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THE ROLE OF PEER JUSTICE CLIMATE

What do we know and where can we go from here?

Agustin Molina, Ana Jakopec, Russell Cropanzano, and Carolina Moliner

Teams have become a vital part of the organizational environment. As such, team members shape their shared perceptions and attitudes about that working environment (Schneider, Salvaggio, & Subirats, 2002). This research highlights that these joint evaluations and attitudes affect team members' individual and group reactions toward other stakeholders within the same organizational setting (e.g., Podsakoff, Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Maynes, & Spoelma, 2014). Consistent with this, team members often form shared perceptions concerning the fairness of their work environments. More important, team members' shared justice perceptions then shape employees' attitudes and behaviors over and above their individual justice perceptions (Mossholder, Bennett, Kemery, & Wesolowski, 1998; Naumann & Bennett, 2000).

However, as suggested by fairness theory (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001), something is needed in order to evoke these shared justice evaluations. That is, there has to be a perpetrator or party responsible for a given justice-related event. Multifoci research (e.g., Lavelle, Rupp, Manegold, & Thorton, 2015), which questions the *foci* or source of workplace perceptions and behaviors, has normally focused on persons or entities that are important. Most often, teams evaluate the fairness of the *formal authorities*: their supervisor or the organization (Liao & Rupp, 2005). At the same time, teams can estimate the fairness of the stakeholders that do *not have formal authority* over each other, their peers (Cropanzano, Li, & James, 2007). Scholars in this area of organizational justice normally distinguish between *justice climate* and *peer justice climate*, formerly referred to as intraunit justice (Li, Cropanzano, & Molina, 2015). Justice climate refers to the team members' shared perceptions about the fairness of (formal) authorities (Naumann & Bennett, 2000), while peer justice climate refers to teams' shared perceptions about the way team members, who do not have formal authority over each other, treat one another (Li & Cropanzano, 2009).

Although several theories explain the ways that shared justice perceptions emerge, two approaches have received the most attention. *Social information processing*

theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) points out that individuals do not operate in a vacuum. To the contrary, they actively engage in multiple types of interactions to make sense of the events in their workspace (Zelesny & Ford, 1990). Employees thus influence each other's perceptions, including perceptions of how one is treated by leaders (Lord, 1985). Consequently, individual perceptions converge into shared or group perceptions (O'Reilly & Caldwell, 1985). In other words, by engaging in discussions about the outcomes they receive and the procedures and interpersonal treatment they are subject to, employees can form shared perceptions of both justice climate and peer justice climate.

A second approach, the *attraction–selection–attrition model* (ASA, Schneider, 1987), highlights three processes that facilitate shared perceptions to emerge. According to the ASA model, people are attracted to the groups or the organizations with whom they share similar characteristics, values, attitudes, or goals (Ployhart, Weekley, & Baughman, 2006). As a result, organizations and entry employees select each other on a similarity basis. If it turns out that they do not fit the group or the organization, they decide to leave, or they are forced to do so (De Cooman et al., 2009). Altogether, these processes eventually cause team members' perceptions to converge (Schneider, Smith, & Goldstein, 2000; Chatman, Wong, & Joyce, 2008).

We have defined justice climate and the more novel peer justice climate, which represents the main focus of this chapter, and also addressed the main theories by which these perceptions emerge. In the next sections, we aim to answer three questions: What do we know so far about peer justice climate? Why is this construct important? And, finally, where should we go from here?

What do we know so far about peer justice climate?

Research on teams' perceptions about the fairness received by authorities – the organization or the supervisor – is quite extensive. This line of inquiry has explored the role of this construct as a predictor, mediator, and moderator of individual-, team-, and organizational-level outcomes (for a comprehensive review, see Li et al., 2015). Research addressing the collective perceptions about how coworkers treat one another, though scarcer, is growing stronger each day. To our knowledge, at the time of this writing, three studies have been published examining peer justice climate. In light of further exploring this construct, in the paragraphs to follow, we summarize these studies and identify what we believe to be the key milestones in the scrutiny of peer justice climate.

Cropanzano, Li, and Benson (2011) published the seminal study on peer justice climate. To examine the legitimacy of this novel unit-level construct, Cropanzano and colleagues followed Morgeson and Hofmann's (1999) suggestion and aimed to articulate the structure and function of peer justice climate. Using a sample of university students working on semester-long team projects, Cropanzano and colleagues measured peer procedural and peer interpersonal justice climate. They defined the former as the extent to which "unit members use fair procedures in the

decision-making process" and the latter as "the interpersonal fairness with which unit members treat one another" (p. 5). After confirming that students were able to differentiate between these two peer justice climate dimensions, Cropanzano and colleagues tested the incremental validity of these unit-level constructs over their individual-level counterparts (i.e., peer procedural and peer interpersonal justice).

