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In the Eyes of the Beholder?:

The Role of Dispositional Trust in Judgments of Procedural Fairness

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## Abstract

Previous research on the antecedents of procedural fairness judgments has focused primarily on situational factors. We suggest that dispositional tendencies also affect perceptions of procedural fairness. Converging evidence from three studies showed that people's general propensity to trust others was positively related to their fairness perceptions. Study 3 also found that the positive relationship between dispositional trust and perceived procedural fairness emerged even when participants received identical procedural fairness information, suggesting that the relationship between dispositional trust and fairness was not simply explained by the possibility that those who are more trusting were actually treated more fairly. Study 3 also showed that dispositional trust in particular was predictive of procedural fairness perceptions whereas other individual difference variables reflecting positivity were not.

### **Keywords:**

Procedural fairness; dispositional trust; individual differences; job satisfaction; organizational commitment

When people believe they are treated fairly, they tend to be more satisfied with their jobs (e.g., Alexander & Ruderman, 1987; Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991; Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, & Taylor, 2000), more committed to their workplace (e.g., Folger & Konovsky, 1989; McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992; Sweeney & McFarlin, 1993), and feel better about themselves (e.g., Tyler & Lind, 1992). Indeed, one of the most robust findings in the organizational justice literature is that perceptions of procedural fairness have a strong and enduring impact on how people feel about and react to their jobs and organizations (e.g., Colquitt et al., 2001).

Given the pervasive influence of procedural fairness judgments, it is both theoretically and practically important to better understand how these judgments are formed. To date, most research examining the antecedents of procedural fairness perceptions has focused on how situational factors, such as the characteristics of the procedures or the opinions of co-workers, influence perceptions of fairness. For instance, fairness judgments tend to be enhanced when procedures are based on accurate information, are applied consistently (e.g., Bies & Shapiro, 1988; Greenberg, 1987; Leventhal, 1980; Leventhal, Karuza, & Fry, 1980), and when employees are allowed to participate in the decision-making process (e.g., Thibaut & Walker, 1975). Procedural fairness judgments also tend to be “contagious,” with perceivers taking cues from their co-workers when determining whether workplace procedures are fair (DeGoey, 2000).

While researchers have provided considerable evidence that situational factors influence judgments of procedural fairness, they have largely overlooked how individual differences among perceivers may shape their fairness perceptions. Yet, there are reasons to believe that dispositional tendencies may lead to fairness judgments. For example, researchers often survey employees within a single organization and find substantial variation in employees’ fairness perceptions (e.g., Brockner et al., 1994; McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992; Siegel et al., 2005). Why do

people within the same organization often reach such different conclusions about whether their managers or organizations are fair? One possibility is that different employees are exposed to different levels of procedural fairness (e.g., Scott, Colquitt, & Zapata-Phelan, 2007). For example, some people may be given more opportunities to have voice or input than others. However, it is also possible that some of the within-organization variation in procedural fairness judgments can be attributed to the lenses through which people view the world. What some people regard as fair, others may see as ambiguous or even unfair. For example, some evidence suggests that employees' identification with the organization (e.g., Blader, 2007) or their attachment to the parties who are affected by decisions (e.g., Brockner, 1990) influence their perceptions of procedural fairness, even when objective fairness information is held constant. In this paper we argue that the dispositional tendencies people bring to the workplace and, in particular, their propensity to trust others also may be related to their perceptions of procedural fairness.

We draw an analogy to the job satisfaction literature in suggesting that dispositional tendencies also predict people's fairness perceptions. For several decades, studies on the antecedents of job satisfaction were similarly dominated by situational explanations, with researchers focusing on how characteristics of the job (e.g., Hackman & Oldham, 1976) or social influence processes (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) affect satisfaction at work. Subsequent research, however, suggested that job satisfaction also may be influenced by dispositional characteristics (e.g., Arvey, Bouchard, Segal, & Abraham, 1989; Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002; Staw & Ross, 1985). For instance, Staw, Bell, and Clausen (1986) found that people's affective dispositions as teenagers significantly predicted their job attitudes fifty years later, supporting the notion that people's perceptions of their workplaces tend to be consistent with their psychological

predispositions. We similarly suggest that dispositional characteristics may be related to people's fairness judgments.

Research examining how personality characteristics influence work attitudes and behaviors suggests that the individual differences people bring to organizations significantly affect how they interpret and respond to workplace events (e.g., Motowidlo, 1996). In essence, dispositional characteristics may act as a reference point for assimilating ambiguous information (e.g., Sherif & Hovland, 1961; Sherif, Sherif, & Nebergall, 1965). As Staw, Bell, and Clausen (1986) put it, "jobs are ambiguous stimuli subject to the cognitive manipulation of meaning... a person's internal state can serve as an important stimulus for the interpretation of job information" (p. 61).

We draw on similar reasoning to argue that individual differences among perceivers may serve as an organizing mechanism for processing fairness information. Those who believe that others are generally trustworthy are likely to evaluate fairness information with a more forgiving standard and therefore are likely to have more positive perceptions of procedural fairness. Indeed, a great deal of empirical evidence, such as research on cognitive consistency (e.g., Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999) and the confirmation bias (e.g., Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979), indicates that people generally perceive information in ways that are consistent with their prior beliefs. Thus, employees who are dispositionally trusting are likely to have more positive perceptions of procedural fairness. While past research has noted the self-perpetuating nature of fairness judgments (e.g., Lind, 2001), it has not examined how dispositional tendencies may serve as a starting point for these judgments. We suggest that perceivers' chronic views about whether others are generally trustworthy will be positively related to how they perceive, evaluate, and ultimately judge whether their organization or managers are procedurally fair.

## *Procedural Fairness and Individual Differences*

Although some previous organizational justice research has considered the role of individual difference variables, it has primarily focused on attitudinal and behavioral *reactions to* procedural fairness, rather than on how individual differences influence *perceptions of* procedural fairness (e.g., Colquitt, Scott, Judge, & Shaw, 2006; Heuer et al., 1999). For instance, Skarlicki, Folger, and Tesluk (1999) found that personality variables such as negative affectivity and agreeableness moderated the relationship between procedural fairness and the likelihood of retaliation, while other research has shown that trait self-esteem moderates the relationship between fairness judgments and organizational commitment (Brockner et al., 1998; Wiesenfeld et al., 2007). In this paper, we examine whether an individual difference variable, the propensity to trust, also may help us understand how people arrive at their procedural fairness judgments.

Prior theory and research suggests that dispositional trust may be a particularly relevant individual difference variable for understanding how people make fairness judgments. For instance, according to fairness heuristics theory (Lind, 2001), people use procedural fairness information to assess whether a decision maker is trustworthy, particularly when they do not have independent information about the trustworthiness of the authority (Lind, 2001; Van den Bos, Wilke, & Lind, 1998). Moreover, Lind and Tyler (1988) identified trust as one of the three inferences people draw from procedural fairness information, the others being neutrality and standing. As Brockner, Ackerman, and Fairchild (2001) put it, “procedural elements matter because they provide information on how much people can *trust* the other party involved in the exchange relationship” (p.194, our emphasis added).

