Which is More Important: Relationships with Superiors or with Colleagues?

Examining Taiwanese Employees’ Justice Perceptions on Co-workers’ Punitive Events

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Abstract

In this study, we examine justice perceptions of Taiwanese employees in response to co-workers’ punitive events. We raised the following question: When one’s co-worker is punished by a superior, does his or her (the “member’s”) justice perceptions vary more as a function of his or her relationships with the superior or more of those with the punished co-worker? We developed a working hypothesis based upon concepts of Chinese behaviors. In order to test our hypothesis empirically, we conducted a study in Taiwan, where the culture is strongly affected by Confucian teachings. We analyzed 65 cases where the scores on each independent variable were either in an in-group category or in an out-group category and omitted all other cases. We found support for interaction effects for perceptions of procedural justice but not of distributive justice. From our results, we discuss implications to Chinese organizational behavior.

Keywords: Chinese organizational behavior, punishment, in-group, out-group, and organizational justice
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Employees have different types and degrees of relationships with the people around them. “Superior” and “colleague” are two important relational categories for a particular employee because they occupy hierarchical positions at different levels. Some scholars have proposed that Chinese people are embedded in a complex social network of guan-xis (dyadic relationships that are based implicitly on mutual interest and benefit) (Yang, 1994). Fei (1949) has used the notion of differential matrix to describe Chinese societies. He argued that Chinese hold multiple standards for other people depending on the types and the nature of their relationships such as “father-son,” “superior-subordinate,” “friend-friend” etc. Furthermore, ordering relationships by status is a crucial element in Chinese societies. Chinese people value the wu-lun (i.e., the five relationships) principles as a referent norm of social interactions. We believe that these concepts will have important implications for Chinese organizational members’ perceptions and behavior. Few studies have shown, however, directly or indirectly, their existence and impact by examining Chinese employees’ behaviors or perceptions as indicators of effects from different relationships.

In an effort to fill this gap, we examine in this study justice perceptions of Taiwanese employees regarding co-workers’ punitive events. We raised the following question: When one’s co-worker is punished by a superior, does his or her (the “member’s”) justice perceptions vary more as a function of his or her relationship with the superior or of those with the punished co-worker? We expect to find results reflecting a cultural tradition of guan-xi networks and of ordering relationships by status. Let us first review some recent literature on justice issues in relations of punishment and then turn to our attention to the proposed hypothesis.

EMPLOYEES’ JUSTICE PERCEPTIONS

Justice Perceptions toward a Punitive Event

The act of punishment is often linked to the behaviorism paradigm. In this study we adopt Arvey and Ivancevich’s (1980) definition, in which punishment refers to the supervisor’s imposition of negative consequences or withdrawal of positive consequences for the purpose of decreasing the likelihood of a repeat of a subordinate’s undesirable behaviors. Organizational behavior textbooks often teach us that punishment can be seen as an alternative for positive reinforcement and is used as a way to shape an individual’s inappropriate behavior (e.g., Robbins, 1998). Unlike other management tools, the use of punishment has been the subject of wide debate and has often been labeled as morally inappropriate (Luthans & Kreitner, 1985). In other words, some scholars believe
that if other alternatives are possible, punishment should not be used to discourage the likelihood of a repeat of a person’s misconduct. It is because of this controversial stance that organizational members are especially sensitive to punitive events whether around or upon them.

Regarding the social effects of punishment on workgroup members, Trevino (1992) argues that members care greatly whether or not a punished co-worker receives an adequate level of punishment (both in terms of severity and consistency) in relation to his or her misconduct. In addition, the manager’s intent is also taken into account (cf. Lind and Tyler, 1988). If the group members perceive an injustice regarding the outcome of (i.e., distributive justice) or the decision process (i.e., procedural justice) regarding the punishment, they worry that their own future interests have been threatened.

The Concepts of Differential Matrix and Wu-lun in Chinese Societies

This paper explores Chinese organizational members’ justice perceptions toward their co-worker’s punitive event. Let us now examine two concepts indigenous to Chinese societies: differential matrix and wu-lun.

