

HOW DO I ASSESS IF MY SUPERVISOR AND ORGANIZATION ARE FAIR? IDENTIFYING THE RULES UNDERLYING ENTITY-BASED JUSTICE PERCEPTIONS

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Researchers have suggested that employees assess the fairness of important social entities such as supervisors and organizations, but little empirical research has examined the rules used in forming such justice judgments. Utilizing a qualitative design, we asked new job entrants to assess the fairness of their supervisor and organization, and to elaborate on the reasons underlying their assessments. Our results reveal that, although individuals did use rules reflecting the four traditional justice dimensions in assessing entity-based fairness, they more frequently used other rules, drawing on such information as the entity's attributes, their own affective state, and social information.

Over the years, research on organizational justice has clearly established that fairness perceptions can influence important work outcomes (Ambrose, 2002) as well as employee behaviors and attitudes (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001). If neglected, perceptions of unfairness can result in negative consequences for organizations, such as workplace sabotage (Ambrose, Seabright, & Schminke, 2002), theft (Greenberg, 1990), and workplace aggression (O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin, & Glew, 1996). Understanding how employees form fairness perceptions can help organizations to better manage employees' perceptions of fairness as well as potential outcomes. One of the fundamental questions within the field of organizational justice, then, is how fairness perceptions are formed (van den Bos, 2001, 2003).

The purpose of this study was to identify the rules underlying the formation of *entity-based* justice perceptions. We believe that this is an important area of research for three reasons. First, to date, the majority of justice research has focused on identifying the rules associated with the assessment of *event-based* justice (e.g., Cropanzano,

Byrne, Bobocel, & Rupp, 2001). We define an event as a segment of time at a given location that is known by an observer to have a beginning and an end (Zacks & Tversky, 2001). For example, in work on organizational justice, researchers have studied the fairness of events such as job applications (Gilliland, 1994), performance appraisals (Taylor, Tracy, Renard, Harrison, & Carroll, 1995), and smoking bans (Greenberg, 1994), all of which have a beginning and an end. However, there are reasons to suspect that employees assess the fairness not only of events, but also of *social entities*. We differentiate an entity from an event in that the former is an object or unit that persists over time and across situations (Zacks & Tversky, 2001); thus, an entity may be a supervisor, coworker, or even an organization as a whole. Past research has highlighted the importance of employees' social exchange relationships with entities such as supervisor (i.e., leader-member exchange) (Graen & Scandura, 1987) and organization (i.e., perceived organizational support) (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). Thus, we believe it is important to study employees' perceptions of the fairness of these social entities.

A second reason for our study is that the current reliance on past findings from event-based studies neglects differences that may exist with entity-based justice perceptions. Some limited work can be characterized as entity-based (e.g., Konovsky & Pugh, 1994; Moorman, 1991; Rupp & Cropanzano,

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2002), but this research builds primarily on findings from non-entity-based studies. Through early qualitative studies (e.g., Bies & Moag, 1986; Mikula, Petri, & Tanzer, 1990; Sheppard & Lewicki, 1987) and later quantitative refinements, researchers have identified four dimensions of justice (distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational), as well as underlying rules for each (e.g., Colquitt, 2001; Cropanzano et al., 2001). Specifically, for distributive justice, theorists have described rules that employees apply in forming fairness perceptions of outcomes, such as equity (e.g., Adams, 1965), and equality and need rules (e.g., Leventhal, 1976). For procedural justice, drawing on the work of Leventhal (1980) and Thibaut and Walker (1975), Colquitt (2001) argued that employees determine the fairness of procedures using seven decision rules: consistency (across persons and over time), bias suppression, accuracy of information, correctability (of wrong decisions), ethicality, voice, and decision control. For interpersonal justice, it has been suggested that employees perceive events to be fair when they are treated with dignity and respect and that informational justice perceptions are associated with honest communication and proper justifications for decisions (Colquitt, 2001).

However, justice researchers have not investigated the decision rules underlying assessments of entity-based justice judgments and instead have imposed the four justice dimensions and underlying rules developed for event-based judgments. Some research that may be classified as entity-related examined employees' perceptions of events in general (i.e., over time) rather than their perceptions of specific events (e.g., Konovsky & Pugh, 1994; Moorman, 1991). For example, Moorman's (1991) items referred to the fairness of organizational procedures in general, rather than specific procedures such as performance appraisal or compensation practices. Thus, Moorman's (1991) work, and that of others using similar measures, might be seen as examining the fairness of an entity (organization) rather than a specific event. In this vein of research, organizations were often cited as the source of distributive and procedural justice, and supervisors were generally assumed to be the source of interactional justice (e.g., Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, & Taylor, 2000). More recent research has adopted a multifocus approach (e.g., Byrne & Cropanzano, 1999; Rupp & Cropanzano, 2002), in which multiple entities are considered as a source of distributive, procedural, and interactional (interpersonal and informational) justice. Thus, such studies include measures of both organizational distributive justice and supervisory dis-

tributive justice, crossing each of the dimensions derived from event-based research with each of the entities to be studied.

In both types of entity-based studies summarized above, researchers have not investigated the decision rules employees actually use to formulate entity-based justice perceptions, but instead have imposed the four justice dimensions and underlying rules developed for event-based justice judgments. This practice is potentially a problem, given that definitions and attributes of entities and events differ. Events are finite, time- and situation-bound; therefore, fairness assessments of events may require consideration of only a few key dimensions: what the outcome was, how it was determined, and what happened during the interaction surrounding the event. In contrast, entities exist beyond individual events and may, in fact, be associated with numerous, conflicting events. Thus, individuals may require more and different types of information to assess their fairness. As Cropanzano et al. noted, "There is no necessary reason to assume that global appraisals of social entities are structured in the same . . . fashion. This is an empirical question" (2001: 195). We respond to this call for empirical research by examining the underlying rules that new employees report they use when assessing the fairness of entities such as their organization and supervisor, without imposing the rules and dimensions previously identified for events.

A third reason for our study relates to a need to examine current theories about entity-based justice perceptions. In a conceptual article, Cropanzano et al. (2001) suggested that entity-based justice perceptions are likely to be the summation of event-based justice perceptions relating to a given entity over time. However, to date, there has been no empirical investigation of this suggestion. By collecting data regarding the formation of employees' entity-based justice perceptions, we examined whether the summation process is empirically supported.

Like Bies and Moag (1986), who sought to identify the rules underlying perceptions of fair treatment using a qualitative approach, we sought to identify the rules underlying the formation of entity-based justice perceptions using a qualitative approach. Asking employees on what they base their assessment of organizational and supervisory fairness, and analyzing these responses, is an appropriate first step toward identifying entity-based justice rules. Absent such an investigation, understanding of the rules underlying entity-based fairness perceptions is incomplete at best, based solely on the application of event-based research findings.

