Hedging Your Bets: Uncertainty about Continued Success Reduces People's Desire for High Procedural Fairness

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Abstract

A central tenet of organizational justice theory is that people prefer decisions to be made with higher than with lower procedural fairness. The results of five studies unearthed a boundary condition for this general tendency. People who experienced non-contingent success had less of a desire to be treated with higher procedural fairness relative to their counterparts who experienced contingent success. Furthermore, four of the five studies examined moderating influences on the relationship between success contingency and fairness preferences and found, as predicted, that the relationship was stronger when people were more motivated to protect against threats to the self.

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A number of trends in contemporary organizations, such as the flattening of hierarchies and employee empowerment initiatives, have had the effect of making it more likely that employees' desires are taken seriously by senior level executives. For example, employees often have clear preferences about how they wish to be treated by organizational authorities. Among the many employee preferences that may shape how they are treated, their desire for high procedural fairness is particularly prominent. Decades of research in the organizational justice literature have shown that people prefer higher procedural fairness. One way in which this preference has manifested itself is that employees tend to respond much more positively (for example, they are more organizationally committed) when they are treated with higher procedural fairness (see Greenberg & Colquitt, 2005, for a review).

High procedural fairness satisfies a host of employees' desires. For example, high procedural fairness addresses employees' instrumental concerns; it leads them to believe that they are likely to receive their fair share of desired outcomes in the long term (Thibaut & Walker, 1975). High procedural fairness addresses employees' status concerns by signaling that they are held in high regard (Lind & Tyler, 1988). High procedural fairness helps employees reduce or manage the uncertainties they may experience, such as the extent to which decision-making authorities may be trusted (Van den Bos, Wilke, & Lind, 1998). High procedural fairness has deontic value; it reassures employees that basic principles of morality have been upheld (Folger, 2001). In sum, a host of employees' desires are satisfied to a greater extent when they are treated with higher levels of procedural fairness.

However, recent theory and research have questioned the conventional wisdom that people prefer higher procedural fairness. Indeed, under certain conditions their preference to be treated with higher than with lower procedural fairness may be reduced. The latter assertion is based on the fact that people's attributions of personal responsibility for their outcomes are influenced by the procedural fairness with which decisions are made, such that higher procedural fairness induces people to see themselves as more personally responsible for their outcomes (Brockner et al., 2003; Holmvall & Bobocel, 2008; Leung, Su, & Morris, 2001; Van den Bos et al., 1999). Furthermore, research in the achievement motivation literature has shown that outcome favorability has more of an influence on people's self-evaluations when they see themselves as more personally responsible for their outcomes (Weiner, 1985). Thus, upon receiving unfavorable outcomes, people may be less likely to react positively to learning that their outcomes resulted from higher procedural fairness, because the higher procedural fairness may lead people to see themselves as more personally responsible for their unfavorable outcomes (Brockner, 2010; Van den Bos et al., 1999).

One interpretation of the latter findings is that people's desire for higher procedural fairness is reduced when higher procedural fairness poses more of a threat to their self-evaluations. Put differently, when people receive unfavorable outcomes, being treated with lower procedural fairness may diminish the extent to which they experience a threat to their self-evaluations because lower procedural fairness enables them to feel less personally responsible; they can attribute their unfavorable outcomes to a less self-relevant factor, namely, the unfairness of the procedures.

However, it is not only *in response to having received* unfavorable outcomes that employees may experience a threat to their self-esteem, and as a result, show a reduced preference to be

treated with higher procedural fairness. Quite commonly, people face situations in which they believe there is a reasonable but uncertain probability that they will receive unfavorable outcomes. We propose that the *anticipation* of possibly receiving unfavorable outcomes may be threatening to people's self-esteem, in which case they also may show a reduced preference for higher procedural fairness. In making this assertion, we draw on the social/clinical psychology literature on self-handicapping, which concerns itself with how people deal with the self-esteem threat associated with anticipating the possible receipt of unfavorable outcomes (e.g., Jones & Berglas, 1978; Higgins, Snyder, & Berglas, 1990).

According to self-handicapping theory, when people are successful but uncertain about being able to continue to perform well, they may put obstacles in their way (or claim in advance that obstacles are in their way). Examples of self-handicapping include getting inebriated on the night before an important test, or failing to put forth the level of effort necessary for success. At first blush, imposing obstacles seems paradoxical in that it actually lowers people's chances for success; in other words, the obstacles increase the likelihood that people will receive unfavorable outcomes. However, the "psycho-logic" of people putting obstacles in their way is that by doing so they may be able to influence the attributions that they and others make for their performance and its associated outcomes. Of particular concern to the present analysis, the self-handicap may provide people with a handy excuse if they were not to perform well, which, *ex ante*, they perceive as a very real possibility. If they were in fact to perform poorly they can attribute their poor performance to the handicap rather than to a more self-threatening cause such as a lack of ability.

In previous experimental studies the typical induction that elicits self-handicapping is for people to experience non-contingent success, in which they receive feedback that they have

performed well ("success") but not due to themselves ("non-contingent"). For example, participants may work on a task which is either insoluble (unbeknownst to them) or very difficult, and then be told that they performed very well. In contrast, participants in a "contingent success" condition work on a soluble or easier task and then are told that they performed well, allowing them to conclude more confidently that they were responsible for their favorable outcome. Relative to those in the contingent success condition, those pretreated with non-contingent success are insecure or uncertain about the likelihood of continued success, which has been shown to make them more likely to self-handicap to minimize the self-threatening implications of the future failure they fear (Jones & Berglas, 1978).

A main premise of the present studies is that reductions in people's desire for higher procedural fairness may serve a similar psychological function to engaging in self-handicapping. Just as people pretreated with non-contingent success may self-handicap to ward off the threat to self-esteem that they anticipate (if their future performance proves to be unfavorable), so too may those pretreated with non-contingent success have less of a preference to be treated with higher than with lower procedural fairness. That is, if their future outcomes turn out to be unfavorable (a possibility made salient by the experience of non-contingent success), then the belief that such outcomes did not come about through fair procedures may buffer people against the experience of self-threat that unfavorable outcomes may otherwise engender.

All five of the present studies tested the hypothesis that people's typical desire for higher procedural fairness will be lower when they experience non-contingent success rather than contingent success. Moreover, the reduced desire for higher procedural fairness elicited by non-contingent success may manifest itself in several ways, two of which were examined in the present studies. First, people may "see what they *want* to see." That is, they may be motivated to

perceive procedures as less fair when they experience non-contingent rather than contingent success. By perceiving the procedures as less fair, they may feel less responsible for their non-contingent success, and by extension, feel less responsible for future performance outcomes which they anticipate may not continue to be favorable.

Other studies have provided evidence that people's perceptions of procedural fairness may reflect their desire to protect themselves. Blader (2007) varied outcome favorability as well as whether participants had been given procedural fairness information, and if so, whether the procedures were fair or unfair. When explicitly told that the procedures were fair or unfair, participants judged procedural fairness to be relatively high or low, respectively, regardless of outcome favorability. However, when participants had been given no information about procedural fairness, they judged procedural fairness to be lower when outcome favorability was low rather than high. One interpretation of the findings in the "no procedural information" condition is that people's judgments of procedural fairness reflected a self-serving motive. By judging procedural fairness as lower when outcomes were more unfavorable, they could see themselves as less personally responsible for the unfavorable outcomes.

Of course, people's perceptions of procedural fairness as a function of success contingency may be attributable to factors other than their desire to engage in self-protection. Consequently, we examined people's desire to be treated with higher procedural fairness (in response to success contingency) in a second and more direct way in the present research. Specifically, after being treated with either non-contingent or contingent success, participants were asked to indicate how much they wanted two procedures varying in fairness to be used as a basis for an upcoming decision. Relative to their counterparts who had experienced contingent success, we expected those pretreated with non-contingent success to express less of a tendency to prefer the more fair

procedure over the less fair procedure. Thus, the present studies integrate two previously distinct literatures (justice and self-handicapping) in the service of delineating when and why people may be less likely to exhibit the typical tendency to want higher rather than lower procedural fairness. The very condition that previously has been shown to induce self-handicapping behavior (being pretreated with non-contingent success) is hypothesized to reduce people's desire to be treated with higher than with lower procedural fairness.[1]

Accordingly, one of the independent variables in all five of the present studies was success contingency. The main dependent variable in Studies 1 and 2 consisted of perceptions of procedural fairness. The main dependent variable in Studies 3-5 consisted of how much people wanted different procedures varying in fairness to be used to make an upcoming decision. Moreover, in four of the five studies we examined a moderating influence on the relationship between success contingency and the dependent variable. Whereas the moderator variables differed across studies, they were chosen for the same overarching reason: if the effect of success contingency on people's preference for procedural fairness is based on their desire to protect themselves, then the effect should be stronger when people are more motivated to engage in self-protection. Thus, all of the moderator variables were selected because they reflected or influenced people's motivation to engage in self-protection.