The concept of differential matrix (Fei,1949) as an explanation of Chinese behaviors has received wide acceptance by scholars. Fei argues that Chinese people do not perceive themselves as related to each other on equal bases. A person can be thought of as being at the center of a set of concentric circles: the closer the circle, the stronger the relational ties. A person holds multiple standards for other people depending on the terms of their relationships. As a result, the quality and the strength of the relationships between superior-subordinate dyads or between subordinate-subordinate dyads may affect the person’s perceptions and attitudes. The choice of favoring one relationship while forsaking another is partly determined by the strength of the relational tie.

Furthermore, traditional Chinese society is strongly based on the wu-lun (the five relationships) principles of Confucianism: emperor-subject, father-son, husband-wife, elder-younger, and friend-friend. The dyadic wu-lun relationships specify people’s roles and behaviors in relation to one another; such relationships often demand a higher expectation of someone with less power than one with greater power (Yang, 1993). Superior-subordinate relationships represent a modern version of vertical relationships, while colleague-colleague represents that of horizontal relationships. Of course, this analogy has been somewhat modified to accommodate modern business settings.

The principle of “Vertical relationships’ superseding horizontal ones” in modern societies may not be a general rule and tends to be situational. Rather than overriding a person’s attitude when the issue is related to someone for whom the member has a strong affinity, this principle has an impact when no other salient social pressures are present or when the situation elicits no controversial demands. There are many cases in nowadays
Chinese societies, for instance, in which a person identifies with his or her husband/wife’s behaviors while going against his or her parents. A superior (as opposed to the Emperor in ancient days) may not elicit such a strong impact to an organizational member, causing his or her abandonment of close friendship with colleagues.

Turning back to our previous argument, we raise the following question: When one’s co-worker is punished by a superior, does the member’s justice perceptions vary more as a function of his or her relationship with the superior or with the punished co-worker? Following the concept of differential matrix, we expect to find the person’s justice perceptions to be a function of the strength of relational ties between him or her and the superior and between him or her and the punished co-worker. A stronger relational tie to the superior is likely to derive more positive justice perceptions than a weaker one does.

Furthermore, we expect that the strength of the relational ties will be different when the counterpart persons belong to different relational categories (i.e., superior, subordinate, or colleague). Based on the principles of wu-lun, other things being equal, a person’s support of his or her superior’s disciplinary actions will be more socially justifiable than his or her appreciation for his or her punished co-worker’s wrong-deeds. Bies (1987) has used the term ideological social accounts to denote individuals’ justifications that reframe an action or outcome so that it is viewed more legitimate and fair. Hence, the person may reinterpret the punitive event in a broader framework of reasoning. For instance, the punishment to the co-worker may be reinterpreted as necessary for group effectiveness.

In order to approximate vertical and horizontal relationships within organizations, we adopt the variables “leader-member exchange quality” to assess the former and “liking” to assess the latter.

**Leader-Member Exchange Quality and Liking**

The vertical relationship between a subordinate and his or her superior is quite different from the relationship between two subordinates. A superior holds both a higher status and higher position power (both reward and punishment power) than a subordinate. We use the variable “leader-member exchange quality” (simplified as LMX-Q) to assess subordinates’ judgment of superior-subordinate relationships. Graen and his associates argue that a superior tends to treat each subordinate differently (Dansereau, Graen and Haga, 1975; Graen and Scandura, 1987). The differences in their dyadic exchange quality can be expressed in terms of the supervisor’s considerations regarding trust of and delegation to the subordinate and of the subordinate’s loyalty, commitment and trustworthiness in the superior (Yukl, 1994).

Unlike a superior, the co-worker of a person does not have the position or power to reward or punish that person. Therefore, the degree of liking in this study assesses the
horizontal relationships between two colleagues. Here we define liking to be a person’s general attitude toward one of his or her colleagues. We expect to find that the degree of liking affects a person’s justice perceptions toward a punitive event (e.g., Bies and Moag, 1986; Folger and Bies, 1989).

As mentioned, this study attempts to examine whether a person’s justice perception toward a co-worker’s punitive event is dependent more upon his or her relationship with the superior than upon that with the co-worker. To consider the effects separately, first, the leader-member exchange quality may affect a person’s justice perceptions as follows: A person who has a high LMX-Q with a superior is more likely to stand on the superior’s side, believing that what he or she does is just. The punishment behaviors are considered necessary for the company. A high LMX-Q person is also more likely to acknowledge the formal procedures used for punitive decisions and see that these procedures are “enacted” by the manager (Greenberg, 1996). On the contrary, if a subordinate has a low LMX-Q, he or she does not consider the superior a trustworthy person and tends not to acknowledge that the punishment follows a due process.