Thus, we conducted an empirical, qualitative study, designed to examine justice perceptions associated with social entities—specifically, supervisors and organizations. We used a longitudinal qualitative approach that involved analyzing text obtained through in-depth interviews for emergent themes (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006). Our sample included new job entrants whom we interviewed at two different times. New job entrants are engaged in the process of forming a host of impressions (e.g., Ashforth & Saks, 2002), including fairness perceptions of their new organization and supervisor. Furthermore, new job entrants are engaged in “sensemaking” to cope with surprises and ambiguity associated with organizational entry (e.g., Louis, 1980). Given that fairness might serve to reduce uncertainty and ambiguity (van den Bos & Lind, 2002), it is possible that new job entrants engage in assessments of entity fairness. For these reasons, new job entrants constitute an “extreme case” (Eisenhardt, 1989) in which the formation of entity-based justice perceptions is likely to be more visible than in other situations, making them a suitable sample for the purpose of this study. Moreover, a qualitative approach is particularly useful in that it does not impose a structure; rather, it allows respondents to describe fairness rules in their own terms.

In summary, we propose to contribute to the justice literature through a qualitative identification of the rules underlying the formation of entity-based justice perceptions. Through this examination, we can (1) shed light on the understudied topic of entity-based justice perceptions, (2) examine whether the four justice dimensions and their related rules alone explain the formation of entity-based justice perceptions, and (3) examine whether entity-based justice perceptions are primarily an aggregation of event-based judgments.

METHODS

Research Design and Sample

The value of using of a qualitative approach for the discovery phase of research is well documented (Dey, 1999; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Locke, 2001). We followed the spirit of grounded theory in our design and analysis by, for example, collecting different “slices” of data over time, generating categories by coding observations, engaging in ongoing comparisons between our data and the literature, and concluding collection and coding when no new codes appeared (theoretical saturation). However, our approach differs from a purely grounded theory one, in that we analyze and compare

“slices” of data over time, rather than across different data sources. Therefore, we have described our study as “longitudinal” and “qualitative.” We designed our longitudinal, qualitative study with interviews conducted at two points in time: time 1 (within a few weeks of interviewees’ starting their jobs) and time 2 (three to five months later). The longitudinal design allowed us to create a baseline of fairness perceptions as our respondents began work and also to detect any changes in fairness perceptions that might occur in the first few months on the job. We based the three-to-five-month time frame of the study on evidence in the socialization literature that this time frame comprises an early entry phase in which many new perceptions of work are formed (Ashforth & Saks, 2002; Feldman, 1976; Nelson, 1987). The length of time between interviews was short enough to capture early job impressions, yet it was also long enough to provide some assurance that questions asked of respondents in the time 1 interview would not unduly influence their responses to questions asked in the time 2 interview.

We gathered our sample by visiting classes at a large midwestern university in which many students were completing their final coursework and were about to begin new full-time jobs. The students were told that the study involved two interviews about attitudes and experiences of new job entrants, and they were given an assurance of confidentiality. Of the 33 students (21 women and 12 men) who volunteered for the study, most were graduating seniors; however, a few were completing master’s programs. Respondents averaged 4.5 years of work experience, most often in cooperative or summer positions, prior to beginning their new jobs upon graduation. Their new jobs were diverse, including 17 different occupations (e.g., internal auditor, motion graphics animator, assistant brand manager), contributing to “ecological validity” in the study’s design (Lee, 1999: 152).

Data Collection

Prior to finalizing the interview protocols, we conducted pilot interviews with five students to assess whether or not the interview questions were understandable and evocative. As a result of this pilot test, we streamlined our protocols and reworded some of the retained questions. Ultimately, the interview protocols included approximately 12 (time 1) and 25 (time 2) structured questions. Key fairness-related questions from the time 1 and time 2 interview protocols are included in the Appendix. We conducted a total of 66 interviews (33 half-hour interviews at time 1 and 33 one-hour

interviews at time 2). Each of the three authors was involved in conducting the interviews. Interviews were semistructured, including a set of required questions with opportunities for probing responses. The interview protocol for time 1 was structured to include questions about each respondent's past work experience, the new position and organization, reasons why the particular job was accepted, and expectations about the fairness of the organization and supervisor. The interview protocol for time 2 was structured to include a general question about how things had gone for the respondent over the first few months of work, as well as specific questions about fair and unfair events that had occurred, surprises encountered, and the respondent's assessment of the fairness of the organization and supervisor. Within this structure, each interviewer was also able to probe further interesting comments that arose. The semistructured design of the interviews then allowed time for both structured (for comparisons) and unstructured (for tailoring interviews to individual respondents) probing.

Each interview was recorded on audiotape and professionally transcribed verbatim. Interview transcripts averaged 10 (time 1) and 18 (time 2) single-spaced pages in length and totaled over 900 pages from the 66 interviews. Data collection and analysis occurred concurrently; that is, we began to analyze time 1 interviews before beginning time 2 interviews. This procedure allowed us to recognize the need for additional questions and probes to understand better the codes emerging in the analysis process, providing us with the flexibility to follow up on interesting leads.

Coding Procedure

The transcribed interview data were coded, first, for evidence of fairness-related thoughts and, second, for the types of rules referred to as the basis for fairness assessments. When we assessed evidence of fairness-related thoughts and the types of rules used to guide fairness-related thoughts in the transcripts, this process was emergent in nature (as described below). All codes we identified were entered into a "dictionary" that guided future coding. By the 42nd transcript, no more new codes were added to the dictionary, giving us confidence that we had fully refined our coding structure—a process that is referred to as "theoretical saturation" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967: 61).

Using a process similar to that used by Butterfield, Trevino, and Ball (1996), we subjected our final categories for emergent justice rules to a secondary coding method involving coders (two doc-

toral students) who were unfamiliar with the study. The coders were given the list of final category labels and definitions, along with passages from a representative sample of our transcripts. They were instructed to make yes/no judgments of whether a passage represented any of the 12 categories and to write beside the passage the category label they believed best represented the passage. Like Butterfield et al. (1996), we calculated an "overall" percentage of agreement; the resulting value (.94) was well above the minimal threshold suggested (.70; Cohen, 1960). Importantly, however, we also found that for each of the 12 emergent rule categories, the coders agreed 100 percent of the time, with two exceptions. One of these exceptions regarded "supervisor support" and the other regarded "organization support." In both of these cases, coders used discussion to resolve their disagreement.

Secondary coding was used for only the emergent justice rule categories because these were this study's focus. In summary, the manner in which we coded the emergent justice rules matches the emergent coding approach used by Ashforth, Kreiner, Clark, and Fugate (2007) and Kreiner et al. (2006), and it matches the secondary coding process used by Butterfield et al. (1996).

In our final dictionary, 60 of the 278 codes (22%) related to fairness. The passages associated with these 60 codes totaled approximately 3,000, of which we retained for further potential analysis the 1,774 passages that specifically referred to the cues respondents used in assessing the fairness of their supervisor or organization. Of these 1,774 passages, 985 related to cues for assessing fairness that fell outside the traditional justice dimensions. These 985 passages were selected for analysis of the emergent fairness rules interviewees used to assess the fairness of their supervisor and/or organization. In summary, then, the answer "yes" had to be the response to each of the following questions if a passage was to be excluded from an analysis of emergent fairness rules: (1) Did the passage refer to substance that made no mention of fairness? (2) Did the passage refer to fairness yet make no mention of how fairness was assessed? and (3) Did the passage refer to any of the traditional justice rules? An example of a passage that was excluded is, "[Interviewer:] 'Adding up all the events and interactions of the past few months together, how would you rate the fairness of your supervisor? On what are you basing your rating?' [Respondent:] 'I guess I was just briefly thinking about stuff that we had talked about and also how management tries usually to be fair.'" Notice that this passage does not refer to the underlying rules, but simply mentions fairness in the context of the interview.