Study 1

All participants completed an initial version of a "business aptitude" test in which they were led to believe that they had performed well. For half of the participants success was contingent whereas for the remaining half success was non-contingent. After receiving success contingency feedback, all participants completed an additional version of the test. The primary dependent

variable consisted of the perceived fairness of the procedures used to determine their performance on the initial business aptitude test.

Hypothesis 1: Relative to their counterparts in the contingent success condition, those in the non-contingent success condition will perceive procedural fairness as lower.

We hypothesize that people's procedural fairness perceptions in Study 1 reflect (at least partially) their desire to protect themselves, in anticipation of possibly unfavorable future outcomes. By perceiving procedures as less fair than their counterparts in the contingent success condition, those in the non-contingent success condition may see themselves as less personally responsible for outcomes which they believe may not continue to be favorable, and therefore may experience less self-threat.

If the above reasoning is correct, that is, if the effect of non-contingent success on procedural fairness perceptions reflects people's motivation to self-protect, then those who are more motivated to self-protect should display the effect set forth in Hypothesis 1 more strongly. More specifically, people's tendencies to perceive procedural fairness as lower in the non-contingent success condition than in the contingent success condition should be stronger among those who dispositionally see themselves as more personally responsible for their outcomes, because they are likely to experience more self-threat in anticipation of possibly performing poorly. People with internal locus of control beliefs see themselves as personally responsible for their outcomes. Therefore, when they experience non-contingent success they may be particularly motivated to perceive procedures as less fair, to reduce the self-threat engendered by seeing themselves as responsible for possibly unfavorable future outcomes. In contrast, external locus of control persons treated with non-contingent success have less of a need to perceive procedures as unfair, in that their external locus of control beliefs already buffer them from the experience of self-threat. Hence:

Hypothesis 2: Locus of control will moderate the relationship between success contingency and procedural fairness perceptions set forth in Hypothesis 1, such that people's tendencies to perceive procedural fairness as lower in the non-contingent success condition than in the contingent success condition will be stronger among those with more internal rather than external locus of control beliefs.

Method

Participants

Participants were 103 undergraduate business students enrolled in an introductory management course at a public university located in the northeastern United States. They received extra course credit for taking part in the study. Slightly over half of the students were male (51.5%) and their median age was 20.

Procedure

Earlier in the semester participants completed the 16-item Work Locus of Control Scale (Spector, 1988), which measures people's general tendencies to see their outcomes in work situations as attributable to something about themselves versus their environments. All items were completed using a five-point scale which ranged from "disagree very much" (1) to "agree very much" (5). Some of the items were phrased such that stronger agreement represented more of an internal locus of control response (e.g., "A job is what you make of it"), whereas others were phrased such that stronger agreement represented more of an external locus of control response (e.g., "It takes a lot of luck to be an outstanding employee on most jobs"). We reverse-scored participants' responses to the internal locus of control items and then computed their average response to all 16 items; higher scores reflected more of an external or less of an internal locus of control response. Coefficient alpha was .78.

Several weeks later, upon arriving at the research site participants were told that they would be taking part in a pilot of the Business Aptitude Test (BAT). They received a letter from the

firm that had supposedly designed the test; within the letter, they were informed that the aptitude test was customized for business issues and was relevant to work. In addition, to heighten participants' engagement we noted that preliminary testing of the BAT indicated that it served as an accurate measure of intelligence and as an effective predictor of success in the workplace.

Participants were instructed that they would be taking several timed sections of the BAT (an hour in total) and that they would receive feedback about their performance on the test, making salient the fact that after the first BAT there would be additional instances of being tested and evaluated. The materials of the BAT were previously pilot-tested to maximize the likelihood that the BAT would be perceived as realistic and consistent with the condition to which the participants were assigned.

Manipulation of Success Contingency. The manipulation was based on the same one used in many previous studies (e.g., Shepperd & Arkin, 1989; Siegel, Scillitoe, & Parks-Yancy, 2005). Participants worked on a total of 15 test items that were comprised of problems typical of those found in the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT), as well as multiple choice questions relating to everyday managerial decisions. In the non-contingent success condition, the problems used were similar to those ranked as "Moderately Difficult" in the standard admissions exam review manuals, whereas in the contingent success condition the problems used were similar to those ranked as "Easy." Furthermore, pilot testing suggested that participants were making educated guesses in the non-contingent success condition whereas they were able to identify correct responses to most of the questions in the contingent success condition. All of them were told that they would have ten minutes to complete the first section of the BAT and that they should answer all of the questions, even if it required making their best guess on questions for which they did not know the answer.

All participants were led to believe that they had performed well on the first BAT. For example, all of them were told that their performance on the first BAT suggested that their "Potential for Business Success" was "High." Those assigned to the non-contingent (contingent) success condition were presented with the following information: "Your score falls in the 89th (96th) percentile. This means that you performed better than 89% (96%) of the individuals who have taken this exam." (Participants' scores in the non-contingent success condition were slightly lower to ensure that the evaluation would be perceived by all participants as both positive and credible. Pilot testing revealed that those in the non-contingent success condition did not find it credible when told that they scored in the 96th percentile, whereas those in the contingent success condition did not perceive scoring in the 89th percentile to be especially positive.) It was expected that relative to their counterparts in the contingent success condition, those in the non-contingent success condition would be more uncertain about their expectations for their performance on the remaining sections of the BAT.

After working on an additional round of the BAT, participants completed a questionnaire which included a measure of the procedural fairness of the first BAT, and a manipulation check on success contingency. The procedural fairness item was, "How fair were the procedures used to determine your score on the first section of the BAT?" Responses could range on a seven-point scale from, "Not at all fair" (1), to "Very fair" (7). To measure the uncertainty concerning future performance that was expected to be influenced by the success contingency manipulation, participants were first asked, "*In light of your performance on the first section of the BAT,* how well did you expect to do on the remaining portion of the BAT?" Responses were made along a seven-point scale, with endpoints of "Very poorly" (1) and "Very well" (7). The manipulation check measure of uncertainty followed immediately: "How certain were you of this

expectation?" Responses were made along a seven-point scale, with endpoints of "Not at all certain" (1) and "Very certain" (7).

Results and Discussion

Manipulation Check

There was a significant effect of success contingency on uncertainty. As expected, participants reported being more uncertain about their expectations for their performance on the upcoming section of the BAT in the non-contingent success condition ($M = 4.31$) than in the contingent success condition ($M = 5.73$; $t(101) = 5.66$, $p < .001$).

Tests of Hypotheses

In support of Hypothesis 1, participants judged the procedural fairness of the first BAT to be lower in the non-contingent success condition ($M = 5.43$) than in the contingent success condition ($M = 6.16$; $t(101) = 2.98$, $p < .01$).

Hypothesis 2 was tested with a regression analysis in which we simultaneously entered the main effects of success contingency, locus of control, and the interaction between the two. Of greatest importance, the interaction effect was significant, $F(1, 99) = 4.71$, $p < .05$. To illustrate the nature of the interaction we drew on the procedures recommended by Aiken and West (1991), in which we generated predicted values of the relationship between success contingency and perceived fairness at a high level of internal locus of control (one SD above the mean) and at a low level of internal (or at a high level of external) locus of control (one SD below the mean). As can be seen in Figure 1, the results supported Hypothesis 2: the tendency for procedural fairness to be judged as lower in the non-contingent success condition than in the contingent success condition was stronger among those with more of an internal locus of control orientation. Indeed,

simple slope analyses showed that the success contingency effect was significant among internals ($t = 3.60$, $p < .001$), but not among externals ($t = 0.56$, $p > .50$).

The results of Study 1 show that non-contingent success induced people to perceive procedures as less fair than their counterparts who had been pretreated with contingent success. Furthermore, we reasoned that those in the non-contingent success condition perceived procedures to be less fair in the service of reducing their experience of anticipated self-threat. The findings supported this reasoning by demonstrating that participants who would be more motivated to protect the self (due to their more internal locus of control beliefs) also were more likely to perceive procedural fairness as lower in the non-contingent success condition than in contingent success condition.