Furthermore, we also expect that the better the liking relationships between a third-party employee and the punished person, the less he or she will perceive the punishment as “just.” That is to say, the more a person likes his or her punished co-worker, the more he or she will be favorable to the person and see the punishment as “unjust.” On the contrary, the less a person likes the punished co-worker, the more he or she will perceive the punishment as “just.”

If we consider a cultural norm of wu-lun, however, there may exist a general tendency for a more positive appreciation for the superior than for the punished co-worker. That is to say, in a Western context an employee’s perception of a punitive event as just or unjust cannot necessarily be attributed to the precedence of vertical or horizontal relationships, but we speculate that in a Chinese context vertical relationships tend to exert a more positive impact on justice perceptions than do horizontal relationships. A detailed analysis of the related effects between these factors follows.

Proposed Hypothesis

Considering potential joint effects due to vertical and horizontal relationships in Chinese contexts, what does an organizational member perceive when his or her co-worker is punished by a superior? In order to simplify our discussions, we classified each relationship (i.e., LMX-Q representing a superior-subordinate relationship and liking representing a subordinate-subordinate relationship) into “in-group” and “out-group” categories. An in-group contains group members who are close to the focal person and have mutual trust with him or her. An out-group contains group members who are distant from the focal person and have little trust with him or her. Thus, we created four types of group members. They are Type I: in-group of the superior and out-group of
the punished co-worker, Type II: in-group of the superior and of the punished co-worker, Type III: out-group of the superior and in-group of the punished co-worker, and Type IV: out-group of the superior and of the punished co-worker.

Justice Perceptions in Terms of Relational Types

Type I: In-group of the Superior and Out-group of the Punished Co-worker

The first type of individual tends to be more favorable to the superior’s decisions and less favorable to the punished co-worker. People in the in-group of the superior usually view the superior’s actions as benevolent and reasonable. At the same time, those individuals in the out-group of the punished co-worker have a formal friendship with the punished person. When the co-worker is punished, Type I individuals tend to attribute the blame to the co-worker and believe that he or she deserves the punishment. We predict a high positive perception of distributive justice.

Furthermore, members of the in-group of the superior often participate in his or her decision-making. They have knowledge regarding how punishment decisions are made in general and this incident (i.e., the decisions regarding the focal person’s punishment) in particular. Therefore, our prediction is that this type of individual will also perceive a high procedural justice.

Consequently, the Type I individuals may show more positive justice perceptions toward their superior than toward the punished co-worker. Such tendencies coincide with the wu-lun principles, as vertical relationships supersede horizontal relationships.

Type II: In-group of the Superior and In-group of the Punished Co-worker

The second type of individual maintains quality relationships with both the superior and the punished co-worker. Type II members face “social dilemmas,” i.e., situations where social pressures came from various sources of guan-xis. Type II individuals have been good friends of the punished co-worker, so they tend to empathize with him or her. Because they are also in-group members of the superior, however, they agree that his or her actions are reasonable from the standpoint of management. Favoring one person by a Type II member may somehow hurt the relationship with the other party.

One possible solution to disentangle the complexity is to act according to wu-lun principles. If they abide by the rule of vertical relationships’ superseding horizontal relationships while all other things are equal, we predict that Type II individuals will perceive moderate distributive justice rather than distributive “injustice.”

Furthermore, in terms of procedural justice, because Type II members are in the in-group of the superior, they probably have knowledge regarding the actual punishment
decision processes. The may find that either their superior did not show goodwill and has mistreated the punished co-worker or that the superior’s behaviors are appropriate and considerate to the punished co-worker. When the *wu-lun* principles come into play, however, we predict that Type II members will favor the superior’s actions rather than the wrong deeds of the co-worker.

