Organizational Justice and Managerial Trust as Predictors of Antisocial Employee Responses
Rebecca M. Chory & Anne P. Hubbell

This study examined the relationships between employee perceptions of organizational justice and trust and employee antisocial organizational behavior and communication. Participants from organizations representing two geographic regions were surveyed regarding their most recent performance appraisal. Results indicated that perceptions of justice and trust negatively predicted indirect interpersonal aggression, hostility, obstructionism, and deception. When justice and trust were entered simultaneously into the regression model, perceptions of trust predicted hostility, while perceptions of distributive justice predicted deception. Post hoc analyses demonstrated that justice and trust interacted to predict antisocial responses, and trust mediated the relationships between justice and antisocial responses.

Keywords: Antisocial Communication; Justice; Organizations; Trust

Antisocial communication such as bullying, shouting, criticism, and vicious gossip is prevalent in organizations (Glomb, 2002; McGovern, 1999). Expressions of hostility and indirect interpersonal aggression, such as spreading rumors about another, and acts of obstructionism, such as failing to return phone calls or respond to memos, are the most frequently occurring types of workplace aggression (Baron, Neuman, & Geddes, 1999; Neuman & Baron, 1998). Victims of such antisocial acts report that they have lost work time worrying about future encounters with the offender or trying to avoid him/her, have thought about changing jobs or have actually done...
so, and have altered their levels of organizational commitment (McGovern, 1999). Because of the prevalence and problematic outcomes associated with antisocial organizational behavior and communication (AOBCs), communication scholars, as well as management and employees, are likely to be concerned with their understanding, prevention, and control.

This study addresses this concern by examining the relationships between employee perceptions of organizational justice and trust and employee indirect interpersonal aggressiveness, hostility, obstructionism, and deception. Like many investigations of these constructs (e.g., Greenberg & Alge, 1998; Hubbell & Chory-Assad, 2005), predictions regarding relationships among them are based on equity theory (Adams, 1965; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978).

Identifying the perceptions that predict AOBCs may provide practical knowledge that can be used to address this important issue. In addition, the study responds to theoretical questions regarding the relationship between injustice and AOBCs (e.g., what is the relative strength of the justice types in predicting AOBCs, and do the justice types predict different types of AOBCs?) (Neuman & Baron, 1998). Finally, the current research examines a relatively new area of study—the relationships between trust in managers and AOBCs.

Organizational Justice

Organizational justice refers to perceptions of fairness and evaluations regarding the appropriateness of workplace outcomes or processes (Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997). In terms of organizational justice, performance evaluations can operate as outcomes in and of themselves (Adams, 1965; Greenberg, 1986a, b) or as steps through which decisions (e.g., pay raises) are made. This study considers performance evaluations as outcomes in their own right, and as such, they may be perceived as rewards or punishments and may communicate the self-worth, value, and career potential of an employee (Greenberg, 1986b). As outcomes, evaluations can also be judged in terms of distributive justice (Greenberg, 1986a, b; Magner, Johnson, & Elfrink, 1994).

Distributive justice refers to perceptions of the fairness of outcomes received in a transaction (Byrne & Cropanzano, 2001; Homans, 1961). Most organizational justice scholars have assumed the rule for judging distributive justice is equity, although scholars recognize the possibility that rules such as need or equality may also be used (Adams, 1965; Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997; Deutsch, 1985; Leventhal, 1980; McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992). In assessing distributive justice, individuals evaluate and compare the outcome (e.g., performance appraisal) they received to a standard or rule (e.g., equity) and/or to the outcome received by a referent (e.g., co-workers) (Adams, 1965; Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997).

While distributive justice deals with evaluations of the fairness of outcomes, perceptions of the fairness of the processes used to arrive at these outcomes is referred to as procedural justice (Byrne & Cropanzano, 2001). Procedural justice is an individual’s perception of the fairness of the process components of the social system that regulates the distribution of resources. Leventhal (1980) proposed that the fairness of
procedures is judged based on their consistency of application, prevailing ethical standards, the degree of their bias, accuracy, correctability, and the extent to which they represent all people concerned.

Finally, interactional justice refers to the fairness and quality of interpersonal treatment received when procedures are implemented (Bies & Moag, 1986). When individuals perceive they have been communicated with in a sensitive and respectful manner and are treated with politeness and dignity by those carrying out the procedures (Bies & Moag, 1986; Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001), they are more likely to judge this communication as fair. Research has shown interactional justice to be positively related to employee performance, supervisor-directed citizenship behaviors, and job satisfaction (Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, & Taylor, 2000).

