

1-1-2017

# Putting the Horse Before the Cart: The Influence of Trigger Events on Justice Perceptions and Work Attitudes

Bonnie S. O'Neill

Marquette University, [bonnie.oneill@marquette.edu](mailto:bonnie.oneill@marquette.edu)

John L. Cotton

Marquette University, [john.cotton@marquette.edu](mailto:john.cotton@marquette.edu)

*Putting the Horse Before the Cart: Understanding the Influence of Trigger  
Events on Justice Perceptions and Work Attitudes*.....

Bonnie S. O'Neill and John L. Cotton

To date very little research on organizational justice and work attitudes has focused on what starts the process that leads to these perceptions. A considerable amount of organizational research is focused on the end result (e.g., employees' perceptions, attitudes, or behaviors), which can become difficult to effectively manage or change after-the-fact in a timely or productive manner (Tekleab *et al.*, 2005). In this paper, two studies are conducted that explore a variety of events employees might notice and how they influence workplace outcomes. Study One explores 16 trigger events from prior research and surveys employees in a manufacturing organization about the events, and identifying 24 additional events. Study Two examines relationships between the trigger events and outcomes of pay and job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intent to leave, using organizational justice as a mechanism for sensemaking. Results from Study Two show that trigger events significantly predicted all four workplace attitudes. Procedural justice was significantly related to all dependent variables, interactional justice was significantly related only to job satisfaction and intention to leave, marginally unrelated to pay satisfaction, and unrelated to organizational commitment. Distributive justice was significantly related to job satisfaction, intention to leave, and pay satisfaction, but not organizational commitment. Seven of the 48 interaction terms examined were significant. Limitations and implications for future research are discussed.

## **Putting the Horse Before the Cart: Understanding the Influence of Trigger Events on Justice Perceptions and Work Attitudes**

Bonnie S. O'Neill

*Associate Professor of Management*  
Marquette University  
bonnie.oneill@marquette.edu

John L. Cotton

*Professor of Management*  
Marquette University  
john.cotton@marquette.edu

The social exchange relationship between employees and employers is one of the most common topics examined in organizational research (Louis and Sutton, 1991; Maitlis and Lawrence, 2007; Rupp and Cropanzano, 2002). A wide range of research streams elucidate this relationship, including theory related to psychological contracts (PCs), organizational justice, perceived organizational support, and organizational commitment, to name just a few. Taken together, two broad questions tend to arise from this research; specifically, *How do employees make sense of the relationship with their employer?* and *How can managers effectively manage employees' workplace attitudes?* These are seemingly simple questions, without simple answers. This paper explores some of the factors that may spark how these questions may be answered.

Even under the best circumstances, understanding what employees are thinking and predicting their potential reactions to environmental stimuli can be quite challenging. Unless perceptions are verbally expressed or specific behaviors are easily observed, managers can find themselves perpetually stuck in reaction mode, always a step behind, and struggling to know what employees are thinking. Regardless of the circumstances, strategies for effectively managing the employment relationship continue to be more reactionary than proactive (Jarzabkowski *et al.*, 2013). As a result, a considerable amount of organizational research, both academic and practitioner-

oriented, is focused on the end result (e.g., employees' perceptions, attitudes, or behaviors), which can become difficult to effectively manage or change after-the-fact in a timely or productive manner (Tekleab *et al.*, 2005). Despite the utility in examining individuals' attitudes, PC perceptions, or their resulting behaviors, by their very nature, the focus tends to fall on the final process or the end result (Alfes *et al.*, 2013). This, however, puts the cart before the horse.

In addition to the importance of understanding employees' perceptions and behaviors (i.e., low job satisfaction may lead to low morale, quitting, increased recruitment and training costs, etc.), it is equally important—and perhaps even more economical in the long run—to pay attention to what happens earlier on. In addition to understanding these outcomes, it is also important to look at events and/or activities that set in motion or *trigger* the noticing and sensemaking that ultimately influence various workplace perceptions and attitudes. For example, Ham and Van den Bos (2011) found that in some situations, individuals make spontaneous inferences about situations that have specific justice implications even if they are not intentionally doing so. Inferences about social justice situations were spontaneously made, even while individuals worked on other things (Ham and Van den Bos, 2011). Similarly, by examining triggers, managers may have more opportunities to consider how to positively shape employee perceptions and attitudes around a particular event or action.

Very little research to date has examined this part of the work relationship. Those studies that specifically mentioned triggers did so only briefly, as a preface to discussing other constructs. Therefore, this paper takes the first step in identifying specific workplace events that are most often noticed among employees. To start, theoretical work is reviewed that highlights how and why employees need to first *notice* something before it influences their behavior. Using sensemaking research as a theoretical foundation, it is argued that noticing something is a necessary precursor for making sense of what is happening. Events thought to be salient in prompting employees to make sense of their employment relationship are derived from a variety of sources and research, including human resources activities, research on PCs, organizational justice, referent choice, and leadership. A field study is conducted in which employees are surveyed about those events/actions and asked about other events they encounter when evaluating the social exchange relationship with their employer. Then, using the events identified in Study One, a second study is conducted to examine how such events might initiate the noticing and sensemaking thought to influence employees' workplace attitudes. Study Two also explores how organizational justice influences the relationship between these trigger events and workplace attitudes of satisfaction, commitment, and intent to leave.

It is important to acknowledge upfront that an exhaustive aggregation of all potential trigger events in any organization is beyond the scope of any single study. However, using the preliminary results, a stepping off point is provided for identifying additional events that employees find most salient. From there, future research can begin to generalize across organizations and contexts, and help managers understand what triggers are most likely to influence their employees' perceptions and attitudes. Essentially, the horse is put back in front of the cart when it comes to understanding employee behavior.

## REVIEW OF WORKPLACE TRIGGERS AND SENSEMAKING RESEARCH

Arguably, most individuals do not typically wake up thinking about their employment relationship (O'Neill *et al.*, 2007). Even when nagging thoughts or perceptions exist, it typically takes *something* to actually initiate consideration of those thoughts or perceptions that prompt individuals to react. Louis and Sutton (1991) argued that some sort of spark or *trigger* is needed for individuals to move from automatic mode to cognitively processing the situation at hand and making sense of it. Such cognitive processing is much more active than simply noticing something, which is done in automatic mode. Accordingly, in the workplace, a specific event is needed to trigger employees to move from the automatic, day-to-day processing described by Louis and Sutton (1991), to a more active consideration of an organization-related event.

Psychological contract research suggests that cognitive engagement is needed in order to make sense of what is happening prior to forming judgments of fulfillment, breach, and/or violation. Tekleab *et al.* (2005) found support for their model in which PC violations mediated the relationship between interactional and procedural justice, and workplace outcomes of job satisfaction and turnover. Despite use of a longitudinal study and finding relationships between justice, PC violation and outcomes, the focus remained on the end results.

Similarly, Colquitt *et al.* (2005) examined some of the rules thought to affect the justice judgment process. The antecedents of justice perceptions were labeled "justice concerns triggered," although none of those items were actual events. Instead, what was identified were very general concerns individuals had that prompted them to engage in justice evaluations, including concerns about belonging, trust and uncertainty, control, esteem, and morality. They theorized that some event needs to trigger thoughts and judgments of fairness. Despite use of the word "trigger" in that study, the concerns that were identified still provide little information about *specific events* to manage. Although it is useful to understand the broad categories of concerns that employees embrace, managers are still left uncertain as to what actually *triggers* those concerns and fairness evaluations. Without such knowledge, it remains difficult to pinpoint how best to manage those events until after the situation arises.

