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Looks Aren't Everything: Aren't Managers Concerned with Actually Being Fair

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LOOKS AREN’T EVERYTHING:
AREN’T MANAGERS CONCERNED WITH ACTUALLY BEING FAIR?

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ABSTRACT

The justice literature has unequivocally noted how important it is employees feel they are treated fairly. Accordingly, managers often find themselves in predicaments of injustice which they must resolve. Research on social accounts describes strategies managers can use to make themselves “seem fair,” thus, alleviating their predicament. But in taking an impression management perspective of justice, this literature fails to acknowledge that many managers actually want to “be fair.” Based on the latter assumption, we propose an alternative framework for understanding how managers will address justice-related predicaments.

81 words
The justice literature has unequivocally noted that individuals in organizations want to be treated fairly. Employees and managers are constantly evaluating whether their outcomes are fairly allocated, whether the system determining the allocation is fair, and whether others are being forthright in disclosing information to them and interacting with them in a respectful manner. If employees feel treated fairly, they are more likely to have job satisfaction, perform well in their jobs, and conduct citizenship behaviors directed at their supervisor or organization (Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, & Taylor, 2000; Tepper & Taylor, 2003; Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2002). Most managers realize how important it is that employees perceive they are treated fairly (Greenberg, 1988) but, even the most careful managers may violate justice norms. Fairness perceptions are socially constructed- even if one party believes they are being fair the other party may not perceive the transaction or interactions as such. Thus, even the most well-intentioned managers are likely to face an occasional “predicament of injustice” (Bies, 1987).

Being in such a predicament is problematic. The justice literature notes many negative outcomes which can result from employees perceiving they are treated unfairly. These employees may stop conducting citizenship behaviors, turnover, or even retaliate against their employer (Jermier, Knights, & Nord, 1994; Masterson et. al., 2000; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). Thus, if managers find themselves in such a predicament, it is important for them to resolve it. Interestingly, however, research in this area has paid little attention to ways in which managers may mend such a situation. Discussion and research of strategies for dealing with a predicament of injustice have been limited to social accounts. Based in impression management theory, the literature on social
accounts acknowledges that managers can create and maintain an identity of fairness by employing various tactics to present themselves as fair to others (Bies, 1987). The social accounts perspective focuses attention on managers’ behavior to discuss how managers may defend themselves against being perceived as unjust. According to this framework, if a manager commits an act others perceive as unfair, they may employ “defensive” tactics (e.g., excuses, justifications, or apologies) to mend their damaged identity (Greenberg, 1990).

In taking this perspective, however, the research on social accounts implicitly assumes that managers will only rely on justice repair strategies which “defend” their position. In reality, many (most) managers won’t be concerned solely with protecting their image or defending their position (i.e., making themselves “seem” fair). Their primary concern will be actually making the situation fair (i.e., being fair to the other person). By ignoring this, the social accounts literature offers an incomplete description of the various ways managers actually address such predicaments. The omission of this perspective previously from the justice literature is surprising considering that studies in this area have explicitly noted that managers are concerned with treating their employees fairly. For example, although Greenberg (1988) interprets the results of his brief survey to conclude that managers are more concerned with appearing to be fair (mean scale value of items = 7.9 out of 9), his results do not indicate that managers are not also concerned with behaving fairly (mean scale value of items = 6.1 out of 9) – an important distinction. Moreover, in light of more recent knowledge regarding the dimensionality of justice (Colquitt, 2001), Greenberg’s (1988) findings can be further re-interpreted. One could argue that his taxonomy of strategies for “looking fair” simply reflect ways to
increase informational justice (i.e., explaining procedures thoroughly and candidly communicating information) and, therefore, are simply other ways managers can be fair. Research by Meindl (1989) also indicated that managers are concerned with being fair to their employees. The managers in his sample were quite concerned with allocating resources fairly and took various contextual and situational factors carefully into consideration in trying to be fair. Meindl observes that “an image of managers as interested in justice and the fair treatment of subordinate others in the execution of their roles is one that should be but often is not represented or taken very seriously” (1989: 272). We concur with this position. Moreover, it is noteworthy that fifteen years after this article’s publication, there is still a dearth of research addressing the intuitive notion that a manager will be concerned with correcting an unfair situation if they have created it. Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to describe various reasons why managers would be motivated to resolve a predicament of unfairness and, then, propose a set of common strategies they are likely to use. Before exploring these issues, however, we offer a brief review of the justice literature and describe the various types of justice.