Managerial Trust

Trust in the superior-subordinate dyad has been considered especially important because it is a “critical factor in affecting behaviors in organizations” (Nyhan, 2000, p. 88) and because “no single variable influences interpersonal and group behavior as much as trust” (Sashittal, Berman, & Ilter, 1998, p. 163). Managers in particular should be the focus of trust development because they must initiate behaviors, like trust, that they wish to have reciprocated from subordinates (Whitener, Brodt, Korsgaard, & Werner, 1998). The common definition of this type of trust refers to allowing oneself to become vulnerable to another, to risk harm from another person, due to the belief that the other will not act in a destructive manner (Rosseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998; Rotter, 1967). Current research on trust in this dyad focuses on behaviors that engender trust, such as integrity, predictability of behaviors, and honesty (Ellis & Shockley-Zalabak, 2001).

Performance Appraisal as a Context to Understand Justice, Trust, and AOBCs

This exploration is set in the context of the performance appraisal—participants are asked to report their perceptions of justice and trust and their corresponding antisocial responses with regard to their most recent performance evaluation. This context seemed an appropriate one in which to conduct the present study because concerns about justice (Greenberg, 1986a, b) and perceptions of trust (Early, 1986; Sashittal et al., 1998) manifest themselves here. Furthermore, performance appraisals have become increasingly important in today’s organizational environment, with organizations downsizing, adopting continuous improvement approaches, and becoming more concerned over wrongful discharge lawsuits and aggressive reactions to feedback (Geddes & Baron, 1997).

Empirical Rationale

The theoretical underpinning of this research is equity theory (Adams, 1965; Walster et al., 1978), which states that individuals evaluate their relationships in terms of the contributions/ input they make and the benefits/outcomes they receive, and by
comparing this ratio to the corresponding ratio of a comparison person or standard. When individuals actually receive what they feel they deserve based on their contributions and the corresponding ratio of a comparison other, the exchange is considered fair and equity is assumed to exist. In contrast, when equity is blocked by injustice, individuals experience emotions such as frustration, anger, and resentment that motivate them to eliminate or reduce the inequity (Adams, 1965; Deutsch, 1985; Homans, 1961; Walster et al., 1978).

The present study focuses on employees’ attempts to restore equity by altering their levels of managerial trust and by engaging in AOBCs. By doing so, employees decrease the number of resources they contribute to the manager-employee relationship so that it better matches the perceived under-rewards they received. Decreasing one’s trust and increasing AOBCs also indicate dissatisfaction with the relationship and perhaps anger toward the unjust person(s). Furthermore, becoming less trusting may act as a means of avoiding future exploitation by the person. All these actions are likely to relieve employees’ distress and increase their feelings that equity has been restored. In the performance evaluation context, the equity-restoration response is evidenced by research indicating that perceptions of injustice related to appraisals have been associated with less organizational commitment, less job satisfaction, declines in employee performance, and higher intentions to quit (Masterson et al., 2000).

Hypotheses and Research Question

Although distrust of managers and perceptions of injustice may occasionally lead employees to respond with overt acts of aggression during employment, most are not expected to do so because they still risk incurring negative consequences (e.g., termination). Thus, organizational members are likely to engage in less extreme, more covert, indirect forms of aggression toward their superior, rather than overt, direct aggression (e.g., physical attacks) (Geddes & Baron, 1997; Greenberg & Alge, 1998; Neuman & Baron, 1998) in response to perceptions of unfairness and distrust. This study focuses on four rather covert forms of AOBC: indirect interpersonal aggression, hostility, obstructionism, and deception.

Organizational justice research indicates that perceptions of procedural injustice are related to hostility and obstructionism (e.g., Bies & Tripp, 1996; Bies, Tripp, & Kramer, 1997; Niehoff & Moorman, 1993), and perceptions of both procedural and distributive justice are negatively related to counterproductive work behaviors and conflict at work (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Donnerstein & Hatfield, 1982). In addition, Greenberg (1991, as cited in Greenberg & Alge, 1998) found that most negative employee reactions occurred among layoff victims whose notices were socially insensitive (interactionally unjust). Finally, perceptions of all three justice types were negatively associated with behaviors that are used to punish or to get even with the organization and its representatives (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). These behaviors include elements of the AOBCs examined here. Based on this research and equity theory, the first hypothesis was posed.
H1: Employee perceptions of organizational justice will negatively predict employee indirect interpersonal aggressiveness, hostility, obstructionism, and deception.

According to the agent-system model, perceptions of interactional justice should affect reactions toward managers, while perceptions of procedural justice should affect reactions toward organizations (Bies & Moag, 1986; Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt, 2001; Masterson et al., 2000). As the present study assesses respondents’ likelihood of engaging in AOBCs with the individual who delivered the performance feedback, these responses are likely to be most strongly predicted by the justice type that is most directly under the control of the individual. This type is likely to be interactional justice, as it involves the communication of the manager, which is likely to originate from the person (i.e., the organization cannot reasonably control how sensitive or respectful the manager is). In contrast, procedures, or procedural justice, and distribution of rewards, or distributive justice, are more likely to be controlled by, or at least constrained by, the larger organization. Managers may not be able to deviate from the organization’s performance appraisal procedures, and managers may only be able to recommend employees for raises and be unable to control the distribution of them. Due to this uncertainty, procedural justice and distributive justice are not expected to be as strong predictors of AOBCs as is interactional fairness. Hypothesis two posits these relationships.