Next, we describe the criteria used to assign initial fairness codes to the passages and to determine the type of rules used to assess fairness.

Criteria for assigning a fairness code to the transcribed interview data. A passage from the transcribed interview data was coded with a fairness code (meaning that fairness was represented in the passage) under one of two possible circumstances: (1) when the passage explicitly included the words “fair” or “fairness” or (2) when the passage was a response to a question that had asked respondents to assess fairness. An example of the former is: “In terms of the company . . . I know plenty of people who have had very fair experiences throughout the company.” An example of a fairness-oriented question is: “Adding up all the events and interactions of the past few months together, how would you rate the fairness of your supervisor? On what are you basing your rating?” The percentage of agreement among coders on this simple assessment (i.e., whether the text included the word “fair/fairness” or was in response to a question asking about fairness) was 100 percent. In our protocols for the time 1 and time 2 interviews, 17 of the 37 questions (46 percent) referred to fairness or respondents’ assessments of fairness. (See the Appendix for more examples of protocol questions.)

Criteria for determining whether justice rules used by interviewees regarded supervisor or organization. A passage from the fairness-related interview data (selected via the process described above) was coded as reflective of either supervisor-related or organization-related fairness assessments if it (1) explicitly referred to “supervisor” or “organization” or (2) was a response to a request to assess either supervisor or organization fairness. The percentage of agreement among coders on this simple assessment (i.e., whether text referred to “supervisor” or “organization” or was in response to a question asking about either of these two things) was 100 percent.

Criteria for determining whether traditional justice rules or other bases were used by interviewees to assess fairness. A passage from the fairness-related interview data containing cues for assessing fairness was coded as reflective of either a “traditional justice rule” or a “fairness phenomena *not* encompassed by a traditional rule” (i.e., reflective of rules that are excluded from the former category) as follows. Whenever we coded passages that comprised the fairness subset of our data, we were careful to enter the codes into the dictionary with “fairness: ____.” The blank after “fairness” consisted, minimally, of the word “supervisor” or “organization” (depending on which of these was

named in the passage when the respondent was assessing fairness). There was never a passage regarding fairness that excluded both of these terms. Thus, all passages that regarded why an organization was seen as fair were coded “fairness: organization,” and all passages that regarded why a supervisor was seen as fair were coded “fairness: supervisor.” Additionally, the substantive focus of the passage that led, ultimately, to the fairness assessment was included in the dictionary. For example, a passage that referred to low turnover as evidence of an organization’s being a fair place to work was coded “fairness: organization” and “turnover.”

We coded a fairness-related passage as indicative of a traditional justice rule when the passage text and meaning reflected past operationalizations of any of the four dimensions of justice identified in Colquitt’s (2001) construct validation study. Specifically, we coded a traditional justice rule as present when a passage referred to (1) distributive justice (e.g., via text reflecting proportional or justified outcomes, or outcomes reflecting effort or performance); (2) procedural justice (e.g., via text reflecting consistently applied procedures or procedures based on accurate information, or opportunities for voice or expression of concern); (3) interpersonal justice (e.g., via text reflecting polite or respectful treatment); and (4) informational justice (e.g., via text reflecting timely communications or reasonable explanations). The dictionary entry for a passage reflective of any of the latter justice rules was “fairness: organization/supervisor (depending on whether the organization versus supervisor was the passage’s referent): distributive justice/procedural justice/interpersonal justice/informational justice (depending on which of these traditional justice dimensions were referenced).”

When a passage from the fairness-related interview data did not reflect any of the four traditional dimensions of justice identified above, it was assigned a code that described the cue used in assessing fairness. As they are outside the traditional justice rules, we refer to these codes as “emergent justice rules.” As indicated above, if an emergent justice rule–related code did not already exist in our dictionary, we created one for the passage and added it to the dictionary for future reference. An example of such a passage is,

Their employees will stay; they won’t have a massive turnover. I know in the hospitality industry turnover is always high. It’s amazing to walk into my office and see we have a chart up in our office that shows longevity of employees there. So, I mean, those employees there think [the organization] is fair.

Notice that this passage excludes the following: any mention of fairness with regard to outcomes (hence makes no mention of distributive [in]justice); any mention of consistency, accuracy, voice, etc. (hence makes no mention of procedural [in]justice); any mention of politeness or respect (hence makes no mention of interpersonal [in]justice); and any mention of timely communication or justifications (hence makes no mention of informational [in]justice). As such, the above passage was coded “fairness: organization” and “turnover,” given that the cue used by the respondent in assessing organization fairness was the low turnover rate of the organization.

Finally, because this study’s focus was on the type of emergent justice rules employees use to assess the fairness of the entities “organization” and “supervisor,” we retained for future analysis only the emergent justice codes that were repeated enough throughout the interview transcripts to possibly represent a phenomenon. For the latter judgment, we were guided by the practice used by Elsbach (2003) and Rafaeli and Vilnai-Yavetz (2004) in their qualitative studies, in which they used a threshold number of instances of a phenomenon (three and two, respectively) before reporting an instance as a category or pattern to be further examined. Specifically, we used the threshold of three or more instances of an emergent justice code in the 66 interview transcripts. Our choice of three respondents as the threshold was guided by these precedents, in which the threshold was low enough to avoid including a phenomenon mentioned by a single respondent, but high enough not to exclude the emergence of a phenomenon mentioned by more than a couple of respondents. This procedure yielded 20 emergent codes. Qualitative research is intended to provide evidence of the existence of a phenomenon rather than its prevalence; subsequently, items based on such phenomena can be operationalized and their prevalence measured more precisely in survey research (Kreiner et al., 2006).

Criteria for determining the type of emergent justice rules used by interviewees to assess fairness. The 20 emergent codes that had been identified in at least 3 of the 66 interview transcripts were selected for further analysis in order to determine the type of emergent justice rules used by interviewees to assess fairness; the total number of passages associated with these emergent codes was 985. The 20 emergent codes were eventually reduced to 12 categories, resulting from our collapsing dictionary codes that seemed synonymous with each other. For example, during the coding process, we had created separate codes for “diversity” and

“gender” as cues for assessing organizational fairness, but upon review, both were related to diversity as a cue for fairness; thus, we collapsed these two codes into the *organization diversity* category. As a second example, when we examined the three separate codes of “other people,” “comparison: other,” and “politics: other people,” all were related to using information from others; thus, we collapsed these three codes into the *social information* category. Overall, this collapsing process resulted in 12 emergent rule categories, of which 5 represented rules used to assess supervisor and 7 represented rules used to assess organization.

It should be noted that although interviewees occasionally mentioned supervisor and organization in the same passage, they always concluded with a fairness assessment of just one of these entities. As a result, no passages had been coded with both of the codes “fairness: supervisor” and “fairness: organization”; this in turn eased our ability to make a clean separation between the two types of entity-based fairness judgments. Passages in which we applied these codes were read carefully to determine whether the interviewee was assessing the fairness of the supervisor or the organization. An example of a fairness-related passage in which both organization and supervisor were mentioned is, “I think if the boss is fair, it [the organization] is fair.” This passage would be coded “fairness: organization,” as it is clear the respondent is assessing organization fairness. Further, the mention by some respondents of the supervisor in a passage coded “fairness: organization” helped us to identify “substitution of supervisor fairness,” one of the emergent rules described below for assessing organization fairness. Similarly, the mention by some respondents of their organization in a passage coded “fairness: supervisor” helped us to identify “substitution of organization fairness,” one of the emergent rules described below for assessing supervisor fairness.