While these studies provide evidence of a positive relationship between trust and fairness, our predictions differ in two primary ways. First, previous work conceptualized trust as a

consequence rather than an antecedent of procedural fairness judgments. The present research, in contrast, contends that people's dispositional tendencies to trust others also may lead to their perceptions of procedural fairness, given that people often perceive events in ways that are consistent with their pre-existing beliefs. Second, past research on the relationship between fairness and trust examined trust as a state rather than a trait. In this paper, we posit that people's more enduring tendencies to trust or distrust others will predict their procedural fairness judgments. In short, whereas prior research provides evidence that trust and procedural fairness are positively related, the ways in which the relationship between trust and procedural fairness was examined differ from the approach taken in the present studies.

### *Propensity to Trust*

Early research on dispositional trust defined it as the general expectation that the “word, the promise, verbal, or written statement of another individual or group can be relied on” (Rotter, 1967, p. 444). Rotter (1971, 1980) proposed that people use early trust experiences to construct a mental model about whether others are generally trustworthy and that over time this model evolves into a fairly stable dispositional dimension. The present studies draw on Rotter's definition by conceptualizing propensity to trust as the general expectation people have about how they will be treated by others. Given that people generally assimilate events in ways that are consistent with their prior beliefs, we posit that those who believe others are generally trustworthy are likely to reach more positive conclusions about how fairly they have been treated.

Research on propensity to trust suggests that it is a relatively stable trait with important behavioral and interpersonal consequences (e.g., Gurtman, 1992; Rotter, 1967; Rotter 1971; Rotter, 1980; Sorrentino et al., 1995).<sup>1</sup> People who are generally trusting are seen as more

trustworthy and more popular (Rotter, 1971), are less likely to have interpersonal difficulties (Gurtman, 1992), and are better at decoding other people's nonverbal cues (Sabatelli, Buck, & Dreyer, 1983). Research on dispositional trust also indicates that people tend to perceive information in ways that are consistent with their prior beliefs. For instance, those who are less trusting are less likely to trust authority figures that they have never met (Goldsteen, Schorr, & Goldsteen, 1989; Parks, Henager, & Scamahorn, 1996). Similarly, those who are less trusting are faster at recognizing words that signal untrustworthy behavior in others (Gurtman & Lion, 1982), suggesting that they will also perceive fairness information in ways that confirm their low trust beliefs.

More recently, organizational researchers have identified ways that dispositional trust shapes behaviors at work (e.g., Colquitt, Scott, Judge, & Shaw, 2006; Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007; Mayer, Davis, Schoorman, 1995; Van Dyne et al., 2000). For instance, Colquitt, Scott, and LePine (2007) found that those with a greater propensity to trust others were more likely to behave constructively towards the organization. They exhibited higher levels of task performance, engaged in more organizational citizenship behavior, and were less likely to behave counterproductively.

Whereas past research has shown that dispositional trust is related to important workplace behaviors, we suggest that trust also will be positively related to workplace perceptions as well. In other words, while past research has shown that dispositional trust affects how people act in organizations, we suggest that trust will also influence how they perceive their work environments. In particular, we contend that those who are more trusting will have more favorable perceptions of how fairly they are treated.

*Hypothesis 1:* Propensity to trust others will be positively related to perceptions of procedural fairness.

#### *Examining Procedural Fairness as a Mediator*

Although Hypothesis 1 posits that dispositional trust will lead to perceptions of procedural fairness, there are various ways to interpret a positive relationship between the two dimensions. For instance, it is possible that dispositional trust does not lead to judgments of fairness but rather, perceptions of fairness lead to dispositional trust. Alternatively, it could be argued that the two constructs are spuriously correlated. Consequently, it is important to provide converging evidence that dispositional trust leads to perceptions of procedural fairness. We tested for converging evidence in the present studies.

More specifically, given that dispositional trust (Variable A) is expected to lead to procedural fairness perceptions (Variable B), and given that previous research has shown that procedural fairness (Variable B) influences organizational commitment (Variable C<sub>1</sub>; Moorman, 1991) and job satisfaction (Variable C<sub>2</sub>; Moorman, Niehoff, & Organ, 1993), it logically follows that dispositional trust (Variable A) also should be positively related to both organizational commitment (Variable C<sub>1</sub>) and to job satisfaction (Variable C<sub>2</sub>). That is, dispositional trust leads to perceptions of procedural fairness (Variable A leads to Variable B), which in turn will lead to organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Variable B leads to Variables C<sub>1</sub> and C<sub>2</sub>). To state this reasoning differently, we expect perceptions of procedural fairness to mediate the relationship between propensity to trust others and both organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

If procedural fairness were shown to mediate the relationship between dispositional trust and both organizational commitment and job satisfaction, it would serve two important purposes. First, it would provide converging support for our primary prediction that dispositional trust leads to people's perceptions of procedural fairness. Second, it would suggest that perceptions of procedural fairness serve as an intervening variable in the relationship between dispositional trust and both organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

We evaluated whether procedural fairness mediates the relationship between dispositional trust and three different but related dependent variables: organizational commitment (in Study 1), job satisfaction (in Study 2), and attraction to a prospective organization, or how committed people feel towards an organization that they have yet to join (in Study 3).

*Hypothesis 2:* Perceptions of procedural fairness will mediate the relationship between propensity to trust and: (1) organizational commitment (Study 1), (2) job satisfaction (Study 2), and (3) attraction to a prospective organization (Study 3).

In sum, the present studies seek to contribute to the literatures on procedural fairness and trust in several ways. First and foremost, by examining the role of a theoretically-derived individual difference variable, we hope to provide a more complete understanding of how people arrive at their procedural fairness judgments. Secondly, we seek to extend previous research on the correlates and consequences of dispositional trust by showing that it predicts important workplace perceptions such as procedural fairness.

### *Plan of Study*

We tested our hypotheses in three studies. In the first two studies we examined the relationships between dispositional trust, procedural fairness, and two well-established consequences of people's procedural fairness judgments: organizational commitment (in Study 1) and job satisfaction (in Study 2). Study 3 was designed to shed light on the mechanism underlying the predicted relationship between dispositional trust and procedural fairness perceptions. Previously, we suggested that propensity to trust and perceptions of procedural fairness will be positively related because people tend to make judgments in ways that are consistent with their prior beliefs. An alternative possibility is that those who are more dispositionally trusting are actually treated more fairly and therefore have more positive perceptions of fairness. In Study 3 participants were exposed to identical procedural fairness information. If dispositional trust and fairness perceptions continue to be positively related even when participants are given the same fairness information, then the positive relationship between trust and fairness would have to result from trust-related differences in fairness perceptions rather than from trust-related differences in actual treatment. Study 3 also allowed us to evaluate whether dispositional trust *in particular* predicts perceptions of procedural fairness or whether other measures of dispositional positivity are similarly predictive of procedural fairness perceptions.

