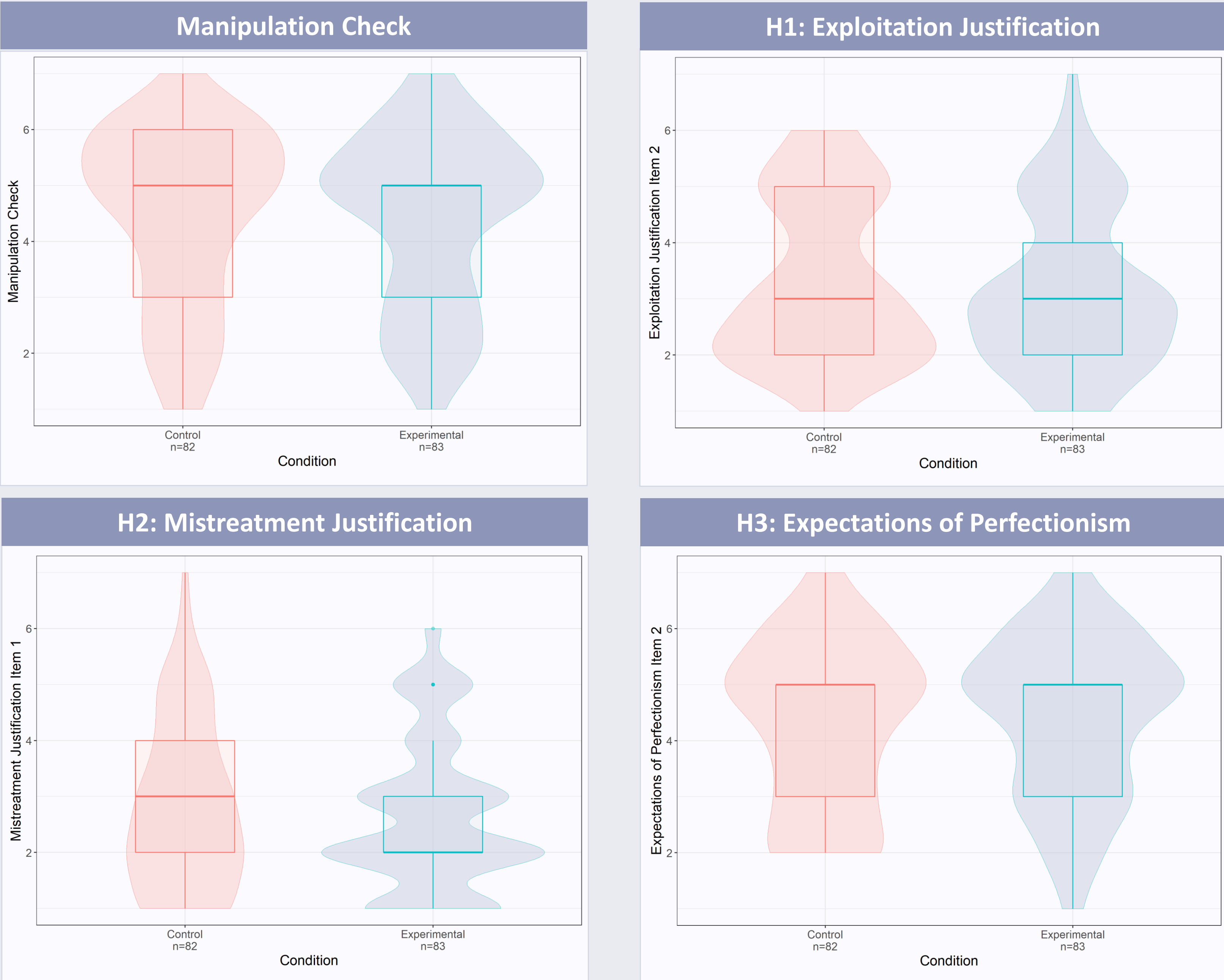
*"A manager at CCM is sick, and no one from management can fill in. John is asked to take over the manager's duties until they come back... without compensation"*

### Measures are scored on 7-point Likert Scales

*"CCM is behaving reasonably in asking John to take over these duties."*

Please rank how strongly you agree:  
1= Strongly disagree – 7 = Strongly Agree

## Findings



- No significant difference in perception of perks between conditions ( $t(163) = 0.27$ ,  $p = 0.79$ )
- No significant difference in justification of exploitation ( $t(163) = 0.93$ ,  $p = 0.35$ ), justification of mistreatment ( $t(163) = 0.7$ ,  $p = 0.49$ ) or expectations of perfectionism ( $t(163) = -0.57$ ,  $p = 0.57$ ) between conditions.

Correlational analysis of all outcome variables found relationships between:

- Manipulation check and expectations of perfectionism ( $r = 0.32$ ,  $p < .01$ )
- Manipulation check and expectations of gratitude ( $r = 0.39$ ,  $p < .01$ )
- Perception of CCM as a fun place and:
  - Exploitation legitimization ( $r = .24$ ,  $p < .01$ )
  - Mistreatment legitimization ( $r = .23$ ,  $p < .01$ )
  - Expectation of perfectionism ( $r = .21$ ,  $p < .01$ )
- Belief that CCM cares about its employees well being and:
  - Exploitation legitimization ( $r = .35$ ,  $p < .01$ )
  - Mistreatment legitimization ( $r = .35$ ,  $p < .01$ )
  - Expectation of perfectionism ( $r = .21$ ,  $p < .01$ )

## Conclusions and Implications

- Insignificant difference in means for the manipulation check between conditions
  - Suggests our **manipulation was ineffective**
  - Brings analysis of outcome variable into question but no key hypothesis confirmed
- Significant correlations between our manipulation check and several measures of observer perceptions of CCM as a clan culture
  - Suggests a **relationship does exist** between clan culture signalling and justification of unfair expectations put on employees
- If relationship does exist:
  - Informs organizations** of the importance of clearly defining their culture and allows them to better meet the needs of their employees
  - Builds on Organizational Culture literature
    - Speaks to the **impact of misleading culture signaling**
  - Adds to workplace perk literature
    - Bulk of perk research studies positive outcomes so this provides a **balancing perspective**
  - Informs prospective employees** seeking new employers
    - Learning to accurately identify an organizations culture

## Limitations and Future Directions

- Ineffective manipulation** → inability to interpret t-test analysis
  - Measure and delivery of IV and DV's may be too subtle or lack construct validity
- Change manipulation →
  - Delivery of IV through more direct means** than brochure
  - Measure of DV's through more direct means** than vignettes
- Sample not reflective** of individuals working in the tech sector
  - More female (though this is changing!!)
  - Younger and may lack career experience
  - Very few studying math or science
- Collect from a **more representative sample**
  - Mechanical Turk to access employed adults
  - Stack Overflow to access tech employees, ideally managers
- Correlational study**
  - Participants diagnose company's organizational culture
  - Respond to measures of DVs

## References