**Review of the Justice Literature**

Rawls (1971) presented a theory that emphasized an individual’s sense of fairness as an important component of social justice, a principle labeled “justice as fairness” (p. 12). Central to Rawl’s argument is the premise that justice is a prerequisite for social order because of the importance of an individual's sense of fairness to maintaining agreement with formal rules and systems. For example, feelings of injustice often prompt employees to file grievances with their union. Justice scholars interpret such responses as a challenge of the legal justice system due to “inequity distress” which is the
negative psychological reaction that occurs when an individual (or group) experiences injustice (Greenberg, 1984). Clearly, this sense of injustice powerfully impacts behavior. Hence, organizational justice scholars have confirmed the relevance of this topic for management since the genesis of equity theory, which Folger (1984a) notes as the “starting point” (p. ix) for most theories of justice.

Once research proliferated in this area, however, justice scholars continuously debated the dimensionality of this construct. Sweeney and McFarlin (1993) argued for a two-factor structure, including distributive and procedural justice. However, other scholars proposed a third type of justice, interactional justice (Bies & Moag, 1986). Currently, research on organizational justice conceptualizes this construct as having four distinct dimensions: distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational (Colquitt, 2001). Thus, in keeping with the extant literature, we employ a four-part conceptualization of justice in this manuscript and describe each of the types below. A manager may find themselves in a predicament if they are perceived to violate norms related to any of the four types.

[(Terri, I think this discussion of Meindl is good but I’m not sure where we should include it. Should we include it in the review section- as it is here- or does a portion of it fit better in the intro? What do you think?) Meindl (1989) pointed out the importance of fairness issues to the values, motives and leadership styles of managers. His empirical research indicated that concerns for Distributive Justice influenced these "thinking practices" (p. 252) of managers. He contrasted "equity," the outcome distribution based upon contributions, with "parity," the outcome distribution based on equality. Meindl's research indicated that managers with a stronger leadership pattern that was people-]
oriented were more likely to employ allocation patterns based upon relative contributions in comparison with managers having task-oriented leadership styles. With respect to findings regarding the level of interdependence between the managers and subordinates in the study, Meindl noted that:

...Somewhat contrary to expectations, managers whose philosophies implied a strong people orientation did not, at the highest level of interdependence, make greater use of parity principles compared with those managers with weaker people orientations. Instead, those managers tended to display more differentiated allocations that corresponded more closely with equity-distributions principles, departing from what otherwise could be defined as more normatively appropriate, parity-based solutions. (p. 265)

These results suggest that, as interdependence between leaders and subordinates increases, consideration by the supervisor plays a stronger role in distributive outcomes. The nature of leader-member relations may have important implications for how Distributive Justice operates in work settings. Meindl (1989) discussed the implications of these findings for managers and urged the development of further leadership theory that incorporates fairness concerns.]

**Distributive justice.** The concept of distributive justice is grounded in equity theory. Equity theory focuses on individual perceptions of the ratio between effort on the job ("inputs") and rewards ("outcomes") (Adams, 1965). Individuals are motivated to act (or change perceptions) to achieve psychological states of balance (Festinger, 1957; Heider, 1958). Distributive Justice (or equity) is defined as employee perceptions of the
fairness of outcomes employees receive, such as pay (Pritchard, Dunnette & Jorgenson, 1972). According to equity theory, states of inequity cause tension for the underpaid (or overpaid) individual, which the individual seeks to resolve through either behavioral or psychological adjustments. For example, behavioral adjustments include working harder and psychological adjustments include rationalizing that some inputs are more important than others. Equity theory resulted in an impressive stream of research (c.f., Adams & Freedman, 1976; Greenberg, 1982).