H2: Among the three organizational justice types, employee perceptions of interactional justice will be the strongest predictor of employee indirect interpersonal aggressiveness, hostility, obstructionism, and deception.

The violation of trust in a superior has been found to influence organizational citizenship (Konovsky & Pugh, 1994; Korsgaard, Brodt, & Whitener, 2002) and deception or information distortion (Gaines, 1980; Mellenger, 1956; Roberts & O’Reilly, 1974; Zand, 1972). In addition, research on trust indicates that individuals low in trust report heightened negative affect and vindictiveness, along with problems centered on hostility and dominance. For example, low trust is associated with being too controlling, competitive, envious, and resentful, and lacking feelings toward others (Gurtman, 1992). Interpersonal trust and hostility are also negatively related (Hoffman & Moon, 1999). These relationships suggest that trust will be predictive of the organizational outcomes examined here. The third hypothesis describes this prediction.

H3: Employee perceptions of managerial trust will negatively predict employee indirect interpersonal aggressiveness, hostility, obstructionism, and deception.

Although perceptions of both organizational justice and trust are hypothesized to predict AOBCs, it is not clear which construct is likely to be the stronger predictor. Furthermore, there does not appear to be any research that simultaneously examines justice and trust as predictors of AOBCs. As such, the following research question was posed:

RQ: Will employee perceptions of organizational justice or managerial trust be a stronger predictor of employee indirect interpersonal aggressiveness, hostility, obstructionism, and deception?
Method

Participants

Participants were 144 working adults (62.5% female) from a variety of organizations recruited through students from a mid-Atlantic university (46.5% of sample) and a southwestern university (53.5% of sample) in the United States. At the mid-Atlantic university, recruiters provided participants’ contact information to one of the researchers, who then sent the questionnaire and consent forms to the participants via e-mail or the U.S. Postal Service. These participants then returned the questionnaires and consent forms to the researcher via the U.S. Postal Service. At the southwestern university, student recruiters themselves administered the consent forms and questionnaires to participants, collected them, and returned them to the other researcher.1 All procedures involving human subjects were approved by the institutional review boards at the researchers’ respective universities.

Approximately 71.6% of the participants reported their ethnic background as Caucasian, 20.6% were Hispanic, 5.7% were African-American, 1.4% were Native American, and 0.7% indicated they were a blend of ethnicities. Participants’ ages ranged from 20 to 67 years \( (M = 38.23, SD = 12.54) \). Approximately 51.1% of the participants were employed in the managerial/professional field, 29.5% in technical/sales/administrative support, 12.9% in service occupations, 4.3% in precision production/craft/repair, and 2.2% as operators/fabricators/laborers. Their mean annual salary was $33,100 \( (SD = 22,700) \), and they worked at their respective jobs an average of 43.07 \( (SD = 8.62) \) hours per week. The evaluation they reported on occurred anywhere from the day of data collection to three years prior \( (M = 6.89 \text{ months, } SD = 7.42) \). About 33% of the participants reported that they were responsible for giving performance evaluations to others.

Organizational Justice Measures

Participants were asked to report their perceptions of justice with regard to their most recent performance evaluation, which was defined as follows:

Performance evaluations are written, formal documents or are informal verbal communications containing task-relevant information, received from a superior/manager. They are typically meant to inform you about your past performance and/or help with your future performance. (Geddes, 1993)

Participants were to recall the most recent performance evaluation they received from a superior/manager about a job or assignment that they had recently completed or were in the process of completing and to use the scales to describe how they felt about that evaluation and their superior/manager. Perceptions of justice were assessed by five seven-point semantic differential scales with the following anchors: unfair/fair, unjust/just, biased/neutral, unjustified/justified, and unwarranted/warranted. Higher scores indicated higher perceptions of justice.

The scales used to measure distributive justice were preceded by the phrase, “The performance evaluation I received was…” Confirmatory factor analysis (Hunter &
Gerbing, 1982) indicated that the unjust/just item should be eliminated ($z = .93$, $M = 5.96$, $SD = 1.27$). The phrase, “the process used to evaluate my performance was . . .” preceded the scales used to measure procedural justice. Confirmatory factor analysis indicated the unjust/just and biased/neutral items should be eliminated ($z = .96$, $M = 5.97$, $SD = 1.40$). To assess interactional justice, the phrase, “In communicating my performance evaluation to me, my superior/manager treated me in a(n) . . . manner” preceded the scales ($z = .94$, $M = 6.22$, $SD = 1.09$).

Confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the three scales composed three individual factors.² Although the justice types were correlated, the confirmatory factor analysis, conceptual definitions, and the results of research showing their distinct factor structures (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001; Hubbell & Chory-Assad, 2005), interactive effects (Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997; McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992), and differing predictive power (Chory-Assad, 2002; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004; Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997; Hubbell & Chory-Assad, 2005) suggest treating them as separate variables.

Managerial Trust Measure

Managerial trust was measured using items from the Managerial Trustworthy Behaviors scale (MTB; Hubbell & Chory-Assad, 2005), which was developed based on theoretical links between managerial trust and agency and social exchange theories by Whitener et al. (1998; see also Ellis & Shockley-Zalabak, 2001). The present study used four of the scale’s components: behavioral consistency (predictability of a manager’s behavior over time), behavioral integrity (manager’s propensity to tell the truth and keep promises), manner and quality of information communicated (manager’s communication accuracy, explanations, and openness), and demonstration of concern (manager’s interest in, protection of, and ability to avoid hurting subordinates). In responding to the items, participants were instructed to indicate how they felt about their superior/manager after their most recent performance evaluation. Perceptions of managerial trust were measured by seven-point Likert scales with responses ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Higher scores represented higher perceptions of managerial trust. Based on the results of a confirmatory factor analysis, 8 of the 29 original items were eliminated from the scale ($z = .95$, $M = 5.42$, $SD = 1.14$).

Antisocial Organizational Behavior and Communication (AOBC) Measures

Participants’ likelihood of engaging in AOBCs was measured by having them respond to items based on how they felt toward their superior after their most recent evaluation. All items were preceded by, “If I had the opportunity I would . . .” Participants evaluated statements on a five-point Likert scale with responses ranging from extremely unlikely to extremely likely. Higher scores indicated a greater likelihood of performing the antisocial act.

Indirect interpersonal aggression was measured by items adapted from Beatty, Valencic, Rudd, and Dobos’ (1999) nine-item indirect interpersonal aggressiveness
scale, which assesses likelihood of harming others without engaging in face-to-face interaction. In this study, the items were adapted to assess likelihood of indirectly aggressing against one’s superior/manager. For example, Beatty et al.’s “I would try to keep important information from people who have been hostile toward me” was adapted to “I would keep important information from the superior.” Confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the item, “I would keep the superior from getting a job or promotion that (s)he really wants” should be eliminated ($\alpha = .86$, $M = 1.33$, $SD = .55$).

Hostility was measured by constructing 12 items representing behaviors identified by Neuman and Baron (1998) as acts of workplace hostility. These acts included, among others, “giving someone the silent treatment” and “negative or obscene gestures toward the target.” In the present study, the use of the word “someone” and “target” was replaced with “the superior.” As opposed to indirect aggressiveness, which stipulates no face-to-face interaction with the target, many of the hostile behaviors involve face-to-face communication (e.g., “make negative eye contact . . .”). In addition, hostility is measured here with items describing rather precise behaviors (e.g., “use negative or obscene gestures . . .”), whereas indirect aggressiveness contains items describing specific behaviors and items that seem to imply goals (e.g., “facilitate the superior’s failure”). Confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the item, “verbally sexually harass the superior” should be eliminated from the hostility scale ($\alpha = .91$, $M = 1.67$, $SD = .64$).

Obstructionism was measured by five items constructed from behaviors identified by Neuman and Baron (1998) as acts of workplace obstructionism—acts intended to interfere with one’s ability to perform his/her job or the organization’s ability to meet its objectives. In the present study, the obstructionism scale measures employee likelihood to engage in acts that interfere with the superior’s ability to perform his/her job duties. Sample items include, “show up late for meetings run by the superior” and “cause others to delay action on matters that were important to the superior” ($\alpha = .86$, $M = 1.51$, $SD = .63$).

Deception was measured by a 10-item scale that assessed message ambiguity, complete message distortion, and partial message distortion (Hubbell, Chory-Assad, & Medved, 2005; McCornack, Levine, Solowczuk, Torres, & Campbell, 1992). A sample item includes, “be ambiguous in communicating information that my superior/manager needs.” Confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the items, “tell my superior/manager the complete truth about every important situation” and “completely distort information when communicating with my superior/manager about an important situation” should be eliminated ($\alpha = .80$, $M = 1.82$, $SD = .68$). Confirmatory factor analyses indicate that the AOBC scales composed four unidimensional factors.$^3$

Results

The correlations among the variables appear in Table 1. Although the justice variables were rather highly correlated with each other, multicollinearity does not appear to be
an issue as variable inflation factors (VIFs) ranged from 2.07 to 3.39 and tolerance ranged from .30 to .48.