According to their model, peer procedural and peer interpersonal justice climate should predict task teamwork processes (a composite of communication effectiveness, coordination, and relative contribution) and also interpersonal teamwork processes (a composition of team cohesion, effort, and mutual support). These two sets of processes, should then relate to task performance and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). As reported by these researchers, peer procedural justice climate explained 20% of the unique variance of task teamwork processes and 23% of interpersonal teamwork processes. Peer interpersonal justice climate explained 20% of the unique variance of interpersonal teamwork process. To our knowledge, this evidence stressing the emergence of peer justice climate as a distinct phenomenon from its individual counterpart represents the first empirical milestone in the research of peer justice climate.

Cropanzano et al. observed that peer procedural and peer interpersonal justice climate engendered both teamwork processes. More important, they also reported that peer procedural and peer interpersonal justice climate had an indirect effect on team task performance (operationalized as the actual grades each project team received from their instructors) and team citizenship behavior (measured as a composite of helping and loyalty behaviors). In short, both peer procedural justice climate and peer interpersonal justice climate predicted task performance and OCB. However, only the indirect effects were significant, as the effect of justice climate was mediated by the two sets of teamwork processes. These promising results are in line with other evidence, indicating that the role of coworkers is very important to work effectiveness (e.g., Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008).

Li, Cropanzano, and Bagger (2013) conducted a second study in which they made a more thorough examination of the structure of peer justice climate. Li and colleagues also used a sample of university students working on semester-long team projects. In addition to measuring peer procedural and peer interpersonal justice climate, they added peer distributive justice climate, which they defined as the "extent to which the rewards that group/team members receive are appropriate, based on their contributions" (p. 569). The authors observed that the structure of peer justice climate was best represented by a hierarchical approach. At the first level were the three specific facets of peer justice climate: procedural, interpersonal, and distributive. These dimensions, though distinguishable, were correlated. At the second level, procedural, interpersonal, and distributive justice climate all loaded on a global second-order dimension. In line with the advancements in overall justice perceptions (see Ambrose & Schminke, 2009), the authors interpreted this general factor as "overall" justice climate. That is, Li et al.'s results showed that the relationship among procedural, interpersonal, and distributive can be better accounted for by the higher-level construct of overall peer justice climate.

Li et al. (2013) obtained a similar factor solution for justice climate (i.e., for authority-based justice climate). To capture justice climate perceptions, students were asked to focus on their instructor. Interestingly, the results for justice climate replicated those shown by peer justice climate. Justice climate was best represented by a hierarchical model, in which three first-order factors (procedural, interpersonal, and distributive justice climate) loaded on a general overall justice climate dimension (see Figure 5.1).

Li et al.'s (2013) results provided a more parsimonious way to continue to test the effects of peer justice climate in organizations. Guided by theory or pragmatic reasons, scholars and practitioners can decide whether to focus on the overall approach to shared justice perceptions, which treats peer justice climate as a single factor, or else to concentrate on the specific dimensions of each source of justice, which provides a more accurate but complex approximation to this phenomenon.

To further the functional analysis of peer justice climate, Li et al. (2013) then examined a panel model in which they tested the effect of overall peer justice climate and overall justice climate on cooperative teamwork process. Consistent with Cropanzano et al. (2011), overall peer justice climate measured at Time 1 had a significant and positive effect on cooperative teamwork process when these were measured at Time 2. Interestingly, these peer justice effects were exhibited above and beyond the effect of overall justice climate, which was not related to cooperative teamwork process. Cooperative teamwork process was, in turn, related to team satisfaction but (contrary to predictions) not to team task performance.

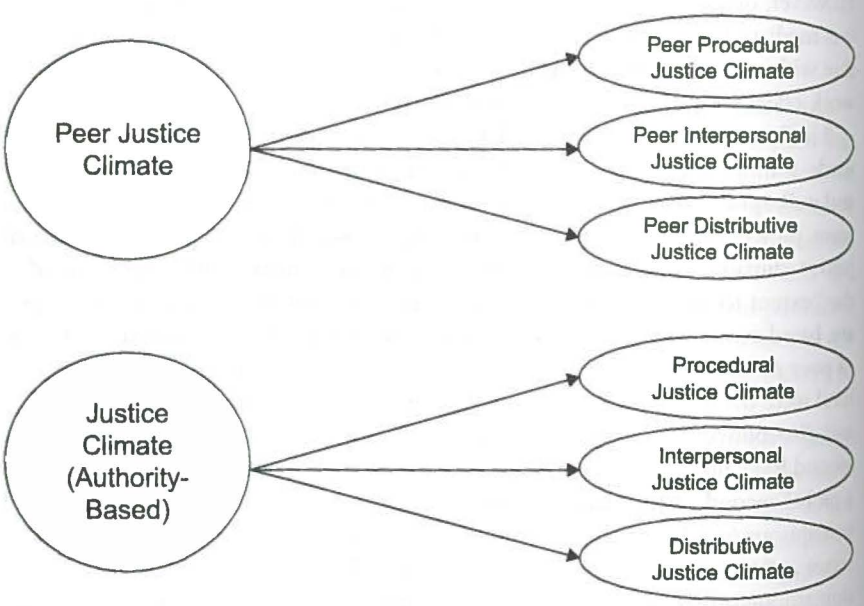

FIGURE 5.1 Hierarchical structure of peer justice climate

Despite the lack of an indirect effect on performance, which the researchers attributed to the small size of the sample (n = 47), this study made a key contribution to our understanding of shared justice perceptions at the workplace. We believe that the effect of overall peer justice climate on cooperative teamwork, even after controlling for overall justice climate, represents the second empirical milestone in the research of peer justice climate. This result provided the first empirical evidence showing that solely focusing on justice climate (that is, shared perceptions regarding the fair treatment offered by organizational authorities) is insufficient to explain the increasing complexity of the social interactions to which employees are subjected.