**Procedural justice.** Research indicates that Distributive and Procedural Justice are separate constructs. Procedural Justice is defined as the application of fair rules in decisions regarding resource allocation. Greenberg (1986) reported factor analytic results suggesting that Procedural Justice and Distributive Justice are distinct, but equally important to employees. He concluded that the process or procedures of fairness are as important to employees as distributive outcomes. Similarly, Lind and Tyler (1988) report a study conducted by Lissak, Mendes and Lind (1983) that found Procedural Justice made a larger contribution to job satisfaction than Distributive Justice in a study of Canadian Armed Forces enlisted personnel. Consistent with the above results, McFarlin and Sweeney (1992) reported that Procedural Justice was more important than Distributive Justice with respect to supervisor evaluations by bank employees.

In a study of fairness perceptions and work outcomes of over 2,000 Federal employees, Alexander and Ruderman (1987) reported results of a factor analysis of 20 organizational justice items that indicated two factors: (a) Procedural Justice (e.g., participation, appeals process fairness) and (b) Distributive Justice (e.g., pay fairness). These authors reported both Distributive and Procedural Justice were positively related to
work outcomes of employees, but Procedural Justice had stronger correlations with Job Satisfaction, harmony, trust in upper-level management, and evaluation of supervisors. In sum, research has supported the distinctness of Distributive and Procedural Justice, and the relative importance of Procedural Justice over Distributive Justice in work settings.

**Interpersonal justice.** Originally, termed “interactional” justice by Bies & Moag (1986), Colquitt (2001) relabeled this dimension of justice as “interpersonal justice.” Proactive organizational justice theory focuses on how employees attempt to change perceptions of unfairness (Greenberg, 1987). Leventhal (1980) proposed that resource allocation decisions are contingent upon the context in which they occur. For example, if resource allocation based upon equity would result in negative competition among members of team, allocations may be made equally so the team can effectively function. Leventhal, Karuza and Fry (1980) presented normative theory summarized as eight rules for ensuring fairness: (a) employers allow participation in the selection of resource allocators; (b) rule application is consistent; (c) decision makers use accurate information; (d) employers identify the decision-making structure (e) decision makers employ safeguards against bias; (f) an appeals process exists; (g) employers provide opportunities to change the decision making process and (h) employers base procedures on prevailing moral and ethical standards. Field studies have supported the efficacy of these normative guidelines (Greenberg, 1986).

Bies and Moag (1986) proposed that Interactional Justice is a third aspect of organizational justice, which is defined as the supervisors' application of the eight rules for communicating fairness to employees listed above by Leventhal and colleagues
Bies and Moag (1986) proposed that procedures lead to interactions that, in turn, lead to outcomes and emphasized the importance of separating the analysis of procedures from the interactions themselves. For example, a procedure for allocating space in a research laboratory may be followed; however, the supervisor may violate the accuracy rule (Leventhal et al., 1980) by not gathering sufficient information from the scientists reporting to him regarding ongoing project needs in terms of space. Although formal procedures for allocating space are followed, if interactions between supervisor and subordinate are ineffective, some subordinates may interpret the allocation (Distributive Justice) as unfair (Bies & Moag, 1986; Greenberg, 1992). In agreement with a review by Cropanzano and Randall (1992), Procedural and Interactional Justice as closely related, but conceptually distinct. Cropanzano and Randall note the importance of this distinction: "... even if procedures and interpersonal treatment are parts of the same phenomenon, both may well be important for understanding organizational behavior" (p. 14). For example, in the context of performance appraisals, Korsgaard, Roberson and Rymph (1998) found that assertive behavior on the part of subordinates was related to interactional justice. Moorman (1991) developed a measure of perceived fairness with scales for Distributive, Procedural, and Interactional Justice, using Confirmatory Factor Analysis procedures. Recently, however, Colquitt (2001) identified a fourth form of justice, “informational justice”

