

## RESEARCH REPORTS

# The Role of Overall Justice Judgments in Organizational Justice Research: A Test of Mediation

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Organizational justice research traditionally focuses on the unique predictability of different types of justice (distributive, procedural, and interactional) and the relative importance of these types of justice on outcome variables. Recently, researchers have suggested shifting from this focus on specific types of justice to a consideration of overall justice. The authors hypothesize that overall justice judgments mediate the relationship between specific justice facets and outcomes. They present 2 studies to test this hypothesis. Study 1 demonstrates that overall justice judgments mediate the relationship between specific justice judgments and employee attitudes. Study 2 demonstrates the mediating relationship holds for supervisor ratings of employee behavior. Implications for research on organizational justice are discussed.

*Keywords:* overall justice, mediation, justice and attitudes, fairness

Organizational justice research has flourished in the last 25 years. In general, this work has been characterized by examining the unique effects of different types of justice on various outcomes. That is, the focus of this research has been on how distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice independently affect individuals' attitudes and behaviors. Recently, researchers have suggested that this singular focus on the effects of specific types of justice may not capture the depth and richness of individuals' justice experiences. These researchers suggested that a shift in focus to a consideration of overall fairness judgments may provide a more complete understanding of justice in organizational settings (Ambrose & Arnaud, 2005; Hauenstein, McGonigle, & Flinder, 2001; Lind, 2001a, 2001b; Lind & van den Bos, 2002; Tornblom & Vermunt, 1999; van den Bos & Lind, 2002).

In this article, we examine overall justice and its relationship with distributive justice, procedural justice, interactional justice, and employee outcomes. We suggest overall justice mediates the relationship between specific justice facets (distributive, procedural, and interactional) and outcomes. We present two studies. In the first we examine whether overall justice mediates the relationship between specific justice types and employee attitudes. In the second, we examine this mediating relationship for supervisors' ratings of employee behavior.

### Overall Justice

Most justice research accepts that three distinct justice types exist: distributive, procedural, and interactional (Cropanzano,

Byrne, Bobocel, & Rupp, 2001; Konovsky, 2000). Further, recent research has suggested there may be four distinct justice types: distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational (Colquitt, 2001; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001). Indeed, empirical support exists for each of these conceptualizations, and it has demonstrated the relationship between each type of justice and a broad range of individuals' attitudes and behavior (see Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001, for meta-analytic reviews). However, researchers have recently questioned the benefits of focusing exclusively on specific types of justice, suggesting a shift toward examining overall justice judgments (Ambrose & Arnaud, 2005; Hauenstein et al, 2001; Lind, 2001a, 2001b; Tornblom & Vermunt, 1999).

Several reasons exist for this interest in overall justice. First, there is an increasing acknowledgment in the justice literature that the focus on different types of justice may not accurately capture individuals' justice experiences. Second, a focus on overall justice may broaden the questions justice researchers consider and overcome some limitations in current examinations of justice. We discuss each of these below.

### Overall Justice and Individuals' Justice Experience

Recently, a number of researchers have suggested weaknesses related to the exclusive focus on specific types of justice. For example, Greenberg (2001) suggested when individuals form impressions of justice, they are making a holistic judgment. Similarly, Lind (2001b) noted that although individuals can distinguish between the sources of their justice experience when asked, what drives behavior is an overall sense of fairness. Likewise, Shapiro (2001) suggested victims of injustice react to their general experience of injustice.

Other researchers have made similar assertions. Hauenstein et al. (2001) suggested researchers should consider models of justice

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in which perceptions of general fairness provide the central causal mechanism. Similarly, Tornblom and Vermunt (1999) argued that individuals consider fairness as a Gestalt, that the components of fairness “are meaningful only in relation to the overall fairness of the situation” (p. 51). The common thread running through all of this research is that a focus on distinct forms of justice may not provide either a complete or an accurate picture of how individuals make and use justice judgments.

In many ways, this current focus on overall justice brings the field full circle. For example, Leventhal’s (Leventhal, 1980; Leventhal, Karuza, & Fry, 1980) seminal work on procedural justice framed procedural and distributive rules as the foundation of overall justice judgments. Lind and Tyler’s (1988) work also acknowledged distributive and procedural justice as components of overall justice in noting that procedural fairness “plays at least as large a role as distributive fairness in determining *overall justice judgments*” (p. 135, emphasis added).

If, as some researchers suggest, individuals react to their assessment of overall justice, then excluding this assessment from our research may omit an important construct and limit our theoretical understanding of individuals’ justice experiences and their reactions to them. Clearly, there are research questions for which a focus on specific facets of justice is desirable. However, research examining the overall justice construct and its relationship to specific types of justice and outcomes is also warranted.

### The Mediating Role of Overall Justice

Implicit in the early conceptualizations of justice is a mediating role for overall justice. That is, specific types of justice affect overall justice judgments, which, in turn, affect outcomes (Leventhal, 1980). Recent discussions also have suggested overall justice is the proximal driver of outcomes, with specific justice types serving a more distal role. For example, both Greenberg’s (2001) suggestion that individuals respond to a holistic assessment of justice and Shapiro’s (2001) assertion that individuals respond to their general justice experience imply overall justice is the more proximal influence on outcomes.