Similarly, Greenberg (2001) discussed what he called "loose canons" of organizational justice. These canons were intended to be cautions to keep in mind when considering justice in organizations. One such "loose canon" cautioned researchers against assuming that justice mattered in all organizational settings. Rather, he argued that, "naturally occurring characteristics of organizations differentially prompt the salience of justice concerns. After all, differences in such dimensions as status, role obligations, and pay inevitably *will trigger* [emphasis added] questions of fairness—but not always, and not equally" (Greenberg, 2001: 246). It can be argued that Greenberg's (2001) "salience" is similar to Louis and Sutton's (1991) noticing and moving from automatic mode to cognitive mode when making sense of an event. Essentially, what is salient will be noticed; what is not salient, will likely be ignored or overlooked.

Chaudhry *et al.* (2009) examined organizational change and its influence on employee evaluations of PC fulfillment across three response patterns: contextual, cognitive, and behavioral. They discussed the "reciprocal response pattern" between employees and employers and how it guides both unfavorable and favorable exchanges between the parties. Their focus was primarily on what led to unfavorable exchanges, or

what they called “deficiency in PC fulfillment” (Chaudhry *et al.*, 2009: 503), and suggested future research should explore what happens when the social exchange is perceived to be positive or favorable by employees. Here, too, examples were not provided to identify what events might lead to favorable or unfavorable social exchange perceptions. Similar to Teklaub *et al.* (2005), their study focused on an end result, that of PC fulfillment. Interestingly, though, the three response patterns they described provide broad categories from which specific trigger events might be developed.

In addition to research that hints at the existence of triggers and workplace outcomes, some research actually uses the term *trigger* as part of the theoretical arguments. Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) examined what triggered stakeholders and leaders to engage in sensemaking and what triggered them to engage in activities that offered sensemaking opportunities for others. Although the study mentioned *triggers*, again, specific trigger events were not identified.

One theoretical article goes beyond simply hinting at trigger events. In examining authentic leadership and follower development, Gardner *et al.* (2005) actually identified a host of events from a leader’s life that might stimulate positive growth and development for him or her. They identified early trigger events influencing leaders as predominantly negative and included things such as loss of a loved one, a health problem, and financial hardships. They also argued that positive events can influence leadership development. Such positive trigger events included things like promotions, changing careers to a new field, pursuing a challenging advanced degree in a new field, expatriate assignments, and new colleagues who offer interesting suggestions that open up new avenues for one’s work (Gardner *et al.*, 2005: 348-349). Several additional positive trigger events were identified. In the most recent study related to triggers examined the development of cultural competencies among college students who had traveled abroad as part of their education. Reichard and colleagues (2015) gathered data from students who had studied abroad via open-ended questions designed to elicit specific experiences related to being abroad. Although these experiences were labeled “cultural trigger events,” their study was designed to group students’ experiences into broad themes that subsequently were theorized as influencing the development of cultural competence. They defined a trigger event as, “a culturally novel situation marked by radically different cultural norms from those of the individual” (Reichard *et al.*, 2015: 466). Although the themes identified in that study are interesting, unfortunately they are not very useful for identifying work-related events that trigger workplace outcomes.

In summary, understanding the end results and workplace outcomes related to employees’ perceptions is an important and necessary part of the puzzle. As the research above demonstrates, there is definite interest and utility in identifying events thought to trigger workplace outcomes. Yet, the research has not addressed this dearth of knowledge. Managers continue to struggle to find ways to be more proactive in managing employees and their perceptions. It is argued that as scholars, research should help managers identify ways to better understand what might *trigger* the fire, rather than always putting out fires in a more haphazard, reactionary mode (Zhao *et al.*, 2007).

To begin this process, a field study is conducted in which a variety of events or activities derived from existing research are examined as potential workplace triggers. Study participants also identify additional trigger events not listed that are deemed salient for them.

## STUDY ONE

### Introduction

As discussed above, limited research has focused on the actual events or activities that might trigger employees' cognitive noticing of things in the workplace. Gardner *et al.* (2005) identified several triggers thought to influence authentic leadership, although their work was theoretical. Only one study was found that identified specific trigger events, and that study sought to examine referent comparisons and PCs (O'Neill *et al.*, 2007). Drawing on a variety of existing research, that study identified 16 activities or workplace events thought to trigger employees' evaluation of their PCs. Theoretical domains referenced in that study included social comparison research (Goodman, 1974), referent selection research (Kulik and Ambrose, 1992; Rousseau, 1995), and research on sensemaking (Louis and Sutton, 1991). They also identified as potential triggers some human resources activities thought to be common among most organizations (e.g., performance reviews, promotions, job duty changes). Following a confirmatory factor analysis, the study by O'Neill *et al.* (2007) discarded seven events not fitting with their hypothesized factor structure. However, all 16 trigger events identified by O'Neill *et al.* (2007) are included in the present study due to its exploratory nature.

### Study One Methods

**Participants and Procedure.** This study was conducted as part of a larger research project at a large manufacturing company in the Midwest. Included in the study were three independent divisions of a company that produces flexible and fixed automation systems. The total available population was 839 employees, and functions included engineering, sales, project management, administration, business development, customer service, information systems, marketing, supply management, quality management, and operations. Of the 839 surveys distributed, 207 individuals responded, representing a 25% response rate. Demographics of the participants were as follows: 78% were male, the average age of the respondents was 37 years old (range of 21 to 60+), and 96.6% were white. The average length of service was approximately 8.5 years (range of 1 to 34 years). The sample closely represented the overall population of the three participating divisions (79% male, average age of 41, and average length of service at that time was 7.8 years). A slight difference in racial breakdown should be noted between the overall population and the participants in the study. In the overall population, 88.6% of the employees were white, as compared to almost 97% of survey respondents. A cover letter explaining the larger research project and the survey were distributed to all employees via the organization's inter-office mail. Participation by employees was voluntary and no inducements were offered to encourage participation, although employees were allowed to complete the survey on work time.

In addition to investigating other variables not related to this study, participants were asked to identify things that prompted them to think about the relationship with their employer. A brief statement was provided to explain that the employment relationship is a social exchange between the organization and its employees. Participants were given an identical list of 16 items from the O'Neill *et al.* (2007) study, with instructions to circle the items that caused them to think about the relationship with their employer. The 16 items were: human resource policy changes, performance

reviews, receiving a promotion, changes in job duties, personal goal-setting activities, others getting an organizational reward that you wanted, turnover in staff, unclear job roles, organizational goal-setting activities, new hires entering the organization, discussions with people at other firms, attendance at professional meetings, attendance at training sessions, promotions of co-workers, educational support, and strength of the industry. An additional item labeled OTHER was provided, along with a blank line to encourage writing in other items participants thought were relevant. In this way, additional triggers that were identified could be examined in Study Two.

### **Study One Results**

Participants indicated that all 16 of the items presented to them were things that they believed caused them to think about their employment relationship. This is not surprising, as the 16 items are relatively common events/activities in most organizations. More importantly, though, 24 additional items were listed by participants as OTHER items that caused them to think about their employment relationship.<sup>1</sup> The complete list of 40 items was used in Study Two to examine the relationship between trigger events and workplace outcomes.

## **STUDY TWO**

### **Linking Triggers to Workplace Outcomes**

This study explored the relationship between trigger events identified in Study One and their relationship with outcomes of pay satisfaction, job satisfaction, affective commitment, and intent to leave. Similar to the earlier discussion about needing to “notice” something before reacting to it, it is asserted that most employees are unlikely to be constantly thinking about these outcomes without a specific reason to do so. That is, when a trigger event alerts employees to something going on around them, some mechanism is needed to help them make sense of it (Maitlis and Lawrence, 2007). Without such a mechanism, the link between the event/activity and various outcomes remains a complicated black box, providing employees and managers with little knowledge of the internal cognitive processes going on, and no logical way to make sense of the relationships (Mayer and Kuenzi, 2010). Therefore, in Study Two, the relationship between trigger events and work outcomes was explored, using organizational justice as the sensemaking mechanism. Arguments presented below illustrate how justice operates as a useful mechanism for employee sensemaking when an event/activity is encountered in the workplace.