**Informational justice.** Colquitt’s (2001) conceptualization of informational justice draws upon the work of Bies and Moag (1986) and Shapiro, Buttner and Barry (1994), in keeping with Greenberg’s (1990) suggestion that interactional and informational justice have independent effects and should be measured separately.
Whereas Interpersonal Justice refers to the degree to which individuals are treated with respect by managers, informational justice describes the types of explanations that are offered regarding outcome distribution. Specifically, informational justice refers to the degree to which a manager is candid, explains procedures and communicates details in a timely manner, and tailors communication to individuals’ specific needs. Colquitt’s studies support the existence of four distinct justice constructs, and the four-factor model fit the data from two samples (university and field) better than rival three-, two- and one-factor models. While there are few studies employing the new four-factor measure, other studies have employed measures reflecting this construct (e.g. Bies & Moag, 1986; Shapiro et al., 1994).

It appears to be important to differentiate among the different types of organizational justice. Results of a meta-analysis of the justice literature suggest that there are unique relationships between the four types of justice and organizational outcomes of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, evaluation of authority, organizational citizenship behavior, withdrawal and performance (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter & Ng, 2001). As part of this meta-analysis, a “usefulness analysis” was conducted in which the variance accounted for by each of the four justice dimensions was computed, controlling for the other three. Differential relationships were found for each of the justice dimensions. Specifically, Distributive Justice had unique effects for outcome satisfaction and withdrawal behavior. Higher unique effects were found for Procedural Justice and system-referenced outcomes of outcome satisfaction, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, evaluation of authority and performance. Finally, higher unique effects were found for interpersonal and informational justice on
job satisfaction, organizational commitment, evaluation of authority, organizational citizenship behavior and performance.

**MOTIVES FOR RESOLVING A PREDICAMENT OF INJUSTICE**

Regardless of the manner in which injustice has occurred, we propose that managers are motivated to resolve a predicament of injustice. A manager would be concerned with keeping the exchange relationships in balance because a follower’s perceptions of injustice may cost the manager both economically and emotionally (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Moreover, a manager needs to be fair to each subordinate in order to maintain authority over that individual as well as the workgroup in which the employee is embedded (Tyler & Lind, 1992).

**Repairing the Dyadic Relationship**

**Rational perspective.** [Need to insert discussion of Blau (1964) and describe the idea of exchanges and why it’s important to keep them balanced.] From a rational (or instrumental) perspective the manager wants to maintain a productive working relationship with direct reports and unfair behavior may be detrimental to employee performance (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001). Lagace, Castleberry and Ridnour (1993) found that cadre members (high quality exchange relationships) scored higher on motivational factors and evaluations of their bosses and experienced less role-related stress (Role Overload, Role Insufficiency, Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict). However, Out-Group members reported lower motivation, lower evaluations of bosses, and more stress, all of which are consistent with predictions from the organizational justice literature (Greenberg, 1984; Tyler & Lind, 1988). Simons and Roberson (2003) demonstrated that justice perceptions of injustice of hotel employees
were related to lower organizational commitment, higher turnover and lower customer satisfaction ratings. Thus, managers are motivated to correct situations of injustice because they affect the bottom line.

**Emotional perspective.** Relationships between leaders and members have been shown to contain affect, or liking (Dienesch & Liden, 1983). If a manager likes the employee in question, it will bother the manager that the employee disapproves of them for an unfair act. From an emotional perspective, the manager may also experience guilt when they have done something unfair. This feeling is related to the concept of “overpayment inequity” in Equity theory (Adams, 1965). Actions that are unjust upset the balance in the exchange process and the manager’s awareness that he/she has been unfair may produce anxiety. Guilt has been shown to present a moral dilemma for the guilty party which is linked to the need to take action towards resolution (Greenspan, 1995). As noted by Greenspan guilt’s “… characteristic desire for reparation may be said to move the agent toward others insofar as it prompts him to make up for any harm done them” (p. 127). This is also linked with Rawls’ (1971) view that guilt is linked with empathetic distress. Thus a manager will be motivated to change the subordinates’ perception that he/she has been unfair to resolve the moral dilemma that engaging in an unfair act causes. One way to do this is by changing the perceptions of unfairness by “looking fair” (Greenberg, 1988). However in looking fair, impression management does not actually resolve the guilt. It may, in fact, make it worse, because it adds dishonesty on top of the original cause of the empathetic distress. Another way is to initiate the relationship repair process so that the subordinate’s sense that the manager is fair is restored.
Maintaining Authority