There is, however, an alternative explanation of why being treated with non-contingent success reduced people's perceptions of fairness. Perhaps such results came about because participants were merely seeing things as they *reasonably believed* them to be, rather than as they *wanted* them to be. For instance, perhaps participants in the non-contingent success condition perceived the procedural fairness of the BAT to be lower because they had to work on more difficult problems relative to their counterparts in the contingent success condition. Whereas this alternative interpretation of the *main effect* of success contingency may not be summarily dismissed, it is less likely to account for the *moderating effect* of locus of control on the relationship between success contingency and perceived procedural fairness. Our reasoning posited that those with more of an internal locus of control orientation would be more motivated to perceive procedures as less fair in response to non-contingent relative to contingent success, which is precisely what occurred.

Study 2

In Study 2 we attempted to conceptually replicate the results of Study 1 in a more naturalistic setting. A sample of working adults indicated the extent to which their successful job performance was contingent versus non-contingent. Their perceptions of voice, one of the main determinants of procedural fairness (Folger, 1977; Leventhal, Karuza, & Fry, 1980; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Thibaut & Walker, 1975), were assessed as the dependent variable. The context of Study 2 also enabled us to examine the effect of success contingency in general on employees' fairness perceptions, rather than looking at the effect of success contingency associated with a specific event. As in Study 1, we expected those who saw their success as more non-contingent to perceive lower levels of procedural fairness (voice).

Also as in Study 1, we examined the moderating influence on the relationship between success contingency and perceived fairness of a factor reflecting participants' motivation to engage in self-protection. Whereas we examined a dispositional moderator variable in Study 1, we investigated a situational moderator variable in Study 2: the extent to which participants believed that their organizations were intolerant of failure. The more that the organization is seen as intolerant of failure, the more salient are the negative implications of failure, and therefore the more likely it is for the receipt of unfavorable outcomes to be self-threatening. Thus, employees who perceive their organizations to be more intolerant of failure should be more motivated to engage in self-protection. One way for people to protect themselves in the face of non-contingent success is by perceiving the procedural fairness with which they are treated as lower. Thus, we hypothesize that organizational intolerance for failure will moderate the relationship between success contingency and perceived procedural fairness.

> *Hypothesis 3: The tendency for non-contingent success to lead to lower levels of perceived voice than contingent success will be stronger when the organization is seen as more intolerant of failure.*

Method

Participants and Procedure

A total of 179 working adults enrolled in a part-time MBA program completed a survey designed "to better understand the nature of employee attitudes and behaviors in the workplace." Embedded in the survey were measures of the independent variables of success contingency ("How confident are you that, when your work performance is successful, it is a direct result of your own ability and effort?") and organizational intolerance for failure ("To what extent does your organization demonstrate a low tolerance for failure?"). The dependent variable of perceived voice consisted of two items that were highly correlated with one another, $r(177) = .84$, and averaged into an index (e.g., "Do you feel that you have a say in the decision-making process of your work group?"). Responses to all measures were made along seven-point scales, with endpoints of "Not at all" (1) and "Very much" (7).

Results and Discussion

A hierarchical regression was conducted on participants' perceptions of voice. In the first step we entered the main effects of success contingency and organizational intolerance for failure whereas in the second step we added the interaction between the two. As can be seen in Table 1, the main effect of success contingency was significant: analogous to the results of Study 1, participants judged voice as lower when they believed that their success in the workplace was more non-contingent. Of greater importance, the interaction effect set forth in Hypothesis 3 also was significant, $F(1, 175) = 7.29$, $p < .01$. As in Study 1, we drew on the procedures recommended by Aiken and West (1991) to illustrate the nature of the interaction effect, in which predicted values of perceived voice as a function of success contingency were computed at a high level of organizational intolerance for failure (one SD above the mean) and at a low

level of organizational intolerance for failure (one SD below the mean). Figure 2 shows that non-contingent success was more likely to lead to lower levels of perceived voice when the organization was more intolerant of failure. The results of simple slope analyses further supported Hypothesis 3: non-contingent success led to lower levels of perceived voice than did contingent success when intolerance for failure was high ($t = 4.26$, $p < .001$), but not when intolerance for failure was low ($t = 0.06$, $p > .50$). Thus, success contingency was more strongly related to perceived voice among participants who were more motivated to protect themselves in the face of the possibility of unfavorable future outcomes.

One shortcoming of Study 2 is that the independent variables consisted of single-item measures. Somewhat reassuringly, however, the results of Study 2 conceptually replicated those found in Study 1: both studies found a main effect of success contingency on procedural fairness perceptions, such that non-contingent success led to lower perceptions of procedural fairness. Moreover, both studies showed that the aforementioned relationship between success contingency and perceived procedural fairness was stronger when participants were more motivated to engage in self-protection, even though people's motivation to engage in self-protection was captured in very different ways in Studies 1 and 2.

Study 3

Consistent with our contention that procedural fairness perceptions are at least somewhat reflective of people's desire for self-protection, Study 1 (in the lab) and Study 2 (in the field) showed that the relationship between success contingency and perceptions of procedural fairness was stronger when people were more motivated to protect against the self-threat associated with possibly not performing well in the future. In Study 1 we predicted and found that those who dispositionally saw themselves as more personally responsible for their outcomes would be more

motivated to see procedures as less fair in response to non-contingent than contingent success. In Study 2 we predicted and found that those who viewed their organizations as more intolerant of failure would be more motivated to see procedures as less fair in response to non-contingent than contingent success. Nevertheless, it still could be argued that the dependent variable in Studies 1 and 2 (procedural fairness perceptions) is at best an indirect measure of how much people *want* to be treated with higher versus lower levels of procedural fairness. Hence, in Studies 3-5 we examined people's desire to be treated with higher versus lower procedural fairness more directly.

All participants in Study 3 (and in Studies 4 and 5 to follow) read a vignette in which they were asked to imagine that they were employees applying for a more desirable position within their organization. Participants also were told that the organization was considering the use of two methods to make the selection decision. Moreover, one of the methods was more procedurally fair than the other. All participants were informed that they had a record of being successful in the organization. Half of the participants were led to believe that their prior success was contingent on their ability and effort while the other half was told that their prior success was not contingent on their ability and effort. The dependent variable consisted of the extent to which participants wanted decision-making authorities in the organization to use each of the two methods when making the decision about whether to offer them the job. In Study 3, one of the methods was more accurate and hence was expected to be seen as more procedurally fair than was the other (Leventhal, Karuza, & Fry, 1980). It was generally expected that participants would prefer the more accurate (more fair) procedure over the less accurate (less fair) procedure. Of greater importance:

> *Hypothesis 4: Relative to their counterparts in the contingent success condition, those in the non-contingent success condition will show less of a tendency to rate*

the more accurate method as preferable to the less accurate method.

Method

Participants and Design

Forty-eight undergraduate students completed the study for course credit. Participants received a booklet in which the manipulation and all measures were embedded. To heighten their involvement participants were instructed to "put yourself in the shoes of the person who is going through this situation, and consider what you would be thinking and feeling if you went through the exact same situation." Participants then read that they had been working at a company for about one year after graduating from college. To insure that all participants perceived that they had been successful to that point, they were told: "You have already received a promotion while none of the other college graduates in your cohort have been promoted at all. Your pay, bonuses, and job title suggest that you have been successful. All in all, your record of promotion and compensation at the company is positive."

Success contingency was manipulated by randomly assigning participants either to a condition in which they were led to believe that their success was contingent upon their ability and effort (contingent success condition) or to a condition in which they were led to feel uncertain about the reasons for their success (non-contingent success condition). Specifically, in the contingent success condition, participants were told:

> Not only are you pleased to have received the positive feedback in the form of pay, bonuses, and job title, but also it is quite clear why you have received this positive feedback. For instance, every indication suggests that you have superior capabilities to your work colleagues. Further reassuring you is the fact that there seems to be a strong relationship between how hard you try and how well you perform. For example,

> on the various projects that you've worked on, the harder you try the better you do. In short, you generally feel secure about your ability to continue to perform well at work.

In the non-contingent success condition, participants were told:

> While you are pleased to have received the positive feedback in the form of pay, bonuses, and job title, you are very unsure about why you have received this positive feedback. For instance, there is no indication that you have superior capabilities to your work colleagues, and in fact when you compare yourself to them you often believe that you are weaker than them in certain fundamental ways. Further puzzling you is the fact that there doesn't seem to be much of a relationship between how hard you try and how well you perform. For example, on some projects you have not tried hard and have done well while on other projects you have tried hard and have not done well. In short, you generally feel insecure about your ability to continue to perform well at work.

All participants were then told that they applied for a position involving a promotion that they would value highly, and (to heighten their involvement further) that important others knew that they had applied for the position. The scenario also provided the following information regarding the criteria necessary to be successful in the position. Specifically, all participants were told:

> The search committee told you that they have identified three attributes that are necessary to be successful in this position. The following is a list of those attributes: (1) attentiveness to detail, (2) Strong quantitative ability, and (3) ability to cope with tight time deadlines.