Next, a brief overview of existing research on justice and workplace outcomes is presented. Several hypotheses are presented and are empirically tested in a field study. Results are presented, followed by a discussion of implications and future research directions.

---

<sup>1</sup> The complete list of all trigger items are available from the first author upon request.

## Organizational Justice, Triggers, and Workplace Outcomes

Research on organizational justice has been extensive, spanning several decades. In addition, the impact of justice perceptions as mediators and/or moderators of workplace attitudes and behaviors has also been of keen interest among scholars and practitioners (Blader and Tyler, 2003; Colquitt *et al.*, 2001; Colquitt *et al.*, 2013). Not coincidentally, as one of four important work values (Collins *et al.*, 2012; Ravlin and Meglino, 1987), understanding justice (a/k/a fairness) in the workplace is critical for the effective management of a firm's human resources.

Organizational justice is broadly defined as what employees consider fair in their organizations (Greenberg, 1987). In their historical overview of organizational justice types, Colquitt *et al.* (2005) identified and defined three types of justice: distributive (fairness about distribution of outcomes), procedural (fairness relative to the allocation process), and interactional (fairness relative to how one treats others).

In addition to distinguishing between the different forms of organizational justice, considerable research focused on the consequences of fair and unfair treatment in organizations. For example, research on PCs shows a strong relationship between justice perceptions, PC evaluation, and work attitudes (Morrison and Robinson, 1997; Robinson, 1996; Robinson and Morrison, 2000; Rousseau, 1995; Tekleab *et al.*, 2005; Zhao *et al.*, 2007). McFarlin and Sweeney (1992) examined distributive justice and procedural justice as predictors of pay satisfaction, job satisfaction, and commitment. Their work suggested that personal outcomes (pay and job satisfaction) were predicted more strongly by distributive justice, and organizational outcomes (organizational commitment) were predicted more strongly by procedural justice.

A meta-analysis conducted by Colquitt *et al.* in 2001 found that both distributive and procedural justice correlated highly with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and withdrawal (i.e., intention to leave), while informational and interpersonal justice (the two components of interactional justice) correlated only moderately with job satisfaction. Informational justice also correlated moderately with organizational commitment and withdrawal, while interpersonal justice was weakly correlated with organizational commitment and withdrawal (Colquitt *et al.*, 2001). In another meta-analysis, Cohen-Charash and Spector (2001) found job satisfaction was more highly correlated with distributive justice than procedural or interactional justice.

More recently, a policy-capturing approach (Till and Karren, 2011) was used to examine pay level satisfaction relative to the three justice types. All three types of distributive justice significantly predicted satisfaction with pay levels, with individual equity (grounded in equity theory) having the largest effect. Positive, significant relationships were also found between pay level satisfaction and both procedural and informational justice.

Using a multi-focal model of justice to examine global justice perceptions, Holtz and Harold (2009) suggested the importance of considering "who or what is being evaluated...to help clarify the relationships between...constructs" (Holtz and Harold, 2009: 1188). In that study, participants were asked to specifically focus on their supervisors when developing perceptions of justice or injustice. Focusing attention on something specific—in this case employees' own supervisors—helped them make sense of things in developing their justice perceptions. In another study, Blader and Tyler (2003) attempted to identify events thought to precipitate procedural and interactional justice evaluations by arguing for an examination of both formal and informal sources.

Although potential examples were provided to illustrate the contextual differences in these sources, as in other studies, specific trigger events were neither identified nor examined in any detail.

Greenberg (2001) also argued that justice concerns are “triggered” by four things: when people receive negative outcomes, when there is change in the organization, when resources are scarce, and with different levels of power. His argument was that it is critical to consider differences in context with respect to how individuals perceive justice in their organizations. However, he did not attempt to itemize specific events included in the four things that trigger justice concerns.

In summary, findings continue to be somewhat mixed when considering the impact of the various justice types on outcomes of pay satisfaction, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intention to leave. Although there may be a variety of reasons for this, it is possible that one reason may be inattention to specific events leading to these attitudes with justice as an intervening variable. Similar to Greenberg’s (2001) suggestion, one way to examine contextual differences in order to better understand individuals’ justice perceptions and their influence on employee attitudes may be to examine different trigger events that set in motion employees’ cognitive noticing. Such events may conceivably be considered some of the “naturally occurring characteristics of organizations [that] differentially prompt the salience of justice concerns” leading to differing employee attitudes (Greenberg, 2001: 246). If organizational justice does not matter in *all* organizational settings, perhaps a more contextual, event-like focus can more clearly pinpoint when and what justice perceptions actually *do* matter.

### **Hypotheses**

The discussion above provides a foundation for examining relationships between trigger events and outcomes, and the influence of organizational justice perceptions on these relationships. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, and in the absence of any specific theory to support directionality, there is no prediction about which trigger events will be perceived as positive or negative by individuals. And, it cannot be stated *a priori* which triggers will individually have the greatest impact. Therefore, as a guide for exploring the various relationships discussed above, the first set of general hypotheses are offered.

*H1a: The negative or positive impact of trigger events predicts job satisfaction.*

*H1b: The negative or positive impact of trigger events predicts organizational commitment.*

*H1c: The negative or positive impact of trigger events predicts intention to leave.*

*H1d: The negative or positive impact of trigger events predicts pay satisfaction.*

Justice evaluations and PC evaluations are thought to involve similar cognitive processes prior to judgments of fulfillment, breach, or violation (Tekleab *et al.*, 2005). Therefore, it is expected that the evaluations of organizational justice similarly influence workplace attitudes. However, due to mixed results of prior studies, hypotheses are again offered without predicting directionality.

- H2a: Procedural justice predicts job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intention to leave, and pay satisfaction.*
- H2b: Interactional justice predicts job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intention to leave, and pay satisfaction.*
- H2c: Distributive justice predicts job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intention to leave, and pay satisfaction.*

In addition to a main effect on workplace attitudes, it is proposed that organizational justice moderates the relationship between triggers and workplace attitudes, much like PC evaluations moderated the relationship between triggers and outcomes of PC fulfillment, breach, or violation (O'Neill *et al.*, 2007; Tekleab *et al.*, 2005; Zhao *et al.*, 2007).

- H3a: Procedural justice moderates the relationship between triggers and job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intention to leave, and pay satisfaction.*
- H3b: Interactional justice moderates the relationship between triggers and job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intention to leave, and pay satisfaction.*
- H3c: Distributive justice moderates the relationship between triggers and job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intention to leave, and pay satisfaction.*

## **Study Two Methods**

***Sample Participants and Procedure.*** A field study was conducted, with data collection taking place in the corporate offices of a large manufacturing firm located in the Midwest. Of the 221 total employees in the corporate offices, 113 employees participated in the study, representing a 51.1% response rate. Surveys were distributed to employees through several face-to-face sessions, with a survey and self-addressed envelope sent through inter-office mail to any employee indicating he/she was unable to attend a session, but wished to participate. All responses were voluntary, and employees were assured that results would not be reported to any member of management if their department included less than five (5) responses. An Executive Report of summarized, aggregate responses was provided to management following data collection and analysis.

Of the employees responding, 42.9% were female, 51.8% were male, and 5.4% did not report their gender. The average age of respondents was 44.5 years old, and ranged from 22 to 60+ years. The average length of service was 11.8 years (range: < 1 year to 40+ years). Employees had been in their current positions an average of 5.9 years, and had been in their current occupation an average of 16.1 years. Lastly, the educational background of the individuals ranged from those with a high school diploma to those with a graduate degree. Of those employees, 67% were college graduates or had some college or technical training.