Type III: Out-group of the Superior and In-group of the Punished Co-worker

The third type of individual is in the out-group of the superior and the in-group of the punished co-worker. Of the four types Type III members empathize with the punished co-worker the most and with the superior the least. As a result, these members will probably tend to perceive low distributive justice. Because they belong to the out-group of the superior, Type III members have little chance to participate in the superior’s decision processes and have no knowledge as to how the punishment decision was made. Consequently, they are not likely to perceive the procedures as constructive and fair for the punished co-worker. They should have low procedural justice perceptions.

Type IV: Out-group of the Superior and of the Punished Co-worker

The fourth type of individual is the most objective category of all since these members do not perceive *guan-xi* pressures from either one of the two sources: the superior or the punished co-worker. It is most likely that they will come up with a more rational viewpoint toward a punitive event—one that is not favorable to either the punished co-worker or to the superior. Factors such as the following will be taken into account: What is the punitive incident about, does the co-worker have an excuse for the incident, did the superior inform the co-worker in advance how to prevent the incident from occurring, etc. Type IV members may review each of these questions to decide whether the superior made a reasonably good decision. We may not be able to reach a final prediction as to whether Type IV members favor the superior or the punished co-worker. We can use the perceptions of Type IV members, however, as “reference points” and compare them with those in the other three categories.

A final consideration of the last two types is whether the *wu-lun* principles will weaken members’ favorable justice perceptions to the punished co-worker and attenuate their unfavorable justice perceptions to the superior. This cultural effect may exist among Type IV members, who may use *wu-lun* as a guideline to make their final evaluations. We suspect that Chinese organizational members of Type III, too, will turn their loyalty away from their in-group, the punished co-worker, and will turn it toward their out-group, the superior, simply to abide by the ordering principles of *wu-lun*.

Drawing upon our above arguments, we utilize leader-member exchange quality (between the superior and the member) and liking (between the member and the punished co-worker) to approximate vertical and horizontal relationships and propose the
following hypothesis.

**Hypothesis:** There exist interaction effects on justice perceptions toward a co-worker’s punitive event from (1) the leader-member exchange quality between superior and a group member and (2) the liking between the group member and the punished co-worker.

Finally, some related literature suggests to us that an individual’s view of the motive of justice (Lerner, 1977) may also affect distributive justice perceptions (Ball et al., 1994). According to Lerner (1977), justice is a basic need of human nature, and, consequently, organizational members expect to see good behaviors rewarded and bad ones punished. Although the concept has been construed in a Western context, we expect to find that Chinese co-workers also have the tendency to believe in a just world (simplified as BJW). Hence, we need to control such individual effects in our analysis.

**METHODS**

**Procedures**

In order to test the proposed hypothesis empirically, we conducted a study in Taiwan, where the culture is greatly affected by Confucian teachings. We used a convenient sampling technique to gather data. The process is as follows: We first contacted the personnel/management office to get permission for the survey. We asked whether the company had a disciplinary incident within the last six months. We provided those companies that agreed to join the research with questionnaires and return envelopes. We asked the contact person in the company to put both the names of the punished person and of the supervisor in the designated blanks of the questionnaire. (We made sure that the punished person shared the same supervisor with the respondents.) We assured confidentiality to the respondents that no individual scores would be disclosed to anyone other than the researchers. During the sampling process, however, most companies avoided letting the focal punished person and his or her supervisor to know about the survey.

**Respondents**

We obtained a total of 104 usable responses that contained 19 punitive cases in 15 companies. Cases included fist fights, getting drunk during work hours, causing casualties in a construction site after disobeying safety rules, extremely low efficiency, and bad work attitudes. The respondents were 40 women (38.5%) and 64 men (61.5%). Their work experience ranged from 1 to 33 years (x=13 years), and their management experience ranged from 0 to 24 years (x=6.6 years).

