# One Justice or Two? A Model of Reconciliation of Normative Justice Theories and Empirical Research on Organizational Justice

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**Abstract** Management scholars and social scientists investigate dynamics of subjective fairness perceptions in the workplace under the umbrella term "organizational justice." Philosophers and ethicists, on the other hand, think of justice as a normative requirement in societal relationships with conflicting interests. Both ways of looking at justice have neither remained fully separated nor been clearly integrated. It seems that much could be gained and learned by more closely integrating the ethical and the empirical fields of justice. On the other hand, it may simply not be possible to bridge the divide between the subjective empirical and the normative prescriptive justice as both fields pose different questions and rely on different assumptions and methods. In this paper, we propose a "reconciliation" model, as a third way of considering justice in the workplace, taking into account normative and psychological issues pertaining to justice. Through applying a reconciliation model, we provide a new way of looking at the interconnections between justice philosophy and organizational justice that could advance future research in both fields. Our model also implies that justice researchers can and should be concerned with the moral implications of their own subject of research.

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## Introduction

Justice falls under the category of "thick ethical concepts," which are concepts that combine facts and values (Alzola 2011; Putnam 2002). For example, when we speak about a just distribution this has clear normative connotations, but it can also refer to fairness perceptions, in a descriptive sense. Accordingly, there are two main research approaches to justice. The first approach is developing and using philosophical theories to prescribe "what justice must be." Thus, the role of the justice researcher in this tradition is to define how "truly" just actions must look like (Aristotle 2000; Pieper 1972; Rawls 1971, 2003; Sandel 1982; Sen 1992). Justice is seen as something objective, and it has the purpose of making the world a better place. The second approach is investigating justice as a subjective experience. Here, the main objective is to understand what people perceive to be just and how they react to it (Cropanzano et al. 2007; Folger and Skarlicki 2001; Greenberg and Wiethoff 2001; Lind 2001). This second approach is descriptive, explaining causes and predicting effects and is the approach taken in the field of organizational justice.

Organizational justice is a field of research that has evolved through empirical enquiry. Studies have focused on perceptions of and reactions to specific aspects of organizational decisions and have typically differentiated among the fairness of outcomes, procedures, interpersonal treatment, and information (see for instance, Colquitt et al. 2005a; Greenberg 1990b). But the foundations of the field have borrowed heavily from philosophical approaches. For example, Adam's equity theory (Adams 1965) argues that

people compare their own ratios of output and input with those of others in order to decide whether what they receive is what they think they ought to receive. Indirectly, this theory draws on Aristotle's concept of merit. A second and more recent example is fairness theory, which acknowledges that people judge whether something is unfair or unjust by comparing reality with their "ought to be" standards (Folger and Cropanzano 2001). In this sense, the theory acknowledges the central role of ethical reasoning but treats the content of the ethical reasoning as a "black box."

In ethics and philosophy, on the other hand, justice has been studied as a central requirement for a good society (Aristotle 2000; Finnis 1980). Philosophers argue that clear justice norms for distributing goods and responsibilities are the foundation of a functioning society that can provide high levels of common good and happiness to its members (Rawls 2003). Ethics researchers have also acknowledged that justice cannot be considered a fact but rather it is an ideal state of affairs within a society and an organization. This stream of research has shown little concern for what people think is fair and whether the average person would be willing to or even capable of following the justice ideals prescribed. This normative research thus remains in the "ought to" type of reasoning and does not attempt to describe "what is."

While each of the two streams of justice research has continued to flourish and develop, there has been little interconnection and cross-fertilization between them since early organizational justice theorists drew on some of the core justice concepts developed by philosophers. For example, in the 1970s, Thibaut and Walker introduced the concept of procedural justice in courtroom contexts, drawing on notions of justice from the Roman legal tradition. Both Adams and Thibaut and Walker thus link perceptions with a sense of normative justice: Adams, by investigating whether people's perception of justice is aligned with the Aristotelian notion of merit, and Thibaut and Walker by examining how the perception of justice depends on procedures. It is quite clear that even if specific outcome distributions or procedures are perceived as just, and lead to positive reactions, they may not be just in the normative sense.

Other recent attempts to connect the fields of empirical psychological and normative philosophical justice have been made by several organizational justice scholars interested in the motives for caring about justice (e.g., Folger 2001). These researchers have focused on the role of moral or ethical justice as a psychological motive. They show, for example, that people care about justice even if they have nothing personally to gain from it (Turillo et al. 2002). That is, they argue that people see justice as a moral value and not just as a means of achieving selfish ends in the workplace.