Some researchers have been more overt about the mediating role overall justice plays in the relationship between specific types of justice and outcomes. For example, Lind’s (2001a) Fairness Heuristic Theory explicitly suggests overall justice judgments mediate the relationship between specific justice judgments and outcomes. Colquitt and his colleagues (Colquitt & Shaw, 2005; Scott, Colquitt, & Zepata-Phelan, 2007) have been explicit in suggesting that overall justice mediates the relationship between specific justice experiences and outcomes as well.<sup>1</sup>

Conceptualizing overall justice as a mediator of the relationship between specific justice facets and outcomes changes the way we think about justice and broadens the avenues of research that scholars might pursue. For example, there are circumstances in which a focus only on overall justice may be warranted, such as when researchers are interested in the influence of fairness relative to other individual characteristics (e.g., affect, personality) or contextual characteristics (e.g., trust, support). Additionally, Colquitt and Shaw (2005) suggested researchers should match the level of specificity of the justice construct being investigated to the outcomes of interest. Therefore, questions involving global attitudes such as organizational commitment or job performance

would be most appropriately examined in conjunction with a global measure of justice. Finally, Lind (2001a) has suggested that the relationship between specific types of justice and overall justice may vary as a function of the salience and relevance of the specific justice type. However, current conceptualizations of justice, which are limited to exploring specific justice facets only, cannot shed light on such issues.

The idea that overall justice judgments mediate the relationship between specific types of justice and outcomes is present in many theories of justice, yet no empirical research has examined this conceptualization. In this article, we examine whether overall justice mediates the relationship between specific justice types and employee attitudes and behavior. We predict the following:

*Hypothesis 1:* Overall justice mediates the relationship between specific types of justice (distributive, procedural, and interactional) and individuals’ attitudes and behavior.

We note there is no discussion in the literature regarding full versus partial mediation in this relationship. Although Lind’s (2001a) schematic of the relationship between specific fairness judgments, overall fairness judgments, and outcomes suggests full mediation, the issue is not explicitly addressed. Baron and Kenny (1986) suggested partial mediation is most likely the norm in psychology research. However, James, Mulaik, and Brett (2006) indicated full mediation should serve as the baseline model in evaluating mediation. Therefore, we employ a full mediation model as the foundation for our investigation but explore partial mediation as well.

We address the hypothesis in two studies. In Study 1 we examine whether overall justice mediates the relationship between specific types of justice and employee attitudes. In Study 2 we examine this mediating relationship for supervisors’ ratings of employee behavior.

## Study 1

### Method

#### Sample and Procedures

Surveys were distributed to 425 employees from 54 organizations in the southeast United States including technology, government, insurance, financial, food service, retail, manufacturing, and medical organizations. Survey packets were hand-delivered to five to seven employees in each department. The cover letter indicated

<sup>1</sup> Research on specific justice facets has sometimes placed justice facets judgments in the role of mediators. For example, research on applicant reactions to selection processes demonstrates that procedural justice judgments mediate the relationship between selection process characteristics such as job relatedness, consistency, and bias, and applicant reactions (e.g., Chapman & Webster, 2006; Hausknecht, Day, & Thomas, 2004; Smither, Millsap, Stoffey, Reilly, & Pearlman, 1996). Our conceptualization differs from this previous work by suggesting that overall justice judgments mediate between these facet judgments and outcomes. Thus, our conceptualization would add an additional link to these conceptual models. Attributes of the experience would affect specific facet judgments (procedural, distributive, and interactional). Overall justice judgments would then mediate the relationship between these facet judgments and outcomes.

the study was being conducted for academic research purposes in an effort to better understand some of the issues that affect people at work. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. A postage-paid envelope was included in the packet to return the survey to the researchers. Employees were not compensated for their participation in the study. A total of 330 surveys were returned for a 78% response rate. Forty-two percent of the respondents were male, and 58% were female. The average age of respondents was 34.1 years, with 3.1 years of tenure in the department and 4.8 years of tenure in the organization.

The survey contained demographic questions and questions assessing perceptions of specific types of justice, overall justice, and job attitudes (job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions). Ten different forms of the survey were used. The order for the measures was determined randomly for each form.

### Measures

*Distributive, procedural, and interactional justice.* Specific justice perceptions were assessed with scales developed by Colquitt (2001). Distributive justice was assessed by four items (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .95$ ). Procedural justice was assessed by seven items ( $\alpha = .89$ ). Interactional justice was assessed by nine items ( $\alpha = .95$ ). For all items, individuals responded on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*to a small extent*) to 5 (*to a great extent*).