**Measures**
**Justice Perception.** We adopted Ball et al.’s (1994) justice perception questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale to assess respondents’ perceptions of punitive events. Because Ball et al.’s original questionnaire was used to assess the punished person’s justice perceptions, we changed the subject terms from “I” to “he” or “she.” Their factorial results showed four dimensions for procedural justice (constructiveness, subordinate control, privacy, and negative supervisor demeanor) and one dimension for distributive justice (harshness). The meanings of these dimensions are as follows: “the constructiveness dimension refers to a generally constructive approach toward the discipline that involves teaching, specifying expected behaviors, and providing an adequate explanation for the punishment.” (p.310) The subordinate control dimension refers to “the amount of control a subordinate had over the procedures used in the disciplinary event and over the actual punishment imposed. Privacy refers to the absence of others during the punishment. Negative supervisor demeanor refers to negative behavior by the supervisor during the interaction, including the expression of anger, irritation, and annoyance.” (p.310) The harshness dimension refers to “perceptions that a punishment is inconsistent with or harsher than what others have received and is too harsh given the violation.” (p.310) Ball et al. found the Cronbach alphas to be .91, .90, .89, .85 and .88 respectively.

**Quality of LMX.** We asked the respondents to rate their relationships with their supervisors. We used Bauer and Green’s (1996) eight-item LMX quality questionnaire with a 7-point Likert scale. (The questionnaire was originally designed by Scandura and Graen (1984).) Bauer and Green (1996) found Cronbach alphas at different point in time as .92 and .94 respectively.

The above three questionnaires were translated into Mandarin Chinese by the authors of this paper and then back-translated into English to assure their correct meanings.

**Justice World Motive.** Rubin and Peplau (1973), using a 6-point Likert scale, developed the Justice World Motive questionnaire. Rubin and Peplau (1973) reported Cronbach alphas for two different samples as .80 and .81 respectively.

**Liking.** We designed two items to assess each respondent’s liking toward the punished person: (1) I like this person very much as a person. (2) I think the person would make a good friend. (Both are in Mandarin Chinese.) We used a 7-point Likert Scale.

**Individual Characteristics.** Respondents provided their gender, age, organizational level, tenure with the organization, tenure at the management level and tenure at the current position.

The Cronbach alpha reliabilities are shown in correlation matrix (Table 1). All reliabilities are over .70, except for the subordinate control dimension (.69).
RESULTS

Table 1 shows the correlation results of the overall sample. In the table the Pearson correlation coefficient between LMX-Q and distributive justice (a reverse score on harshness) was not significant (p>.05), and coefficients between LMX-Q and constructiveness, subordinate control and negative supervisor demeanor all reached significant levels (r=.39, .28, and .26, p<.001, .01, and .01 respectively). The Pearson correlation coefficients between liking and all dimensions of justice perceptions were not significant (p>.05). The control variable, BJW, was found to be significantly related to distributive justice (r=.26, p<.01) but not to the four procedural justice dimensions.

Identifying In-Group and Out-Group Members

Because our purpose was to analyze possible interaction effects in terms of vertical relationships and horizontal relationships, a decision was made to cut the entire sample into a smaller set. The highest 30% of liking or LMX-Q of respondents was labeled the in-group. The lowest 30% or liking or LMX-Q of respondents was labeled the out-group. The middle 40% was comprised of those members who were not strongly affiliated with either party. We retained only those cases in which the scores on leader-member exchange quality were among either the in-group or the out-group while their scores on liking were also among either the in-group or the out-group. For example, one chosen respondent might indicate an in-group relationship with superior and an out-group relationship with the punished co-worker, while another respondent might indicate an out-group relationship with superior and an out-group relationship with the punished co-worker.

As a result, 65 cases remained. 12 cases were Type I group members. 20 cases were Type II group members. 7 cases were Type III group members, and 26 cases were Type IV group members.

We re-coded in-group relationships as “1” and out-group relationship as “0.” Figure 1 exhibits diagrams of the mean scores for perceived distributive justice and perceived procedural justice for each cell.
Analysis of Interaction Effects

We conducted ANOVA tests to examine possible main and interaction effects by the two independent variables. Our ANOVA results (Table 2) showed that the overall effects on perceptions of procedural justice reached .001 level of significance but did not reach .05 level of significance on perceptions of distributive justice. That is to say, the mean scores for the four cells on the former were significantly different while those on the latter were not different statistically. Moreover, the interaction term in the equation on distributive justice reached a .10 significance level. We then conducted post hoc analyses (adopting the technique of Scheffe tests) to compare the differences of mean scores on justice in between the paired cells.