Among the emergent rules specific to the supervisor, the five categories and their descriptions were as follows. For the category *supervisor support*, we included passages in which a respondent described his or her supervisor as being accommodating and developmental as evidence of supervisor fairness. Sample phrases from the passages that cued this category were, “[The supervisor] is very accommodating” and “[The supervisor] provides direction and structure in the job.” For the category *supervisor flexibility*, we included passages in which a respondent described the supervisor as allowing freedom in scheduling work arrangements and in doing the job as evidence of supervisor fairness. A sample of such a passage follows: “[In-

interviewer:] ‘On what are you basing your supervisor rating?’ [Respondent:] ‘The leeway he gives me with the work. . . . I feel like the way he approaches projects that he gives me is he just tells me to run with it.’” In this passage, the respondent attributes flexibility to the supervisor and bases his fairness assessment of the supervisor on this perceived flexibility. For the category *supervisor traits*, we included passages in which a respondent described characteristics of the supervisor, both positive and negative, as evidence of supervisor fairness. Sample phrases include “being religious” and “being an introvert.” For the category *substitution of organization fairness*, we included passages in which a respondent described the fairness of an organization as evidence of supervisor fairness. Sample quotes include “as long as the company is fair, he will be fair” and “the organization is in the same boat as my supervisor.” For the category *social information*, we included passages in which a respondent described coworkers’ experiences and perceptions of fairness as evidence of supervisor fairness. Sample phrases include, “others have always said good things about [the supervisor]” and “seeing how the supervisor treats other people.”

Among the emergent rules specific to the organization, the seven categories and their descriptions were as follows: For the category *organization support*, we included passages in which the respondent described a pleasant work environment and developmental opportunities as evidence of organization fairness. Sample phrases from the passages that cued this category were, “taking good care of employees” and “providing training programs.” For the category *organization flexibility*, we included passages in which a respondent described his or her organization as allowing freedom in scheduling work arrangements and in doing the job as evidence of organization fairness. A sample of such a passage follows: “[Respondent:] ‘As a corporation, it is a very fair place to work.’ [Interviewer:] ‘On what are you basing your belief that it is a fair place to work?’ [Respondent:] ‘. . . letting us work where we want to work.’” In this passage, the respondent attributes flexibility to the organization and bases his fairness assessment of the organization on this perceived flexibility. Sample phrases from the passages that cued this category are “letting us work where we want” and “being flexible rather than being really hard about rules.” (If the latter phrases had named “supervisors” or “my supervisor” when describing flexibility, they would instead have been coded “supervisor flexibility.”) For the category *organization diversity*, we included passages in which a respondent described

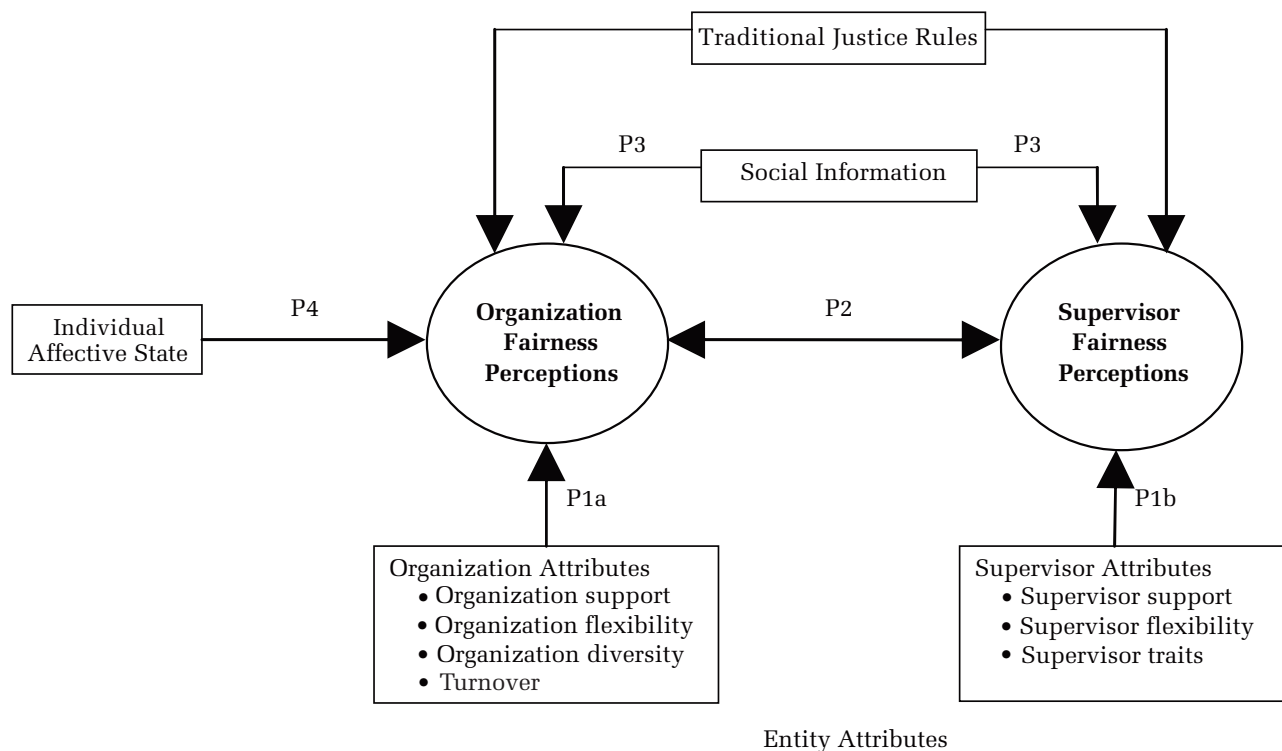
various indicators that an organization valued minorities and/or demographic minority groups as evidence of organization fairness. Sample phrases from the passages that cue this category include “minority representation in higher positions” and “having a lot of Hispanic and Spanish employees.” For the category *turnover*, we included passages in which a respondent described employee longevity or tenure as evidence of organization fairness. Sample phrases include, “employees have been here 20 years or more” and “having to lay people off.” For the category *substitution of supervisor fairness*, we included passages in which a respondent described the fairness of his/her supervisor as evidence of organization fairness. Sample phrases include, “if [the supervisor] is fair, [the organization] is fair” and “if not for the supervisor, organization fairness would be higher.” For the category *individual affective state*, we included passages in which respondents described different emotional states, negative and positive, as influencing their assessment of organization fairness. Sample phrases include “feelings of frustration negatively affected my perception of fairness” and “being happy” (the latter used as evidence for why the organization is fair). For the category *social information*, we included passages in which a respondent described coworkers’ experiences and perceptions of fairness as evidence of organization fairness. Sample phrases include “what others have told me” and “seeing how others interact.”

Data Analysis

For our data analysis, we used the NVivo 2.0 software program to aid us in entering codes, examining passages of text in which codes appeared, and counting the frequency of codes. Using NVivo, we determined the frequency with which each emergent rule was reported as used in assessing fairness of the organization and supervisor, both at time 1 and time 2.