*Overall justice.* Two approaches have been suggested in the literature for how to measure overall justice (Colquitt & Shaw, 2005; Lind, 2001a). Both approaches reflect what have been termed *entity judgments*, which ask individuals to assess some entity (e.g., organization, group, or supervisor) as a whole. Entity judgments reflect a general assessment of the fairness of the entity (Cropanzano et al., 2001). However, the two approaches differ in their specific suggestions for assessing overall fairness. Lind (2001a) suggested overall justice represents an individual's global evaluation of the fairness of his or her experiences. Consequently, it should be assessed by items focusing on the individual's personal experiences (e.g., Overall, how fairly treated am I?; Lind, 2001a, p. 85). Colquitt and Shaw (2005) provided an alternative approach. Drawing on Cropanzano et al. (2001), they suggested overall justice items be composed of general statements about the organization (e.g., How fair is this organization?). These statements do not refer directly to individuals' own personal experiences. Indeed, research has demonstrated that individuals also use information about the fairness experiences of others to form their impressions of fairness (Kray & Lind, 2002; Lind, Kray, & Thompson, 1998). Thus, in forming a global assessment of an entity, individuals may consider the fairness of the organization generally (e.g., In general, how fairly does the organization treat its employees?).

Using a deductive approach (Hinkin, 1998), we developed a six-item measure consistent with both Lind's (2001a) and Colquitt and Shaw's (2005) suggestions for measuring overall justice, called the Perceived Overall Justice (POJ) scale. The POJ scale consists of three items to assess individuals' personal justice experiences: "Overall, I'm treated fairly by my organization" (POJ1); "In general, I can count on this organization to be fair" (POJ3); "In general, the treatment I receive around here is fair" (POJ4). The

POJ also includes three items to assess the fairness of the organization generally: "Usually, the way things work in this organization are not fair" (POJ2, reverse scored); "For the most part, this organization treats its employees fairly" (POJ5); "Most of the people who work here would say they are often treated unfairly" (POJ6, reverse scored). Individuals reported their agreement with each POJ statement (as well as those for satisfaction, commitment, and turnover intentions below) on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Responses to the items were recoded to parallel the specific justice items, such that higher ratings reflect greater perceptions of fairness. The  $\alpha$  for overall justice was .93.<sup>2</sup>

*Job attitudes.* Job satisfaction was assessed by using five items ( $\alpha = .82$ ) from the Job Satisfaction Index (Brayfield & Rothe, 1951). Organizational commitment was measured with five items<sup>3</sup> ( $\alpha = .76$ ) from the Affective Commitment Scale (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993). Two items from Cropanzano, James, and Konovsky (1993) assessed turnover intentions ( $\alpha = .67$ ).

### Results

Correlations, means, and standard deviations for all variables are presented in Table 1.

### Test of the Measurement Model

We conducted a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) on the justice items and attitude items. Because more complex models might obscure the fit of the justice measures, we first examined the measurement model for the justice items only. Following these CFAs, we examined the measurement model including the justice items and the attitude items jointly.

For the justice items, we conducted a CFA analysis to assess the fit of our theorized four-factor model (distributive, procedural, interactional, and overall justice). Results in Table 2 indicate the four-factor model provides an acceptable fit to the data. We compared this model with two alternative models: a two-factor model (all of the specific justice items in one factor and the overall justice items in a second factor; this model is analogous to a composite overall justice factor versus a global overall justice factor) and a one-factor model. The four-factor model was a significantly better fit than was the two-factor model:  $\chi^2$  difference( $df = 5$ ) = 3,815.20,  $p < .01$ ; or the one-factor model:  $\chi^2$  difference( $df = 6$ ) = 6,010.49,  $p < .01$ . Thus, the four-factor

<sup>2</sup> Although we believe it is useful to include both types of items in an assessment of overall justice, we conducted all analyses for both studies by using only the three personal experience items (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .90$  for both Study 1 and Study 2) or the three general experience items (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .85$  for Study 1; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .84$  for Study 2). In all cases, the pattern of results remains the same.

<sup>3</sup> Our survey included the seven-item version of the Affective Commitment Scale (Meyer & Allen, 1984). Because this scale has been revised, we deemed it best to utilize the five items that were consistent between the 1984 scale and the revised 1997 scale; one item from the 1997 scale was not assessed. The pattern of results with the 1984 (seven-item) measure is the same as with the five-item version of the 1997 measure. The correlation between the two commitment measures is .97, and the reliabilities for the two scales are also the same (.79).

Table 1  
Study 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Distributive justice	3.14	1.17	(.95)						
2. Procedural justice	3.01	0.88	.57	(.89)					
3. Interactional justice	3.80	1.01	.45	.53	(.95)				
4. Overall justice	5.19	1.23	.46	.46	.37	(.93)			
5. Satisfaction	5.30	1.18	.27	.31	.36	.54	(.82)		
6. Commitment	4.29	1.21	.26	.33	.30	.55	.66	(.76)	
7. Turnover intentions	4.03	1.61	-.29	-.35	-.27	-.51	-.55	-.70	(.67)

Note. All correlations significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed),  $N > 285$  for all variables. Reliabilities (coefficient alpha) are in parentheses.

model (distributive, procedural, interactional, and overall justice) represents the best fit to the data.<sup>4</sup>

We next assessed the fit of a seven-factor model reflecting distributive, procedural, interactional, and overall justice, and the three job attitude measures (see Table 2). Because our previous CFAs demonstrate the usefulness of four distinct justice factors, we compared the fit of this seven-factor model with that of a five-factor model that retained the four justice factors, and we combined all attitude items into a single factor. The seven-factor model (reflecting three attitude factors) was a significantly better fit than was the five-factor model:  $\chi^2$  difference( $df = 11$ ) = 71.8,  $p < .01$ .