### *A Note on Methodology*

Whereas all three studies sought to evaluate whether dispositional trust predicts procedural fairness, there are a number of important differences between them. For example, in testing Hypothesis 2, we examined related but distinct dependent variables (organizational commitment in Study 1, job satisfaction in Study 2, and organizational attraction in Study 3).

Moreover, the items used to measure dispositional trust and procedural fairness differed somewhat across studies. There is both greater risk and greater reward associated with introducing these sorts of differences between studies. The risk is that if the results were inconsistent across studies, it would be harder to know if such differences were conceptually meaningful or if they were due to differences in the constructs or the ways in which they were operationalized. On the other hand, if consistent results emerged across studies using different constructs and different operationalizations of the variables, we would be more confident of both the generality and the construct validity of the findings. For example, it would be more likely that the significant relationships between variables were based on the underlying constructs themselves, and not on how the constructs were operationalized (Cook & Campbell, 1979; Lykken, 1968).

## Study 1

### *Participants and Procedure*

Participants in Study 1 consisted of 220 working adults from throughout the United States. All participants were voluntary members of a research panel who were recruited through internet-based advertisements to complete occasional online surveys in return for payment or credits toward online retailers and merchandise. Over half of the participants were female (61.4 percent) and 84.5 percent were Caucasian. The majority of respondents were full-time employees (73.3 percent) and 45.9 percent reported having some supervisory or managerial responsibilities. Most of the participants (59.1 percent) were between 35 and 55 and on average had been at their jobs for 9.3 years ( $SD = 8.6$ ). They came from 40 different states and worked in a wide range of industries including general services (29.1 percent), educational, health, and social services (16.4

percent), manufacturing (8.2 percent), and retail trade (8.6 percent). The majority of participants (55.9 percent) earned \$25,000 to \$75,000 a year.

### *Measures*

All items were completed on a seven-point scale ranging from, “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7).

*Dispositional Trust.* We used five items from Schuessler’s (1982) dispositional propensity to trust scale.<sup>2</sup> Items included, “Most people can be trusted,” and “I find it hard to figure out who you can really trust these days” (reverse-scored). Coefficient alpha was .82 and responses were averaged into an index.

*Procedural Fairness.* This measure consisted of a four-item shortened version of Colquitt’s (2001) validated scale and drew from both Leventhal et al.’s (1980) and Thibaut and Walker’s (1975) conceptions of procedural fairness. Items included, “The procedures used by management are applied consistently,” and “I am able to express my views to management.” Coefficient alpha was .92. Responses were averaged into an index.

*Organizational Commitment.* Organizational commitment consisted of six questions from the short form of the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982).<sup>3</sup> Sample items included: “This company really inspires the very best in me in the way of job performance,” and “I find that my values and the values of this company are very similar.” Coefficient alpha was .94; responses were averaged into an index.

*Control Variables.* To provide a better sense of the sample as a whole, we measured a number of demographic factors (e.g., age, education) and work-related variables (e.g., salary, managerial status). We included these factors as control variables if they were significantly related to organizational commitment, procedural fairness, or dispositional trust. We examined

correlates of all three variables because they served as dependent variables in at least one of the models we tested. Three variables met these criteria: salary, managerial status, and the number of employees in the respondent's organization. Salary was coded: (1) "\$0-25,000," (2) "\$25,000-\$50,000," (3) "\$50,000-75,000," (4) "\$75,000-100,000," (5) "\$100,000-125,000," (6) "\$125,000-150,000," and (7) "\$150,000." Managerial status was coded (0) if the respondent did not hold a management position and (1) if the respondent was a manager. Number of employees in the organization was coded from (1) "1 to 4 employees" to (9) "1000 or more employees."

### *Results*

Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations for all the variables in the Study 1 are shown in Table 1.

To test our hypotheses, we conducted a series of hierarchical regressions (see Tables 2 and 3). In Model 1, we entered the control variables that were significantly correlated with organizational commitment, procedural fairness, or dispositional trust. As shown in Model 2 in Table 2, dispositional trust was positively related to procedural fairness ( $\beta = .33$ ;  $t(215) = 4.22$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = .18 to .49), providing support for Hypothesis 1.

Previous research has shown that procedural fairness leads to organizational commitment (e.g., Moorman, 1991). Hence, if dispositional trust led to procedural fairness (Hypothesis 1), and procedural fairness led to organizational commitment (as has been shown in prior research), then we should find that procedural fairness mediates the relationship between dispositional trust and organizational commitment (Hypothesis 2).

We tested our mediational hypothesis using Baron and Kenny's (1986) four-step procedure. According to Step 1, the independent variable should be correlated with the hypothesized mediator; as reported previously, dispositional trust was significantly related to

procedural fairness. Step 2 requires the independent variable to be related to the dependent variable. Indeed, dispositional trust also was significantly related to organizational commitment ( $\beta = .25$ ;  $t(215) = 3.21$ ,  $p < .01$ , 95% CI = .10 to .40; see Model 3, Table 2). According to Step 3, the mediator must be correlated with the dependent variable, even after controlling for the independent variable. When regressing organizational commitment simultaneously on procedural fairness and dispositional trust, we found that procedural fairness remained strongly related to organizational commitment ( $\beta = .69$ ;  $t(214) = 14.84$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = .60 to .78; see Table 2, Model 4). Finally, according to Step 4, to establish mediation, the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable should be reduced when controlling for the mediator. Controlling for procedural fairness, we found that the relationship between dispositional trust and organizational commitment was no longer significant ( $\beta = .02$ ;  $t(214) = 0.34$ ,  $p > .10$ , 95% CI = -.10 to .13), suggesting complete mediation (Sobel  $z = 4.02$ ,  $p < .001$ ; see Table 2, Model 5).

We also evaluated several alternative pathways including: (1) whether dispositional trust accounts for the relationship between procedural fairness and organizational commitment, see Model B in Figure 1, and (2) whether organizational commitment accounts for the relationship between dispositional trust and procedural fairness, see Model C in Figure 1. Whereas we logically expect dispositional trust to lead to judgments of procedural fairness, we tested the first alternative pathway (Model B) to evaluate whether dispositional trust was a meaningful predecessor of procedural fairness (as set forth in Hypotheses 1 and 2), or whether fairness experiences may affect dispositional trust. The latter possibility is suggested by previous research which has shown that prolonged exposure to workplace conditions can influence personality (e.g, Kohn & Schooler, 1982). It is also possible that dispositional trust and

procedural fairness are spuriously related, rather than that dispositional trust leads to procedural fairness, as set forth in Hypothesis 1. If procedural fairness influences people's trusting tendencies, or if dispositional trust and procedural fairness are merely spuriously related, then we should not only find that procedural fairness accounts for the relationship between dispositional trust and organizational commitment (as shown above and as illustrated in Model A, Figure 1), but also that dispositional trust accounts for the relationship between procedural fairness and organizational commitment (as illustrated in Model B, Figure 1). However, if as we hypothesized, dispositional trust leads to perceptions of procedural fairness then we would expect to find support for the mediational pathway set forth in Hypothesis 2 (Model A in Figure 1), but not for the alternative pathway (Model B in Figure 1).