To examine whether entity-based justice perceptions could be explained by the four justice dimensions and their related rules (for parsimony, referred to hereafter and in the tables as “traditional rules”) alone, and if they were primarily an aggregation of event-based judgments, we compared the use of emergent and traditional rules. For this analysis, we focused exclusively on responses to two entity-based justice questions asked at time 1 and two similar entity-based justice questions asked at time 2. These questions asked respondents to rate their perceptions of the fairness of their organization and supervisor and to explain the basis for

FIGURE 1
Rules Underlying the Formation of Entity-Based Justice Perceptions^a



^a “P” indicates “Proposition.”

their ratings. The wording of the time 2 questions followed the model in which Cropanzano et al. (2001) proposed that entity-based justice perceptions are likely to be an aggregation of event-based justice perceptions; for example: “Adding up all of the events and interactions of the past few months together, how would you rate the fairness of the company [supervisor]? On what are you basing your rating?”

To identify and examine the frequency with which a code category (e.g., “traditional” and “emergent”) occurred within particular subsets of data (e.g., time 1 and time 2), we ran Boolean (or combination code) searches. Specifically, we calculated frequencies for the following: (1) the extent to which respondents used only emergent rules, only traditional rules, or a combination of the two in assessing the fairness of entities, both at time 1 and time 2; (2) the use of emergent versus traditional rules by entity type, both at time 1 and time 2; and (3) the use of emergent versus traditional rules for fair and unfair entities.

FINDINGS

In presenting our results, we describe the rules underlying entity-based justice perceptions that we

uncovered in our study, examine whether the traditional rules explain the formation of entity-based justice perceptions, and assess whether these perceptions are primarily an aggregation of event-based judgments. Figure 1 depicts a model that illustrates the rules underlying the formation of entity-based justice perceptions that we found in our study. Specifically, the circles in the model represent fairness perceptions of organization and supervisor. The boxes represent the rules respondents used in assessing the fairness of these entities, including traditional justice rules. The arrows represent our respondents’ use of the rules to assess organization and supervisor fairness. The labels on the arrows refer both to the use of a particular rule in forming an entity-based fairness assessment and to the proposition derived from this rule (developed later in the discussion section). For example, the arrow that connects “organization attributes” to “organization fairness perceptions” (P1a) refers to our finding that respondents used organization attributes in forming organization fairness perceptions. It also represents the relationship proposed in Proposition 1a, which we develop later (in the discussion section). Below we describe the rules our respondents reported using in evaluating the fairness of their organizations and supervisors.

TABLE 1
Emergent Rules Used in Forming Entity-Based Justice Perceptions of Organizations^a

	Number (Percentage) of Respondents Reporting Rule			
Emergent Rule	Time 1	Time 2	Description	Sample Quotes
<i>Entity attributes</i>				
Organization support	8 (24)	7 (21)	Using a pleasant work environment and developmental opportunities to assess the fairness of an organization.	I think that they take good care of their employees, and that they put a lot of time and energy into making sure that people are happy with their place of work.
Organization flexibility	3 (9)	6 (18)	Using freedom in scheduling work arrangements and in doing the job to assess the fairness of an organization.	The company I am working for has been pretty flexible with me and I have been able to come part time during school. So far they have been very flexible as long as I do my job when I am in there.
Organization diversity	5 (15)	4 (12)	Using various indicators that an organization valued minorities and/or demographic minority groups to assess the fairness of the organization.	They value diversity and it's a very diverse group of people. I know there's about every ethnicity group that I know of that works there and that I have come into contact with at one time or another, and I've never heard any complaints.
Turnover	4 (12)	0	Using longevity or tenure of employees to assess the fairness of an organization.	I know in the hospitality industry turnover is always high. It's amazing to walk into my office and see we have a chart up in our office that shows longevity of employees there . . . it's fair.
<i>Entity substitutes</i>				
Substitution of supervisor fairness	5 (15)	3 (9)	Using perceived fairness of the supervisor to assess the fairness of an organization.	They [whether supervisors are fair or not] definitely had a big part of how I viewed the organization.
<i>Affective state</i>				
Individual affective state	1 (3)	9 (27)	Using one's emotional state, positive and negative, to assess the fairness of organization.	It is kind of like passing emotions. I have good days and I have bad days. If you ask me how I feel about [the company] on a good day or a bad day, it is going to change my answer.
<i>Social information</i>				
Social information	15 (45)	18 (54)	Using coworkers' experiences and perceptions of fairness to assess the fairness of an organization.	The people who had left the company all had positive things to say about it . . . [that] was a pretty good cue that it's a fair place.

^a $n = 33$ respondents (responses separated by time period); time 1 was within a few weeks of a respondent's beginning a job; time 2 was three to five months after respondent's beginning job.

Emergent Rules Used in Forming Entity-Based Justice Perceptions of an Organization

Table 1 provides a description of each emergent rule our respondents used in assessing organization fairness, sample quotes, and the frequency with which each rule was reported, at both time 1 and time 2. Respondents evaluated organization fairness on the basis of several accessible organization attributes; namely, organization support, organization flexibility, organization diversity, and turnover. (See the P1a arrow in Figure 1.) For example, some respondents associated low rates of turnover with higher organization fairness (e.g., "If [the organ-

ization] wasn't fair, I don't think I would see that longevity in employees"). Others associated various forms of organization support with organization fairness, such as "taking care of employees." Respondents also based their perceptions of organization fairness on the existence of organization diversity and experiences with organization flexibility (e.g., "letting us work where we want to work").

Although many respondents used attributes of their organization to assess its fairness, others used perceptions of another entity (i.e., a supervisor) to evaluate fairness (e.g., "I think if the boss is fair, [the organization] is fair"). (See the P2 arrow in

Figure 1.) Some respondents based inferences about organization fairness on social information about the way coworkers interacted or were treated or on conversations with coworkers regarding their experiences and perceptions. (See the P3 arrow in Figure 1.) In fact, we found that the category of social information was the single most used criterion in assessing organization fairness, reflecting the socially constructed nature of organizations (e.g., Lind, Kray, & Thompson, 1998). Finally, a number of respondents used their own current *affective state* as a rule when evaluating organization fairness. Thus, if the new job entrant felt positively toward his or her organization, the individual surmised from this feeling that the organization was fair. (See the P4 arrow in Figure 1.) In some cases, the use of affective state reflected an anchoring and adjustment effect (Fiske, 1993). In the complex context of negotiating a new job, respondents anchored their perceptions of organization fairness in their current emotional state, then adjusted these perceptions later (e.g., "How I feel about [the company's fairness] on a good day or a bad day . . . is going to change my answer").

Comparison between time periods reveals some differences in the emergent rules used to evaluate organization fairness. For example, at time 1, four employees used turnover in assessing organization fairness; however, by time 2, no employees appeared to be applying this rule. It might be that, particularly after first joining a new organization, turnover (or lack thereof) is a particularly salient rule in that new job entrants are considering their own likelihood of staying with the organization, but after a few months on the job, other rules become more important. We also noted a large increase in the use of affective state between time 1 (one respondent) and time 2 (nine respondents). Perhaps, after a few months, employees start trusting and relying more on their own feelings.