While the work of Cropanzano et al. (2011) and Li et al. (2013) provided a useful foundation for peer justice climate, both of these studies were conducted with student samples. A third study that examined peer justice climate aimed to extend the functional analysis of this construct to a real-world situation. Molina, Moliner, Martínez-Tur, Cropanzano, and Peiró (2015) proposed a justice-quality model within the healthcare industry. The goal of this work was to help promote the quality of life for people with intellectual disabilities. These individuals are much like customers, in that they rely on these services for their well-being. Their basic tenet was that units perceiving fair treatment (both peer justice climate and also justice climate) would put more effort into the delivery of service quality. This service quality, in turn, would translate into high customer ratings of the service quality they receive and, subsequently, a higher quality of life (see Figure 5.2). Before testing their model, Molina and colleagues followed Li et al.'s (2013) overall approach and replicated their findings: both peer justice and justice climate were once again better represented using a hierarchical structure.

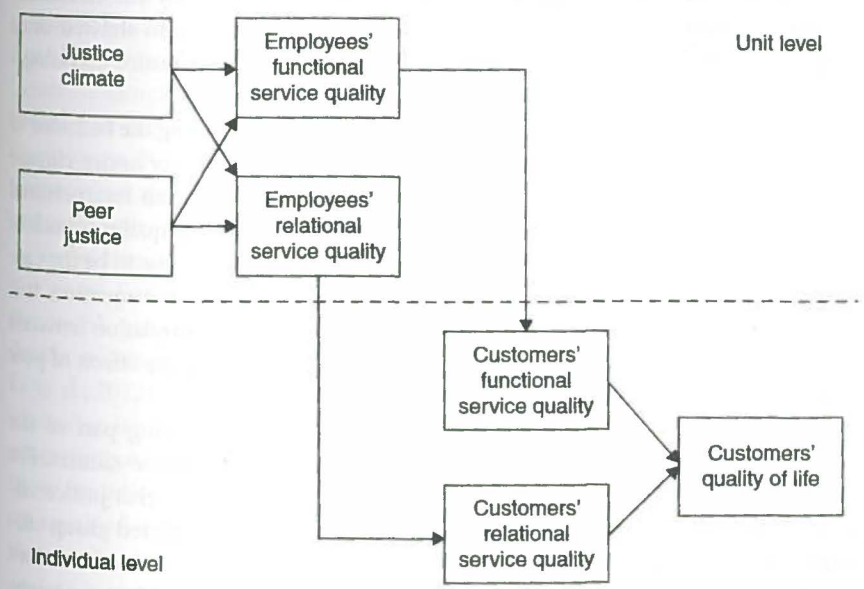

FIGURE 5.2 Molina et al.'s hypothesized justice-quality model (p. 628)

Molina et al.'s (2015) results showed that overall peer justice climate and overall justice climate were in fact related to the service quality delivered by the unit. Moreover, results showed that the unit's quality efforts did translate into high customer ratings of the service quality they received. This, in turn, ultimately related to an increase in customers' quality of life, thereby suggesting that unit-level fairness is a key to fostering service quality and customer care.

For our present purposes, there was another interesting finding from Molina et al.'s study. Authority-based justice climate was associated with one facet of service quality, but peer justice climate was associated with another. Specifically, overall justice climate was related to *functional service quality*. Functional service quality is an outcome from the service industry that captures the efforts made by the unit to deliver their services in an instrumental and efficient manner (Peiró, Martínez-Tur, & Ramos, 2005). Justice climate was not related to *relational service quality*. Relational service quality is another outcome from this industry. It captures the efforts made by a unit to provide benefits to customers, such as doing little extras or empathizing with customers, which are above and beyond their core service (Gwinner, Gremler, & Bitner, 1998). Overall peer justice climate showed the opposite pattern. This construct was unrelated to the unit's effort to perform their instrumental tasks (functional service quality) but was associated with the unit's efforts to treat customers in a special manner (relational service quality).

We believe the third milestone in the study of peer justice climate to be the external validity offered by Molina et al. (2015). In their study, Molina and colleagues first confirmed that the overall structure of peer justice climate observed by Li et al. (2013) using university students' data could also be applied to employees from formal work environments, such as the one represented by the healthcare industry. Second, similar to Li et al., Molina and colleagues' results showed once again that peer justice climate seems to play a different role in the justice nomological network than the one played by justice climate.