Hypotheses and Research Question

Given the directional nature of the hypotheses, one-tailed $t$-tests were used to evaluate the statistical significance of the regression coefficients. The first hypothesis, which predicted that justice would negatively predict the four AOBCs, was tested with four multiple regressions. To control for their potentially confounding effects, a block of variables that related to the predictor or criterion variables (i.e., sex, age, salary, geographical region, whether participants gave feedback) was entered into the model first, followed by a block of the three justice variables.

The block of participant variables predicted obstructionism, $F(5, 134) = 2.65, p < .05$; and deception, $F(5, 134) = 2.41, p < .05$; but not indirect aggression, $F(5, 134) = .78, p > .05$; or hostility, $F(5, 134) = 1.49, p > .05$. The addition of the second block containing the justice variables improved the ability of the regression models to predict indirect aggression, $\Delta R^2 = .17, R^2 = .20, F(3, 131) = 9.24, p < .001$; $F(8, 131) = 4.04, p < .001$; hostility, $\Delta R^2 = .18, R^2 = .24, F(3, 131) = 10.46, p < .001$; $F(8, 131) = 5.06, p < .001$; obstructionism, $\Delta R^2 = .16, R^2 = .25, F(3, 131) = 9.25, p < .001$; $F(8, 131) = 5.43, p < .001$; and deception, $\Delta R^2 = .29, R^2 = .37, F(3, 131) = 20.10, p < .001$; $F(8, 131) = 9.68, p < .001$. The first hypothesis was supported.

The second hypothesis predicted that among the three organizational justice types, interactional justice would be the strongest predictor of AOBCs. When all the predictors were entered in the models, interactional justice predicted indirect aggression, obstructionism, and deception, and procedural justice predicted indirect aggression and hostility. Hypothesis two was partially supported.

The third hypothesis predicted that trust would negatively predict AOBCs. This hypothesis was also tested with four multiple regressions, with the block of confounds entered first, followed by trust. The addition of trust improved the ability of the models

Table 1  Pearson Correlations among Organizational Justice, Managerial Trust, and Antisocial Behavior and Communication Variables

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<td>Procedural justice</td>
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<td>— .38</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hostility</td>
<td>— .40</td>
<td>— .42</td>
<td>— .42</td>
<td>— .48</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>Obstructionism</td>
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<td>— .37</td>
<td>— .43</td>
<td>— .38</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.82</td>
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<td>Deception</td>
<td>— .54</td>
<td>— .43</td>
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<td>— .46</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.66</td>
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Note: All correlations are statistically significant at $p < .001$. 

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to predict indirect aggression, $\Delta R^2 = .14$, $R^2 = .16$, $F(1, 133) = 21.38$, $p < .001$; $F(6, 133) = 4.31$, $p < .001$; hostility, $\Delta R^2 = .21$, $R^2 = .26$, $F(1, 133) = 37.46$, $p < .001$; $F(6, 133) = 7.83$, $p < .001$; obstructionism, $\Delta R^2 = .12$, $R^2 = .21$, $F(1, 133) = 19.61$, $p < .001$; $F(6, 133) = 5.79$, $p < .001$; and deception, $\Delta R^2 = .18$, $R^2 = .26$, $F(1, 133) = 31.84$, $p < .001$; $F(6, 133) = 7.77$, $p < .001$. The second hypothesis was supported. Table 2 contains the standardized regression coefficients.

The research question asked whether justice or trust would be a stronger predictor of AOBCs. Four multiple regression models were run, with the block of confounds entered first, followed by a block of trust and justice. When all the variables were entered, the models predicted indirect aggression, $F(9, 130) = 3.90$, $R^2 = .21$, $p < .001$; hostility, $F(9, 130) = 5.80$, $R^2 = .29$, $p < .001$; obstructionism, $F(9, 130) = 5.11$, $R^2 = .26$, $p < .001$; and deception, $F(9, 130) = 8.97$, $R^2 = .38$, $p < .001$. Trust predicted hostility, distributive justice predicted deception, and interactional justice predicted obstructionism at a level that approached statistical significance ($p = .079$). Table 3 contains the standardized regression coefficients for these regression models.

**Post hoc Analyses**

The interaction between justice and trust as a predictor of AOBCs was examined. To do this, the relationship between justice and trust first had to be assessed.
A theoretical discussion and an in-depth analysis of the relationship between the constructs may be found in Hubbell and Chory-Assad (2005). In the present study, the three organizational justice types were entered as a block into the model predicting trust after the block of confounds was entered. The addition of the justice block improved the ability of the model to predict trust, $R^2 = .46$, $R^2 = .52$, $F(3, 131) = 41.60, p < .001$. When all the variables were in the model, sex (being male), $b = .03$, and procedural justice, $b = .48$, predicted trust, $F(8, 131) = 17.68, p < .001$. 