They were then told that different methods could be used to determine who would be awarded

the new position. Two different selection methods were described to all participants. The first method was described as being highly accurate. Specifically, Method 1 was depicted as follows:

> In this case, the search committee would collect information about the three attributes mentioned previously, that is: attentiveness to detail, quantitative ability, and ability to cope with tight time deadlines. This information is not currently available in the job candidates' personnel files and therefore the effort would require a great deal of time to gather all of the necessary information. On the other hand, having all of this information would allow the company to be very accurate in selecting the right person for the job.

Method 2 was described as being less accurate, thereby suggesting that its use would make it less likely that the most qualified person would be selected for the job:

> In this case, the search committee would collect information about the job candidates' quantitative ability only. This information is not available in the job candidates' personnel files but could be obtained through a brief test. This would not require as much time as Method 1 requires. On the other hand, having information about candidates' quantitative ability but not the other attributes relevant to job performance would make it more difficult for the company to be accurate in selecting the right person for the job.

After reading the scenario, participants completed a questionnaire which included manipulation checks and the main dependent variable: participants' preference for the two methods. The success contingency manipulation check was, "How certain or uncertain would you feel about your overall competence at work?" with responses ranging from "highly uncertain" (1) to "highly certain" (7). In addition, participants rated the fairness of each of the two methods that the organization was contemplating using to make the selection decision, i.e., "How fair is it to use Method 1 [Method 2] to determine which job applicant should be awarded

the position?" Response scales ranged from "not at all fair" (1) to "very fair" (7).

To assess the strength of their relative preference for the two methods participants were asked: "How strongly would you prefer that Method 1 [Method 2] be used as the basis for selecting the job applicant?" Response scales ranged from "not at all" (1) to "very strongly" (7).

Results

Manipulation Checks

The success contingency manipulation influenced participants' certainty about their competence, $t(46) = 2.08$, $p < .05$. As expected, participants felt significantly more uncertain about their overall competence in the non-contingent success condition (M = 5.00) than in the contingent success condition (M = 5.72). To evaluate the perceived fairness of the two methods, we conducted a two-factor analysis of variance (success contingency x method, with repeated measures on the last factor). The only significant effect to emerge was the main effect of method, such that participants perceived the more accurate method ($M = 5.67$) as significantly more fair than the less accurate method ($M = 3.31$; $F(1, 46) = 43.12$, $p < .001$). In short, both experimental manipulations were successful.

Test of Hypothesis 4

To test the main hypothesis in Study 3, we conducted a success contingency x method analysis of variance of participants' preferences, with repeated measures on the last factor. There was a main effect of method, $F(1, 46) = 16.46$, $p < .001$, such that participants generally expressed greater preference for the more accurate method ($M = 5.06$) over the less accurate method ($M = 3.52$). Of greater importance, the interaction was significant, $F(1, 46) = 3.89$, $p = .05$. In support of Hypothesis 4, participants' tendency to prefer the more accurate method over the less accurate method was significantly less pronounced in the non-contingent success

condition (more accurate method: $M = 4.67$; less accurate method: $M = 3.88$) than in the contingent success condition (more accurate method: $M = 5.46$; less accurate method: $M = 3.17$). The main effect of success contingency was not significant, $F < 1$.

Subsidiary Analysis Testing an Alternative Interpretation

It could be argued that non-contingent success made participants less apt to prefer the more accurate method over the less accurate method because they believed that the use of the more accurate method would lower their chances of being selected for the position (or that the use of the less accurate method would heighten their chances of being selected). As the manipulation check on success contingency showed, participants felt less certain about their overall competence at work in the non-contingent success condition. Consequently, they may have perceived that the more accurate procedure would be more likely to expose their weaknesses, thereby making the more accurate procedure less desirable and the less accurate procedure more desirable, relative to those in the contingent success condition.

To evaluate this possibility, we asked participants at the end of the questionnaire, "Assume you had to choose between Method 1 and Method 2 to serve as the basis for selecting the job applicant. Which one of these methods would you choose?" (Method 1 was the more accurate and Method 2 was the less accurate method, although this was not mentioned in the question itself.) Immediately after they had made their choice, participants were asked, "Assume that the company used the method that you just chose. In light of this, rate the likelihood that you will be selected for the job." Responses could range from "not at all likely" (1) to "very likely" (7).

To evaluate the alternative hypothesis we conducted a Success Contingency x Method Selected (2 x 2) analysis of variance on participants' perception of the likelihood that they will be chosen for the job. Most participants (70%) selected the more accurate method, with this

percentage slightly but not significantly higher in the contingent success condition than in the non-contingent success condition. If the alternative interpretation is correct, that is, if participants' preferences for the methods were largely based on the instrumental concern of being selected for the job, then Success Contingency and Method Selected should interact to influence the perceived likelihood of being selected for the job. More specifically, in the contingent success condition, those who chose the more accurate method should be more confident than those who chose the less accurate method that they would be selected for the job. The more accurate method makes it more likely that the job will go to the person who is most qualified or deserving. Those who experienced contingent success had been told that they were quite deserving of their previous success, in that their success was based upon their ability and effort. Thus, among participants in the contingent success condition, those who chose the more accurate method should believe that it is more likely that they will be selected for the job, relative to their counterparts who chose the less accurate method.

The alternative interpretation suggests that the results should look rather different in the non-contingent success condition, in which participants were feeling more uncertain about their competence. If their method preference was based on maximizing the likelihood of being selected for the job, then in the non-contingent condition, we should find the tendency expected in the contingent success condition, namely, for those who chose the more accurate method to be more confident about being selected for the job, to be reduced or perhaps even reversed. In short, the reasoning underlying the alternative interpretation should manifest itself in the form of an interaction effect between Success Contingency and Method Selected.

However, the analysis of variance yielded no significant effects. The interaction effect was trivial, as were the two main effects (all Fs < 1). Thus, it does not appear that the reduction in

participants' preference for the more accurate/more fair method over the less accurate/less fair method in the non-contingent success condition was based on their trying to "game the system" so as to make it more likely for them to be selected for the job.

Study 4

The results of Studies 1-3 provide converging evidence that people found high procedural fairness to be less desirable when they were pre-treated with non-contingent than with contingent success. Studies 1 and 2 showed that participants perceived procedural fairness to be lower in the face of non-contingent than contingent success, especially when they were more likely to be motivated to engage in self-protection. Study 3 showed that participants' tendency to prefer the more accurate method over the less accurate method was lower in response to non-contingent than contingent success.

Study 4 was designed to build on Study 3 in several important respects. First, procedural fairness was examined in a different way. Whereas procedural fairness referred to accuracy in Study 3, it was based on voice in Study 4. As in Study 3, all participants in Study 4 were asked to imagine that they had applied for a more desirable position in their organization. After the success contingency manipulation, they were told that the organization was considering the use of two methods to make the selection decision. The two methods varied on the basis of how much voice they allowed participants to have. Our prediction was conceptually analogous to Hypothesis 4 from Study 3: people's tendencies to prefer the voice-giving method over the voice-denying method were expected to be lower in the non-contingent success condition than in the contingent success condition. Support for this prediction would provide generality to the results of Study 3 in that it would show that the effect of success contingency on people's preference for high procedural fairness is not limited to conditions in which procedural fairness

is based on accuracy.

Study 4 (as well as Study 5 to follow) also sought to extend the results of Study 3 by examining a moderating influence on the relationship between success contingency and people's desire for high procedural fairness. We have hypothesized that the tendency for non-contingent success to reduce people's preferences for relatively high procedural fairness is due to their desire to protect themselves if their future outcomes prove to be unfavorable. If so, then factors that influence or reflect the extent to which people are motivated to engage in self-protection should moderate the relationship between success contingency and people's preferences for relatively high procedural fairness, such that the relationship will be stronger when people are more motivated to engage in self-protection. .

One factor likely to reflect people's motivation to protect themselves is their regulatory focus. According to regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1998), people engage in self-regulation in two different ways: promotion focused or prevention focused. Relative to their promotion focused counterparts, those with a prevention focus are more motivated by safety and security, which makes them more vigilant to protect against meaningful losses, such as guarding against self-threat. Previous research has examined the moderating effect of regulatory focus on the relationship between procedural fairness and people's self-evaluations in the face of unfavorable outcomes *that they already received* (Brockner et al., 2008). Among those with more of a prevention focus, higher procedural fairness was more likely to lead to lower self-evaluations.