In terms of distributive justice, Scheffe tests showed that the Type III respondents (out-group vertical relationship and in-group horizontal relationship) had a significantly lower mean score on perceived distributive justice ($m=2.54$) than the other three cells ($m=3.20$, $3.31$, and $3.25$ respectively) (significance levels at .05, .05, and .10 respectively), which means that those members who were close to the punished co-worker and did not have a quality relationship with the superior perceived the least distributive justice toward the punitive event. The contrasts among the other pairs did not show significant differences.

In terms of procedural justice, our results again showed that the Type III respondents (out-group vertical relationship and in-group horizontal relationships) had a significantly lower mean score on perceived procedural justice ($m=2.37$) than the scores in the other three cells ($m=2.95$, $3.28$, and $3.33$ respectively) ($p<.05$, .01, .01). This result means that the ones who were close to the punished co-worker and did not have a quality relationship with the superior also perceived the least procedural justice toward the punitive event. In addition, the Type IV respondents (out-group vertical relationships and out-group horizontal relationships) had a significantly lower mean score on perceived procedural justice ($m=2.95$) than the Type I ($m=3.33$) ($p<.05$) and the Type II respondents ($m=3.28$) ($p<.05$).

Summary

Our hypothesis predicts that a person’s leader-member exchange quality with a superior has a joint effect with his or her liking of a punished co-worker as regards procedural and distributive justice perception. Our results partially support our hypothesis. In terms of distributive justice, the overall model was not statistically significant. From our post hoc analysis, we found that those members who were close to
the punished co-worker and did not have a quality relationship with the superior perceived the least distributive justice toward the punitive event.

Moreover, the data supports our prediction regarding procedural justice. Both the overall model and the interaction term reached statistically significant levels. Specifically, those members who were close to the punished co-worker and did not have a quality relationship with the superior did perceive the least procedural justice toward the punitive event. Furthermore, the ones who were distant from the superior and from the punished co-worker held a poorer procedural justice perception than those who were close to the superior.

**DISCUSSION**

**Contributions of the Research**

Until now no study had looked at organizational members’ justice perceptions toward a co-worker’s punitive event in terms of vertical and horizontal relationships simultaneously. We chose to study the topic in a Chinese context since we expected to find an interaction effect resulting from various types of interpersonal relationships. This research made several contributions to our knowledge of leadership dynamics and organizational justice. First, our results are consistent with Graen’s leader-member exchange theory, which posits that subordinates with varying degrees of leader-member exchange quality have different perceptions and attitudes, which supplements Lind and Tyler’s (1988) group-value model by adding a differential effect for group members in terms of justice perceptions. In other words, although all subordinates value long-term relationships with their superiors, every member comes up with his or her justice evaluations differently.

Secondly, our results showed that leader-member exchange quality did exhibit a stronger main effect on members’ perceptions of procedural justice than liking between the two colleagues did. One possible explanation parallels our earlier statement, *i.e.*, Chinese group members may value vertical relationships over horizontal relationships. One drawback of our study, however, was our using LMX-Q and liking as approximations of vertical and horizontal relationships. There may exist multiple dimensions of vertical relationships and horizontal relationships. The two variables represent only a limited assessment of an overall complicated interpersonal phenomenon. Therefore, we should be careful in interpreting our data in terms of the explained variances of the two independent variables.

Finally, we found interaction effects on members’ perceptions of procedural justice. This result provides support for our hypothesis. From our post hoc analyses, we found several significant paired mean-score differences. But owing to both the concern mentioned previously and our lack of measurement on the *wu-lun* effects, we cannot
arrive at conclusions on the causes of these differences. An in-depth investigation is needed to single out each effect separately.

We have found the following tentative implications to Chinese organizational behavior.

Implications to Chinese Organizational Behavior

We collected data in Taiwan, where most people are Chinese descendents. Our study has several implications regarding Chinese organizational behavior. First, in terms of distributive justice, our findings seem to indicate that our respondents wanted to maintain a “neutral” position regarding the punitive events; hence, both LMX-Q and liking had no main effect on justice perceptions. It has been suggested that Chinese often use different justice rules depending on the nature of the interpersonal dyadic relationship (Leung and Bond, 1984). They adopt equality rules for friends but equity rules for strangers.