The second major reason why a manager would be motivated to address a predicament of unfairness is that unfair behavior to one employee may affect the entire work group. Sias and Jablin (1995) found that group members discuss instances of unfairness by authority figures with one another. When one member is treated unfairly by a manager, all work group members know about it. For example, performance appraisal systems often require supervisors to rank employees. Managers must allow equal access to the system and follow procedures that are fair in outcome distribution. If managers do not attend to fundamental aspects of fairness, leadership cannot occur, since the followers will reject the leader's authority if they perceive the leader as unfair (Tyler & Caine, 1981). The manager must thus be concerned about his/her reputation for fairness with the work group, and perhaps in the organization as well. Greenberg (1988) asserts that managers with a reputation for fairness in an organization have more power. Lind and Tyler (1988) suggested that In-Group and Out-Group issues may be understood by "Value to Group" which they defined as an individual's perception that his or her contributions are valued by the leader and the group. Tyler (1986) concludes that "... concerns about group feeling and loyalty to the group heighten attention to issues of Procedural Justice" (p. 17). This approach, referred to as the "Relational model of authority in groups" views an employee's feeling that his or her contributions are valued as an outcome of Procedural Justice. In contrast to assumptions that individuals always act in self-interest, the Group Values model implies that procedures can be viewed as fair if consistent with the values of the group. Lind and Tyler (1988) suggest that status and security are universal group values. The group will thus support procedures reinforcing
security within the group. For example, if the group perceives that the manager has been unfair to one member of the group, they may begin to question the legitimacy of the manager. Members of the group may also begin to be concerned that the manager will treat them unfairly in the future. The manager cannot maintain authority over the group, unless the group perceives them as fair (Scandura, 1999).

**STRATEGIES FOR RESOLVING A PREDICAMENT OF INJUSTICE**

Hence, there are many reasons why managers would want to mend an unfair situation they had created for a subordinate and there are various strategies they may enact. Drawing from the literatures on justice, explanations, and social exchange theory, we propose four general tactics that managers may employ to correct an injustice: explanations, restorative actions, alternative recompense, and apologies. Granted, many of these tactics already appear in the justice literature, but are presented as ways in which managers can defend and protect their image – assuming their primary concern is not actually being fair to the other person. Instead, the focus in this discussion is how managers can use these tactics proactively to mend the situation with their employee in order to protect the integrity of their relationship. Below, we describe each tactic, note when managers are likely to employ the tactic, and identify which type of justice violations the tactic would be able to address. See Table 1 for a summary of this discussion. [Terri: I haven’t created the table yet because I was going to see if we had the room available for an extra page. Or we may decide that this discussion is clear enough without a table (i.e., the table wouldn’t add much value). But I have one sketched out to show you, then we can decide.] Granted, managers may employ more than one of these strategies concurrently to resolve a particular justice violation. However, in order to
garner understanding of these tactics in a manageable, systematic way, we discuss each separately.

Insert Table 1 About Here

**Explanations**

Explanations are verbal responses which reveal “the reason for, or the cause of, some event that is not immediately obvious or entirely known” (Shaw et. al., 2003: 445) and come in two forms, excuses and justifications (Scott & Lyman, 1968). Bies (1987) noted that explanations are a form of social account and referred to excuses and justifications as causal accounts and ideological/referential accounts, respectively.

Excuses are explanations in which an individual, in this case a manager, admits what they did was unfavorable or inappropriate but claims that a mitigating circumstance influenced his or her behavior. By contrast, a justification admits responsibility for the act in question but denies the act is inappropriate, appealing to a superordinate goal or another referent standard to “justify” the behavior. Research has demonstrated that explanations can have a beneficial impact on outcomes such as enhanced cooperation, and decreased retaliation and withdrawal (Shaw et. al., 2003).