The above reasoning suggests that regulatory focus also may influence people's desire for high procedural fairness when they are *anticipating* the possible receipt of unfavorable outcomes, such as after being treated with non-contingent success. In particular, those with more of a prevention focus may be particularly motivated to minimize loss, that is, to engage in self-

protection in anticipation of the possibility of receiving unfavorable outcomes. In the context of Study 4, the motivation to self-protect in response to non-contingent success should lead to a reduced tendency to prefer fair procedures. Accordingly, in addition to manipulating success contingency we varied people's regulatory focus orientations in Study 4.

> *Hypothesis 5: The relationship between success contingency and people's preference for higher procedural fairness will be moderated by regulatory focus, such that the tendency for non-contingent success to reduce people's preference for the voice-giving over the voice-denying method will be stronger among those induced to be prevention focused rather than promotion focused.*

Method

Participants and Design

Sixty-five undergraduate students at a business school participated in the study in exchange for course credit. When participants arrived at the experimental laboratory, they were given a booklet containing a scenario and a questionnaire, in which our experimental manipulations and dependent variables were embedded. To prime regulatory focus, we followed the identical procedure used in many studies (e.g., Higgins, 1998). Specifically, participants were asked to list and write about either how they plan to accomplish three hopes and aspirations (promotion condition) or three obligations and duties (prevention condition).

They then read a scenario that was virtually identical to the one described in Study 3 above, in which success contingency also was manipulated in the same way as in Study 3. However, instead of describing more versus less accurate methods that could be used to determine which candidate would be selected for the position, we described two methods that differed with respect to the level of voice they offered.

One method was described as denying voice to participants. Specifically, participants were told: "In this case, the search committee would look for indications of how well applicants were

doing in the company, such as their record of promotion and compensation, to make their decision. This method would not allow you to have any direct personal input into the search process." They were also told that the search committee would not interview them for the position prior to making their decision. The other method was described as giving voice to participants. Specifically, they were told: "In this case, the search committee would look for the same indications of how well applicants were doing in the company as in the other method (e.g., their record of promotion and compensation) to make their decision. Furthermore, the search committee would also allow you to have direct personal input into their deliberations about whether to select you for the position." They also were told that the search committee would interview them for the position as part of the process of choosing the successful candidate.

After reading the scenario, participants completed a questionnaire which included the manipulation check items and method preference measures used in Study 3.

Results

Manipulation Checks

Participants were significantly less certain regarding their competence in the non-contingent success condition ($M = 3.63$) than in the contingent success condition ($M = 6.24$; $t(63) = 9.75$, $p < .001$. We analyzed participants' fairness perceptions with a two-factor analysis of variance (success contingency x method, with repeated measures on the last factor). The only effect to emerge was the main effect of method: participants perceived the voice-giving method as significantly more fair (M = 6.17) than the method that did not give them voice (M = 3.25; $F(1, 63) = 191.79$, $p < .001$). Thus, both the success contingency and method fairness variables were operationalized successfully.

Higgins (1998) has suggested that the method used in Study 4 to vary regulatory focus does

not easily lend itself to a manipulation check, in that the act of checking on the manipulation may alter people's regulatory focus orientation. Hence, we did not include a manipulation check on regulatory focus in Study 4. However, the method used in Study 4 was the same as the one employed in many previous studies by Higgins and others, in which the results suggested that the induction successfully influenced people's regulatory focus orientation.

Tests of Hypotheses

We conducted a three-factor analysis of variance (success contingency x regulatory focus x method) of participants' method preferences, with repeated measures on the last factor. As in Study 3 there was a main effect of method, $F(1, 60) = 10.41$, $p < .01$, such that participants generally preferred the voice-giving method ($M = 5.63$) over the voice-denying method ($M = 4.49$). Conceptually replicating Hypothesis 4, we found a two-way interaction between success contingency and method, $F(1, 60) = 6.74$, $p < .025$. As predicted, participants' preference for the voice-giving method over the voice-denying method was less pronounced in the non-contingent success condition (voice-giving method: $M = 5.12$; voice-denying method: $M = 4.87$) than in the contingent success condition (voice-giving method: $M = 6.12$; voice-denying method: $M = 4.21$).

Hypothesis 5 posited that the aforementioned two-way interaction between success contingency and method would be stronger among those in the prevention focus condition than in the promotion focus condition. In fact, the three-way interaction was significant, $F(1, 60) = 3.92$, $p = .05$, and was shown in Table 2 to take the predicted form: participants primed with prevention focus displayed a preference for the voice-giving method over the voice-denying method to a considerably lesser extent in the non-contingent success condition than in the contingent success condition, whereas those primed with promotion focus preferred the voice-giving method over the voice-denying method, regardless of success contingency. Indeed, the

simple interaction effect between success contingency and method was significant in the prevention focus condition, $F(1, 60) = 10.65$, $p < .01$, but not in the promotion condition, $F(1, 60) < 1$.[2] In sum, the results of Study 4 show that not only was success contingency a determinant of people's preference for procedural fairness, but also that the tendency for those in the non-contingent condition to show a diminished preference for high procedural fairness was stronger among those who were more motivated to guard against self-threat (i.e., participants in the prevention focus condition).

Subsidiary Analysis Testing the Alternative Interpretation

Once again, we evaluated the alternative explanation that participants' preferences for the methods were based on the perceived likelihood of being selected for the job. As in Study 3, at the end of the post-experimental questionnaire participants were asked to choose one method or the other. They were then asked to assume that the organization had decided to use the method they chose. If so, they were asked, to what extent did they think it likely that they will be selected for the job? Responses could range from "not at all likely" (1) to "very likely" (7).

As in Study 3, most participants (77%) chose the more fair method, in this case the one that gave them voice, and once again there was a slight but not significant tendency for participants to select the more fair method in the contingent success condition than in the non-contingent success condition. As was the case in Study 3, the key term for evaluating the alternative explanation is the interaction effect between Success Contingency x Method Selected. Once again, however, this particular effect was trivial ($F < 1$). The only significant effect that did emerge from the 2 x 2 analysis of variance was an unexpected main effect of Method Selected: participants thought it more likely that they would be selected for the job if the organization used the method that did not allow voice than if the organization used the method that did allow voice.

Importantly, however, this tendency was equally pronounced in the contingent success condition and the non-contingent success condition (i.e., there was no interaction effect).

The results of the subsidiary analyses in Studies 3 and 4 provide little support for the alternative interpretation. Regardless of whether procedural fairness was in reference to accuracy (in Study 3) or voice (in Study 4), it does not appear that participants' preferences for one method over the other were primarily based on the perceived likelihood of being selected for the job, if a particular method were used to make the selection decision.

Study 5

Study 5 was designed to replicate and extend the results of Studies 3 and 4. As in Study 3, procedural fairness was varied on the basis of accuracy, hence we expected to replicate the finding that relative to their counterparts in the contingent success condition, those pretreated with non-contingent success would show less of a tendency to prefer the more accurate (more fair) procedure over the less accurate (less fair) procedure. The extension provided by Study 5 is based on the fact that we examined a different moderator of the relationship between success contingency and preference for high procedural fairness. The results of Study 4 showed that being more prevention focused led to a *stronger* relationship between success contingency and people's preference for higher over lower procedural fairness. In Study 5, we examined the influence of a factor expected to *weaken* the relationship between success contingency and people's preference for higher procedural fairness, namely, a high need for self-assessment.

A key assumption underlying the present studies is that people want to feel good about themselves. Thus, when faced with a possible threat to their self-esteem, such as being pretreated with non-contingent success which arouses uncertainty about whether their success will continue, people's desire for self-protection will lead to a reduced preference for higher over lower

procedural fairness, as suggested by the results of Studies 1-4. However, people's self-motives are not simply in the service of helping them to feel good about themselves. People also strive to have an accurate understanding about themselves, such as having a realistic appraisal of their capabilities (e.g., Trope, 1982). When procedural fairness is based on the accuracy of information used to make decisions, those with a stronger need for self-assessment may be *less* apt to exhibit the results found in Study 3 in which non-contingent success led to a reduced preference for the more accurate (or fair) method over the less accurate (or unfair) method. Whereas a less accurate decision-making process may satisfy people's needs for self-protection in response to non-contingent success, those with a strong need to self-assess have a different motive: to evaluate themselves accurately, not necessarily favorably.