In testing Model B, we found that procedural fairness was significantly related to dispositional trust ( $\beta = .23$ ;  $t(215) = 4.16$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = .12 to .33) and to organizational commitment ( $\beta = .69$ ;  $t(215) = 15.55$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = .61 to .78). When controlling for dispositional trust, however, we found that the relationship between procedural fairness and organizational commitment did not change ( $\beta = .69$ ;  $t(214) = 14.84$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = .60 to .78), and was not significantly reduced (Sobel  $z = .34$ ,  $p = n.s.$ ). In other words, the support for our hypothesized pathway does not appear to stem from a potentially spurious relationship between dispositional trust and procedural fairness. Nor is there support for an alternative pathway in which procedural fairness led to dispositional trust which led to organizational commitment. In addition, even though our data came from a single source, the fact that our hypothesized pathway is supported while the alternative pathway is not suggests that our results cannot simply be explained by common methods (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003)

Finally, as shown in Model C, it could be argued that procedural fairness did not lead to organizational commitment, but rather that procedural fairness and organizational commitment were essentially measuring the same thing. Indeed, the relationship between these two dimensions was quite sizable (see Table 1,  $r = .76$ ). Thus, if procedural fairness does not lead to organizational commitment but rather the two dimensions simply measure the same thing, then we should find not only that procedural fairness accounts for the relationship between dispositional trust and organizational commitment (as illustrated in Model A in Figure 1), but also that organizational commitment accounts for the relationship between dispositional trust and procedural fairness (as illustrated in Model C in Figure 1). However, if as we hypothesized, dispositional trust leads to procedural fairness which in turn leads to organizational commitment, then controlling for organizational commitment should not eliminate the relationship between dispositional trust and procedural fairness. Indeed, when we controlled for organizational commitment, the relationship between dispositional trust and procedural fairness remained significant ( $\beta = .15$ ;  $t(214) = 2.60$ ,  $p < .01$ , 95% CI = .04 to .26).

## Study 2

Study 2 was designed to extend the generalizability of the results of Study 1 by: (1) testing our hypotheses with a larger and more representative sample, (2) testing Hypothesis 2 with a different dependent variable (job satisfaction rather than organizational commitment), and (3) using different items to measure dispositional trust and procedural fairness. Study 2 drew on data from the General Social Survey (GSS), a nationwide questionnaire conducted by the National Opinion Research Center and funded by the National Science Foundation. The GSS is one of the most widely used databases in the social sciences (Singleton & Straits, 2005). Participants are drawn from a probability sample of the adult population in the United States and

considered highly representative of that population (Kalleberg, Knoke, Marsden, & Spaeth, 1996; Singleton & Straits, 2005; Vecchio, 1980). Thus, the participants in Study 2 were considerably more representative of the entire population of working adults in the United States than the sample in Study 1. The GSS has been used in organizational research as the primary data source in research on job satisfaction and stability (Vecchio, 1980), employee reactions to workplace policies (Grover & Crooker, 1995), and work-family conflict (Dierdorff & Ellington, 2008).

### *Participants and Procedure*

Respondents in Study 2 consisted of 1115 US adults who participated in face-to-face GSS interviews. Data were taken from surveys conducted in 2002 (36.0 % of our sample) and 2006 (64.0 % of our sample), the two most recent years in which the GSS included questions about fairness at work. Participants were included if they answered all of the survey questions related to dispositional trust, procedural fairness, and job satisfaction and if they were currently working full-time for someone other than themselves. The average age of the population was 40.9 years old ( $SD = 11.9$ ) and roughly half of the sample was female (50.1 percent). Participants came from all nine regions in which GSS data were collected and had completed an average of 14.1 years of schooling ( $SD = 2.7$ ).

### *Measures*

*Dispositional Trust.* The three items gauging dispositional trust were drawn from the Human Nature Part II component of the GSS. A sample item was, “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in life?” Response options included “Most people can be trusted” (1), “Can't be too careful” (2), “Depends” (3), “Don't know” (8) and “No answer” (9). All items were recoded so that “1” indicated low dispositional

trust, “2” represented moderate trust, and “3” indicated high trust. All “don’t know” or “no answer” responses were not included in the analyses. The three items were averaged into an index. Respondents were only included if they had valid responses to all three items. Coefficient alpha was .65.

*Procedural Fairness.* The five-item measure of procedural fairness in Study 2 was based on the degree of voice that participants believed they had in their jobs as well as other measures of procedural fairness (e.g., Lind & Tyler, 1988). A sample item reflecting voice was, “I have a lot of say about what happens on my job” with endpoints ranging from “often” (1) to “never” (4). A sample item representing other measures of procedural fairness was, “Promotions are handled fairly” with endpoints ranging from “very true” to “not at all true.” All items were rated on a four-point scale and were coded such that higher scores represented higher levels of procedural fairness. All “don’t know” or “no answer” responses were not included in the analyses. The five items were averaged into an index and participants were only included if they had valid responses to all items. Coefficient alpha was .71.

*Job Satisfaction.* Job satisfaction was composed of two items. One was: “All in all, how satisfied would you say you are with your job?” with anchors ranging from “very satisfied” (1) to “very dissatisfied” (4). The second item, which appeared much earlier in the survey, asked respondents: “On the whole, how satisfied are you with the work you do—would you say you are very satisfied, moderately satisfied, a little dissatisfied, very dissatisfied?” with anchors ranging from “very satisfied” (1) to “very dissatisfied” (4). Both items were recoded such that higher scores reflected greater satisfaction, and the two items were averaged into an index. Respondents who answered “don’t know” (8) or “no answer” (9) for either question were not included in the analyses. Coefficient alpha was .79.

*Control Variables.* As in Study 1, we included variables as controls if they were significantly related to procedural fairness, dispositional trust, or job satisfaction in correlational analyses. Five variables met these criteria: age, race, years of education, socioeconomic status, and marital status. Age was entered numerically by year. Race was collected at three levels, “White”, “Black,” and “Other race” and was recoded into two dummy variables, one for “Black” and the other for “Other race.” Years of education were entered numerically. Socioeconomic status (SES) was computed by the National Opinion Research Center, with higher scores representing greater socioeconomic status. SES scores ranged from 17 to 97. Finally, marital status was coded as “not married” (0) or “married” (1).

### *Results*

Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations for the variables in Study 2 are shown in Table 3.

As in Study 1, we tested our hypotheses by running a series of hierarchical regressions (see Table 4). In Model 1, we included all control variables as predictors. In subsequent models, we entered the control variables as well.<sup>4</sup> As in Study 1, trust was a significant predictor of procedural fairness ( $\beta = .15$ ;  $t(1107) = 6.14$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = .10 to .20; see Table 4, Model 2), lending support to Hypothesis 1. Consistent with previous findings (e.g., Colquitt et al., 2001; Masterson et al., 2000), procedural fairness also was strongly related to job satisfaction ( $\beta = .53$ ;  $t(1107) = 16.26$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = .47 to .59).