The studies reviewed here suggest a striking conjecture regarding the behavior of peer justice climate: even when justice climate is controlled for, peer justice climate seems to be associated with constructs that involve behaviors of an interpersonal nature, such as cooperative teamwork process and relational service quality – both of which require employees to interact with others. That does not appear to be the case with justice climate, at least not when both variables are in the same equation. It is worth mentioning that Molina et al. (2015) reported a positive correlation between justice climate and relational service quality that disappeared once the effects of peer justice climate were controlled.

This raises the possibility that peer justice climate is explaining part of the variance that justice researchers have previously attributed to justice climate. For instance, Chen, Lam, Naumann, and Schaubroeck (2005) reported that justice climate (actually, procedural justice climate, as they measured it) predicted group citizenship behavior, an outcome embedded by employees' interpersonal behaviors. Another example is the work by Lin, Tang, Li, Wu, and Lin (2007). These researchers found that justice climate was related to the cooperative norm established by

the group, another outcome embedded by interpersonal conduct. Unfortunately, these studies did not measure peer justice climate, and so we do not know if these relationships would have persisted if peer justice had been controlled for.

This interrogation takes us to a more critical question, what does a just peer climate have to offer to its members that is beyond what is offered by a just (authority-based) climate? In other words, why is peer justice climate important? In the next section, we tackle these questions by examining the reasons people care about workplace justice.

Why is peer justice climate important?

Why is peer justice climate important? Before answering this question, we should first ask ourselves, why do people care about organizational justice? So far, justice researchers have provided at least three models to respond to this question: the instrumental model, the relational model, and the moral virtues model. In the paragraphs to follow, we describe these models and their implications for unit-level justice research by exploring distinctive ways in which peer justice climate may impact employees' attitudes and behaviors above and beyond justice climate. We argue that instrumental motives are more important for justice climate, whereas relational and possible moral motives are more important for peer justice climate.

The instrumental model

The instrumental model proposes that people care about justice because of self-interest (Tyler, 1989). Based on an economic rationality, this model argues that people will behave in such a manner that allows them to maximize their control of desirable outcomes (Thibaut & Walker, 1975). There is evidence that justice judgments are sometimes driven by self-interest (Cropanzano & Moliner, 2013) and that this motive impacts well-being at work (Moliner, Martínez-Tur, Peiró, Ramos, & Cropanzano, 2013). While both coworkers and managers can activate instrumental concerns, we speculate that this motive will be met less well by peer justice climate but more so by (authority-based) justice climate. We develop this logic next.

To be sure, team members have some influence on an individual's workplace outcomes. For example, team members can decide how much to contribute to the team's goals, apply rules to dictate the unit's decision-making process, and decide whether to behave in a respectful manner toward their coworkers (e.g., Li et al., 2013). While this is important, the unit's power over economic events is somewhat limited (Ambrose & Schminke, 2007), at least with respect to that of a supervising authority. Many personnel decisions that impact employees, particularly those regarding outcome allocation and formal related procedures, normally rely on specified authority figures within the organization. The common interest of these authority figures is often to promote goal achievement (Kramer, 1996). If this analysis is correct, then justice climate will act as a strong mechanism for addressing instrumental concerns, at least to a greater extent than peer justice climate. If this

is so, then the two types of justice climate should influence employee behavior in predictable ways.

According to the social marketplace model (Beugré & Liverpool, 2006), individuals make self-interested judgments concerning the most productive ways to invest their time and energy (Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey, & Toth, 1997). When the work environment is administered justly, then individuals will work harder because they can have greater confidence that their contributions to organizational goals will allow them to reap deserved economic rewards at some future date. Justice climate, which pertains to the behavior of authority figures, is especially relevant here. When justice climate is high, employees are more apt to behave in a manner that is beneficial to enduring success (e.g., by taking part in voluntary learning activities). This is because there is a greater likelihood that their instrumental needs will eventually be met.

When justice climate is low, then the work environment may appear to be volatile and uncertain. Hard work and conscientiousness can become risky investments. The payoffs, if any, may never be realized. Likewise, in an unfairly political environment, people may be rewarded for their status and power rather than for their work contributions (Randall, Cropanzano, Bormann, & Birjulin, 1999). For these reasons, the social marketplace model predicts that a poor justice climate will stymie employees' instrumental goals. Realizing this to be the case, employees will exert less effort on behalf of the organization.

In sum, the social marketplace model begins with the non-controversial assumption that people want some control over their access to desirable outcomes. Just management, such as that found in a strong justice climate, can provide them with sufficient predictability that they can confidently invest their hard work in meeting organizational goals. As the supervisors play an important role in assigning instrumental outcomes, such as pay increases and job assignments, then justice climate is a tool for making the workplace fair and predictable rather than politicized and unpredictable. Put differently, justice climate allows an opportunity for these self-interested work goals to be met through conscientious work habits that benefit the organization. The key issue here is that units seeking instrumental control should focus on doing those tasks that are most valued by those in power – the achievement of the prescribed unit's tasks and objectives. However, this should occur primarily in a just climate in which the worker anticipates a predictable payoff for her or his efforts.