## Measures

**Workplace Triggers.** The 40 trigger events from Study One were used to explore the events that are more frequent triggers for employees. A five-point Likert scale was developed for employees to rate the frequency with which each event caused them to think about their relationship with the company (1=never; 5=always). They were also asked to rate the impact of each event on them in the organization using a seven-point Likert scale (1=negative; 4=neutral; 7=positive). Since it could not be assumed that individuals perceive events similarly, the scale allowed the authors to explore whether a trigger event was considered a positive or negative event by the employees, providing more information about how individuals make sense of the events.

Of the 40 trigger events, 17 were ranked by individuals as more than occasionally causing them to think about their employment relationship (i.e., more than three on the five-point scale). These 17 triggers, were used in data analyses for this study, as the rest of the trigger events were rated as seldom or never causing individuals to think about the relationship. The evaluations (i.e., 1=negative, 4=neutral, 7=positive) of the 17 triggers selected were then grouped using a factor analysis, which yielded four factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 (initial eigenvalues ranging from 1.09 to 5.05). A varimax rotation was used to produce four orthogonal factors.<sup>2</sup> The first factor consisted of seven items with factor loadings of 0.5 or greater. The second factor included five items, the third factor included three items, and the last factor consisted of two items (see Table 1 for all items and their factor loadings, indicated in bold).

The first factor consisted of items related to management and the organization. Most of these items tended to be negative (e.g., turnover in staff, unclear job roles, restructuring). Some items *could* be positive (leadership skills of management), but were generally seen as negative by respondents. The second factor was more focused on individual issues (e.g., personal goal-setting activities, setting a timetable for meeting goals, changes in technology) and these trigger events were perceived by respondents as generally positive. The third factor consisted of general economic issues (e.g., strength of manufacturing industry, cutbacks in benefits, the economy in general), which were also seen as negative. The fourth factor consisted of two items mentioning interpersonal events (new people joining company, meetings w/your supervisor), which were seen as generally positive.

**Pay Satisfaction.** Pay satisfaction was measured using Heneman and Schwab's (1985) 18-item modified Pay Satisfaction Questionnaire. This scale examines satisfaction with various aspects of an individual's pay, including pay level, benefits, raises, and structure/administration. To maintain consistency with other scales used in this study, a Likert scale with responses ranging from 1 to 7 was used (1=strongly disagree; 7=strongly agree). Participants were asked to provide their level of satisfaction with each of the 18 items including satisfaction with the company's pay structure, satisfaction with the size of their current salary, their benefit package, and similar items (Heneman and Schwab, 1985). As in past research, Cronbach's alpha showed internal reliability at 0.93 for all items.

---

<sup>2</sup> Other rotation methods were also explored but they generated the same factors as the varimax method.

**Table 1**  
**Study Two Workplace Trigger Events**

Trigger Event	Overall				
	Mean/ Mean Frequency	Factor 1 Loadings	Factor 2 Loadings	Factor 3 Loadings	Factor 4 Loadings
Changes to Job Duties	4.28/3.40	<b>0.58</b>	0.47	0.03	0.06
Turnover in Staff	3.25/3.40	<b>0.57</b>	-0.20	0.39	0.29
Unclear Job Roles	3.14/3.21	<b>0.60</b>	-0.14	0.30	-0.12
General Feedback from Management	4.18/3.09	<b>0.68</b>	0.26	-0.16	0.28
Restructuring at the Co.	3.41/3.43	<b>0.62</b>	0.17	0.27	0.30
Leadership Skills of Mgt.	3.71/3.57	<b>0.61</b>	0.34	-0.04	0.22
Inconsistency between Mgt. Talk and Behavior	2.67/3.38	<b>0.71</b>	-0.05	0.12	-0.10
Personal Goal-Setting Activities	4.92/3.31	0.12	<b>0.69</b>	-0.02	0.14
Sharing Information With Others	4.48/3.16	-0.05	<b>0.52</b>	0.10	0.43
Future Opportunities at the Company	4.21/3.08	0.43	<b>0.64</b>	0.16	-0.02
Setting a Timetable for Meeting Goals	4.65/3.17	0.10	<b>0.71</b>	0.33	-0.11
Changes in Technology	4.89/3.19	-0.05	<b>0.77</b>	-0.06	0.17
Strength of Mfg. Industry	4.07/3.14	-0.14	0.43	<b>0.60</b>	0.09
Cutbacks in Benefits	2.37/3.32	0.16	0.04	<b>0.80</b>	0.06
The Economy in General	3.56/3.50	0.19	0.04	<b>0.74</b>	0.07
Meetings With Your Supervisor	4.54/3.13	0.48	0.42	0.19	<b>0.58</b>
New People Joining the Co.	4.03/3.22	0.11	0.07	0.22	<b>0.83</b>

*NOTE:* Factor 1 was categorized as management and the organization, Factor 2 was individual events, Factor 3 was macro-economic events, and Factor 4 was miscellaneous interpersonal issues. Items that were included in each factor are in bold.

\*Mean frequency was participants' response to "Impact on You as an employee" (1-Negative; 4-Neutral; 7-Positive).

**Job Satisfaction.** Overall job satisfaction was measured using Brayfield and Rothe's (1951) five-item Job Satisfaction Scale, with responses ranging from 1 to 7 (1=strongly disagree; 7=strongly agree). This is a global measure of job satisfaction evaluating individuals' agreement with a range of evaluative statements (e.g., I find real enjoyment in my work; I feel fairly well satisfied with my present job). Cronbach's alpha showed internal reliability at 0.88.

**Organizational Commitment.** Organizational commitment was measured using the six-item Affective Commitment Scale by Allen and Meyer (1990). The ACS was chosen due to its value as a "psychological summary of equity and expectancy considerations" (Meyer and Allen, 1991: 75), which is expected to have a relationship with perceptions of organizational justice. Responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

agree), with sample items as follows: This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me; I do not feel emotionally attached to this organization (reverse scored). Cronbach's alpha was 0.85.

**Intention to Leave.** Intention to leave the organization was assessed using the three-item scale from the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire. Using a seven-point scale (1=strongly agree; 7=strongly disagree), individuals responded to the following items: I will probably look for a new job this year; I often think about quitting; I will actively look for a new job within this year. Cronbach's alpha was 0.86.

**Distributive Justice.** Distributive justice was measured using the six-item Distributive Justice Index (Price and Mueller, 1986), which examines individuals' perceptions of whether they were fairly rewarded on the basis of the following: responsibilities, amount of experience, amount of education/training, amount of work done well, amount of effort put forth, and the stresses and strains of their job. A five-point scale was used, with anchors of 1=Not distributed equitably at all to 5=Very equitably distributed. Cronbach's alpha was 0.94.

**Procedural Justice.** Procedural justice was measured with Moorman's (1991) nine-item procedural justice scale. Moorman (1991) designed the scale to measure agreement with the degree to which individuals perceive fair procedures in the organization using a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree). Sample items included the following: My input is obtained prior to making decision; accurate information is used to make decisions that affect me; consistent rules and procedures are used to make decisions about things that affect me. Cronbach's alpha was acceptable at 0.89.

**Interactional Justice.** Moorman's (1991) five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree) measured interactional justice. This six-item scale measured perceived fairness of the interactions associated with formal procedures in the organization. Individuals' attention was focused on rating the interpersonal behavior of their supervisor, being the most proximal source to influence perceptions of justice/injustice. Sample items are: My supervisor treats me with kindness and consideration; My supervisor takes steps to deal with me in a truthful manner; My supervisor considers my viewpoint. Cronbach's alpha was 0.92.