To investigate whether justice and trust interacted to predict AOBCs, 12 multiple regression analyses were conducted, with the block of confounds entered first, followed by the given interaction term for each of the justice types and trust. Results indicate that the interaction between distributive justice and trust predicted indirect aggression, $\Delta R^2 = .08, \beta = .30, p < .05$; hostility, $\Delta R^2 = .03, \beta = .18, p < .05$; and deception, $\Delta R^2 = .06, \beta = .25, p < .05$; but not obstructionism. Similarly, the interaction between procedural justice and trust predicted indirect aggression, $\Delta R^2 = .08, \beta = .30, p < .05$; hostility, $\Delta R^2 = .06, \beta = .24, p < .05$; and deception, $\Delta R^2 = .04, \beta = .21, p < .05$; but not obstructionism. Finally, the interaction between interactional justice and trust predicted indirect aggression, $\Delta R^2 = .10, \beta = .33, p < .05$; hostility, $\Delta R^2 = .04, \beta = .20, p < .05$; and deception, $\Delta R^2 = .05, \beta = .24, p < .05$; but not obstructionism.

Although the interactions were statistically significant, they accounted for a small amount of variance in AOBCs. Thus, 12 path analyses were conducted to determine if the relationships between justice and AOBCs were mediated by trust. Based on the ordinary least squares method, Pearson correlations (see Table 1), which were sufficient in size, were used as the parameters. The first set of path analyses examined distributive justice leading to trust leading to AOBCs. Three of the four global tests for these models indicated that the errors were within sampling error: indirect aggression, $\chi^2(1) = 1.53, p > .05$; hostility, $\chi^2(1) = .98, p > .05$; obstructionism, $\chi^2(1) = 3.24, p < .05$. However, interactional justice leading to trust leading to AOBCs was not statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 1.23, p > .05$.

### Table 3 Standardized Regression Coefficients for Research Question One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Indirect interpersonal aggression</th>
<th>Hostility</th>
<th>Obstructionism</th>
<th>Deception</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>$-.03$</td>
<td>$-.03$</td>
<td>$-.02$</td>
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<td>Age</td>
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<td>Procedural justice</td>
<td>$-0.13$</td>
<td>$-.08$</td>
<td>$-.04$</td>
<td>$0.03$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactional justice</td>
<td>$-.24$</td>
<td>$-.17$</td>
<td>$-.26$†</td>
<td>$-.22$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial trust</td>
<td>$-.17$</td>
<td>$-.33$*</td>
<td>$-.16$</td>
<td>$-.16$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Sex: male $= 1$, female $= 2$. Region: southwest $= 1$, mid-Atlantic $= 2$. Give evaluation: no $= 1$, yes $= 2$.  

$^*p < .05$; $^†p = .079$. 

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\( \chi^2(1) = 2.00, p > .05; \) and deception, \( \chi^2(1) = 5.67, p < .05; \) demonstrating that trust acted as mediator between distributive justice and indirect aggression, hostility, and obstruction, but not deception.

Trust was then tested as a mediator of the relationship between procedural justice and the AOBCs; however, here all of the global tests indicated that the errors were within sampling error: indirect aggression, \( \chi^2(1) = 1.21, p > .05; \) hostility, \( \chi^2(1) = .78, p > .05; \) obstructionism, \( \chi^2(1) = 1.02, p > .05; \) deception, \( \chi^2(1) = 1.21, p > .05; \) indicating that trust acted as mediator between procedural justice and all of the AOBCs.

The third set of path analyses assessed trust as a mediator of the relationship between interactional justice and the AOBCs. The results were similar to those of distributive justice in that, again, three of the four global tests indicated that the errors were within sampling error: indirect aggression, \( \chi^2(1) = 2.35, p > .05; \) hostility, \( \chi^2(1) = 1.48, p > .05; \) obstructionism, \( \chi^2(1) = 3.25, p > .05; \) deception, \( \chi^2(1) = 4.99, p < .05; \) demonstrating that trust mediated the relationship between interactional justice and three of the AOBCs.5

Discussion

Antisocial communication and behavior are prevalent in organizations (Glomb, 2002; McGovern, 1999). Although these acts are often more covert than overt and physical, victims report decreased productivity and organizational commitment (McGovern, 1999), thus making actions that elicit such behaviors essential to understand. By understanding the perceptions and processes that provoke employee problematic behavior and communication, provisions can be made to aid in the efficient, effective, and safe functioning of organizations. The present study addresses the issue of antisocial organizational behavior and communication (AOBC) by exploring justice and trust in a context that could incite antagonistic reactions from employees—the performance appraisal.