As in Study 1, we tested our primary hypothesis that dispositional trust leads to procedural fairness in an additional way. Previous research has shown that procedural fairness leads to job satisfaction (Moorman et al., 1993). Thus, if dispositional trust leads to procedural fairness, and procedural fairness leads to job satisfaction, then we should find that procedural

fairness mediates the relationship between dispositional trust and job satisfaction. Once again, we tested the predicted mediational pathway (see Figure 1, Model A) using Baron and Kenny's (1986) four steps (see Table 4). Consistent with Hypothesis 1, and as mentioned above, dispositional trust was significantly related to procedural fairness. In addition, dispositional trust was significantly related to job satisfaction ( $\beta = .10$ ;  $t(1107) = 3.41$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = .04 to .16; see Model 3).

When we regressed job satisfaction on trust and procedural fairness simultaneously, we found that procedural fairness continued to be strongly correlated with job satisfaction ( $\beta = .52$ ;  $t(1106) = 15.83$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = .46 to .59; see Model 4; Step 3). Moreover, that same regression showed that the relationship between dispositional trust and job satisfaction was no longer significant ( $\beta = .02$ ,  $p = \text{n.s.}$ ; Step 4), suggesting full mediation. Indeed, a Sobel test found that controlling for procedural fairness, the relationship between dispositional trust and job satisfaction was significantly reduced ( $z = 5.82$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

We also tested for several alternative possibilities. Model B posits that dispositional trust accounts for the relationship between procedural fairness and job satisfaction. After including the control variables, procedural fairness was significantly related to dispositional trust ( $\beta = .22$ ;  $t(1107) = 6.14$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = .15 to .29; Step 1) and job satisfaction ( $\beta = .53$ ;  $t(1107) = 16.26$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = .47 to .59; Step 2). However, controlling for dispositional trust, we found that the relationship between procedural fairness and job satisfaction remained highly significant ( $\beta = .52$ ;  $t(1106) = 15.83$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = .46 to .59) and was not significantly reduced, suggesting that dispositional trust did not account for the relationship between procedural fairness and job satisfaction.

Model C posits that job satisfaction accounts for the relationship between dispositional trust and procedural fairness. If so, then controlling for job satisfaction should eliminate the relationship between dispositional trust and procedural fairness. However, we found that when procedural fairness was regressed on both dispositional trust and job satisfaction, the relationship between dispositional trust and procedural fairness remained highly significant ( $\beta = .11$ ;  $t(1105) = 5.15$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = .07 to .16).

### *Discussion*

Study 2 provided additional support for our hypotheses. Using a large, diverse, and representative national sample, we found that dispositional trust predicted perceptions of procedural fairness. In addition, mediational analyses provided further evidence that dispositional trust led to judgments of procedural fairness, which in turn led to job satisfaction. One potential limitation is that the measures of procedural justice and dispositional trust in Study 2 were not based on previously validated scales. However, the fact that the same pattern of findings emerged in Study 1 provides some reassurance about the construct validity of the results and measures. In addition, the highly representative sample in the GSS further enhanced the external validity and generalizability of the previous findings.

### Study 3

Although the results of Studies 1 and 2 are consistent with our predictions, they raise questions about the mechanism underlying the positive relationship between dispositional trust and fairness perceptions. At the outset we reasoned that because people generally perceive events consistently with their prior beliefs, those who are more trusting will have more favorable judgments of procedural fairness than their less trusting counterparts. However, it is also possible that people who are more dispositionally trusting actually are treated more fairly than their less

trusting counterparts. After all, trust is a two-way street. If an employee trusts her supervisor, her supervisor may in turn be more trusting towards her. A more trusting supervisor may be more likely to include the employee in the decision-making process. He also may spend more time with the employee and therefore draw on more accurate information when making decisions about the employee (and as a result be more fair, Leventhal, Karuza, & Fry, 1980). In short, more trusting employees actually may be treated more fairly than their less trusting counterparts.

One way to evaluate our hypothesized perceptual mechanism is by examining the relationship between dispositional trust and perceived procedural fairness when people are exposed to identical procedural fairness information. If dispositional trust is related to fairness perceptions even when fairness information is held constant, then the relationship between trust and perceptions of fairness cannot simply be explained by the possibility that those who are more trusting are treated more fairly. Instead, it would suggest that dispositional trust affects procedural fairness perceptions rather than actual fairness treatment. Study 3 was designed to test this reasoning.

In Study 3, we conducted a vignette study in which participants were given objective information about how fairly they were treated. We manipulated the nature of this information, such that some participants were treated very fairly (high procedural fairness condition) whereas others were treated very unfairly (low procedural fairness condition). Given that we controlled the information participants received, a positive relationship between dispositional trust and fairness perceptions *within* conditions could not be explained by the possibility that people were treated differently depending on their preexisting trust beliefs. Rather, in this context, a positive relationship between dispositional trust and procedural fairness judgments could only occur if those who were more trusting had more positive perceptions of procedural fairness.

We tested this reasoning in two ways. First, we examined the relationship between dispositional trust and procedural fairness judgments in both the high and low procedural fairness conditions. We expected dispositional trust and perceptions of procedural fairness to be positively related within both conditions. Second, we tested whether dispositional trust influenced perceptions of fairness over and above the influence of the experimental manipulation of procedural fairness.

An additional purpose of Study 3 was to evaluate whether dispositional trust in particular predicts perceptions of procedural fairness, or whether other individual differences reflecting a positive outlook on the world also influence fairness perceptions. Our initial reasoning suggested that: (1) people's tendencies to trust reflect how much they see others as benignly motivated, and (2) people tend to construe events in ways that are consistent with their prior beliefs.

Consequently, those who are more dispositionally trusting are more likely to see others as benignly motivated and therefore are more likely to see decision-making procedures as fair.

It is also possible that the relationship between dispositional trust and perceptions of procedural fairness reflects a more general "positivity bias." That is, perhaps people who generally have more positive worldviews may have more positive perceptions of procedural fairness than their more negative counterparts. If so, then other dispositional measures of positivity rather than propensity to trust in particular will influence people's fairness perceptions. In other words, the extent to which people generally have a "sunny outlook" about themselves or their lives also may be related to their perceptions of procedural fairness. To evaluate this alternative possibility, participants in Study 3 completed several dispositional measures reflecting two other types of positivity, self-referenced positivity and positivity about life in general. The measures of self-referenced positivity included self-esteem, emotional stability

(from the Big Five) and negative affectivity. The measure of positivity about life in general consisted of a life satisfaction scale.

If the alternative explanation of the positive relationship between dispositional trust and perceptions of procedural fairness is correct, then some or all of these other measures of dispositional positivity also should be related to procedural fairness. On the other hand, if as we predicted, dispositional trust is particularly relevant to fairness judgments, then these alternative measures are not likely to be positively related to people's procedural fairness perceptions.

#### *Participants and Procedure*

Participants in Study 3 consisted of 160 working adults from throughout the United States. The majority of the participants 95 (59.4%) were female and identified themselves as Caucasian (81.3 percent). All participants were voluntary members of an online research panel. The majority of respondents (55.6 percent) earned under \$50,000 a year and worked in a wide range of industries including general services and educational, health, and social services.