## Study Two Results

To test the hypotheses, separate three-step hierarchical regression analyses were performed for each of the four outcome variables. The predictors were entered in three groups, with the four work-trigger factors entered first, the individual justice variable entered second, and the four interaction terms (each of the trigger factors multiplied by each justice variable) entered in the third group. The findings from these regression analyses are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
**Regression Results with Organizational Justice Variables**

<b>Regression Analyses - Procedural Justice</b>		<b>Job</b>	<b>Org</b>	<b>Intent To</b>	<b>Pay</b>
		<b>Satisfaction</b>	<b>Commitment</b>	<b>Leave</b>	<b>Satisfaction</b>
Model 1 –		r <sup>2</sup> =0.31	r <sup>2</sup> =0.29	r <sup>2</sup> =0.23	r <sup>2</sup> =0.14
	Trigger Factor 1	β=0.49	β=0.38	β=-0.44	β=0.36
	(TF1)	p<0.00	p<0.00	p<0.00	p<0.01
	Trigger Factor 2	β=0.28	β=0.41	β=-0.27	β=0.18
	(TF2)	p<0.01	p<0.00	p<0.01	p<0.10
	Trigger Factor 3	β=-0.10	β=-0.03	β=0.02	β=0.13
	(TF3)	p<0.27	p<0.72	p<0.86	p<0.24
	Trigger Factor 4	β=0.10	β=-0.05	β=0.01	β=0.12
	(TF4)	p<0.27	p<0.56	p<0.97	p<0.29
Model 2 –		r <sup>2</sup> =0.43	r <sup>2</sup> =0.32	r <sup>2</sup> =0.35	r <sup>2</sup> =0.41
Procedural	(above plus)	β=0.50	β=0.26	β=-0.51	β=0.73
Justice (PC)		p<0.00	p<0.05	p<0.00	p<0.00
Model 3 –	(above plus)	r <sup>2</sup> =0.44	r <sup>2</sup> =0.36	r <sup>2</sup> =0.33	r <sup>2</sup> =0.50
	TF1 x PC	β=0.05	β=-0.44	β=0.20	β=0.32
		p<0.85	p<0.12	p<0.48	β=0.32
	TF2 x PC	β=-0.48	β=0.25	β=0.34	β=-0.27
		p<0.15	p<0.48	p<0.35	p<0.41
	TF3 x PC	β=0.23	β=0.51	β=0.02	β=-0.10
		p<0.38	p<0.07	p<0.95	p<0.73
	TF4 x PC	β=0.08	β=0.05	β=-0.18	β=-0.89
		p<0.14	p<0.87	p<0.53	p<0.01
<b>Regression Analyses – Interactional Justice</b>					
Model 1 –		r <sup>2</sup> =0.31	r <sup>2</sup> =0.29	r <sup>2</sup> =0.23	r <sup>2</sup> =0.14
	Trigger Factor 1	β=0.49	β=0.38	β=-0.44	β=0.36
	(TF1)	p<0.00	p<0.00	p<0.00	p<0.01
	Trigger Factor 2	β=0.28	β=0.41	β=-0.27	β=0.18
	(TF2)	p<0.01	p<0.00	p<0.01	p<0.10
	Trigger Factor 3	β=-0.10	β=-0.03	β=0.02	β=0.13
	(TF3)	p<0.27	p<0.72	p<0.86	p<0.24
	Trigger Factor 4	β=0.10	β=-0.05	β=0.01	β=0.12
	(TF4)	p<0.27	p<0.56	p<0.97	p<0.29
Model 2 –		r <sup>2</sup> =0.37	r <sup>2</sup> =0.29	r <sup>2</sup> =0.28	r <sup>2</sup> =0.17
Interactional	(above plus)	β=0.34	β=0.07	β=-0.31	β=0.27
Justice (IC)		p<0.01	p<0.55	p<0.01	p<0.06
Model 3 -	(above plus)	r <sup>2</sup> =0.42	r <sup>2</sup> =0.31	r <sup>2</sup> =0.30	r <sup>2</sup> =0.15
	TF1 x IC	β=0.80	β=-0.09	β=-0.42	β=0.26
		p<0.01	p<0.78	p<0.20	p<0.84
	TF2 x IC	β=0.12	β=0.47	β=-0.12	β=-0.33
		p<0.73	p<0.21	p<0.75	p<0.45
	TF3 x IC	β=0.54	β=0.78	β=-0.53	β=0.26
		p<0.09	p<0.03	p<0.13	p<0.54
	TF4 x IC	β=0.02	β=-0.03	β=-0.54	β=0.60
		p<0.96	p<0.95	p<0.23	p<0.26

JUSTICE PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES

Table 2 (cont')

Regression Analyses – Distributive Justice		Job	Org	Intent To	Pay
		Satisfaction	Commitment	Leave	Satisfaction
Model 1 –		r <sup>2</sup> =0.31	r <sup>2</sup> =0.29	r <sup>2</sup> =0.22	r <sup>2</sup> =0.14
	Trigger Factor 1	β=0.49	β=0.38	β=-0.43	β=0.36
	(TF1)	<i>p</i> <0.00	<i>p</i> <0.00	<i>p</i> <0.00	<i>p</i> <0.01
	Trigger Factor 2	β=0.28	β=0.41	β=-0.27	β=0.18
	(TF2)	<i>p</i> <0.01	<i>p</i> <0.00	<i>p</i> <0.01	<i>p</i> <0.10
	Trigger Factor 3	β=-0.10	β=-0.03	β=0.02	β=0.13
	(TF3)	<i>p</i> <0.27	<i>p</i> <0.72	<i>p</i> <0.86	<i>p</i> <0.24
	Trigger Factor 4	β=0.10	β=-0.05	β=0.01	β=0.12
	(TF4)	<i>p</i> <0.27	<i>p</i> <0.56	<i>p</i> <0.98	<i>p</i> <0.29
Model 2 –		r <sup>2</sup> =0.36	r <sup>2</sup> =0.29	r <sup>2</sup> =0.27	r <sup>2</sup> =0.60
Distributive	(above plus)	β=0.28	β=0.08	β=-0.28	β=0.77
Justice (DC)		<i>p</i> <0.01	<i>p</i> <0.43	<i>p</i> <0.02	<i>p</i> <0.00
Model 3 –	(above plus)	r <sup>2</sup> =0.34	r <sup>2</sup> =0.33	r <sup>2</sup> =0.29	r <sup>2</sup> =0.63
	TF1 x DC	β=0.25	β=-0.12	β=-0.08	β=0.26
		<i>p</i> <0.03	<i>p</i> <0.66	<i>p</i> <0.77	<i>p</i> <0.23
	TF2 x DC	β=0.25	β=-0.12	β=-0.08	β=0.26
		<i>p</i> <0.81	<i>p</i> <0.29	<i>p</i> <0.52	<i>p</i> <0.12
	TF3 x DC	β=0.11	β=0.61	β=-0.26	β=0.01
		<i>p</i> <0.68	<i>p</i> <0.03	<i>p</i> <0.35	<i>p</i> <0.99
	TF4 x DC	β=0.24	β=-0.16	β=-0.59	β=-0.57
		<i>p</i> <0.34	<i>p</i> <0.53	<i>p</i> <0.03	<i>p</i> <-0.02

Betas are standardized and r<sup>2</sup>s are adjusted.

The trigger factors have strong effects on all four dependent variables. The adjusted r<sup>2</sup> from the equation with the four trigger factors regressed on the outcome variables was 0.31 for job satisfaction, 0.29 for affective commitment, 0.23 for intention to leave, and 0.14 for pay satisfaction. All regression equations are significant beyond the 0.01 level. Therefore, Hypotheses H1a through H1d are supported. It appears, however, that the major impact comes from the first two factors (i.e., management and organization events and personal events). The individual betas for these two factors are significant for all four dependent variables, with the exception of the influence of the second factor (individual issues) on pay satisfaction. The third and fourth factors (general economic issues and interpersonal issues) were non-significantly related to all four dependent variables.