Singer's (2000) research is another rare exceptions trying to include both traditions: she studies both people's subjective beliefs about what ought to be ethical and just and what people

judge as actually being ethical and just. In a survey study of three different groups (managers, students, and the general public, respectively), she asked what respondents perceive ethical work behavior "ought to be" and how they perceive ethical work behavior actually "is." Singer concluded that people's subjective "ought" thinking is close to theoretical and philosophical normative theories, when considering the five normative criteria of "justice," "utility," "right," "care," and "principle." The study also suggested that managers usually think they are implementing justice the way they ought to. In contrast, when the students and the general public were asked about managerial behavior, they reported that they believed managers actually acted differently from how managers ought to, to be just. Singer's study thus illustrates the interplay between subjective justice perceptions from different perspectives with normative ideas of justice.

What all of the studies reviewed above have in common is that they draw on concepts from philosophical/ethical justice research, but remain firmly grounded in an empirical social science paradigm that observes human behavior and looks for cause and effect predictions. Naturally, these types of study cannot say anything about what is the "right" moral conception of justice. As has been pointed out by numerous ethicists, an "ought" cannot be inferred from an "is" (Greenberg and Bies 1992).[1] Despite this limitation, these studies can make an important contribution to both fields. For empiricists, understanding which normative theories individuals and groups adhere to can improve prediction, while for ethicists, studies such as these can demonstrate behavioral and perceptual constraints to justice ideals.

In short, some social scientists have usefully drawn on philosophical concepts of justice; and many have called for doing more of this type of integrative work. Greenberg and Bies (1992), for example, examined peoples' concerns about fairness and reviewed empirical evidence suggesting that the underlying philosophical premises of some theories (e.g., premises behind utilitarianism) seem to be overly simplistic regarding human nature. They therefore called for more empirical evidence to promote debate to further develop philosophical theories. Another call for cross-fertilization has been made by Hosmer and Kiewitz (2005) who propose an extension of the concept of "organizational justice" through normative stakeholder theory. The moral principles of normative stakeholder theory, they suggest, should ultimately be testable with specific hypotheses and by operationalizing these hypotheses using well-established behavioral constructs.

The challenges, however, in creating such integration between empirical justice research in the social sciences,

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[1] Here "is" refers to subjective perceptions and preferences. We do not discuss in this article how "ought" may be inferred from general and "objective" knowledge about human nature. For a fascinating classic on this question, see Fromm (1947/2003).

and normative philosophical justice reasoning, are formidable. Consider for example the recent review of organizational justice and behavioral ethics by Cropanzano and Stein (2009). Even though organizational justice and behavioral ethics are two empirical fields in the social sciences, both dominated by researchers with training in psychology, Cropanzano and Stein point out how integration between these fields is complicated by different assumptions and different foci of interest. For example, one of the differences between behavioral ethics and organizational justice is, according to Cropanzano and Stein, that organizational justice research has assumed individuals are motivated for selfish reasons and by social identities, while behavioral ethics has usually focused on internalized moral convictions and duties and on moral identities. If integration with the empirical field of behavioral ethics is so complicated, how can we hope to integrate organizational justice and normative ethics?

But before we discuss whether integration is feasible, we ask whether it is desirable? How much can be gained by integrating both fields? Should we aim at full integration, where questions of what is normatively just or unjust can be addressed at the same time as questions about behavioral mechanisms?

A wide debate in ethics research has led many researchers and philosophers to argue that full integration between the empirical and the normative sciences does not seem possible, nor is it desirable. In this paper, we suggest a new framework, drawing on recent work by Alzola (2011). In this "reconciliation model," we will argue, it seems both feasible and desirable to continue to work on the intersections between organizational empirical and normative philosophical justice. We hope that this model will spark a new research agenda of reconciliation between organizational justice and philosophical justice research, and believe that such research has the potential to help solving managerial problems.

## The Case for Cross-Fertilization Between Organizational and Normative Justice

Following empirical research without moral reasoning can have harmful effects. For example, by teaching instrumental types of reasoning to future practitioners, scholars can increase instrumental motivation in the real world. Even if the intent of the teacher is not to change the students' type of reasoning, self-fulfilling prophecy effects mean that students are likely to adopt the instrumental type of reasoning they were taught (Ferraro et al. 2005; Ghoshal 2005; Rocha and Ghoshal 2006). By detaching ourselves from the ethical consequences of our theories, scholars may be teaching how to continue doing bad things better. This is why some organization scholars have argued that social scientists have the obligation to engage in "practical wisdom," which includes value judgments (Flyvbjerg 2001). In the field of organizational justice, the divide between descriptive empirical science and ethical reasoning is particularly glaring because there is such a richness of ethical reasoning behind what is just.