### Structural Model

Our hypothesis predicts overall justice will mediate the relationship between antecedent variables (distributive, procedural, and interactional justice) and outcome variables (job satisfaction, commitment, and turnover intentions). We analyzed the data via structural equation modeling, utilizing LISREL 8.80. Following Mayer and Gavin (2005) and Schneider, Ehrhart, Mayer, Saltz, and Niles-Jolly (2005), we sought to identify the most appropriate structural model before testing our hypothesis. Existing theory and prior research do not provide a compelling rationale for whether overall justice will partially or fully mediate the relationship between specific justice types and outcomes. Thus, we follow the recommendation of James et al. (2006) that full mediation represents the best choice of a baseline model.

In this case, we compare the fit of this full mediation model with that of an alternative partial mediation model. The full mediation model includes six paths, three from the antecedent variables to

the mediator (overall justice) and three from the mediator to the outcome variables. As such, it assumes that all effects of the antecedent variables on the outcome variables are exerted indirectly, through the mediator. The partial mediation model adds to this model nine direct paths, connecting each of the three antecedent variables to each of the three outcome variables. Thus, it assumes that the antecedent variables may exert either direct or indirect effects on the outcome variables.

Fit indices indicate that the full mediation model provides an acceptable fit to the data:  $\chi^2(df = 656) = 3,624.19$  (root-mean-square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .10, incremental fit index [IFI] = .94, and comparative fit index [CFI] = .94), as does the partial mediation model:  $\chi^2(df = 647) = 3,605.53$  (RMSEA = .10, IFI = .94 and CFI = .94). However, the partial mediation model does not provide a better fit to the data:  $\chi^2$  difference( $df =$

<sup>4</sup> We also considered a five-factor model that distinguishes between interpersonal justice and informational justice. The CFA demonstrated the five-factor model was a good fit to the data,  $\chi^2(df = 289) = 683.10$  (RMSEA = .06, IFI = .95, CFI = .95), and an improvement over the four-factor model. However, the correlation between interpersonal justice and informational justice is .79. This correlation falls well above the guideline (.70) suggested by Colquitt and Shaw (2005) for the aggregation of justice constructs. This suggests that although the five-factor model may provide a better fit, a four-factor model is more appropriate. This decision is also consistent with Colquitt and Shaw's caveat that, "Confirmatory factor analyses can provide some guidance, but it must be noted that the fit statistics in those analyses almost always reward the more complex factor structure, even when correlations among the factors are particularly high" (p. 138).

A comment on the magnitude of the correlation between interpersonal justice and informational justice is warranted. Although the correlation in this study is higher than that found in Colquitt et al.'s (2001) meta-analysis ( $r_c = .66$ ), it is consistent with more recent studies that distinguish between interpersonal justice and informational justice. We reviewed justice research published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Personnel Psychology*, *Academy of Management Journal*, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, and *Journal of Management* since the publication of Colquitt's scale in 2001. Of the 87 articles we found, only 7 studies (Bell, Wiechmann, & Ryan, 2006; Humphreys, Ellis, Conlon, & Tinsley, 2004; Judge & Colquitt, 2004; Kernan & Hanges, 2002; Liao & Rupp, 2005; Roch & Shanock, 2006; Scott et al., 2007) distinguished between interpersonal justice and informational justice and included both in their study. In these 7 articles, the correlation between interpersonal justice and informational justice often exceeds the guideline provided by Colquitt and Shaw. Six of the 13 correlations reported are above .70, and 2 of these are above .80.

Table 2  
Study 1: Confirmatory Factor Analyses

Item	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	RMSEA	IFI	CFI
Justice items only					
Four-factor model	1,480.02	293	.11	.96	.96
Two-factor model	5,295.22	298	.23	.86	.86
One-factor model	7,490.51	299	.27	.80	.80
Justice and attitude items					
Seven-factor model	2,491.93	644	.09	.95	.95
Five-factor model	2,563.73	655	.09	.94	.94

Note. RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; IFI = incremental fit index; CFI = comparative fit index.



9) = 18.66, *ns*. The rule of parsimony, therefore, suggests the fully mediated model is the preferred model (James & Brett, 1984; James et al., 2006). In the fully mediated model, distributive justice exerted a significant direct effect on overall justice (structural coefficient = .25,  $p < .01$ ), as did procedural justice (.43,  $p < .01$ ) and interactional justice (.14,  $p < .01$ ), with an  $R^2$  for variance explained in overall justice of .33. Overall justice in turn exerted a significant effect on job satisfaction (.50,  $p < .01$ ), commitment (.56,  $p < .01$ ), and turnover intentions (–.53,  $p < .01$ ), with an  $R^2$  for variance explained of .33, .46, and .42, respectively. Figure 1 illustrates the full mediation model.