Following this line of thought, the relationship between justice climate and task performance should be stronger than the relationship between peer justice climate and the same outcome. Of course, as we will see later on, this does not preclude peer justice climate from indirectly influencing the unit's performance; our point is that justice climate has the stronger effect. The preliminary results offered by Molina et al. (2015) support these ideas. Recall that justice climate was a strong predictor of variables that highlight authorities' main concern, while peer justice climate was not a significant predictor (at least when both types of climate were included in the same equation). As previously discussed, Molina and colleagues'

results showed that justice climate was related to the unit's efforts to deliver their services in an instrumental and efficient manner, which represents the authorities' main concerns in healthcare organizations. Peer justice climate, however, was not related to this outcome.

The relational model

In addition to the desire to instrumentally control valuable outcomes, there are other reasons people desire justice. A family of theoretical frameworks, collectively termed the relational models, proposes that people care about justice because they have a psychological need for belongingness (Tyler & Lind, 1992; Blader & Tyler, 2015). According to this paradigm, being treated fairly conveys information regarding our social standing in a group. So whereas the instrumental model highlights a rational and control-seeking nature, the relational model emphasizes the importance of interpersonal concerns as a source of self-worth and identity (Cropanzano, Byrne, Bobocel, & Rupp, 2001). As with the instrumental model, relational needs can be met by both supervisors and coworkers. Unlike instrumental concerns, we speculate that relational needs are more typically addressed through strong coworker relationships (i.e., by high levels of peer justice climate). We develop our logic in what follows.

Without a doubt, the power held by organizational authorities over workplace events means they represent a critical source for signaling social status within the organization through the fairness of their acts (Tyler & Lind, 1992). That said, coworkers have a strong impact on employees' day-to-day work experiences, even if they do not hold formal power. It is no news that organizations are becoming flatter and that the use of team settings is becoming more and more common (Harrison, Johns, & Martocchio, 2000). In this context, coworkers have become one of the most salient aspects of workplace environments. Chiaburu and Harrison's (2008) meta-analysis represents a good example of the growing importance of coworkers at work. Based on 161 independent samples, their results showed that perceived coworker support was positively related to employees' job satisfaction, job involvement, and performance and negatively related to turnover intentions, absenteeism, role conflict, and role ambiguity. Noteworthy, Chiaburu and Harrison ruled out alternative explanations by showing that their results held even after controlling for the effect of perceived support from authorities. Extending this evidence, it is likely that peers are an especially important source of justice influencing employees' feelings of social inclusion. As the primary source of social interaction (Schneider, 1987), fair treatment from coworkers could increase an employee's self-worth and identity, satisfying his or her need for belongingness. The aforementioned does not preclude justice climate from influencing the social standing. It simply suggests that given the greater frequency of interactions with coworkers than supervisors (e.g., Terry, Nielsen, & Perchard, 1993), peer justice climate may have a more consistent impact over employees' feelings of belongingness.

As indicated by Li and Cropanzano (2009), peer justice climate could act as a significant means for building inclusion and status. As these goals are met, the

relational models posit that individuals expand their definition of the self in order to take into account the needs of others (Blader & Tyler, 2015). That is, the work unit becomes part of the employee's self-concept (De Cremer, Tyler, & den Ouden, 2005). Consequently, individuals are willing to exert effort on behalf of others (e.g., Tyler & Blader, 2003; Blader & Tyler, 2009). The behaviors that result from this self–other merging are likely to be those that increase the quality of work life for fellow teammates. For example, team members feeling valued by the group may be more willing to inject extra energy and dedication to the team and, thus, increase the emotional state of the group.

Interestingly, preliminary findings seem to support this contention. Jakopec (2015) observed that peer justice climate was positively related to the team's level of work engagement, over and above the effects of justice climate. The aforementioned increased emotional state promoted by a peer justice climate could also be manifested in more helping behaviors, which research has shown to take place through the relational identification with team members (Moteabbed, 2014). In other words, peer justice climate may help to meet relational needs, and this may encourage a focus on tasks with an interpersonal nature. Noteworthy, as suggested by Jakopec's (2015) results and by the non-significant effects of justice climate on cooperative teamwork process and relational service quality reported by Molina et al. (2015), these interpersonal behaviors that are likely to benefit the team's positive atmosphere (and indirectly the team's performance) cannot be fully promoted by organizational authorities, since they are not "one of us."

The moral virtues model

A third perspective, the moral virtues model of organizational justice, argues that people care about justice simply because they hold an essential respect for human worth and dignity. Therefore, individuals care about fairness at the workplace for its own sake (Folger, 1998; Folger, Cropanzano, & Goldman, 2005). In other words, justice is a basic quality of being human, which is distinct from (and distinguishable from) people's interest in being respected or accepted by authorities or groups. Continuing with this line of research, Skitka, Bauman, and Mullen (2008) further indicated that people have an intrinsic propensity for caring about and acting on conceptions of morality. The same authors suggest that people treat their moral beliefs as if they were readily observable, objective properties of situations. That is, people tend to believe that their personal moral standards ought to apply to everyone.