Emergent Rules Used in Forming Entity-Based Justice Perceptions of the Supervisor

Table 2 provides a description of each emergent rule used in assessing supervisor fairness, sample quotes, and the frequency with which each rule was reported, at both time 1 and time 2. Supervisor attributes, such as a supervisor's support, flexibility, and traits, were used in assessing supervisor fairness. (See the P1b arrow in Figure 1.) Many respondents discussed perceptions of supervisor support as a basis for assessing the fairness of their supervisor. In some cases, super-

visor support involved making the new job entrant feel welcome, including "taking the time to get to know me," which was interpreted as evidence of the supervisor's fairness. In addition, some respondents' perceptions of supervisor fairness were based on perceived supervisor flexibility (e.g., "the leeway he [the supervisor] gives me with the work"). Others used supervisor traits such as friendliness, ambition, and even being religious. As they did with organization fairness, some respondents used attributes of another entity (in this case, their organization) to assess the fairness of their supervisor (e.g., "as long as the company is fair, [the supervisor] is going to be fair"). (See the P2 arrow in Figure 1.) Also, as with organization fairness, respondents reported using social information in assessing supervisor fairness, although not as extensively as with organization fairness. (See the P3 arrow in Figure 1.)

Again, comparison between time periods reveals a fairly large increase in the use of several emergent rules between times 1 and 2: supervisor support (from 6 to 11 respondents); supervisor flexibility (from 1 to 6 respondents), and social information (from 3 to 7 respondents). It appears that, on the whole, employees were using different rules at time 2 to assess supervisor fairness, perhaps as a function of having had more time to interact with their supervisor (and thus experience more incidents of supervisor support and flexibility) as well as their coworkers (and thus acquire more information through conversation and observation).

Emergent versus Traditional Rules in Entity-Based Justice Perceptions over Time

Table 3 reports the frequency with which respondents reported using only emergent rules, only traditional rules, or a combination of the two in assessing the fairness of entities, both at time 1 and time 2. The results show that in 35 out of 66 interviews (53%), emergent rules were the only basis offered for entity-based justice perceptions, while in another 12 (18%) both emergent and traditional rules were offered. Still, in 16 interviews (24%) only traditional rules were cited, and an additional three interviews (5%) in which neither emergent or traditional rules were noted. Although individuals did use traditional rules, emergent rules were used more frequently, and by more respondents, over both time periods of the study. Furthermore, there are similar numbers of respondents in each of the categories between time 1 and time 2. One might expect a decrease in emergent rules over time, with a corresponding increase in traditional rules as em-

TABLE 2
Emergent Rules Used in Forming Entity-Based Justice Perceptions of Supervisors^a

Emergent Rule	Number (Percentage) of Respondents Reporting Rule		Description	Sample Quotes
	Time 1	Time 2		
Entity attribute				
Supervisor support	6 (18)	11 (33)	Using a supervisor's accommodating and developmental behavior to assess the fairness of the supervisor.	I am basing it on his willingness to help me. His responses to my work. His critiques or his criticisms. Anything that he has done to help me along the way. I just think he has been a fair manager.
Supervisor flexibility	1 (3)	6 (18)	Using freedom in scheduling work arrangements and doing the job to assess the fairness of a supervisor.	The fact that I currently do database development, but they [supervisors] have been receptive to the fact that I would like to get into design later on in my career.
Supervisor traits	4 (12)	4 (12)	Using characteristics of a supervisor, positive and negative, to assess the fairness of the supervisor.	Just her [supervisor] overall personality, the way she comes off. It seems as if religion is a very important part of her life. Those are just some of the cues that make me feel that she would really give me a fair and equitable chance.
Entity substitutes				
Substitution of organization fairness	2 (6)	1 (3)	Using the perceived fairness of a supervisor to assess the fairness of the supervisor.	I know what the company stands for; so, I know that what he is doing in a disciplinary action is fair.
Social information				
Social information	3 (9)	7 (21)	Using coworkers' experiences and perceptions of fairness to assess the fairness of a supervisor.	We had a truck driver that totally demolished his truck. Totally just demolished it, but you know what? It was an accident . . . He [the truck driver] didn't get fired over the situation. He's [the supervisor] very fair with his employees. He really is.

^a $n = 33$ respondents (responses separated by time period); time 1 was within a few weeks of a respondent's beginning a job; time 2 was three to five months after respondent's beginning job.

employees experience more events, yet this was not the case.

Emergent versus Traditional Rules in Entity-Based Justice Perceptions by Entity Type

Table 4 reports the frequency with which respondents reported using emergent versus traditional rules by entity type, at both times 1 and 2. Results show that in 47 out of 66 interviews (71%), respondents included at least one emergent rule in assessing their organization (17), their supervisor (9), or both entities (21). In comparison, only 28 respondents (42%) used traditional rules in assessing organization (10), supervisor (8), or both organization and supervisor (10) fairness. These findings indicate our respondents relied predominantly on emergent rules in evaluating the fairness of both entities. Results also reveal differences in the fre-

quency with which rules were used in making fairness assessments of the two entities at time 1 and time 2. The number of respondents reporting using emergent rules to evaluate supervisor fairness (and not organizational fairness) jumped from 0 to 9, whereas the number of respondents reporting using traditional rules dropped from 7 to 1.

Emergent versus Traditional Rules as a Function of Fair and Unfair Entity-Based Justice Perceptions

Table 5 reports the frequency with which respondents reported using emergent versus traditional rules as a function of whether respondents described the entity as being fair or unfair. Results suggest that respondents used both types of rules in assessing entities as both fair and unfair. Further, within each category, there are instances of indi-

TABLE 3
Emergent versus Traditional Rules in
Entity-Based Justice Perceptions over Time^a

Category	Time 1	Time 2
Only emergent rules	17 (51%)	18 (54%)
Only traditional rules	9 (27%)	7 (21%)
Both emergent and traditional rules	7 (21%)	5 (15%)
Neither emergent nor traditional rules	0	3 (9%)
Total number of respondents	33 (100%)	33 (100%)

^a $n = 33$ respondents (responses separated by time period); time 1 was within a few weeks of a respondent's beginning a job; time 2 was three to five months after respondent's beginning job.

For this analysis, we examined responses to four entity-based justice questions, asking two at time 1 and two at time 2. The time 1 questions were: Do you expect that the company [supervisor] will be fair or unfair? On what are you basing your expectations? The time 2 questions were: Adding up all of the events and interactions of the past few months together, how would you rate the fairness of the company [supervisor]? On what are you basing your rating?

viduals using the same rule to judge entities as both fair and unfair, with the exception of the category of supervisor traits, which was used only for positive supervisor fairness assessments. The consistency in rule use for assessments of both fairness and unfairness increases our confidence in these emergent rules, as they do not seem to be used for only one type of assessment.