Accordingly, participants in Study 5 experienced the same success contingency manipulation as those in Studies 3 and 4. They were then asked to rate their preference for two methods varying in accuracy for making the selection decision. Individual differences in people's desire for self-assessment also were assessed. We expected to replicate Hypothesis 4 (originally tested in Study 3), such that those pretreated with non-contingent success were expected to show less of a tendency to prefer the more accurate method over the less accurate method, relative to their counterparts who were pretreated with contingent success. Furthermore, and of greater importance:

> *Hypothesis 6*: *The relationship between success contingency and preference for higher procedural fairness will be moderated by need for self-assessment, such that the tendency for non-contingent success to reduce people's greater preference for the more accurate procedure over the less accurate procedure will be weaker among those with more of a need for self-assessment.*

Method

Thirty-nine undergraduate students completed the study in exchange for course credit. They

received a booklet in which the manipulation and all measures were embedded. The scenario was virtually identical to the one described in Study 3 above. One slight difference is that participants in Study 5 were told that there were five (rather than three) criteria necessary to be successful: being effective working on teams, being highly detail-oriented, being strong in quantitative ability, being able to cope with tight time deadlines, and being creative. For the more accurate method participants were told that the company would use information about all five criteria whereas for the less accurate method they were told that the company would only use information about applicants' quantitative ability. After reading the scenario participants completed a questionnaire which included all of the measures mentioned below.

Measures

The manipulation check items for success contingency and perceived fairness, as well as the measures of how much participants preferred the two methods, were identical to those used in Studies 3 and 4. Need for self-assessment was measured with a four-item scale that we developed for this study, which consisted of the following items: "When working on a task in which I don't know how well I am doing, I actively seek feedback to find out where I stand"; "I like to put myself in situations that allow me to assess my capabilities"; "I enjoy the process of learning about whether I am good or not so good at something"; and "Performance situations in which I can't tell how well I am doing are frustrating to me." Response scales ranged from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7). Participants' responses were averaged into an index. Coefficient alpha was .62.

Results and Discussion

Manipulation Checks

Participants felt significantly less certain about their overall competence in the non-contingent

success condition ($M = 4.40$) than in the contingent success condition ($M = 6.28$; $t(37) = 6.29$, $p < .001$). As in Studies 3 and 4, we also analyzed participants' fairness perceptions with a two-factor analysis of variance (success contingency x method, with repeated measures on the last factor). The only effect to emerge was the main effect of method: the more accurate method ($M = 6.21$) was seen as much more fair than was the less accurate method ($M = 2.97$; $F(1, 37) = 91.57$, $p < .001$). Thus, the success contingency and method fairness manipulations were successful.

Tests of Hypotheses

A regression analysis was performed on participants' preferences for the two methods varying in perceived fairness. Specifically, we conducted a hierarchical multiple regression in which we entered the main effects of success contingency, need for self-assessment, and method (as a repeated measure) on the first step. The two-way interactions were added to the main effects on the second step, and the three-way interaction was added to the main effects and the two-way interactions on the third step. As expected given the results of Studies 3 and 4, there was a significant main effect of method: participants preferred the more accurate method ($M = 5.82$) over the less accurate method ($M = 3.44$; $F(1, 37) = 26.07$, $p < .001$). Moreover, the second step revealed an interaction between success contingency and method: consistent with Hypothesis 4 and the results of Study 3, participants' tendencies to prefer the more accurate method over the less accurate method were lower in the non-contingent success condition than in the contingent success condition, $F(1, 35) = 3.14$, $p < .05$. (Note that we used a one-tailed test of this hypothesis in Study 5, which is justified on theoretical grounds and, in light of the results of Studies 3 and 4, on empirical grounds.) The two-way interaction between need for self-assessment and method also was significant, $F(1, 35) = 4.16$, $p < .05$, and showed that participants' greater preference for the more accurate over the less accurate method was stronger among those with a higher need for

self-assessment.

Extending previous findings, the three-way interaction between success contingency, need for self-assessment, and method also was significant, $F(1, 35) = 4.00$, $p = .05$. To illustrate the nature of the interaction effect, we first classified participants as high or low in need for self-assessment on the basis of a mean split. We then computed the average preference in each of the eight cells (2 x 2 x 2) created by a factorial crossing of need for self-assessment, success contingency, and method, with repeated measures on the last factor. As can be seen in Table 3, the results supported Hypothesis 6: among those higher in need for self-assessment, success contingency had little effect on people's relative preferences for the two methods. That is, those higher in the need for self-assessment preferred the more accurate method over the less accurate method regardless of their success contingency condition. In contrast, those lower in the need for self-assessment were much more likely to exhibit a reduced preference for the more accurate method over the less accurate method in the non-contingent success condition than in the contingent success condition.

One possible concern of Study 5 pertains to the measure of need for self-assessment. The internal consistency of this measure, constructed specifically for this study, was modest. Nevertheless, the results of Study 5 are at least somewhat reassuring about the validity of the measure. For one thing, the fact that the results were consistent with Hypothesis 6 provides suggestive evidence that the need for self-assessment scale had construct validity. In addition, the significant two-way interaction between need for self-assessment and method provided further evidence of the validity of the measure. Given that the two methods varied in accuracy it might be expected that those with more of a need for self-assessment would show more of a preference for the more accurate method over the less accurate method; that is, the more accurate

method would better enable them to satisfy their desire for self-assessment. Indeed, this is precisely what the two-way interaction between need for self-assessment and method revealed. Whereas further research is needed to improve the measure of need for self-assessment, the findings suggest that the scale used in Study 5 was at least somewhat valid.

General Discussion

Taken together, the results of all five studies suggest that people's desire to be treated with higher than with lower procedural fairness is significantly reduced when they experienced non-contingent as opposed to contingent success. Moreover, the relationship between success contingency and people's desire for high procedural fairness is quite generalizable in that the studies varied in numerous ways, such as: (1) the type of research method (i.e., in Studies 1 and 2 participants responded to a situation that they actually experienced, the former in the laboratory and the latter in the field, whereas in Studies 3-5 participants responded to a hypothetical situation); (2) whether success contingency referred to a specific event (as in Studies 1, 3, 4, and 5) or to a more general experience (as in Study 2); (3) the way in which success contingency was operationalized (the method used in Study 1 differed from the one employed in Study 2, which in turn differed from the one used in Studies 3-5), (4) the measure of people's desire for procedural fairness (i.e., fairness perceptions in Studies 1 and 2 versus how much they wanted procedures varying in fairness to be used to make an upcoming decision in Studies 3-5), and (5) within Studies 3-5, the operationalization of procedural fairness (i.e., accuracy in Studies 3 and 5 and voice in Study 4). The fact that the relationship between success contingency and people's desire for higher procedural fairness was consistent across five studies differing in these ways bodes well for the reliability and generalizability of the findings.

Not only did we find that being treated with non-contingent success led to less of a desire for

higher procedural fairness, but also the moderating effects tested for in four of the five studies help to explain *why* this was the case. We posited that people's reduced desire for higher procedural fairness in response to non-contingent success reflected their motivation to protect themselves in anticipation of the possible receipt of unfavorable outcomes. Study 1 showed that people who were more internal in locus of control, who are more likely to feel self-threatened because they see themselves as more personally responsible for possibly unfavorable future outcomes, were more likely to perceive procedural fairness as lower in the non-contingent success condition than in the contingent success condition. Study 2 found that employees who believed that their organizations were more intolerant of failure were more likely to perceive procedural fairness as lower in the face of non-contingent success. In Studies 4 and 5, we reasoned that if the relationship between success contingency and people's desire for higher procedural fairness were attributable to the motive to protect themselves in the face of non-contingent success, then the relationship should be: (1) stronger among those with more of a prevention focus (which was found in Study 4), and (2) weaker among those with more of a need for self-assessment (which was found in Study 5).

Theoretical Implications

The present findings offer several important contributions to the justice literature. A cardinal principle in justice theory and research is that people prefer to be treated with higher than with lower procedural fairness; for example, they tend to respond more positively when they are treated with relatively high procedural fairness. Moreover, a host of explanations have been shown to account for people's pervasive tendency to respond more positively to higher procedural fairness, such as self-interest theory (e.g., Thibaut & Walker, 1975), relational theory (e.g., Tyler & Lind, 1992), uncertainty management theory (e.g., Van den Bos & Lind, 2002),

and deonance theory (e.g., Folger & Cropanzano, 2001). According to these viewpoints, people want the very things that higher procedural fairness provides (e.g., to be held in higher regard), which is why they generally respond more positively when they are treated with higher procedural fairness.

The fact that people also use procedural fairness information to judge how personally responsible they are for their outcomes suggests, however, that there may be some conditions under which their typical tendency to prefer higher procedural fairness may be reduced. In particular, when outcomes are unfavorable people's tendencies to see themselves as more personally responsible when procedural fairness is higher may lessen their desire to be treated with higher procedural fairness. Indeed, many studies have shown that when people's outcomes are unfavorable, the typically positive relationship between procedural fairness and self-evaluations is significantly reduced (Brockner, 2010).