Frequently interacting with people leads individuals to form expectancies about those with whom they interact (Burgoon, 1978). It is important to note here that, as we mentioned earlier, employees tend to interact more with coworkers than with authorities (Terry et al., 1993). The greater frequency of interaction and the expectancies that result from those interactions might translate into peers sharing more norms with each other than they do with their authorities. Following this logic, people might react distinctively depending on who is violating our own ethical

standards. Keep in mind that we often depend on other people to help us obtain, or at least not to hinder, the things we value (Lewicki, McAllister, & Bies, 1998). So if the violation is committed by someone with whom we expect to be sharing the same norms, we might react more strongly than if the breach is caused by someone with whom we do not interact as much and, hence, we do not expect to be sharing the same standards. These phenomena might be an additional reason for explaining the strong effects of peer justice climate, at least when compared to justice climate, over outcomes such as cooperative team process. Preliminary findings seem to add additional support to this logic. Jakopec, Sušanj, and Molina (2015) found that peer justice climate had a strong positive effect on team cohesion, above and beyond the effect of justice climate.

Some closing thoughts: Why is peer justice important?

Despite the few studies that have examined this construct, there is a good deal of consistency among their results. So far, it seems likely that peer justice climate provides additional value in explaining employee reactions, above the value of justice climate. Just peer climate seems to signal not only belongingness to the most salient social group at work, the team, but also the existence of shared ethical norms among coworkers. The abovementioned preliminary findings suggest that peer justice climate may affect both – team work engagement and team cohesion as well. Justice climate is important as well, especially for allowing employees to meet their instrumental needs.

We close this section by qualifying this analysis slightly. The three needs stated by the different models are not completely independent of one another. For example, although it appears that justice climate is more relevant than peer justice climate when considering economic outcomes, peer justice climate may also influence those self-interest concerns through relational and moral goals. That is, the high levels of a team's work engagement and cohesiveness, which seem to be strongly affected by peer justice climate, might in turn affect unit's performance (for a supportive meta-analysis on work engagement, see Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; and for a meta-analysis on team cohesion, see Beal, Cohen, Burke, & McLendon, 2003). This suggest that peer justice may also be related to performance, though its effects may be smaller and indirect, at least when compared to justice climate. These findings are encouraging, though tentative. Given the growing interest in peer justice climate, we now propose two directions that may help to guide future research on unit-level justice climate.

Where can we go from here?

Based on recent trends in organizational behavior research, we propose two areas of development that could help further our understanding of justice climate and, particularly, the role of peer justice climate within the workplace. The first trend has to do with the congruence of unit-level justice sources and the second trend with the

configurations of those climates. In the next paragraphs, we briefly describe these trends and their potential to help us better understand a more comprehensive unit-level justice research, which takes into account not only unit-level justice events but also the sources responsible for such events.

The importance of consistent multifoci treatment

Congruence theories in the organizational context point out the importance of the alignment for multiple organizationally relevant outcomes (Nightingale & Toulouse, 1977). Namely, the interaction between the individual and different aspects of one's work environment (i.e., organization, job, team, and supervisor) is important. The alignment between an employee and his or her work environment (*person–environment fit*) has positive effects on the organizationally relevant attitudes and behaviors of the employees. Misalignment, on the other hand, leads to negative attitudes and undesirable employee behaviors (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). Within the field of justice, the alignment between different dimensions of justice has also proved to be important. Employees, for instance, react most negatively to injustice when they perceive both outcomes and procedures as unfair. If either is fair, then the individual is likely to maintain positive attitudes toward the decision maker or the institution (Folger & Konovsky, 1989; Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997).

Despite the strategic benefits of examining unit-level justice through congruence methods, multifoci research has traditionally focused on the main and mediating effects of the sources of justice on employee reactions rather than exploring their (mis)alignment. For this reason – and with the exception of few studies conducted at the individual-level of analysis (described by Lavelle and his colleagues, 2015) – we know little about the potential of joint, interactive effects of the various justice sources on employee reactions.

In a preliminary analysis conducted by Rupp, Bashshur, and Liao (2007), these researchers pointed out the detrimental effect of misaligned or inconsistent supervisory and organizational treatment of the team. Results of their research showed that the misalignment between supervisory and organizational justice climate (a situation in which a team simultaneously perceives one source as fair while the other is unfair) leads to even more pronounced decrease in the level of employees' organizational citizenship behavior than in a situation where the team perceives both sources as being consistently unfair. These results not only emphasize the complexity of examining the nature of joint unit-level justice sources but also the vast opportunities enlightened by this field of research.