General Discussion

First, the potential influence of the three types of justice was examined, and both their combined and individual relationships with the four antisocial outcomes assessed. Unlike hostility and obstructionism, indirect aggression and deception’s relationships with organizational justice have not yet been studied. It was believed, however, that these communication behaviors would be related to perceptions of injustice much as hostility and obstruction are. As predicted, the combined justice types predicted all four AOBCs.

Further, based on the agent-system model (Colquitt, 2001), it was expected that the more interpersonal type of justice, interactional justice, would be a stronger predictor of the four AOBCs than would procedural or distributive justice, because the AOBCs were directed toward another person (the superior). This hypothesis only received partial support. When the three justice types were entered into the regression
model, interactional justice was the sole predictor of obstructionism, predicted indirect aggression with a strength similar to procedural justice, predicted deception with somewhat less strength than did distributive justice, and did not predict hostility (procedural justice predicted hostility). These results suggest that although interactional justice may be the most consistent predictor of AOBCs, all three types of justice must be considered important, as they each play unique roles in relating to the different types of AOBCs.

Second, it was believed that, like organizational justice, managerial trust would predict AOBCs. This hypothesis received strong support in that managerial trust predicted all four AOBCs, with its predictive power strongest with regard to hostility. Third, the research question’s examination of the relative strength of justice and trust in predicting AOBCs suggests that trust is more important in predicting hostility, whereas justice is more important in predicting deception and obstructionism.

Results of multiple regression analyses examining the interaction of justice and trust indicate that the interactions between each justice type and trust predicted indirect aggression, hostility, and deception, but not obstructionism. These interactions, however, accounted for a small amount of variance in the AOBCs, so path analyses were conducted. The path analyses demonstrated that trust mediated the relationships between all three types of justice and indirect aggression, hostility, and obstructionism. Trust also mediated the relationship between procedural justice and deception, but not the relationships between distributive and interactional justice and deception. These results suggest that interactional and distributive justice directly influence deception, whereas procedural justice’s effect on deception occurs through its relationship with trust.

This pattern of results may be due to the interpersonal and communicative nature of deception and interactional justice and the more organizational/less interpersonal nature of procedural justice (see the previous discussion of the agent-system model). Procedural justice may need to work through an interpersonal variable, such as trust in superior, to affect deception. Trust may not have mediated the relationship between distributive justice and deception because distributive justice is so closely tied to satisfaction with the given outcome. Satisfaction with an important outcome, such as a performance appraisal, may directly influence employees’ responses to superiors. These interpretations must be considered cautiously, however, in that the path analyses were conducted post hoc and the direct relationships tested by the regression models were rather strong.

Taken together, these findings begin to illustrate the potential impact of organizational justice and trust on AOBCs. First, it appears that each type of justice is important in predicting AOBCs, with interactional justice appearing to be the most consistent predictor. This indicates that when examining the perceived fairness of an organizational process, such as the performance appraisal, each of the three justice types is distinct, and thus, all three should be measured and their relationships to the antisocial outcomes assessed.

Second, the role of managerial trust as both a direct predictor of AOBCs and as a mediator of the relationships between justice and AOBCs should be considered.
The regression analyses showed that trust predicted AOBCs, especially hostile behavior toward superiors. This finding demonstrates the importance of managerial trust when attempting to influence and/or understand behaviors, as opposed to attitudes, of organizational members. Behaviors, especially antisocial ones, can have more direct and stronger effects on organizational functioning, and thus managerial trust emerges as a variable that should be included in future research on antisocial and other organizational behaviors. In terms of mediation, trust seems to be most important in mediating the relationships between procedural justice and antisocial responses, as procedural justice indirectly affected all four AOBCs through its relationship with trust.

**Theoretical Implications**

Results of the present study of multiple organizations and organizational levels suggest that subordinates respond to perceived violations of justice and trust by superiors with a violation of their own—they engage in AOBCs. In terms of equity theory, such action likely restores relational balance. These responses also emphasize the dynamic relationship that exists between superiors and subordinates and provides insight into a means by which employees may gain a sense of power and control over their organizational environment.

Performance evaluations may also exemplify relational turning points or provide the context within which turning points may occur. For example, organizational members have reported being positively recognized for their work by superiors as turning points leading to beneficial organizational outcomes (Bullis & Bach, 1989b). In contrast, superior-subordinate relational clashes, such as subordinates receiving positive feedback and then being reprimanded by superiors, have been associated with negative organizational outcomes (Bullis & Bach, 1989a). In terms of the present study, subordinates’ receiving a performance evaluation considered unfair may alter their trust in superiors. Trust is a reciprocal relationship, and once lost is difficult to regain; thus, the seemingly unfair performance evaluation may transform, possibly irrevocably, the relationship between the superior and subordinate. Future research may wish to examine perceived organizational injustice using turning point analysis.