In all of those studies, however, people *already have received* outcome favorability and procedural fairness information. The present findings suggest that people may exhibit a reduced preference for high procedural fairness *in anticipation of the possibility* that their future outcomes may be unfavorable. When people experience non-contingent success, they are caught in a bind. On the one hand, they may appreciate the success, but, on the other hand, the non-contingency of the success makes them uncertain about their prospects for continued success. Indeed, the manipulation check evidence in all four experimental studies showed that participants felt more uncertain about their chances for subsequent success in the non-contingent than in the contingent success condition. Previous research has shown that one way people may deal with this predicament is by engaging in self-handicapping. Whereas self-handicapping may lower people's chances for success, it offers a self-protective explanation if they happen to

experience an unfavorable outcome (Higgins et al., 1990). For similarly self-protective reasons, and as suggested by the results of all five studies, people who experience non-contingent success have less of a desire to be treated with higher procedural fairness relative to their counterparts who experience contingent success.

The results of Studies 1 and 2 also contribute to our understanding of the determinants of people's procedural fairness perceptions. Most of the research on the antecedents of people's procedural fairness perceptions has focused on attributes of the procedures, such as whether people are allowed to have voice (Thibaut & Walker, 1975) or the various structural characteristics set forth by Leventhal et al. (1980), e.g., consistency and accuracy. Furthermore, there is evidence that people's procedural fairness judgments result from a social process, in which people take cues from others about whether to judge a procedure as fair or unfair (Degoey, 2000). Recently, research has identified certain factors that bias people's subjective justice judgments such as their social identification and emotional states (Blader, 2007; Blader, Rothman & Gonzalez, 2009). The results of Studies 1 and 2 extend this growing area of research, suggesting that people's procedural fairness perceptions also are determined by a motivated self-protective process, in anticipation of the possibility that their future outcomes may be unfavorable.

The present studies also forge a connection between two previously distinct literatures: self-handicapping and procedural fairness. While appearing to be different on the surface, people's tendencies to engage in self-handicapping behavior and their lessened desire to be treated with higher procedural fairness may serve a similar psychological function: to reduce the self-threat that possibly negative future outcomes may engender. One way to do so is by engaging in self-handicapping. Another way, as the present studies suggest, is to exhibit less of a desire to be

treated with higher procedural fairness.

Limitations

In considering some limitations of the present studies, we also are suggesting some additional avenues for further research. For example, all of the present studies provided evidence that people preferred procedural fairness to a significantly lesser extent when they were pretreated with non-contingent than with contingent success. However, it would be important to evaluate whether other factors related to uncertainty about future success influence people's preferences for higher and lower procedural fairness. Factors other than success contingency may influence people's uncertainty about their future outcomes, such as being faced with very challenging goals, or dispositional factors such as self-efficacy or self-uncertainty. Much like those pretreated with non-contingent success, people who face very challenging goals, or those who are low in self-efficacy or high in self-uncertainty may show a significantly reduced tendency to prefer high procedural fairness over low procedural fairness, which would lend even further generality to our results.

In addition, Studies 3-5 drew on vignettes in which participants indicated how they would have responded to a hypothetical situation, which may not correspond to how they would have responded if they actually experienced the situation. For example, reactions to vignette studies may be tainted by social desirability concerns, in which people report how they would like to believe they would respond, rather than how they would actually respond. Moreover, vignette studies may not be very engaging, raising questions about whether people's reactions would generalize to situations that they actually experienced.

Both of these concerns about vignette studies, however, do not appear to have entirely compromised the results of Studies 3-5. For one thing, there is a strong social norm for people to

prefer higher levels of procedural fairness. Indeed, this tendency was found in each of Studies 3-5: in general, people preferred the more fair method over the less fair method. The fact that they were less apt to do so in response to non-contingent success, however, does not seem easily explained by a socially desirable response tendency. Moreover, the fact that we found several moderating influences on the relationship between success contingency and people's preference to be treated with relatively high procedural fairness suggests that they were at least somewhat engaged. If participants were generally highly disengaged then it would be harder to explain why the relationship between success contingency and people's preference to be treated with relatively high procedural fairness was more pronounced under some conditions than others.

Of course, perhaps the most compelling evidence that the present findings were not an artifact of or limited to the use of vignettes is that Studies 1 and 2 were based on situations that participants actually experienced. Nevertheless, the results found in Studies 1 and 2 were conceptually analogous to the ones found in Studies 3-5: participants perceived procedural fairness to be lower in the non-contingent success condition than in the contingent success condition, particularly when they were more motivated to engage in self-protection.

Practical Implications

A central tenet of organizational justice theory and research is that employees want to be treated with high procedural fairness. Therefore, as practitioners have advised (e.g., Kim & Mauborgne, 1997), it behooves managers to use fair procedures when planning and implementing decisions. The present findings suggest an important boundary condition to employees' desire for high procedural fairness: the experience of non-contingent success. The possibility that current success may give way to future failure, combined with the fact that higher procedural fairness induces people to see themselves as more personally responsible for their

outcomes, may lead people to prefer higher procedural fairness to a lesser degree.

Are we therefore suggesting that under such conditions managers should intentionally and strategically implement decisions with less procedural fairness? Not at all. High procedural fairness may lead people to experience self-threat in anticipation of the possibility of unfavorable outcomes, but high procedural fairness also has other desirable consequences. For example, fair procedures signal to people that they are held in high regard (Tyler & Lind, 1992), and that basic principles of morality have been upheld (Folger, 2001). Thus, rather than to eschew high procedural fairness, managers may be more effective when they take steps to make people less likely to experience the self-threat that high procedural fairness could potentially engender.

One way managers may reduce employees' experience of self-threat associated with being treated with high procedural fairness is suggested by the main effect of success contingency on people's preference for high procedural fairness. When employees are successful, managers need to help them see how their success was contingent on their ability or effort (assuming, of course, that such attributions are veridical). Relative to their counterparts who were treated with non-contingent success, those who experienced contingent success exhibited more of the typical tendency to prefer high procedural fairness. Getting employees to perceive their success as contingent may be challenging, however, given the many workplace conditions that make it hard for people to discern the extent to which they were responsible for their outcomes. For example, the prevalence of teamwork may make it difficult for people to see how their individual and collective performance outcomes resulted from their own contributions. Moreover, the pervasiveness of change in organizations may make it hard for employees to predict future outcomes based upon their current experiences, thereby creating ambiguity about how much they

are personally responsible for their future outcomes. On the other hand, employees may be quite open to their managers' efforts to induce them to see themselves as personally responsible for their successes, given the self-enhancement that employees may experience.

A second way managers may reduce employees' experience of self-threat associated with being treated with high procedural fairness emanates from the moderating influences we found on the relationship between success contingency and people's preference for procedural fairness. Relative to contingent success, non-contingent success was more likely to lower people's desire to be treated with high procedural fairness when they felt more of a need to engage in self-protection: for example, when their organization was seen as more intolerant of failure, or when they were prevention rather than promotion focused. These findings suggest that even in the face of non-contingent success, employees may respond positively to high procedural fairness (and therefore managers should practice high procedural fairness) provided that employees are not strongly motivated to engage in self-protection. For instance, giving employees the message that failure is something to be learned from rather than something to be avoided at all costs, may maintain employees' preference to be treated with high procedural fairness, even in the face of non-contingent success. Relatedly, inducing employees to be more concerned with growth and advancement (that is, to be promotion focused) may have the same effect. Consistent with this reasoning, the results of Study 5 showed that even in the face of non-contingent success those with more of a desire to assess (and presumably learn about) themselves had a strong preference for high procedural fairness. Moreover, Study 4 showed that in response to non-contingent success, promotion focused individuals also had a strong desire for high procedural fairness.

One implication of the moderating effects found in Studies 4 and 5 is that when employees are uncertain about their future outcomes, the extent to which they want to be treated with higher procedural fairness may depend upon their organization's culture. In organizations that emphasize learning, growth and advancement procedural fairness may be valued even in the face of uncertainty about future outcomes. On the other hand, organizations which focus greater attention on cost savings, efficiency, and the avoidance of failure may be contexts in which employees who are uncertain about the favorability of their future outcomes may be less likely to prefer procedural fairness.

In conclusion, the present research contributes to an emerging body of theory and research that gives pause to the conventional wisdom that people want to be treated with higher procedural fairness. Previous research has shown that in response to unfavorable outcomes already received, high procedural fairness is not uniformly revered (Brockner, 2010; Holmvall & Bobocel, 2008; Van den Bos et al., 1999). The present studies demonstrate that merely anticipating the possible receipt of unfavorable outcomes also reduces people's desire to be treated with higher procedural fairness.