To our knowledge, the aforementioned study is the only one that explicitly examined the interactive effects of two sources of unit-level justice – the organization and the supervisor – on workplace outcomes. As described throughout this chapter, the growing body of research on peer justice climate highlights the importance of this construct in relation to organizationally relevant outcomes. Hence,

there is a need for further research to include peer justice climate in the interaction as well, along with the authority-based sources of unit-level justice. As suggested in a previous section, peer justice climate may offer team members some attributes, such as a strong focus on the interpersonal nature of behaviors, which are not necessarily the primary concern of authority-based sources. Continuing this line of research thus is particularly important for grasping the full range of social context in which individuals operate.

In order to do so, Jakopec et al. (2015) examined the interactive effects of supervisory and peer justice climate on supervisory and peer-oriented outcomes on a sample of 196 teams by using polynomial regression analysis combined with response surface methodology. The results of this preliminary work showed that all the measured outcomes improved as the level of supervisory and peer justice climate increased. Both peer-oriented outcomes (teams' organizational citizenship behavior toward peers and team cohesiveness) depended upon the level of perceived peer justice climate, regardless of the level of supervisory justice climate.

When it came to supervisory-oriented outcomes, including trust in and OCB toward the supervisor, things turned out to be quite different. Teams' organizational citizenship behavior toward the supervisor was at its highest level when teams perceived at least one source of justice – either the supervisor or peers – as fair. And this was so even when they simultaneously perceived the other source as unfair. Apparently, some kind of compensation effect was taking place. Trust showed weaker effects. When it came to teams' trust in the supervisor, neither source could compensate for perceived unfairness in the other source of unit-level justice. When a team perceived only one source as unfair, teams' trust in the supervisor was at the extremely low level, even if the team simultaneously perceived the other source as entirely fair. Further, it did not matter if these ill feelings pertained to the supervisor (justice climate) or to the workgroup (peer justice climate).

It is clear by Jakopec et al.'s (2015) preliminary findings that adding peer justice climate to the justice climate approach, which centers on the organization and supervisor, may offer rich insights into our understanding of justice as a group phenomenon. As peer justice climate captures a source of justice that lies within the team – rather than outside, as the supervisor or the organization – addressing the interaction of this construct with authority-based justice climate may help us better design management policies that do not solely rely on authorities concerns but consider a wider range of organizational affairs.

It is important to note that, as suggested by Rupp et al. (2007), polynomial regression analysis combined with response surface methodology has proven to be a powerful approach for examining these interactive effects. By examining the interactive effects of two constructs on an outcome through a three-dimensional instead of a two-dimensional space, these techniques allow to overcome the shortcomings of the difference score method (Edwards, 2002). Hence, we encourage scholars to apply these tools, as they create new opportunities for theory development.

From climate level and strength to climate uniformity

There is little doubt that unit-level justice research has been very fruitful. As portrayed by Whitman, Caleo, Carpenter, Horner, & Bernerth (2012), meta-analysis, justice scholars have primarily focused on the study of the *level* of justice climate. This construct refers to the degree to which unit members believe that their group has been treated fairly (Naumann & Bennett, 2000) and is normally operationalized as the mean of the individual perceptions of the unit (Chan, 1998). After examining more than a decade of research, Whitman and colleagues observed that the level of justice climate is related to several workplace outcomes, including unit-level performance, attitudes, processes, and withdrawal.

To further our understanding of unit-level justice, scholars have also studied the role of justice climate *strength* (Li et al., 2015). This construct refers to the degree of agreement that exists within the unit (Naumann & Bennett, 2000). It is generally operationalized by a within-unit variability statistic as the standard deviation (e.g., Roberson, 2006). Whitman and colleagues examined the effect of climate strength as a moderator of the relationship between justice climate and workplace outcomes. As they reported, justice climate strength moderated the effect of climate on those outcomes in such a way that greater agreement within the unit resulted in stronger relationships. Despite the novelty of peer justice climate, research has already examined peer justice climate strength. Based on previous findings by Colquitt, Noe, and Jackson (2002), Cropanzano et al. (2011) wanted to test if the variation in peer justice climate agreement influenced teamwork processes and outcomes. Results showed that peer procedural justice strength was related to task and interpersonal teamwork processes and, in turn, to team task performance and team helping behaviors. Peer interpersonal justice strength was not related to either of these variables.

Research on climate strength has helped scholars to better understand justice as a group phenomenon. Still, climate strength is not sufficient to fully address the distribution of within-unit perceptions (González-Romá & Hernández, 2014). Take the example described by González-Romá and Hernández (2014) and see Figure 5.3, which shows the distribution of individual climate scores for two hypothetical teams. In the team on the left "there are two subgroups with dissimilar views on the climate dimension involved, reflected by the low and high scores presented by each subgroup"; and "in the other team, there is only one grouping of scores that shows a clear tendency of convergence toward the group mode" (González-Romá & Hernández, 2014, p. 1042). In spite of these clear different patterns, the mean (climate level) and the standard deviation (climate strength) of both these groups is the same (3.0 and 1.0, respectively). This is obviously misleading, as the pattern of justice perceptions is quite distinct for each group. Fortunately, climate level and climate strength are not the only concepts related to climate emergence that can be applied to unit-level research (Brown & Kozlowski, 1999; Kozlowski & Klein, 2000).