*Design and Procedure.* The design was a 2 (Procedural fairness: low vs. high)  $\times$  3 (Outcome favorability: low vs. high vs. no outcome information) between-subjects design. The manipulation of outcome favorability was tangential to the purposes of the present study, and therefore was included as a control variable in all analyses.

Participants read a vignette adapted from Lin, Che, and Leung (2009). They were asked to imagine they were applying for a job and were told that they had to undergo an extensive hiring process which consisted of nine different selection tests, including intelligence tests, personality tests, and interviews. Procedural fairness was based on the accuracy of the process used to make the hiring decision (Leventhal, Karuza, & Fry, 1980). In the high procedural fairness condition, participants were told that the hiring decision was based on a thorough

analysis of what the organization learned about them during the selection process. Specifically, the organization “used information about your performance on all nine components of the selection process that you completed.” In the low procedural fairness condition, participants were told that the hiring decision was based on a very limited review of the selection criteria. Specifically, participants were told that, “even though they had information about you from nine different components in the selection process, they only used information about your performance on one of the nine components.”

Outcome favorability was manipulated by telling the participants that they received the job (high outcome favorability), did not receive the job (low outcome favorability), or were given no information about whether they received the job (no outcome information). Because there were more than two levels of outcome fairness, we created two dummy variables to facilitate interpretation. For the first dummy code (OFdummy1), the low outcome favorability condition was coded as “1” and all other conditions were coded “0.” For the second dummy code (OFdummy2), the high outcome favorability condition was coded as “1” and all other conditions were coded “0.”

The dependent variable consisted of attraction to the organizational, or how appealing the organization was to prospective members, and was based on the items used by Lin et al. (2009).

### *Measures*

Unless otherwise noted, all items were completed on a seven-point scale ranging from, “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7). Participants first answered questions about the scenario (e.g., perceptions of procedural fairness and manipulation checks), and then answered questions about individual difference measures (e.g., dispositional trust, negative affectivity).

*Dispositional Trust.* As in Study 1, dispositional trust items came from Schuessler's (1982) scale; we used all eight items from the scale. Coefficient alpha was .86 and responses were averaged into an index.

*Perceptions of Procedural Fairness.* Perceptions of procedural fairness were assessed with three items, similar to the measure used by Lin et al. (2009). A sample item was: "The selection process used to make the hiring decision was fair." Coefficient alpha was .92 and responses were averaged into an index.

*Negative Affectivity.* Four items measuring negative affectivity were drawn from the top four factor-loading items in Watson, Clark, and Tellegen's scale (1988). Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they generally felt certain ways. Items included "scared," and "distressed." The scale ranged from "very slightly/not at all" (1) to "extremely" (5). Coefficient alpha was .84 and responses were averaged into an index.

*Emotional Stability.* This construct was assessed using the relevant items from the previously validated Ten-Item Personality Inventory, or TIPI (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003). The TIPI includes a positively and negatively valenced item for each Big Five dimension. The emotional stability items are, "I am calm, emotionally stable" and, "I am anxious, easily upset." Coefficient alpha was .54.

*Self-esteem.* Self-esteem was measured using the validated Single Item Self-Esteem Scale (Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001). The item was, "I have high self-esteem."

*Life satisfaction.* Life satisfaction was assessed using Diener et al.'s (1985) five-item Satisfaction with Life Scale. Items included, "In most ways my life is close to ideal," and, "The conditions of my life are excellent." Coefficient alpha was .88.

*Organizational attractiveness.* Attraction to the organization consisted of three items, two of which were drawn from the Lin, Che, and Leung's (2009) study and one additional item that we created. The items from Lin, Che, and Leung included, "The company is worth joining," and "I will recommend this organization to my friends," with anchors of "strongly disagree" (1) and "strongly agree" (7). The additional item we created was, "How attractive is this organization to you," with anchors of "not at all attractive" (1) and "very attractive" (7). Coefficient alpha was .95 and responses were averaged into an index.

### *Results*

Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations for all variables are shown in Table 5.

### *Tests of Hypotheses*

We regressed participants' perceptions of procedural fairness on the experimental manipulations of procedural fairness and outcome favorability as well as on the measure of dispositional trust. As expected, there was a significant main effect of procedural fairness on perceptions of fairness ( $\beta = .60$ ;  $t(156) = 5.22$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = .37 to .83), with participants reporting higher judgments of procedural fairness in the high procedural fairness condition ( $M_{high} = 4.67$ ) than in the low procedural fairness condition ( $M_{low} = 3.53$ ). Outcome favorability did not influence perceptions of procedural fairness. Of greatest importance, and as shown in Table 6, there was a strong positive main effect for dispositional trust ( $\beta = .45$ ;  $t(156) = 4.13$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = .23 to .66) suggesting that those who were more trusting had more positive perceptions of procedural fairness, over and above the influence of the procedural fairness manipulation.

We then examined the relationship between dispositional trust and procedural fairness *within* each of the procedural fairness conditions. As shown in Table 7, controlling for the

experimental manipulation of outcome favorability, dispositional trust was significantly related to perceptions of fairness both when manipulated fairness was low, ( $\beta = .55$ ;  $t(74) = 3.00$ ,  $p < .01$ , 95% CI = .19 to .92) and when it was high ( $\beta = .39$ ;  $t(79) = 3.00$ ,  $p < .01$ , 95% CI = .13 to .64).

We also tested for the mediational pathway found in the first two studies, as a way to evaluate further whether dispositional trust led to people's procedural fairness perceptions. That is, if dispositional trust was positively related to procedural fairness, and if procedural fairness led to organizational attractiveness (both of which were found to be true in Study 3), then procedural fairness should mediate the relationship between dispositional trust and organizational attractiveness. As reported above, controlling for the experimental manipulations of outcome favorability and procedural fairness, we found that dispositional trust was significantly related to perceptions of procedural fairness (Step 1). Dispositional trust also was a significant predictor of organizational attractiveness ( $\beta = .42$ ;  $t(156) = 3.63$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = .19 to .65; Step 2). In addition, when we regressed organizational attractiveness on trust and perceptions of procedural fairness simultaneously (controlling for the experimental manipulations), perceptions of procedural fairness continued to be positively related to organizational attractiveness ( $\beta = .75$ ;  $t(156) = 12.21$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = .63 to .87; Step 3). Moreover, that same regression showed that once perceptions of procedural fairness were included as a predictor, the relationship between dispositional trust and organizational attractiveness was no longer significant ( $\beta = .09$ ,  $p = \text{n.s.}$ ; Step 4), suggesting full mediation (Sobel's  $z = 2.91$ ,  $p < .01$ ).<sup>5</sup>

As in Studies 1 and 2, we also evaluated the alternative mediational pathways shown in Figure 1. Model B posits that dispositional trust accounted for the relationship between perceived

procedural fairness and organizational attraction. Controlling for the procedural fairness and outcome favorability manipulations, fairness perceptions were significantly related to both dispositional trust ( $\beta = .22$ ;  $t(156) = 4.13$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = .12 to .33; Step 1) and organizational attraction ( $\beta = .76$ ;  $t(156) = 12.94$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = .64 to .87; Step 2). Controlling for dispositional trust, however, we found that the relationship between perceived procedural fairness and organizational attraction remained significant ( $\beta = .74$ ;  $t(155) = 11.97$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = .62 to .86) and was not significantly reduced (Sobel's  $z = 0.97$ ,  $p = ns$ ), suggesting that dispositional trust did not account for the relationship between procedural fairness perceptions and organizational attractiveness.