DISCUSSION

Contributions and Implications

To our knowledge, this study is the first to derive qualitatively the rules individuals use in forming entity-based justice perceptions. Other qualitative studies of organization and supervisor fairness have often examined individuals' perceptions of unjust events (e.g., Harlos & Pinder, 1999; Mikula et al., 1990), sometimes including prompts specifically relating to rules associated with the four justice dimensions (Clemmer & Schneider, 1996). Overall, our study provides a starting point for understanding how entity-based justice perceptions are formed and also supplies a launching pad for future research on the different types of information and rules used in assessing entity-based justice. Our results indicate that, as they do in forming event-based justice perceptions, individuals apply rules in forming entity-based justice perceptions. Specifically, our findings suggest that there are at least four relationships that management scholars and practitioners need to be aware of as potentially important in influencing employees'

TABLE 4
Emergent versus Traditional Rules in
Entity-Based Justice Perceptions by Entity Type^a

Rule Type	Time 1	Time 2
Emergent rules		
Only organization fairness	10 (30%)	7 (21%)
Only supervisor fairness	0	9 (27%)
Both organization and supervisor fairness	14 (42%)	7 (21%)
Total number of respondents using emergent criteria	24 (73%)	23 (70%)
Traditional justice rules		
Only organization fairness	5 (15%)	5 (15%)
Only supervisor fairness	7 (21%)	1 (3%)
Both organization and supervisor fairness	4 (12%)	6 (18%)
Total number of respondents using justice rules	16 (48%)	12 (36%)

^a $n = 33$ respondents (responses separated by time period); time 1 was within a few weeks of a respondent's beginning a job; time 2 was three to five months after respondent's beginning job.

For this analysis, we examined responses to four entity-based justice questions, asking two at time 1 and two at time 2. The time 1 questions were: Do you expect that the company [supervisor] will be fair or unfair? On what are you basing your expectations? The time 2 questions were: Adding up all of the events and interactions of the past few months together, how would you rate the fairness of the company [supervisor]? On what are you basing your rating?

entity-based justice perceptions. These four relationships are summarized as testable propositions to guide future research:

Proposition 1a. An increase in organization support, organization flexibility, and organization diversity, and a decrease in turnover, are positively associated with an increase in the perceived fairness of an organization.

Proposition 1b. An increase in supervisor support, supervisor flexibility, and valued supervisor traits is positively associated with an increase in the perceived fairness of a supervisor.

Proposition 2. An increase in the perceived fairness of one entity (organization or supervisor) is positively associated with an increase in the perceived fairness of the other entity (organization or supervisor).

Proposition 3. An increase in positive social information regarding coworkers' experiences and perceptions is positively associated with an increase in the perceived fairness of entities (organization and supervisor).

TABLE 5
Emergent versus Traditional Rules as a Function
of Fair and Unfair Entity-Based Justice
Perceptions

Category	Number (Percentage) of Respondents Reporting Heuristic	
	Fair Organization	Unfair Organization
<i>(a) Emergent rules</i>		
Entity attributes		
Organization support	10 (30)	5 (15)
Organization flexibility	7 (21)	2 (6)
Organization diversity	3 (9)	6 (18)
Turnover	2 (6)	2 (6)
Entity substitutes		
Substitution of supervisor fairness	4 (12)	4 (12)
Affective state		
Individual affective state	8 (24)	2 (6)
Social information		
Social information	20 (60)	13 (39)
<i>(b) Traditional rules</i>	11 (33)	9 (27)
	Fair Supervisor	Unfair Supervisor
<i>(c) Emergent criteria</i>		
Entity attributes		
Supervisor support	11 (33)	6 (18)
Supervisor flexibility	4 (12)	3 (9)
Supervisor traits	8 (24)	0 (12)
Entity substitutes		
Substitution of organization fairness	2 (6)	1 (3)
Social information		
Social information	8 (24)	2 (6)
<i>(d) Traditional rules</i>	9 (27)	9 (27)

Proposition 4. An increase in positive affective state is positively associated with an increase in the perceived fairness of an organization.

In the remainder of this section, we identify and discuss the theoretical and practical implications of the four propositions that emerged in our study. With regard to the first proposition, we found that new job entrants based their assessments of entity fairness on entity attributes. Interestingly, past research points to a link between several of the entity attributes and perceptions of fairness. For example, Masterson et al. (2000) found that procedural jus-

tice perceptions were related to perceptions of organization support, and interactional justice perceptions were related to perceptions of leader-member exchange, an element of which is supervisor support. In addition, Brashear, Manolis, and Brooks (2005) found a relationship between justice perceptions and salesperson turnover, and Tepper (2000) found a relationship between abusive supervision and justice perceptions. Thus, it appears that our respondents, as naïve scientists (Higgins & Bargh, 1987), intuitively used these previously researched fairness-related variables as rules in their own assessment of entity-based fairness. However, respondents also used entity attributes that have not been previously linked to fairness perceptions. Further, some of these attributes were reported as rules for *both* organization and supervisor fairness assessments, and thus may reflect universal rules that are applicable across entities, comparable to the universal application of procedural justice rules such as correctability and consistency to many kinds of events. In contrast, other attributes were entity-specific, including the use of organization diversity and turnover to assess organization fairness and the use of supervisor traits to assess supervisor fairness.

By recognizing the rules individuals use to evaluate organization and supervisor fairness, managers can better manage employees' justice perceptions and, indirectly, influence important organizational outcomes. For example, we found that many of our respondents used broad organization attributes, such as organization diversity and turnover, to assess organization fairness. Managers might be more intentional about showcasing these positive organization attributes in order to enhance justice perceptions. Our research suggests that these attributes garner particular attention from new job entrants as they assess organization fairness; thus, they may deserve more attention from managers than has been suggested by earlier research.

With regard to the second proposition, the use of organization fairness as a rule for assessing supervisor fairness, and vice versa, mimics the reciprocal relationship sometimes found between perceptions of organizational support and leader-member exchange (Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). Given the interrelatedness of supervisors (who may be seen as official organizational representatives) and organizations (which provide the context and constraints within which supervisors act), this finding is perhaps not surprising, and it points to the fact that entity-based justice perceptions may not be mutually exclusive and are likely to influence one another. Further, social identity theory suggests that identification with a charismatic leader can gener-

alize to an organization in that individuals perceive the social category of "organization" as embodying and routinizing characteristics of the leader (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Perhaps the same is true with entity-based fairness perceptions, so that a salient fairness perception of one entity (supervisor or organization) generalizes to another entity (supervisor or organization). Given that the employees we studied relied on fairness perceptions of another entity, managers should recognize the potential reciprocity of entity-based justice perceptions and strive to foster a climate of fairness in which all entities are perceived fairly.

With regard to the third proposition, our finding that entity-based justice perceptions were susceptible to social influences is consistent with recent evidence on the influence of third parties and co-workers on event-based justice perceptions (e.g., Jones & Skarlicki, 2005; Lamertz, 2002; Lind et al., 1998; Skarlicki & Kulik, 2005). This finding highlights the importance of social cues (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) as well as the socially contagious nature of fairness perceptions (Degoey, 2000). Earlier authors have described ties between social information and job attitudes; our study extends this work by suggesting that positive social information can actually increase perceptions of entity fairness. Social information was among the most frequently reported emergent rules used in assessing both organization and supervisor fairness. Therefore, additional research may be needed on the role of social information in assessments of both event- and entity-based justice perceptions. Further, managers might focus on utilizing socialization tactics in which events, stories, and experiences related to entity fairness can be shared among employees (Colquitt, Noe, & Jackson, 2002; Naumann & Bennett, 2000).