Previously, researchers conceptualized explanations as managers’ primary response to justice violations, since they were a readily available means of “defending” managers’ social identities. However, if managers are, in fact, concerned with actually being fair, then their use of this tactic as a response to a predicament of injustice will, in fact, be much more limited. Specifically, if managers desire to be fair to their employees, then they will only resort to explanations if they truly believe what they did was fair. To illustrate this argument we will describe a fictional manager, Patty, who oversees three
employees, George, Sharon, and Don, and is concerned with maintaining a good relationship with each of her reports. Patty recently awarded raises them raises for the upcoming quarter. The raises were based on merit and could not exceed a total, fixed amount of $1000 for all three employees. Patty allocated the money as follows to George ($350), Sharon ($350), and Don ($300). Upon discovering he had received a smaller raise than his counterparts, Don felt he had been treated unfairly and questioned Patty about her decision. Patty, however, had more information about the objective performance of his colleagues than Don and knew that the allocation had been fair. George and Sharon had worked longer hours and brought in more business during the last quarter than Don. Therefore, when Don approached her with his grievance, knowing that her allocation had been fair, Patty did not reconsider the amount of his raise, but, instead, explained to him why he received that amount. In sum, to repair her relationship with Don, Patty resorted to using an explanation in the form of an excuse offering Don’s objective performance as a mitigating circumstance.

The aforementioned example involves a predicament relating to distributive justice. However, managers likely employ explanations when faced with a predicament involving any of the four types of justice violations -- if they believe the employee’s feelings are unjustified. Under this condition, taking action to correct the perceived injustice would, consequently produce an unfair state for all involved as well as create an imbalance in the exchange relationship of the two parties.

**Restorative Action**

In the example above, Patty knew she had been fair to her employees. In reality, sometimes when managers are faced with a predicament of injustice, they may realize
what they did was, in fact, unfair. Assuming managers are concerned with being fair to their employees, they will then be motivated to correct the injustice. [Need to insert some citations to support this….perhaps from equity research.] For example, when Don expressed his grievance to Patty, during this conversation Patty may have realized she made an error in her evaluation of Don’s performance. Patty may have not been aware of additional business that Don had brought to the group that quarter or may have mistakenly attributed these new accounts to George or Sharon. In order to repair her relationship with Don, upon realizing this mistake, Patty would want to give Don the additional money he deserves. Thus, assuming funds were available, she would increase Don’s raise to accurately reflect his performance at work.

By correcting an injustice in such a manner, the exchanges between the manager and the subordinate would be re-balanced. Moreover, by taking action, the manager would also signal to the subordinate that they are concerned with repairing their relationship with them. However, managers will not be able to apply this tactic to all types of justice violations. Restorative action is not possible for injustices resulting from flawed interactions (i.e. interpersonal and informational justice), because interactions cannot be undone. Such action would, however, be possible for violations related to distributive justice, as noted in the above-example, and procedural justice. If a manager has committed a procedural injustice, they can restore justice by re-applying the procedures in a fair manner or altering the procedures to be fair.

**Alternative Recompense**

Although managers will be motivated to restore justice when possible, sometimes they cannot correct the specific behavior which was unjust or correcting that particular
behavior is not appropriate. Organizational policies may constrain a manager’s actions so that they cannot re-distribute outcomes or alter procedures. In cases where desired resources of a certain type are limited, additional resources of the same type may be unavailable to compensate employees who have been under-rewarded. If so, the manager will have to repair the relationship by using other means to restore balance to the exchange. They are likely to do this by offering inputs of a different type. [Look for any studies that support this idea.]

Referring back to our example, Patty may realize that she has not rewarded Don adequately but may not be able to give him the additional compensation he deserves. There may not be available funds past the $1000 that she was initially allocated and she may not be able to re-distribute those funds between her three reports. However, assuming Patty wants to correct the injustice, she will likely think of other ways she may compensate him. She may help him bring in a profitable account, may supply him with other resources (e.g., a new computer), or pay to send him to a conference he wants to attend.