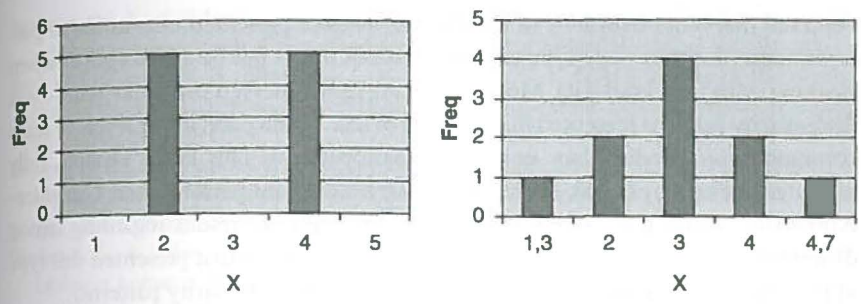

FIGURE 5.3 Two hypothetical samples of climate perceptions with identical means of 3.0 (i.e., they show the same climate level). These samples also have equal within-group standard deviations, both of which are 1.0 (i.e., they possess the same climate strength). As depicted by González-Romá and Hernández (2014, p. 1043), the *X* axis represents team members' climate scores on a 1-to-5 scale, whereas the *Y* axis represents the frequency of observed scores.

In addition to examining the level of a climate, which focuses on the magnitude of the climate, and the strength of a climate, which focuses on the degree of within-unit agreement, scholars should also consider the *uniformity* of a climate. Climate uniformity refers to the pattern or form represented by the distribution of the climate perceptions within a work unit (González-Romá & Hernández, 2014). While both climate level and climate strength assume that perceptions emerge as a uniform climate following a single model pattern (Chan, 1998), climate uniformity does not (Brown & Kozlowski, 1999). Climate uniformity distinguishes between uniform and non-uniform climates. A uniform climate would be represented by a single-modal pattern (i.e., one cluster comprising all the perceptions of all unit members; as an example, see the team on the right in Figure 5.3). A non-uniform climate would be represented by a multimodal or highly skewed pattern (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000); see the team on the left in Figure 5.3.

Based on dispersion theory, non-uniform climates can be divided into two patterns: *strong dissimilarity patterns* and *weak dissimilarity patterns* (Brown & Kozlowski, 1999). The former are characterized by distinct clusters or sub-groupings, each of which presents a high degree of agreement or strength, and each of which is located at different points in a scale. For instance, consider a situation in which 50% of unit members agree that they are treated fairly by management (sub-group 1) and the remaining 50% of unit members agree they are treated unfairly (sub-group 2). In teams or units with weak dissimilarity patterns, it is not possible to find more than one sub-group with high strength while the remaining members are distributed in such a way that fail to form a unique cluster.

González-Romá and Hernández (2014) conducted a study to examine the role of uniformity by focusing on team organizational support. Interestingly, they

observed that more than 30% of the climates assessed presented non-uniform patterns, suggesting that these type of configurations might not be an exception when working with unit-level data. More important, they observed that units with weak dissimilarity patterns presented higher levels of task conflict and lower levels of team communication quality than uniform climate patterns. This latter variable fully mediated the effect of weak dissimilarity patterns on team performance. González-Romá and Hernández argued that the lack of significant results regarding strong dissimilarity patterns was due to the small number of teams that presented this type of pattern (i.e., most non-uniform climates had weak dissimilarity patterns).

Since the existence of sub-groups within a unit can have important consequences over the units' outcomes (Carton & Cummings, 2013), we believe this line of research can be a great contribution to unit-level justice. And given that the source of justice in peer justice climate lies within the team and not outside the team, as is the case for justice climate, we believe this contribution can be even greater for our understanding of peer justice climate. Future research that addresses the study of non-uniform climates may review the paper by González-Romá and Hernández (2014) and the easy-to-follow guidelines they proposed.

Conclusion

In spite of the few studies that have examined peer justice climate, it is clear this work-group phenomenon has important effects beyond those of justice climate, which highlights the importance of authority-based sources. Coworkers are becoming more and more important at work, and that trend is not going away. In this sense, peer justice climate offers a unique possibility to address this journey. Noteworthy is that the available empirical findings show strong and consistent results: peer justice climate and justice climate are distinguishable by employees and, more important, seem to behave differently. Moreover, different theoretical models addressing the question *Why does justice matter?* suggest that peer justice climate has different things to offer than justice climate.

Even though there are a number of possibilities in which peer justice climate research could contribute to our understanding of unit-level justice, we have focused on two. First, we proposed to add peer justice climate to the growing literature addressing the joint interaction between sources of unit-level justice. Second, we proposed to move beyond the conventional focus on climate level and strength and examine the role of climate uniformity on peer justice climate. We hope that these ideas further encourage scholars and practitioners to help develop our knowledge about unit-level justice and particularly peer justice climate.

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