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Footnotes

1. One of the main predictions of the present studies is that people's typical preference to be treated with higher than with lower procedural fairness will be reduced when they experience non-contingent rather than contingent success. In Studies 3-5, participants were asked how much they want two procedures (one more fair than the other) to be used as the basis for an upcoming decision. Note that the prediction that non-contingent success will reduce people's typical tendencies to prefer higher rather than lower procedural fairness can take three different forms: (1) an *attenuation* effect, in which people still have more of a preference for higher than lower procedural fairness, albeit to a significantly lesser degree than in the case of contingent success, (2) an *elimination* effect, in which people prefer higher and lower procedural fairness to a comparable degree, and (3) a *reversal* effect, in which people actually prefer to be treated with lower than with higher procedural fairness.

Of these three possible patterns, the reversal effect is the most extreme or dramatic but also may be the least likely to emerge. Whereas people use procedural fairness information to make inferences about how much they are personally responsible for their outcomes, which could lead them to feel badly about themselves to the extent that higher procedural fairness causes them to see themselves as more personally responsible for their unfavorable outcomes, procedural fairness has other effects, as we set forth at the outset. For example, procedural fairness informs people about: (1) the extent to which they are held in high regard by the decision-making authority (Tyler & Lind, 1992), and (2) the extent to which basic principles of morality have been upheld (Folger, 2001). In both instances, people prefer being treated with higher than with lower procedural fairness, in that higher procedural fairness: (1) leads them to believe that they are held in higher regard, and (2) reassures them that basic principles of morality have been

upheld. Whereas non-contingent success was expected to reduce people's typical preference to be treated with higher than with lower procedural fairness, our hunch is that this finding is more likely to take the form of an attenuation effect or an elimination effect than a reversal effect. Of course, this is an empirical question which Studies 3-5 will answer.

2. We included gender as a covariate in the analyses in Study 4 because (unlike in Study 3 and in Study 5, to follow) gender was significantly related to participants' tendencies to prefer the more fair method over the less fair method; specifically, women showed more of a tendency to prefer the fair method over the unfair method than did men, $F(1, 60) = 5.69$, $p < .02$.

Figure 1. Perceived Fairness as a Function of Success Contingency and Locus of Control (Study 1)

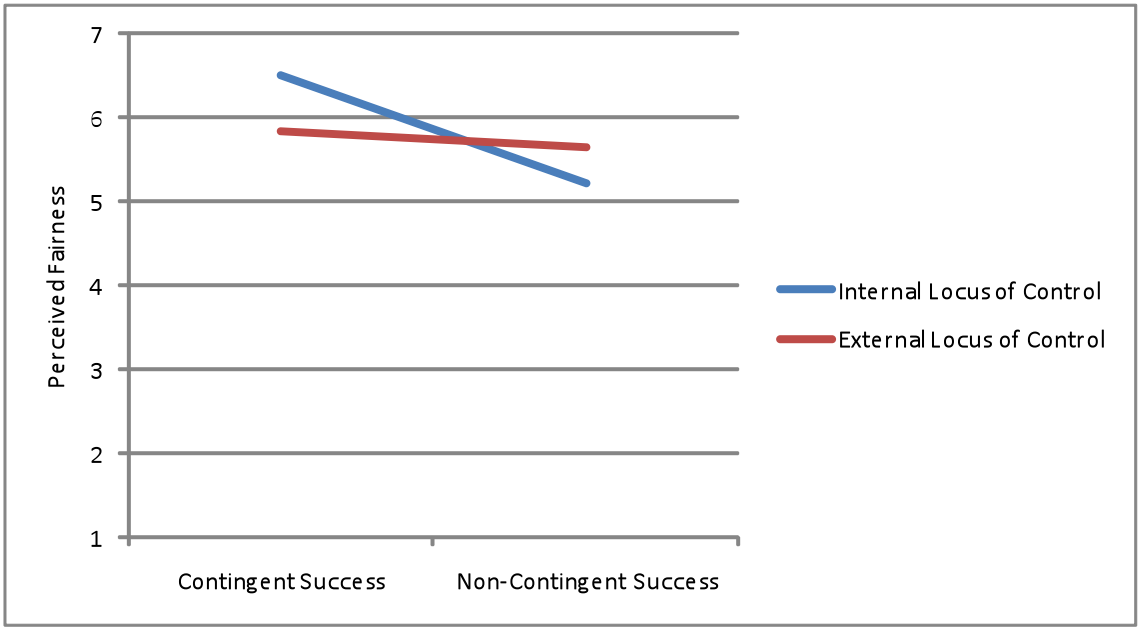

Figure 2: Perceived Voice as a Function of Success Contingency and the Organization's Intolerance for Failure (Study 2)

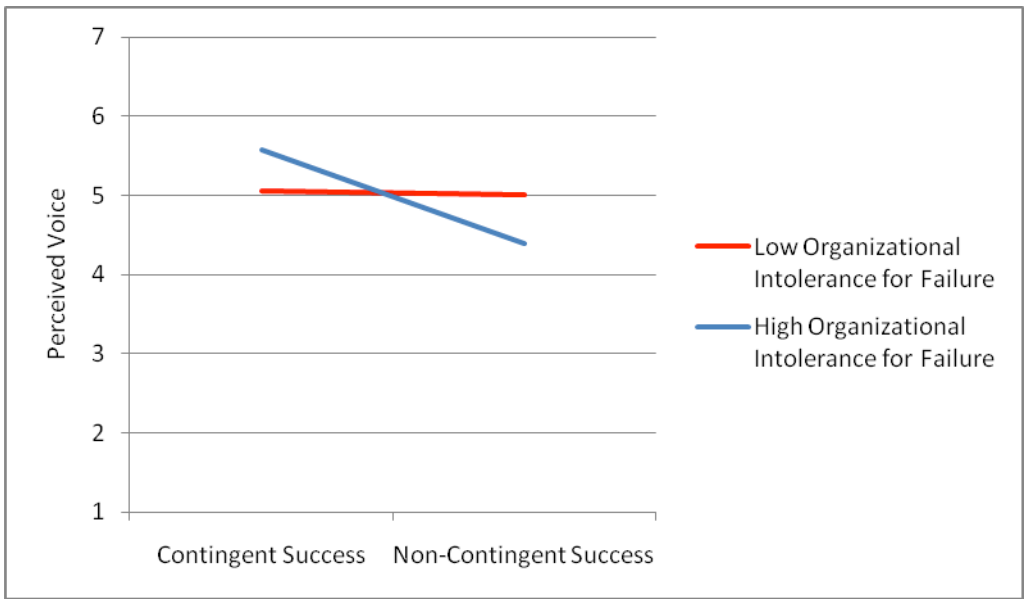

Table 1: Results of Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Perceived Voice (Study 2)

	Step 1	Step 2
Dependent Variable	Perceived Voice	
Success Contingency (SC)	.24**	-.28
Organizational Intolerance for Failure (OIF)	.01	-.86*
(SC x OIF)		.95**
R^2	.06	.10
R^2_{adj}	.05	.08
R^2_{change}		.03
Overall F	5.56*	6.26**
Df	2, 177	3, 176

*$p < .01$
**$p < .001$

Note: Standardized betas are reported.

Table 2. Adjusted Mean Preference Ratings as a Function of Success Contingency Condition, Regulatory Focus Priming Condition, and Method (Study 4)

	Prevention Focus		Promotion Focus	
	Voice-Giving Method	Voice-Denying Method	Voice-Giving Method	Voice-Denying Method
Contingent success	6.20 (SE = 0.33)	3.85 (SE = 0.46)	5.98 (SE = 0.32)	4.43 (SE = 0.45)
Non-contingent success	4.64 (SE = 0.34)	5.29 (SE = 0.48)	5.63 (SE = 0.32)	4.46 (SE = 0.46)

Notes: Preference ratings are adjusted for gender. Scores could range from 1-7, with higher scores reflecting more of a preference.

Table 3. Mean Preference Ratings as a Function of Success Contingency Condition, Need for Self-Assessment, and Method (Study 5)

	Higher Need for Self-Assessment		Lower Need for Self-Assessment	
	More Accurate Method	Less Accurate Method	More Accurate Method	Less Accurate Method
Contingent success	6.12 (SE = 0.35)	3.12 (SE = 0.35)	6.43 (SE = 0.54)	3.00 (SE = 0.54)
Non-contingent success	5.88 (SE = 0.51)	3.50 (SE = 0.51)	4.43 (SE = 0.54)	4.57 (SE = 0.54)

Note: Scores could range from 1-7, with higher scores reflecting more of a preference.