Hypotheses 2a through 2c proposed that the justice variables would also predict the outcome variables. Procedural justice was significantly related to all of the dependent variables. Interactional justice was significantly related to job satisfaction, and intention to leave, but was not related to organizational commitment and marginally unrelated to satisfaction with pay (*p*<0.06). Distributive justice was significantly related to job satisfaction, intention to leave, and pay satisfaction (strongly, β=0.77), but was not related to organizational commitment. Therefore, Hypothesis 2a was supported, while Hypotheses 2b and 2c received partial support.

Hypotheses 3a through 3c were generally not supported. The interaction terms between the trigger factors and the justice variables did not add appreciable variance. The only exceptions to this included the interaction of procedural justice and the triggers significantly predicting pay satisfaction ( $r^2$  increased from 0.41 to 0.50), the interaction of interactional justice and the triggers significantly predicting job satisfaction ( $r^2$  increased from 0.37 to 0.42), and the interaction of distributive justice and the triggers significantly predicting organizational commitment ( $r^2$  increased from 0.29 to 0.33). Overall, only seven betas of the total 48 interaction terms examined were significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). Given the number of analyses, the family-wise error rate (the chance of false positives) would predict that even a lack of effects should have generated two or three significant findings. Therefore, the small number of significant effects should be taken with caution. Interestingly, several of these significant effects were with the third and fourth trigger factors, which had little direct impact on the outcome variables.

### OVERALL DISCUSSION

The sensemaking model of PC evaluation by employees has theorized that individuals need to consider what goes on in their workplace before perceptions of fulfillment or violation can take place (Chaudhry *et al.*, 2009). This study examined similar aspects of the employment relationship: the contextual (i.e., trigger events), the cognitive (i.e., justice judgments as a moderator), and several attitudinal results (i.e., satisfaction with pay, job satisfaction, commitment, and intent to leave). Results show that triggers significantly predicted job satisfaction, affective organizational commitment, intention to leave, and satisfaction with pay. Because it was not possible (or realistic) to state *a priori* which triggers might be most important to employees, the list of 40 potential workplace triggers identified in Study One was used, and identified those triggers that employees reported they thought about more than occasionally. Because a number of work-related triggers were identified as being prominent (or “top of the head,” Taylor and Fiske, 1978), a factor analysis developed potential categories for the triggers and create a limited, more manageable set of predictors for examining outcomes. Although no assumptions were made about the exhaustiveness of the triggers used in this study, a strength of the study is that actual events identified by employees in a field study were used in Study Two, with both organizations operating in the manufacturing industry. This essentially provides at least two different contexts for examining organizational justice (Greenberg, 2001) within a single industry. And, along with examining only those trigger events employees considered more than just occasionally, this also supports theoretical arguments that individuals have a need to interpret or make sense of events in the organization that they find surprising, complex, or confusing (Cornelissen, 2012).

It was also found that individual differences in perceptions of justice had an impact on work outcomes, above and beyond those of the triggers. Perceptions of procedural, interactional, and distributive justice were also related to the work attitudes, although the results varied across the outcome variables. Procedural justice was significantly related to all four attitudes. Interactional justice significantly predicted job satisfaction and intention to leave. And, distributive justice was related to job satisfaction, intention to leave, and pay satisfaction.

Study Two results are somewhat consistent with what McFarlin and Sweeney (1992) found. Distributive justice was a significant predictor of pay and job satisfaction in the McFarlin and Sweeney (1992) study, and it also predicted pay and job satisfaction, as well as intention to leave (which they did not). The results are also similar to those of Colquitt *et al.* (2001) and Dailey and Kirk (1992) who found distributive justice predicted job satisfaction and intention to leave. Further, both McFarlin and Sweeney (1992) and Colquitt *et al.* (2001) found that procedural justice significantly predicted organizational commitment,<sup>3</sup> and Study Two had similar results. Consistent with Colquitt *et al.* (2001), procedural justice significantly predicted job satisfaction and intention to leave, along with having low to moderate correlations between interactional justice and all four outcomes.

Another finding and contribution of this study is the fact that the justice variables remained significant after accounting for the work-related triggers. This suggests that, in some cases, *both* noticing events/activities in the organization *and* evaluating their fairness predict some work attitudes. For example, post hoc analyses showed that Factor 1 (the management and organization factor) remained a significant predictor of both job satisfaction when both interactional justice and distributive justice were uniquely accounted for (i.e., these separate regression equations are available from the authors). Intention to leave was also significantly predicted by Factor 1 and both interactional and distributive justice (i.e., also in separate regression equations available from the authors). Factor 2 (the individual issues factor) remained a significant predictor of job satisfaction when distributive justice was accounted for and remained a significant predictor of affective commitment when procedural justice was also accounted for. Interestingly, none of the factors remained significant predictors of pay satisfaction when any of the justice variables were also entered into the regression equations. Overall, despite the relatively small sample size used in this study (i.e., larger sample sizes are typically used for both factor analyses and hierarchical regression analyses), some interesting relationships between triggers, justice, and workplace attitudes are revealed.

If the story were to end here, this study would not be able to address any of the inconsistencies in results found for the various justice types and workplace attitudes. However, the inclusion of trigger events in hierarchical regressions adds information not previously known. First, the interaction of trigger Factor 1 and both distributive and interactional justice predicted job satisfaction. The remainder of the significant interactions involved Factor 3 and Factor 4, with distributive justice predicting organizational commitment, intention to leave, and pay satisfaction, and with interactive justice predicting organizational commitment.

In a practical sense, these findings demonstrate that events noticed by employees that are related to their organization and/or their work are powerful predictors of work attitudes. Issues like “leadership skills of management” and “inconsistency between management talk and behavior” were noticed by employees and were strongly related to key attitudes of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. In fact, post hoc analyses revealed that Factor 1 triggers (events related to management and the

---

<sup>3</sup> McFarlin and Sweeney (1992) used Cook and Wall's (1980) organizational commitment scale. Although this scale was not specifically labeled affective commitment, inspection of the scale items suggests that it is consistent with Allen and Meyer's (1990) affective commitment scale used in the present study.

organization) were significantly correlated with procedural, interactional, and distributive justice ( $r = 0.64, 0.40$  and  $0.41$ , respectively, all at  $p < 0.000$ ). Factor 2 triggers (individual issues in the organization) were also significantly correlated with procedural, interactional, and distributive justice ( $r = 0.25, p < 0.05$ ;  $0.34, p < 0.00$ ; and  $0.29, p < 0.00$ , respectively). Factor 4 triggers (interpersonal issues) were only significantly correlated with interactional justice ( $r = 0.36, p < 0.00$ ). And, Factor 3 triggers (economic issues) were not significantly correlated with any justice variables.<sup>4</sup> Although no direct theory existed to support hypothesized relationships between the specific triggers and justice perceptions, the Group Value Model (Lind and Tyler, 1988) suggests that judgments of procedural justice are strongly linked to values held by various groups (e.g., work groups, departments), and are learned through socialization. As such, it should not be unusual to find that triggers experienced by employees in the same organization correlate with both procedural and distributive justice, as both Factor 1 and Factor 2 triggers did. This may also explain why Factor 3 was not significantly correlated with any justice types, as economic issues are external to the organization and may be less likely to trigger the type of justice thoughts that are typically made *within* the organization.

Taken together, this suggests that it is useful to identify trigger events that employees notice and understand how they make sense of them in order to address potential issues *before* they turn into costly outcomes such as turnover (Dailey and Kirk, 1992) and sabotage (Rupp and Cropanzano, 2002), to name a few. Although these triggers will likely vary from location to location and over time (i.e., perhaps the “context” noted by Greenberg, 2001), determining which triggers are most important requires that employees be asked what is bothering them and what they are thinking about. As Study Two shows, simple questions like this can identify important issues that predict job satisfaction, pay satisfaction, commitment, and intent to leave.