## Study 2

Study 1 provides strong support for our hypothesis. Overall justice mediates the relationship between specific justice types and employee attitudes. However, one limitation of Study 1 is the reliance on same-source data; both the justice perceptions and attitude assessments came from the employee. In Study 2 we address this limitation by examining the mediating role of overall justice on the relationship between the specific justice facets and outcomes by utilizing supervisors' reports of employee behavior. Specifically, we examine three types of behavior previously demonstrated to be related to fairness: organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), task performance, and organizational deviance. Thus, we examine whether our Study 1 mediation results can be replicated in a second sample that uses non-self-report outcomes.

## Method

### Sample and Procedures

Surveys were distributed to 137 employee–supervisor dyads (274 individuals) from 58 organizations in the southeast United States. The organizations represented a broad range of functions, including retail, service, manufacturing, medical, food service, entertainment, technology, and educational organizations. Survey packets were hand-delivered to participants. As with Study 1, the cover letter indicated the study was being conducted for academic research purposes in an effort to better understand some of the issues that affect people at work. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. A postage-paid envelope was included in each packet to return the survey directly to the authors.

Neither employees nor supervisors were compensated for their participation in the study. A total of 125 matched employee–supervisor dyads (250 participants) returned surveys, representing a 91% response rate. Forty-five percent of the employee respondents were male, and 55% were female. The average age of employee respondents was 31.2 years, with 3.1 years of tenure in the department and 4.0 years of tenure in the organization.

The employee survey contained demographic questions and questions assessing perceptions of specific types of justice and overall justice. Eight different forms of the employee survey were used. The order for the measures was determined randomly for each form. The supervisor survey contained questions to assess ratings of employee job behaviors, including task performance, OCBs, and organizational deviance. Two forms of the supervisory survey were used, with employee performance ratings appearing first in one version and last in the other.

## Measures

*Procedural, distributive, interactional, and overall justice.* As in Study 1, distributive, procedural, and interactional justice were assessed with Colquitt's (2001) items. Overall justice was assessed with the same six items as in Study 1. Reliabilities (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) for procedural, distributive, interactional, and overall justice, were .90, .95, .95, and .92, respectively.

*Task performance.* Employee task performance was assessed by supervisors with a seven-item ( $\alpha = .84$ ) task performance scale (Williams & Anderson, 1991). This and all subsequent measures utilized a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

*Organizational citizenship behavior.* Employee OCB was assessed by supervisors with an eight-item ( $\alpha = .93$ ) OCB scale (Williams & Anderson, 1991).

*Organizational deviance.* Organizational deviance on the part of the employee was assessed by supervisors with a 12-item ( $\alpha = .94$ ) organizational deviance scale (Bennett & Robinson, 2000).

## Results

Correlations, means, and standard deviations for all variables are presented in Table 3.

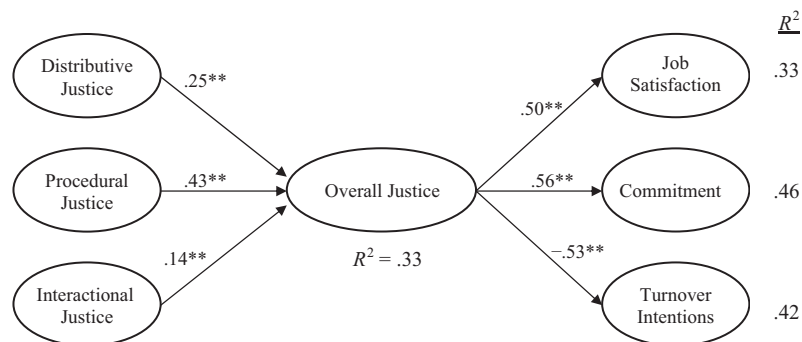


Figure 1. Study 1 structural equation modeling results: Full mediation model. \*  $p < .05$ , one-tailed; \*\*  $p < .01$ , one-tailed.

Table 3  
Study 2: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Distributive justice	4.64	1.61	(.95)						
2. Procedural justice	4.22	1.32	.53**	(.90)					
3. Interactional justice	5.54	1.39	.33**	.54**	(.95)				
4. Overall justice	5.06	1.34	.47**	.68**	.52**	(.92)			
5. Task performance	4.90	0.61	.06	.19*	.29**	.19*	(.84)		
6. OCB	4.02	0.81	.08	.23*	.31**	.12	.69**	(.93)	
7. Organizational deviance	1.39	0.59	-.19*	-.30**	-.31**	-.22*	-.57**	-.58**	(.94)

Note.  $N > 115$  for all variables. Reliabilities (coefficient alpha) are in parentheses. OCB = organizational citizenship behavior.  
\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Test of the Measurement Model

We conducted a series of CFAs on the justice items and job behavior items. As in Study 1, we first examined the measurement model for the justice items only. Following this series of CFAs, we examined the measurement model including the justice items and the job behavior items jointly.