**Limitations of the Research**

Even though the present research aids in understanding the impact of organizational variables on antisocial responses, there are three major limitations. First, participants came from multiple organizations, which adds to the results’ generalizability but limits a more in-depth exploration of the specific processes at work among the variables. Using multiple organizations also does not allow for an examination of the influence of a specific organizational size or type on trust in managers. In smaller or certain types of organizations, for example, the interpersonal relationship between a manager and subordinate may be more intense, resulting
in stronger responses to perceived injustice. These processes may be more effectively studied in a comparison of two organizations or a more comprehensive study of one organization.

Second, this research focused on one context, the performance appraisal, which in this instance appeared to be a rather infrequent event. Future research may wish to examine justice and trust perceptions regarding other organizational communication events and the influence these perceptions may have on AOBCs. Finally, although this study showed that fair performance appraisals delivered by trustworthy managers predicted a lower reported likelihood of employee AOBCs, it did not include organizational trust (i.e., the belief that the upper levels of an organization are interested in the welfare of those at lower levels). Although beyond the scope of the current study, if two organizations were compared, as discussed above, differences in levels of organizational trust may explain or predict differences in AOBCs between the organizations.

Future Research

These limitations lead to two suggestions for future research. First, a logical step would be to examine how perceptions of justice and trust influence behaviors that may have a more direct link to organizational efficiency and effectiveness, such as absenteeism, workplace probation, and turnover. Second, although generalizability was a goal of the present research, future research could focus on one or two organizations to provide more in-depth understanding of the function of organizational justice and managerial trust in relation to the antisocial communication and behaviors examined here and those just mentioned. The present study offers a glimpse of these relationships, and given that the observed relationships were strong, they appear to lend themselves to more detailed research that can be accomplished with a smaller sample studied over time.

Conclusions

This research examined a problematic aspect of the superior-subordinate relationship and its results suggest strategies for avoiding disruptive and potentially damaging organizational behaviors and communication. These results may be particularly beneficial to supervisors charged with communicating feedback, as they tend to be concerned about aggressive reactions (Geddes & Baron, 1997). Here it was found that performance appraisals that are perceived as fair assessments, resulting from fair procedures, and communicated in a fair manner by a trusted superior appear to be less likely to elicit antisocial responses from employees. Knowing the potential loss of productivity and negative organizational impact that can result from a hostile workplace, this research demonstrates that justice and trust are crucial to high-functioning organizations and to understanding the human communication processes operating in such organizations.
Notes

[1] Participants recruited from the mid-Atlantic were older [(M = 42.31, SD = 12.66 vs. M = 34.68, SD = 11.37), t (142) = -3.18, p < .05] and earned more [(M = $37,900, SD = $25,300 vs. M = $29,000, SD = $19,400), t (142) = -2.40, p < .05] than those from the Southwest; however, the mid-Atlantic participants perceived less distributive justice after their performance evaluations than did the Southwestern participants [(M = 6.18, SD = 1.11 vs. M = 5.71, SD = 1.40), t (142) = 2.26, p < .05]. The form of the evaluation also differed according to the participants’ geographic region, F(1, 128) = 7.19, p < .05.

[2] For the justice variables, tests of homogeneity (internal consistency) indicated that for distributive and procedural justice, no error calculated between observed and expected correlations was greater than sampling error. For interactional justice, only one error calculated between observed and expected correlations was greater than sampling error (error was .01 beyond sampling error). Tests of heterogeneity (parallelism) indicated that fewer than 3% of errors calculated between observed and expected correlations was greater than sampling error (on average, errors were .13 beyond sampling error).

[3] Tests of homogeneity indicated that for deception and obstructionism no error calculated between observed and expected correlations was greater than sampling error. For indirect interpersonal aggressiveness, only one error calculated between observed and expected correlations was greater than sampling error (error was .01 beyond sampling error). For hostility, less than 10% of the errors calculated between observed and expected correlations was greater than sampling error (on average, errors were .06 beyond sampling error). Tests of heterogeneity indicated that less than 3% of errors calculated between observed and expected correlations was greater than sampling error (on average, errors were .13 beyond sampling error).

[4] Perceptions of all three justice types differed by participant sex, with women perceiving higher levels of justice. Participants responsible for giving feedback perceived higher levels of distributive justice and managerial trust than did participants not responsible for giving feedback. Participant age was negatively correlated with hostility, obstruction, and deception. Participant salary was negatively correlated with perceptions of procedural justice. As mentioned in Note 1, participant perceptions of distributive justice also differed according to the region from which the participants were recruited.

[5] Because the distributions for the predictor and criterion variables were quite skewed and exhibited non-normal kurtosis, the data were normalized using the logarithm transformation. The results for the hypotheses only became stronger after transforming the variables and the results for the post hoc analyses only changed slightly.

[6] Results after transforming the variables are available from the first author.

References


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