Nevertheless, according to our post hoc analysis, the respondents did favor the punished co-worker and perceived injustice to their superior if they liked the punished co-workers and had poor relations with their superiors. Chinese organizational members are indeed embedded in complex social networks. They face tremendous social pressures when situations demand a fair perception among their superiors and colleagues. Although the wu-lun principles may be used as a moral justification to resolve such social dilemmas, can Chinese employees reconcile the dilemmas simply by abiding by an ancient philosophy, or should they pursue other means in order to maintain justice perceptions? These questions remain unanswered and need further explorations in future studies.

In addition, we found that BJW significantly correlated with distributive justice perceptions. Lerner’s (1977) just world motive theory has been successfully evidenced in the North American culture, but has not been tested widely in Eastern cultures such as Chinese societies. Until now, we have known little about the general tendencies of BJW for Chinese organizational members. Our data provides a preliminary answer for this question, and the justice motives will be a promising subject for future comparative studies across cultures.

Finally, some scholars suggest that Chinese organizational structure is strong vertically but weak horizontally (e.g., Yates and Lee, 1996), that Chinese culture is characterized by high power distance, and that its decision customs are highly sensitive to status differences (Hofstede, 1980). It is, therefore, reasonable to say that those who perceive a high LMX-Q are people who possess a higher level of power relative to a low LMX-Q member. Hence, these members might appreciate their superiors more and, thus, hold more positive procedural justice perceptions.
Study Limitations

One limitation of this study is the small sample size of punitive incidents. In the early stage of this study, we phoned potential companies one by one to ask permission to conduct this survey. Unfortunately, many rejected our request immediately. Their official explanation was that their company had “no such cases available!” The researchers suspect that the reason behind this response might be due to the Chinese saying, “One should claim goodness in public, while blame fault in private.” That is to say, most companies do not like other people to inquire about their internal punishment events on employees; They will lose face. As a result, this study could not obtain a wide range of disciplinary events.

Another problem is that the results for the privacy dimension of procedural justice in our study might contain biases through our sampling process. If perfect privacy does exist, it would be impossible for us to conduct research using the related respondents, for in order to have them to respond to our questionnaires, they had to have at least minimum knowledge about the events. Those who knew nothing about the events had been excluded, so our sample contained only a partial list of all potential respondents. Finally, the personnel or the management office we contacted decided to whom they would send the questionnaires. It is likely that their decisions were mainly affected by the availability/willingness of the related employees. Such sampling bias might result in a smaller variance of LMX-Q.
REFERENCES


### TABLE 1

**Descriptive Statistics and Correlations** \(^a\) (N=104)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>mean</th>
<th>s.d.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Belief in a just world</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>(0.70)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>2. LMX-Q</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.38***</td>
<td>(0.92)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Liking</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>(0.95)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Harshness</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>-0.26**</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>(0.7)</td>
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<td>5. Constructiveness</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.39***</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.55***</td>
<td>(0.88)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Subordinate Control</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.28**</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>-0.44***</td>
<td>0.61***</td>
<td>(0.69)</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Privacy</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.21*</td>
<td>(0.76)</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Negative Supervisor Demeanor</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.26**</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>-0.41***</td>
<td>0.44***</td>
<td>0.27***</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>(0.95)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Numbers in parentheses are Cronbach alpha reliabilities.

* \(p<0.05\)

** \(p<0.01\)

*** \(p<0.001\)
### TABLE 2

ANOVA Results by LMX-Q and Liking

#### Distributive Justice as Dependent Variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Variation</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Covariate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belief in a Just World</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.73</td>
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<td>Main Effects</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>LMX-Q</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>2.34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liking</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.85</td>
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<td>Interactions</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMX-Q × Liking</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>.10+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explained</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>1.72</td>
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</table>

#### Procedural Justice as Dependent Variable

<table>
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<th>Source of Variation</th>
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<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Effects</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMX-Q</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>19.23***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liking</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>4.67*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interactions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMX-Q × Liking</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>3.36+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explained</td>
<td>5.52</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>6.67***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+ p<.10  
* p<.05  
** p<.01  
*** p<.001
FIGURE 1
Diagrams for Interaction Effects

Distributive Justice

Leader-Member Exchange Quality

Procedural Justice

Leader-Member Exchange Quality

a Coding: 0=out-group
1=in-group