For the justice items, we conducted a CFA to assess the fit of our theorized four-factor model (distributive justice, procedural justice, interactional justice, and overall justice). Results in Table 4 indicate the four-factor model provides an acceptable fit to the data. We compared this model with two alternative models. First, we examined a two-factor model with all of the specific justice items in one factor and the overall justice items in a second factor. Second, we examined a one-factor model. The four-factor model was a significantly better fit than was the two-factor model:  $\chi^2$  difference( $df = 13$ ) = 1,596.48,  $p < .01$ ; or the one-factor model:  $\chi^2$  difference( $df = 14$ ) = 2,007.51,  $p < .01$ . Thus, the four-factor model (distributive, procedural, interactional, and overall justice) represents the best fit to the data.

We next assessed the fit of a seven-factor model reflecting distributive, procedural, interactional, and overall justice, as well as the three job behavior measures (see Table 4). We compared the fit of this seven-factor model with that of a five-factor model that retained the four justice factors and combined all the job behavior items into a single factor. The seven-factor model was a significantly better fit than was the five-factor model:  $\chi^2$  difference( $df = 11$ ) = 1,798.45,  $p < .01$ .

Structural Model

Our hypothesis predicts overall justice will mediate the relationship between antecedent variables (distributive, procedural, and

interactional justice) and outcome variables (task performance, OCB, and organizational deviance). We analyzed the data via structural equation modeling, utilizing LISREL 8.80.

Consistent with Study 1, we consider both a fully mediated model and a partially mediated model. Results indicate that the full mediation model provides a good fit to the data:  $\chi^2(df = 1316) = 2,439.45$  (RMSEA = .08, IFI = .92 and CFI = .92). As in Study 1, fit indices for an alternative partial mediation model (which allows for direct effects of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice on outcomes, as well as their hypothesized indirect effects via overall justice) does not significantly improve the fit to the data:  $\chi^2(df = 1307) = 2,415.65$  (RMSEA = .08, IFI = .92, CFI = .92);  $\chi^2$  difference( $df = 9$ ) = 23.80, *ns*. Thus, the rule of parsimony again indicates the fully mediated model is the preferred model (James et al., 2006).

Procedural justice (structural coefficient = .58,  $p < .01$ ) and interactional justice (.24,  $p < .01$ ) each exerted direct effects on overall justice, while distributive justice did not (.08, *ns*). Overall  $R^2$  for variance explained in overall justice was .61. Overall justice in turn exerted a significant effect on task performance (.25,  $p < .05$ ), OCB (.18,  $p < .05$ ), and organizational deviance (-.28,  $p < .01$ ), with an  $R^2$  for variance explained of .06, .03, and .08, respectively. These results also provide support for our hypothesis. Figure 2 illustrates this model and results.

Discussion

In this article, we presented two studies to examine the relationship between overall justice judgments, specific justice judgments, and outcomes. We hypothesized overall justice would mediate the relationship between specific justice judgments and attitudes and behavior. The results provide clear support for this hypothesis. Study 1 demonstrated overall justice mediated the effect of the specific justice judgments on employees' self-reports of job satisfaction, commitment, and turnover intentions. Study 2 demonstrated this mediating effect for supervisors' evaluations of employees' OCB, task performance, and organizational deviance. The results of both studies suggest these relationships are best described by full mediation.

Two aspects of the results warrant additional attention. First, it is useful to examine further the relationship between the specific justice judgments and overall justice. In Study 1, all three justice facets were significant predictors of overall justice judgments. However, in Study 2, distributive justice did not significantly predict overall justice. Perhaps the more robust bivariate rela-

Table 4  
Study 2: Confirmatory Factor Analyses

Item	$\chi^2$	$df$	RMSEA	IFI	CFI
Justice items only					
Four-factor model	595.12	285	.09	.96	.96
Two-factor model	2,191.60	298	.23	.82	.82
One-factor model	2,602.63	299	.26	.79	.79
Justice and job behavior items					
Seven-factor model	2,299.12	1304	.08	.93	.93
Five-factor model	4,097.57	1315	.14	.88	.89

Note. RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; IFI = incremental fit index; CFI = comparative fit index.

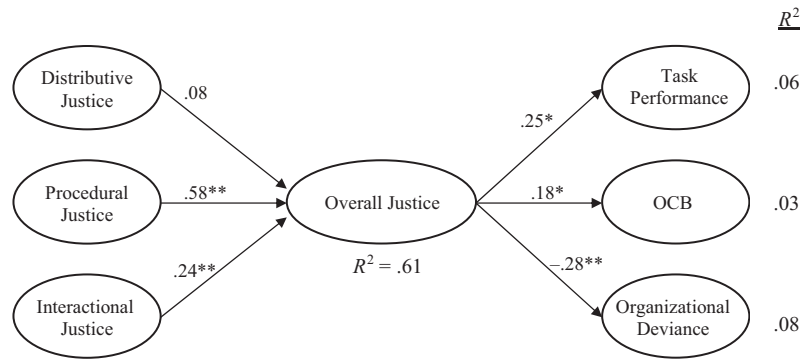


Figure 2. Study 2 structural equation modeling results: Full mediation model. OCB = organizational citizenship behavior. \*  $p < .05$ , one-tailed; \*\*  $p < .01$ , one-tailed.

tionships between procedural, interactional, and overall justice in Study 2 overshadowed the relationship between distributive justice and overall justice (which is relatively consistent across the studies).