Furthermore, Model C examines whether organizational attraction accounted for the relationship between dispositional trust and perceived procedural fairness. Indeed, dispositional trust was positively related to organizational attraction and procedural fairness (both  $p$  values  $< .01$ ). However, we found that upon simultaneously regressing procedural fairness on dispositional trust and organizational attraction, the relationship between dispositional trust and procedural fairness remained significant ( $\beta = .18$ ;  $t(155) = 2.15$ ,  $p < .05$ , 95% CI = .01 to .34).

In sum, as in Studies 1 and 2, we found evidence that procedural fairness mediated the relationship between dispositional trust and the “downstream” dependent variable, in this case, attraction to the organization. These mediational findings provide converging support for our primary hypothesis: dispositional trust leads to people's perceptions of procedural fairness, such that those who are more trusting have more positive judgments of procedural fairness.

#### *Evaluation of Other Personality Variables*

We also evaluated whether other measures of dispositional positivity also predicted fairness judgments. To test this possibility we conducted regression analyses, in which

perceptions of procedural fairness were regressed simultaneously on the experimental manipulations of procedural fairness and outcome favorability and the relevant dispositional variable. Four separate regression analyses were conducted, one for each of the dispositional variables of self-esteem, emotional stability, negative affectivity, and life satisfaction. In no instance was the dispositional variable significant (all  $ps > .05$ ). Put differently, whereas dispositional trust accounted for a significant portion of the variance in people's procedural fairness perceptions over and above the influence of the experimental manipulations, self-esteem, emotional stability, negative affectivity, and life satisfaction did not. Thus, it appears that the positive relationship between dispositional trust and procedural fairness is not simply part of a more general tendency for people who are more positively oriented to have more favorable perceptions of procedural fairness.

### *Discussion*

In Study 3, we provided participants with fairness information to better understand the mechanism accounting for the previously established positive relationship between dispositional trust and perceptions of fairness. The results of Study 3 support and complement the results of Studies 1 and 2 in several ways. First, and most importantly, Study 3 allowed us to evaluate whether the relationship between dispositional trust and perceived fairness emerged when participants received identical procedural fairness information. An alternative interpretation of the results of Studies 1 and 2 is that those who were more trusting were actually treated more fairly than their less trusting counterparts. In Study 3, however, the positive relationship between dispositional trust and perceived fairness could not be explained by the possibility that those who were more trusting were actually treated more fairly. In other words, whereas actual differences in fairness treatment (as reflected in the manipulation of procedural fairness) influenced fairness

perceptions, dispositional trust was positively related to perceived fairness over and above the influence of the procedural fairness manipulation. Of course, Study 3 does not eliminate the possibility that people who are more trusting may be treated with greater procedural fairness than their less trusting counterparts. The findings of Study 3 suggest, however, that even when this possibility is controlled, those who are more trusting have more positive perceptions of fairness.

The results of Study 3 also provided evidence against an alternative interpretation of the positive relationship between dispositional trust and perceptions of procedural fairness, namely that the relationship reflects a more general tendency for more positive people to have more favorable perceptions of procedural fairness. However, the results showed that controlling for the experimental manipulations of procedural fairness and outcome favorability, dispositional trust was a significant predictor of perceptions of fairness whereas self-referenced measures of positivity (self-esteem, emotional stability, and negative affectivity) and a more general measure of positivity (life satisfaction) were not.

### *General Discussion*

Taken together, the results of three studies provide evidence that people's general propensity to trust others is positively related to their perceptions of procedural fairness. Furthermore, mediational analyses in all three studies suggested that dispositional trust led to perceptions of procedural fairness. We reasoned that if dispositional trust led to procedural fairness, which in turn was positively related to the downstream dependent variables of organizational commitment (Study 1), job satisfaction (Study 2), and organizational attractiveness (Study 3), then we should find that procedural fairness mediates the relationship between dispositional trust and the downstream dependent variables. In fact, this pattern emerged in all three studies. Moreover, in all three studies there was little support for alternative pathways

which posited that: (1) dispositional trust accounted for the relationship between procedural fairness and the downstream dependent variables (see Model B, Figure 1), and (2) the downstream dependent variables accounted for the relationship between dispositional trust and procedural fairness (see Model C, Figure 1). The consistency of these findings across both survey (Studies 1 and 2) and scenario (Study 3) methods, different samples, different dependent variables, and different measures of the constructs underscores the validity and generalizability of the results. Indeed, given the representativeness of the sample in Study 2 the present findings have a particularly high degree of generalizability.

### *Theoretical Implications*

*Procedural Fairness.* For more than thirty years research on the antecedents of fairness perceptions has focused on situational factors such as characteristics of the procedures (e.g., Leventhal, Karuza, & Fry, 1980; Thibaut & Walker, 1975) or social cues (Degoey, 2000). The current findings are the first we know of to suggest that perceptions of procedural fairness also may be predicted by dispositional characteristics of the perceivers and, in particular, the extent to which they generally see others as trustworthy.

The results of the present studies also provide one explanation for why there may be such a wide range of perceptions of fairness within a single organization. It seems unlikely that people in these organizations are exposed to vastly different sets of rules and procedures, and yet they often reach notably different conclusions about whether these procedures are fair. The present results suggest that at least some of the variation in procedural fairness judgments may be explained by the different lenses through which people evaluate fairness information. Indeed, the results of Study 3 suggest that even when people are exposed to identical procedural fairness

information they may reach different conclusions about the fairness of these procedures, depending on their dispositional tendencies to trust others.

To be sure, our results do not suggest that the disposition of the perceiver is the only or even the primary determinant of procedural fairness judgments. Indeed, a large body of research has demonstrated that how procedures are designed and implemented influence how they are perceived (e.g., Bies & Moag, 1986; Leventhal, Karuza, & Fry, 1980; Thibaut & Walker, 1975). Thus, we are not suggesting that managers should overlook opportunities to enhance perceptions of fairness and instead assume that employees will reach similar fairness conclusions regardless of their efforts. Rather, our findings suggest that a significant portion of the variance in people's judgments of procedural fairness also may be explained by dispositional factors. The results of Study 3, for instance, show that *both* the experimental manipulation of procedural fairness and dispositional trust were significant predictors of people's fairness judgments.