### Study Limitations

As noted above, because a factor analysis was conducted with 17 items, the sample of 113 respondents is smaller than Nunnally (1978: 421) recommends. Unfortunately, there was no way to know how many triggers would be identified, or how many individuals would respond to the (extensive) questionnaire. Given the small sample, sampling error is a concern. Another obvious limitation of findings from Study Two is that they are based on responses from employees in one organization, and at one point in time, limiting possible generalizability. However, two studies were conducted in which employees from both studies were employed by large manufacturing organizations and were both located in similar regions of the U.S. Study One provided an opportunity to explore potential trigger events and Study Two allowed an opportunity to examine relationships between these trigger events and workplace outcomes, along with moderating effects of organizational justice for sensemaking. The fact that two manufacturing organizations (one for each study) were used, there was an opportunity to experimentally control for potential cross-contamination issues that may arise from the use of multiple organizations in the same study.

---

<sup>4</sup> A complete table of all correlations is available from the first author.

Next, although the trigger items were developed from events identified by employees in one manufacturing organization and were examined by employees in another manufacturing organization, it cannot be said with any certainty that the work-related triggers examined here will be significant predictors of outcomes in other manufacturing organizations, or will even be events noticed by employees in any other type of organization. However, some relationships *were* found, supporting Greenberg's (2001) argument that different organizations may be less relevant than different contexts. In addition, even if the trigger events or the organizations change, the basic cognitive processes are unlikely to change. Similar to PC evaluations, both negative and positive events lead employees to evaluate aspects of their jobs and the goings on in their organizations, and doing so requires them to make sense of what is noticed. Since justice perceptions have been shown to relate to a variety of workplace attitudes and outcomes (Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001; Colquitt *et al.*, 2013; Conlon *et al.*, 2005; Dailey and Kirk, 1992; McFarlin and Sweeney, 1992; Moorman, 1991), results in this study provide a useful mechanism for making sense of what is noticed and how employees might respond (Morrison and Robinson, 1997; Robinson and Morrison, 2000; Robinson, 1996; Turnley and Feldman, 2000).

A related concern with using one survey to collect data in Study Two is the possibility of common method variance. Several arguments exist against this being a cause for the findings. First, the justice variables had significant effects beyond the work-related triggers. If respondents were simply answering the questions all the same way, this would not have occurred. Second, the justice variables demonstrated differences across the outcomes in accordance with theoretical expectations. For example, distributive justice had the largest impact (by far) on pay satisfaction, with a beta of 0.77. Procedural justice, on the other hand, was related to all of the outcome variables, while interactional justice was only related to job satisfaction and intention to leave.

Finally, Study Two examined one-way relationships between the trigger events, organizational justice, and work attitudes. It is acknowledged that the relationships between trigger events and justice perceptions could potentially be bi-directional. This may be especially true if perceptions of unfairness become so strong that they negatively color future organizational events, even when it may be perceived to be objectively neutral or positive. Once attitudes become firmly ingrained, they can become difficult to change, especially if individuals are unable to seek out other employment opportunities (Iverson and Buttigieg, 1999).

### **Implications for Future Research and Practice**

These studies offer several opportunities for future research. As mentioned above, future studies could examine the potential for a bi-directional relationship between trigger events and the various forms of organizational justice to determine more clearly the nature of the relationship. In addition, Study One utilized an exploratory approach to identify and examine potential trigger events thought to influence work attitudes. Although past research sought to identify general concerns or link broadly to sensemaking, this is believed to be the first attempt to identify a range of specific organizational, managerial, personal, and economic events that may trigger such attitudes and justice perceptions. Future research should seek to replicate the studies and the various trigger events, and continue to advance knowledge on the nature of the various trigger events identified and examined here.

From a practical perspective, if even a *handful* of trigger events can be identified that a broad range of individuals notice and make sense of within their organizations, managers may have a better opportunity to prepare themselves ahead of time to more effectively influence perceptions of unfairness by considering and adapting their behaviors in a way that more positively influences employee attitudes. In addition, managers utilizing employee engagement surveys may find it useful to ask employees about specific workplace events thought to influence their attitudes about justice and outcomes of satisfaction, commitment, and intention to leave. By identifying those trigger events that either positively or negatively influence employee attitudes, managers are better armed with useful information about what their employees are thinking, and may be better able to address concerns before they become problematic.

Lastly, it might be useful to consider the importance of various individual differences thought to influence perceptions of justice in the workplace. For example, Kickul and Lester (2001) found that equity sensitivity influenced perceptions of PC breach and, based on conceptual similarities between organizational justice and PC perceptions, equity sensitivity and other individual differences may be significant moderators between trigger events, justice perceptions, and work attitudes.

### OVERALL SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Two separate studies were conducted in different manufacturing firms to examine potential trigger events and their influence on workplace outcomes. In Study One, employees examined a preliminary group of triggers identified in earlier research (O'Neill *et al.*, 2007) and provided 24 additional triggers that they thought influenced their employment relationship. In Study Two, all 40 trigger events were examined relative to their influence on workplace attitudes of pay satisfaction, job satisfaction, commitment, and intent to leave. This study also examined whether organizational justice moderated the relationship between the trigger events and workplace attitudes. Results from the second field study showed that trigger events significantly predicted all workplace attitudes. Procedural justice was significantly related to all dependent variables, interactional justice was significantly related only to job satisfaction and intent to leave, marginally unrelated to pay satisfaction, and unrelated to organizational commitment. Distributive justice was significantly related to job satisfaction, intent to leave, and pay satisfaction, but not organizational commitment. Among the 48 interactions, seven significant betas suggested that there is *some* influence on workplace outcomes, especially between management and organization events, distributive justice, interactional justice, and both job satisfaction and intent to leave. In addition, individual trigger events interacted with procedural and distributive justice to predict affective commitment and job satisfaction, respectively. Although the results from this study are modest, hopefully this research leads to (or perhaps *triggers?*) additional research on the events that trigger awareness and sensemaking about justice and changes in important work attitudes. By better understanding trigger events, the horse can remain before the cart when examining workplace outcomes.

## References

- Alfes, K., A. Shantz, C. Truss, and E. Soane. 2013. "The Link Between Perceived Human Resource Management Practices, Engagement and Employee Behaviour: A Moderated Mediation Model." *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 24(2): 330-351.
- Allen, N. J., and J. P. Meyer. 1990. "The Measurement and Antecedents of Affective, Continuance and Normative Commitment to the Organization." *Journal of Occupational Psychology* 63(1): 1-18.
- Blader, S. L., and T. R. Tyler. 2003. "What Constitutes Fairness in Work Settings? A Four-Component Model of Procedural Justice." *Human Resource Management Review* 13(1): 107-126.
- Brayfield, A. H., and H. F. Rothe. 1951. "An Index of Job Satisfaction." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 35(5): 307-311.
- Chaudhry, A., S. J. Wayne, and R. Schalk. 2009. "A Sensemaking Model of Employee Evaluation of Psychological Contract Fulfillment When and How do Employees Respond to Change?" *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 45(4): 498-520.
- Cohen-Charash, Y., and P. E. Spector. 2001. "The Role of Justice in Organizations: A Meta-Analysis." *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 86(2): 278-321.
- Collins, B. J., K. W. Mossholder, and S. G. Taylor. 2012. "Does Process Fairness Affect Job Performance? It Only Matters if They Plan to Stay." *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 33(7): 1007-1026.
- Colquitt, J. A., D. E. Conlon, M. J. Wesson, C. O. L. H. Porter, and K. Y. Ng. 2001. "Justice at the Millennium: A Meta-Analytic Review of 25 Years of Organizational Justice Research." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 86(3): 425-445.
- Colquitt, J. A., J. Greenberg, and B. A. Scott. 2005. "Organizational Justice: Where Do We Stand?" In J. Greenberg and J. A. Colquitt (Ed.) *Handbook of Organizational Justice*: 589-619, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Colquitt, J. A., J. Greenberg, and C. P. Zapata-Phelen. 2005. "History of Organizational Justice." In *Handbook of Organizational Justice*. Eds. J. Greenberg and J. A. Colquitt. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Colquitt, J. A., B. A. Scott, J. B. Rodell, D. M. Long, C. P. Zapata, D. E. Conlon, and M. J. Wesson. 2013. "Justice at the Millennium, a Decade Later: A Meta-Analytic Test of Social Exchange and Affect-Based Perspectives." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 98(2): 199-236.
- Conlon, D. E., C. J. Meyer, and J. M. Nowakowski. 2005. "How Does Organizational Justice Affect Performance, Withdrawal, and Counterproductive Behavior?" In *Handbook of Organizational Justice*. Eds. J. Greenberg and J. A. Colquitt. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Cook, J., and T. Wall. 1980. "New Work Attitude Measures of Trust, Organizational Commitment and Personal Need Non-Fulfilment." *Journal of Occupational Psychology* 53(1): 39-52.
- Cornelissen, J. P. 2012. "Sensemaking Under Pressure: The Influence of Professional Roles and Social Accountability on the Creation of Sense." *Organization Science* 23(1): 118-137.
- Dailey, R. C., and D. J. Kirk. 1992. "Distributive and Procedural Justice as Antecedents of Job Dissatisfaction and Intent to Turnover." *Human Relations* 45(3): 305-317.