Second, a comment on full versus partial mediation is warranted. The fully and partially mediated models exhibited similar fit to the data in both studies. Given the rule of parsimony, the fully mediated model is preferred. Nonetheless, the adequate fit for the partially mediated model raises the question about circumstances in which partial mediation may be a more appropriate model than is full mediation. We consider a few such situations below.

Much research on organizational justice focuses on the effect of different types of justice on different types of outcomes. Specifically, researchers have suggested there should be a stronger relationship between distributive justice and specific outcome-referenced attitudes and behavior, procedural justice and organization-referenced outcomes and behavior, and interactional justice and supervisor-referenced outcomes and behavior. Ambrose and her colleagues (Ambrose & Arnaud, 2005; Ambrose, Hess, & Gansar, 2007) called this the differential effects approach. Although one might intuitively expect evidence of partial mediation in situations where the foci of the specific justice judgment matches the foci of the attitude or behavior, we do not think there is a strong basis for predicting partial mediation in these cases. Despite the appeal of the differential effects conceptualization, meta-analytic results suggest the support for these differential effects is mixed (Colquitt et al., 2001; Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001). Indeed, recently Ambrose et al. (2007) reviewed these findings, tested competing models, and did not find support for a differential effects conceptualization of the relationships between specific justice judgments and attitudes.

However, we believe there may be some situations in which outcomes are strongly associated with specific justice facets. For example, bandwidth-fidelity theory suggests it is important to match the breadth or generality (bandwidth) of a predictor variable to that of the criterion variable to be predicted (Cronbach, 1970; Cronbach & Gleser, 1965). Stronger relationships emerge, and optimal explanatory power is achieved, when the complexity of the predictor matches that of the criteria being predicted.

Based on bandwidth fidelity, one might expect full mediation by overall justice to be less likely when the target of the justice assessment and the target of the attitude or behavior are similarly

specific. The idea here is similar to the differential effects approach in that the predictor and the criterion are matched, but it differs in that it suggests it is not just the focus of the attitude or behavior that matters, but the specificity of the assessment as well. This idea is consistent with that of Colquitt and Shaw (2005), who suggested a fit should exist between the level of specificity of the justice construct being investigated and the outcomes of interest. Specifically, they suggested questions concerning how improving the fairness of performance appraisal or compensation systems would necessarily require an equally specific justice construct. However, for questions involving global attitudes such as organizational commitment or job performance, a more global measure of justice would be more appropriate. Thus, it may be that full mediation is less likely when judgments of a specific process, outcome, or interaction are related to specific attitudes about that process, outcome, or interaction (e.g., fairness of performance appraisal associated with satisfaction with performance appraisal) than when specific facet judgments are related to global outcomes (e.g., commitment, performance).

Other factors might also affect full versus partial mediation. For example, Lind's (2001a) framework suggests that partial mediation is perhaps most likely during the judgment phase (as a general justice judgment is developing) whereas full mediation is most likely during the use phase (in which the general justice judgment is driving attitudes and behavior).<sup>5</sup>

There are a number of theoretical and conceptual benefits to considering a global approach to justice. The results suggest the importance of overall fairness in understanding individuals' justice experiences and reactions. In particular, overall justice judgments mediate the relationship between specific justice judgments and outcomes. These findings are consistent with recent discussions of individuals' justice experiences.

Recognizing the role of overall justice as the link between specific justice types and outcomes raises some interesting questions. Consider Lind's (2001a) suggestion that the relationship between the specific justice facets and overall justice may vary as a function of the salience and relevance of the specific type of justice. Justice experiences that occur early in the relationship with the organization (often procedural in nature) might be particularly

<sup>5</sup> We thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

influential in the development of overall justice judgments. Additionally, contextual variables such as organizational structure may influence the salience and relevance of the specific justice facets (Ambrose & Schminke, 2003; Schminke, Ambrose, & Cropanzano, 2000; Schminke, Cropanzano, & Rupp, 2002). Future examination of contextual variables like structure or climate on the relationship between specific justice types and overall fairness would be useful.

Finally, an overall justice construct provides a more parsimonious approach to examining justice. It is quite common in the justice literature for researchers to make identical predictions about the effect of some moderating or mediating variable on all three subtypes of justice (e.g., Kernan & Hanges, 2002; Liao & Rupp, 2005; Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2002). Under such circumstances, the underlying construct of interest appears to be a general sense of justice rather than the specific justice subtypes. An overall assessment of justice provides a better indicator of that underlying construct and a more parsimonious approach to studying justice. Therefore, unless a clear theoretical basis exists for making differential predictions across different subtypes of justice, researchers should assess overall justice instead.