*Dispositional Trust.* The present results also make several important contributions to the literature on dispositional trust. Existing organizational research on dispositional trust has mainly examined its behavioral consequences (e.g., Colquitt et al., 2006; Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007). Our findings build on this research by suggesting that dispositional trust also has important implications for how people perceive events at work, and not simply for their behavioral reactions to these events. For example, Colquitt, Scott, & LePine (2007) found that dispositional trust was positively related to several behavioral concomitants of organizational commitment, specifically, the extent to which people engaged in organizational citizenship behavior. Perhaps even more importantly, the present findings also suggest that perceptions of procedural fairness may act as an intervening or mediating variable in the relationship between dispositional trust and work attitudes.

Our results also provide additional insight into the dispositional determinants of important workplace attitudes such as organizational commitment and job satisfaction. For example, the present results build on a body of literature that highlights the relationship between job satisfaction and individual difference variables such as affective disposition (Staw, Bell, & Clausen, 1986), Big Five personality traits (Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002), and genetic variability (Arvey, Bouchard, Segal, & Abraham, 1989). The current findings suggest that people's tendency to trust or distrust other people may be yet another important dispositional predictor of job satisfaction, and as the results of Study 3 suggest, over and above the influence of self-esteem, emotional stability, negative affectivity, and life satisfaction.

Whereas the present results show that dispositional trust predicts perceptions of procedural fairness, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction, we are more agnostic about whether such tendencies are unilaterally good or bad for people and organizations. On the one hand, organizations may seek employees who are more trusting, because they may be more likely to embrace the organization's authorities, policies, and mission. More trusting employees may be easier to manage and work with, given that they are less suspicious and are generally more forgiving. Furthermore, considering that those who are more organizationally committed and satisfied with their jobs are less likely to leave their jobs or to be absent from work (e.g., Steers, 1977), and that turnover and absenteeism are financially costly, having employees who are more dispositionally trusting may benefit employers as well.

On the other hand, being more trusting also may have harmful consequences to employers and employees. For instance, employees who are highly trusting may be less vigilant about monitoring their surroundings and therefore may be more vulnerable to manipulation or deceit. They also may be less likely to notice or voice problems inside the organization, and

instead allow detrimental practices to continue unchecked. As Andy Grove (1996) put it in the title of his best-selling book, “Only the Paranoid Survive.” If so, employees who are extremely trusting might compromise the success or even the survival of their organization.

#### *Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research*

Although our findings were highly consistent across the studies, they do have some methodological and conceptual shortcomings. By calling attention to them, we also are identifying some potential areas for future research. For instance, Studies 1 and 2 relied on self-reports, raising the possibility that common method bias may account for some of the observed effects. In particular, it is possible that common methods increased the likelihood that respondents were influenced by implicit theories they may have about the relationship among the constructs (Berman & Kenny, 1976), or by the desire to appear consistent throughout the survey (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). While we cannot totally eliminate these possibilities, we took several steps to minimize the effects of common methods bias. For instance, the independent, dependent, and mediating variables appeared in opposite orders in Studies 1 and 2, reducing the likelihood that one of the constructs primed associations with the other two (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In addition, in Study 2, the independent variable appeared in the survey well before the mediating variable. Moreover, the dependent variable was composed of items from two different parts of the survey. Finally, in both studies the constructs appeared in a different order than the mediational order we predicted. These features may have reduced the possibility that the inferential pathway we hypothesized was due to the structural design of the survey.

Most importantly, if the findings were simply attributable to common methods, then testing for the various alternative mediating pathways (e.g., that dispositional trust accounted for

the relationship between procedural fairness and organizational commitment/job satisfaction/organizational attraction, as shown in Model B in Figure 1) also should have yielded significant results. However, this was not the case. Whereas we found that perceptions of procedural fairness mediated the relationship between dispositional trust and the dependent variables of organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and organizational attraction, there was no evidence that dispositional trust accounted for the relationship between procedural fairness and those same dependent variables. We also found no evidence that organizational commitment (in Study 1), job satisfaction (in Study 2), and organizational attractiveness (in Study 3) accounted for the relationship between dispositional trust and procedural fairness. Taken together, these findings provide some reassurance that our results were not merely an artifact of common methods bias.

In addition, future research may build on some of the conceptual limitations of the current studies. For instance, whereas we used dispositional trust to examine the influence of individual differences on fairness-related perceptions, we are not suggesting that it is the only dispositional variable that may lead to perceptions of fairness. While the findings of Study 3 suggest that self-referenced and general positivity did not predict procedural fairness judgments, it is possible that other dispositional characteristics more closely aligned with justice considerations will be related to fairness perceptions, such as the tendency to believe in a just world (Lerner, 1980). Furthermore, future studies need to better understand the psychological mechanisms underlying the relationship between trust and perceptions of fairness. We suggest that the present findings result from people's tendency to process information in a way that is consistent with their prior beliefs and assumptions. Further research is needed to evaluate the more specific processes driving these results.

## *Conclusion*

Perceptions of procedural fairness strongly influence employees' work attitudes and behaviors. Given the important consequences of procedural fairness judgments, it is both theoretically and practically important to better understand how people arrive at these perceptions. Past research has primarily examined how situational factors influence fairness perceptions. The current studies suggest that people's dispositional tendency to trust others also plays an important role in shaping their judgments of procedural fairness.

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### *Footnotes*

1. As Colquitt et al. (2007) noted, many terms have been used to describe individual differences in the tendency to trust others including propensity to trust, dispositional trust, and interpersonal trust. In this paper we use the terms dispositional trust and propensity to trust interchangeably.
2. Whereas Schuessler's (1982) original scale consists of eight items, we chose five of them due to space and time constraints. We eliminated those items that seemed most similar to the ones already included in the scale. For instance, we removed the item, "Strangers can generally be trusted," because it is quite similar to the item, "Most people can be trusted."
3. The commitment literature distinguishes between different forms of commitment, such as affective, continuance, and normative (Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993). Our focus is on affective commitment, which is the most widely studied form of commitment, and is most similar to the way in which Mowday, Porter, and Steers' (1982) conceptualized the construct in their seminal work.
4. When examined individually, all of the control variables were significantly correlated with at least one of the following: job satisfaction, procedural fairness, or dispositional trust. See the correlational results presented in Table 3. Some were no longer significant once they were included with other control variables in the regression analyses.
5. For exploratory purposes we also evaluated whether dispositional trust interacted with the experimental manipulations of procedural fairness and outcome favorability to influence

perceptions of procedural fairness. In fact, neither of the two-way interactions (dispositional trust x procedural fairness, and dispositional trust x outcome favorability) was significant, nor was the three-way interaction (dispositional trust x procedural fairness x outcome favorability).

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Zero-Order Correlations, Study 1<sup>o</sup>

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Dispositional trust	3.69	1.32	(.82)					
2. Procedural fairness	4.63	1.70	.29**	(.92)				
3. Organizational commitment	5.27	1.61	.23**	.76**	(.94)			
4. Salary	2.55	1.47	.13 <sup>†</sup>	.15*	.13 <sup>†</sup>	N/A		
5. Managerial status	0.46	0.50	.08	.28**	.29**	.26**	N/A	
6. Number of employees	5.54	2.97	-.01	-.26**	-.25**	.16*	-.28**	N/A

<sup>†</sup>  $p \leq .10$

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

<sup>o</sup>Reliability estimates are in parentheses