With regard to our fourth proposition, respondents reported using their affective state in assessing organization, but not supervisor, fairness; this is in contrast to the other three categories, which were used in assessing both types of entity fairness. Affect is frequently studied as a consequence of justice perceptions; however, it has less often been investigated as an antecedent (Byrne, Rupp, Eurich, & Mattern, 2004). Some researchers studying event-based justice perceptions have suggested that individuals may substitute feelings for more objective information when making fairness judgments, using affect as information (Barsky & Kaplan, 2007; Schwarz & Clore, 1983; van den Bos, 2003). Our results suggest not only that new job entrants use their affective state in entity-based justice perceptions but also that they do so differentially—only in the case of organization assessments. Given that

affect can serve as information, one might imagine that affect becomes even more important when more objective information is less accessible for making assessments, as is the case with an abstract and complex organization, but less so with a supervisor. Our study then suggests a need to investigate the rules associated with different types of social entities and to consider affective state as an antecedent. Managers should be aware of employees' emotions (particularly as they begin work), provide outlets for their appropriate expression, and ensure that employees have opportunities to experience positive emotions at work, as these emotions may, in fact, influence fairness perceptions of organizations.

Collectively, our findings allow us to examine empirically the notion of whether entity-based justice perceptions are likely to be the summation of event-based justice perceptions relating to a particular entity over time (Cropanzano et al., 2001). Although our results do not necessarily negate the role of event-based justice perceptions, they do suggest that entity-based justice perceptions are formed on the basis of more than just past events, including rules incorporating entity attributes, individuals' affective states, and social information, both at organizational entry and after a few months of experience within an organization. In other words, individuals do more than just mentally sum their own experiences in judging the fairness of an entity such as their organization or supervisor. Rather, they take into account multiple factors that deserve further exploration.

Our findings point to the importance of additional empirical research focusing specifically on entity-based justice perceptions. Justice researchers have done outstanding work establishing the rules associated with event-based justice perceptions, yet there is a need to conduct research to better explain the rules associated with entity-based justice perceptions. Given the importance of entities in the workplace, as evidenced by research showing the magnitude of effects associated with relational variables such as perceived organizational support (e.g., Eisenberger et al., 1986) and leader-member exchange (e.g., Graen & Scandura, 1987), it is not surprising that employees can readily assess the fairness associated with these social entities. Our research provides a starting point for understanding how employees go about forming these assessments.

Future Research and Limitations

Future research is needed in which the connections between entity-based and event-based justice perceptions are addressed more explicitly. For ex-

ample, research might examine how the perceived fairness of a specific performance appraisal (an event) influences the perceived fairness of a supervisor (an entity). Moreover, research might examine how employees assess the fairness of entities that act consistently fairly in one type of situation (e.g., performance appraisals) but act consistently unfairly in another type (e.g., compensation decisions); how do employees reconcile such behaviors into a single assessment of entity fairness? In addition, research might address whether the perceived fairness of a supervisor influences the fairness perceptions of subsequent events, such as pay raises or performance appraisals. Finally, research should investigate what outcomes are most highly associated with event- versus entity-based justice. Do both types of justice perceptions influence the same outcomes, such as organizational commitment and "turnover intentions," or do they relate to different outcomes in different ways?

We collected data from new job entrants at two time points, utilizing a longitudinal, qualitative design. This design allowed us to capture what (and how) fairness perceptions of entities were formed in the early months of work. However, we did not gather detailed information about each respondent's specific socialization process in order to connect changes in perceptions to specific organizational actions. Future research could examine in more detail how fairness perceptions might change throughout orientation and early socialization. Also, although we considered different slices of data over time, we did not gather information from sources other than our respondents because they worked at a number of sites. Future qualitative researchers might triangulate findings by employing multiple sources of data, such as on-site observation, artifacts, and archival data, to gain a richer understanding of emergent rules for entity-based justice perceptions in particular workplaces.

Another limitation of our approach is that qualitative data are not well suited for providing justifiable documentation of the prevalence of phenomena. In that vein, it is important to note that the counts reported here are intended to provide transparency for our findings, but we do not propose that certain attributes are more essential than others simply because they were invoked more often. Rather, one of the benefits of qualitative research is that it allows for discovery of attributes for future research to document and compare in even greater detail. Hence, future research could examine the attributes and processes we observed and subject them to quantitative testing. For example, some respondents relied both on emergent and traditional rules in assessing entity-based justice, while

others relied on one or the other. Future research might tease out the particular conditions under which individuals use emergent rules as either supplements or substitutes for traditional rules in assessing entity fairness.

Finally, our study is somewhat limited in that it focuses on a relatively homogeneous sample restricted in terms of age, educational background, and work experiences, limiting the generalizability of our findings. Thus, future research should be conducted on more diverse samples, such as tenured employees, or new job entrants who come to the job with extensive past organizational experience. Having said that, the sample was well suited to the purpose of the study. Furthermore, given the competitive labor market that exists in many industries, it is particularly important to understand how new job entrants form perceptions of (and attractions to) organizations, including perceptions related to fairness. Overall, this study can provide a basis for future research on entity-based justice perceptions.

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APPENDIX

Selected Questions from the Interview Protocols

Time 1

1. You have just gone through the “hiring” process to gain entry into [name of company]. Describe for me any strengths or weaknesses about this process.
2. Do you think the hiring process was fair or unfair? What about the hiring process seems fair or unfair?
3. Think about organizational procedures such as performance appraisal, promotions, and so forth, that you may experience in future. Do you expect that they will be fair?
4. What leads you to expect this?
5. Have you met your supervisor yet? How do you expect to be treated by him or her?
6. Do you expect that the supervisor will be fair or unfair?
7. On what are you basing your expectations?

8. Do you expect that [the company] will be fair or unfair?
9. On what are you basing your expectations?

Time 2

1. Let me start off by asking you, how have the past few months gone? Tell me about what's been happening.
2. The last time we spoke, we talked about expectations you had for this job. Regardless of how prepared we are to start a new job, we often encounter surprises. What surprises, big or small, have you encountered so far in your job?
3. How has this [surprise] affected you, or how did you deal with it?
4. How has this [surprise] shaped your expectations about going forward if, in fact, it has?
5. Whenever you interact in organizations, even in the best of worlds, things inevitably happen that are unfair. Tell me about something that happened, big or small, that you considered unfair.
6. How did you deal with [the unfair event]? Can you recall thoughts that you had?
7. Just as there are unfair things that happen, sometimes fair things happen unexpectedly. Tell me about something that made you think, "Oh! This is really remarkably fair."
8. How did you deal with [the fair event]? Can you recall thoughts that you had?
9. How have the fair and unfair events you described affected how you feel about your [job, supervisor, company] overall?
10. The last time we spoke, we talked briefly about your relationship with your supervisor. Now, after working with this person for some time, how would you describe your relationship?
11. Can you describe for me an incident that stands out in your memory—sort of a defining moment—that helped you define or understand your relationship with your supervisor?
12. Is that similar to or different from how you saw your relationship with your supervisor when you first started?
13. Now that you've been there for a while, how would you assess or describe your relationship with the organization?

14. Can you describe for me an incident that helped shape your relationship with the organization? Who was involved? How did you feel?
15. Adding up all of the events and interactions of the past few months together, how would you rate the fairness of the company?
16. On what are you basing your rating?
17. Adding up all the events and interactions of the past few months together, how would you rate the fairness of your supervisor?
18. On what are you basing your rating?
19. Are there any other issues that you've thought of during our interview that you think might be important for me to know about fairness at your work?



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