If a manager relies on alternative recompense as a tactic to repair the injustice, the specific injustice will not be corrected. However, the manager will try to restore balance to their exchange relationship by offering the subordinate alternative inputs. Alternative recompense is likely the primary tactic a manager will employ for violations relating to interpersonal and informational justice, because, as stated above, they will not be able to undo such violations. However, a manager may also be forced to find other means to correct a distributive or procedural injustice if constraints do not permit them to take
restorative action. Thus, alternative recompense may be used to help repair a predicament of injustice related to any of the four types.

**Apology**

Other than explanations, an additional type of verbal response a manager may use is an apology. An apology is as a statement that acknowledges both responsibility and regret for causing a particular injustice. Managers are likely to apologize when they realize they have done something unfair and either cannot employ restorative action or alternative recompense or believe that taking such action is not necessary because the offense is very trivial. An apology can help resolve a predicament of injustice because the manager provides an expression of remorse that may positively influence the employee’s beliefs about their motives and intentions, and reduce the employee’s concerns about continued vulnerability (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). Bies (1987) describes an apology as a penitential account because by publicly expressing remorse, the manager is actually enacting a form of self-retribution. Thus, the act of apologizing in itself can be perceived as “offering partial payment for the injustice event” (i.e., offering an input) (Bies, 1987: 303). Thus, an apology alone may be sufficient to re-balance the exchange relationship if the initial violation was small. If the violation is more significant, an apology may not be sufficient to fully address the injustice but may be better than not responding at all, because experimental studies reveal that the expression of remorse following a transgression can mitigate punishment (e.g., Schwartz, Kane, Joseph, & Tedeschi, 1978).

There is a risk, however, that an apology may also escalate a predicament of injustice. Because an apology acknowledges guilt, it may fail to ameliorate the negative
consequences of a predicament if other action is not also taken to address the injustice (Schlenker, 1980). Returning to our example, if Patty realizes she has unfairly allocated the raises, she may apologize to Don and promise to be more careful in the future. If the amount of money was trivial, Don may accept her apology and forgive her error. If the amount of money was not trivial, however, the apology may cause Don to perceive more injustice than initially and, thus, experience moral outrage. An apology is also not likely to be effective, if the employee believes the injustice was not a result of an error (i.e., a competence-related issue) but a purposeful attempt by the manager to harm the employee (i.e., an integrity-related issue). Recent research on trust repair indicates that an apology can be effective for repairing trust when the initial violation concerned matters of competence but that an apology is less effective for repairing trust after an integrity-related issue, because of how individuals process information about each type of violation (Kim, Ferrin, Cooper, & Dirks, 2004). Thus, if Don thought Patty had simply made a mistake by not realizing he had brought in extra business in the previous quarter, Patty’s apology would be much more effective for repairing the situation than if Don believed Patty purposely cheated him out of the money for another reason.

To conclude, if an apology is used as the sole tactic to address a predicament of injustice, it may be effective if the initial injustice was trivial in nature. However, in other cases an apology risks outraging the aggrieved employee, if the manager does not also try to correct the injustice. In such cases, an apology may be effective but only if used in conjunction with a restorative action or alternative re-compensation. Moreover, such behavioral tactics would likely always benefit from being coupled with an apology, since an apology expresses remorse for the initial misdeed.
CONCLUDING REMARKS

This theoretical discussion describes why many managers are concerned with being, rather than simply appearing, fair and proposes various tactics such managers likely use to resolve predicaments of injustice they encounter. We hope this discussion will encourage such research, since the literature on social accounts offers only a limited description of how managers may address perceptions of injustice. Our typology of strategies may not be exhaustive, however, we offer it as a framework to guide initial empirical research on this topic. After researchers identify the various tactics managers employ, they also need to assess the effectiveness of each tactic for alleviating justice concerns and repairing relationships between the parties involved. Such research would not only inform management theory but be able to offer valuable prescriptions for managers faced with such situations.
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