- Gardner, W. L., B. J. Avolio, F. Luthans, D. R. May, and F. Walumbwa. 2005. "Can You See the Real Me?" A Self-Based Model of Authentic Leader and Follower Development." *The Leadership Quarterly* 16(3): 343-372.
- Goodman, P. S. 1974. "An Examination of Referents Used in the Evaluation of Pay." *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance* 12(2): 170-195.
- Greenberg, J. 2001. "The Seven Loose Can(n)ons of Organizational Justice." In *Advances in Organizational Justice*. Eds. J. Greenberg and R. Cropanzano. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Greenberg, J. 1987. "A Taxonomy of Organizational Justice Theories." *Academy of Management Review* 12(1): 9-22.
- Ham, J., and K. van den Bos. 2011. "On Justice Knowledge Activation: Evidence for Spontaneous Activation of Social Justice Inferences." *Social Justice Research* 24(1): 43-65.
- Heneman III, H. G., and D. P. Schwab. 1985. "Pay Satisfaction: Its Multidimensional Nature and Measurement." *International Journal of Psychology* 20(2): 129-141.
- Holtz, B. C., and C. M. Harold. 2009. "Fair Today, Fair Tomorrow? A Longitudinal Investigation of Overall Justice Perceptions." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 94(5): 1185.
- Iverson, R. D., and D. M. Buttigieg. 1999. "Affective, Normative and Continuance Commitment: Can the 'Right Kind' of Commitment be Managed?" *Journal of Management Studies* 36(3): 307-333.
- Jarzabkowski, P., J. K. Lê, and A. H. Van de Ven. 2013. "Responding to Competing Strategic Demands: How Organizing, Belonging, and Performing Paradoxes Coevolve." *Strategic Organization* 11(3): 245-280.
- Kickul, J., and S. W. Lester. 2001. "Broken Promises: Equity Sensitivity as a Moderator Between Psychological Contract Breach and Employee Attitudes and Behavior." *Journal of Business and Psychology* 16(2): 191-217.
- Kulik, C. T., and M. L. Ambrose. 1992. "Personal and Situational Determinants of Referent Choice." *Academy of Management Review* 17(2): 212-237.
- Lind, E. A., and T. R. Tyler. 1988. "The Social Psychology of Procedural Justice." *Springer Science & Business Media* 232, 239.
- Louis, M. R., and R. I. Sutton. 1991. "Switching Cognitive Gears: From Habits of Mind to Active Thinking." *Human Relations* 44(1): 55-76.
- Maitlis, S., and T. B. Lawrence. 2007. "Triggers and Enablers of Sensegiving in Organizations." *Academy of Management Journal* 50(1): 57-84.
- Mayer, D. M., and M. Kuenzi. 2010. "Exploring the 'Black Box' of Justice Climate: What Mechanisms Link Justice Climate and Outcomes." *Research on Managing Groups and Teams* 13: 331-346.
- McFarlin, D. B., and P. D. Sweeney. 1992. "Distributive and Procedural Justice as Predictors of Satisfaction with Personal and Organizational Outcomes." *Academy of Management Journal* 35(3): 626-637.
- Meyer, J. P., and N. J. Allen. 1991. "A Three-Component Conceptualization of Organizational Commitment." *Human Resource Management Review* 1(1): 61-89.
- Moorman, R. H. 1991. "Relationship Between Organizational Justice and Organizational Citizenship Behaviors: Do Fairness Perceptions Influence Employee Citizenship?" *Journal of Applied Psychology* 76(6): 845-855.

- Morrison, E. W., and S. L. Robinson. 1997. "When Employees Feel Betrayed: A Model of How Psychological Contract Violation Develops." *Academy of Management Review* 22(1): 226-256.
- Nunnally, J. C. 1978. *Psychometric Theory*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- O'Neill, B. S., J. R. B. Halbesleben, and J. C. Edwards. 2007. "Integrating Employment Contracts and Comparisons: What One Can Teach Us About the Other." *Journal of Managerial Issues* 19(2): 161-185.
- Price, J. L., and C. W. Mueller. 1986. *Handbook of Organizational Measurement*. Marshfield, MA: Pittman.
- Ravlin, E. C., and B. M. Meglino. 1987. "Effect of Values on Perception and Decision Making: A Study of Alternative Work Values Measures." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 72(4): 666-673.
- Reichard, R. J., S. A. Serrano, M. Condren, N. Wilder, M. Dollwet, and W. Wang. 2015. "Engagement in Cultural Trigger Events in the Development of Cultural Competence." *Academy of Management Learning and Education* 14(4): 461-481.
- Robinson, S. L. 1996. "Trust and Breach of the Psychological Contract." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 41(4): 574-599.
- Robinson, S. L., and E. W. Morrison. 2000. "The Development of Psychological Contract Breach and Violation: A Longitudinal Study." *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 21(5): 525-546.
- Rousseau, D. M. 1995. *Psychological Contracts in Organizations: Understanding Written and Unwritten Agreements*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Rupp, D. E., and R. Cropanzano. 2002. "The Mediating Effects of Social Exchange Relationships in Predicting Workplace Outcomes from Multifoci Organizational Justice." *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 89(1): 925-946.
- Taylor, S. E., and S. T. Fiske. 1978. "Salience, Attention, and Attribution: Top of the Head Phenomena." In *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*. Ed. L. Berkowitz. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Tekleab, A. G., R. Takeuchi, and M. S. Taylor. 2005. "Extending the Chain of Relationships Among Organizational Justice, Social Exchange, and Employee Reactions: The Role of Contract Violations." *Academy of Management Journal* 48(1): 146-157.
- Till, R. E., and R. Karren. 2011. "Organizational Justice Perceptions and Pay Level Satisfaction." *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 26(1): 42-57.
- Turnley, W. H., and D. C. Feldman. 2000. "Re-Examining the Effects of Psychological Contract Violations: Unmet Expectations and Job Dissatisfaction as Mediators." *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 21(1): 25-42.
- Zhao, H. A. O., S. J. Wayne, B. C. Glibkowski, and J. Bravo. 2007. "The Impact of Psychological Contract Breach on Work-Related Outcomes: A Meta-Analysis." *Personnel Psychology* 60(3): 647-680.