In addition to these implications for scholars, our results also have implications for practitioners. For example, in employee surveys, length is almost always an issue. A general measure of fairness may allow organizations to assess fairness more parsimoniously and, consequently, to understand better its relation to other important outcomes. Similarly, previous research has suggested that although individuals are capable of expressing perceptions of specific justice facets when asked to do so, they tend to think in terms of general justice impressions. Thus, the overall justice construct may provide practitioners, managers, and employees alike with a language of justice that is both more accessible to them and more accurately descriptive of their concept of organizational justice.

Of course, there are questions our study cannot answer about overall justice. For example, we suggest specific justice experiences are the foundation for overall justice judgments. However, it is likely that once formed, overall justice may influence perceptions of specific justice experiences. Indeed, Lind (2001a) suggested overall justice judgments are quite stable over time. As this is an important issue, we collected additional data to provide a preliminary examination of the stability of the specific justice judgments and overall justice judgments over time. We assessed both specific justice judgments and overall justice judgments of fifty-seven respondents at Time 1 and then again 4 months later (Time 2). All respondents were in the same job with the same supervisor at Time 1 and Time 2. Dependent sample *t* tests revealed respondents' judgments of procedural justice (PJ) and distributive justice (DJ) were stable across the 4 month period: PJ Time 1 = 4.42, Time 2 = 4.60,  $t(df = 52) = -1.25$ , *ns*; DJ Time 1 = 4.85, Time 2 = 4.75,  $t(df = 54) = .50$ , *ns*. In contrast, judgments of interactional justice (IJ) and overall justice (OJ) changed significantly from Time 1 to Time 2: IJ Time 1 = 5.53, Time 2 = 5.14,  $t(df = 50) = 2.84$ ,  $p < .01$ ; OJ Time 1 = 5.26, Time 2 = 4.99,  $t(df = 50) = 2.18$ ,  $p < .05$ . We also compared the correlations between the Time 1 and Time 2 justice measures. The correlations were .62, .64, .69, and .74 for distributive justice, procedural justice, interactional justice, and overall justice, respectively. None of the correlations was significantly different from the

others, suggesting the specific justice judgments and overall justice judgments demonstrate similar stability over time. Although not a definitive test, these data suggest overall justice judgments are not more stable than specific justice judgments over time. Rather, specific justice experiences may continue to influence the overall justice judgments. We suspect there is an ongoing interplay between specific justice experiences and overall justice judgment. However, the precise nature of that relationship is a topic for future research.

As with all studies, there are limitations. First, in Study 1, we used a single method and a single respondent. However, Study 2 demonstrates similar effects by using supervisor ratings of employee behavior. Second, we used a cross-sectional design and data collection method, which might inflate the relationship between our variables. Third, our overall justice scale is a direct measure of fairness. That is, it is a measure that asks respondents directly how fair something is. In contrast, the specific justice scales are indirect measures (i.e., a measure that describes attributes of fairness such as voice, consistency, courteous treatment). Indirect measures such as scales developed by Folger and Konovsky (1989), Moorman (1991), and Colquitt (2001) are the most common measures of the specific justice facets. Colquitt and Shaw (2005) suggested direct measures be used when justice is an endogenous variable (such as a mediator), while indirect measures are appropriate when justice is an exogenous variable (i.e., the predictor variable). We followed this advice. Nonetheless, the relationship between direct measures of the justice facets and the direct measure of overall justice may differ from the relationship with indirect measures.

Colquitt and Shaw (2005) also suggested direct measures may be more susceptible to biases because words such as "fair" may be morally charged. Similarly, an overall measure may be more likely to capture general affect. In collecting data for Study 2, we measured negative affectivity as well as the variables utilized in the main analyses. In a subsequent structural equation modeling analysis, we controlled for negative affectivity in the model. The pattern of results is the same as those we report above. Moreover, the model fit,  $\chi^2(df = 1875) = 3,303.65$  (RMSEA = .08, IFI = .89, CFI = .89), was worse than that of our hypothesized model. Thus, for these data at least, general affect does not seem to account for the effect of overall justice.

## Conclusion

In this article, we strive to contribute to the organizational justice literature by examining the relationship between overall justice, specific types of justice, and employee attitudes and behavior. Our hope is that demonstrating the mediating role of overall justice in the relationship between specific types of justice and outcomes will encourage scholars to think differently about justice and to pursue new avenues of inquiry. We do not suggest that work on specific types of justice and their effect on outcomes should cease. Rather, we suggest justice research could benefit from an alternative, contemporaneous, and complementary line of inquiry—one including overall justice judgments. We believe overall justice is particularly useful in considering questions such as the relative impact of justice versus other organizational mo-



tives. Moreover, we believe this is an area that has largely been overlooked in the current literature.

We have learned much from examining the unique effects and relative impact of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice. We will continue to do so. However, as the field of organizational justice continues to mature, considering the holistic influence of overall justice on employee outcomes is a path worth traveling as well.

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