Investigating perceptions alone cannot replace reflection and discussion about justice. For example, think of a group of employees that is not allowed representation, works in dangerous conditions, and is underpaid. Empirically, we may find that this particular group perceives that procedural justice is upheld, as long as they are given voice without any real input, that they are happy with their salaries, as long as we do not tell them what the company earns through their labor, and that they do not worry about safety, as long as we make them wear useless paper masks. In this case, managing the group's perception of justice without addressing the underlying issues of power, underpayment, and safety is unlikely to be judged as just by most researchers, ethicists and by most lay people.

On the other hand, it might be just as misinformed to ignore subjective perceptions of justice and strictly follow a normative justice theory. Such a dogmatic approach could create a lot of unhappiness if the normative approach chosen was not aligned with the preferences of those concerned or if those concerned were simply not able to follow the prescriptions. Brief (2012) gives the example that most people agree it is the right thing to help one's family first before helping strangers, yet there is very little support for this type of belief in ethical theory. Furthermore, different ethical theories often provide conflicting answers to dilemmas. And in those cases, who is to be the arbiter of which normative theory of justice is the right one? Furthermore, societies evolve in terms of updating the justice of their standards, as well as their normative and legal systems. Social facts at some moment in time (e.g., during apartheid), can be perfectly legal and considered by the majority as just, even if they are normatively unjust. Empirical research by social scientists is useful for finding out what people's reasoning about justice really is and what those who are affected by a decision think is most important and how this changes over time.

In short, we argue that each of the two justice fields can be usefully informed by the other. The question then is how far the integration between both fields can and should usefully go.

## Is Full Integration Between Normative and Empirical Justice Research Possible?

Business ethicists have long debated the question of integration of prescriptive theory and empirics, in general. This discussion has been largely motivated by corporate scandals, which has made the need for integration of normative

ethics into business more pressing. In 1994, a special issue of *Business Ethics Quarterly* focused on the question without reaching general agreement on the question (see for instance, Donaldson 1994; Weaver and Treviño 1994). The discussion between integration believers and separation defenders still continues in several ethicists' forums (Alzola 2011; Hartman 2011; Sandberg 2008).

On the one hand, there are researchers who argue for full integration, often based on the argument that "there is only one world, there should be only one kind of theory about it" (Weaver and Treviño 1994). Proponents of integration believe there can be a single theory that can answer at the same time questions about "what ought to be" and "what actually is." However, proponents of the "separation thesis" (e.g., Donaldson 1994) believe that facts are fundamentally different from values, so questions concerning what ought to happen need to be separated from those that address what is actually happening.

One of the reasons for the lack of an agreement may be that integration is an elusive and rather vague word. It can refer to the theoretical level, conceptual level, or pragmatic level (Weaver and Treviño 1994). For instance, at the conceptual level, integration can be achieved through contrasting and comparing previous research about a very specific part of a concept with other similar studies and by searching for a broader concept that would encompass both ideas at the same time. Another type of integration is achieved when drawing on previous research to see relationships between organizational constructs and through reflecting on ways in which together they can lead to a better understanding of their organizational consequences.

An even deeper type of integration, through meta-theoretical advances, can aim at answering normative and empirical questions at the same time. The underlying idea is that facts and values are not separated in the real world. As Hartman (2011) points out, "many issues that appear to be ethical are in fact economic" (Hartman 2011, p. 5). Applying this argument to justice, he wonders "what happens with something like justice. Does economics have anything reasonable to say about it?" (Hartman 2011, p. 5). He gives the example of economist Michael Jensen who when a student raised a question about justice replied, "Justice? What's that? Show me justice?" Some of the theorists in management have little time for justice, even though justice is in reality one of the factors that decision makers take into account when making decisions that have real world economic impact, because it is a crucial determinant of people's experiences and reactions in organizations. One of the achievements of organizational justice literature has been to demonstrate that indeed people's justice perceptions and judgments can be motivated by self-interest AND have a very clear impact on the bottom line in organizations (Cropanzano et al. 2007). Yet, beyond those instrumental concerns, justice research also shows that people naturally care about justice for its own sake. Thus, neglecting justice in organizations is not only inhuman but also inefficient, because it will not be the most complete picture of reality.

Could fully integrating the research on actual justice experiences and proposals for meaningful justice theories lead to better applied theories of justice in the real world? So far, we do not see any such examples of full integration of different streams of justice research. The promise of integration is that a single theory can address both empirical and normative aspects at the same time, answering simultaneously questions of actual and desirable justice. But even if such theoretical parsimony sounds desirable, it threatens to produce theories that may no longer question current undesirable states of affairs (Donaldson 1994). Following this argument, ethical justice theory could no longer be an objective evaluation tool used to suggest better alternatives, and thus it would lose some of its power.

Whether desirable or not, integration is certainly not easy and perhaps impossible. The fields of empirical and philosophical justice research are separated by more than just different questions. Indeed, they use different methods, standards of evaluation and underlying assumptions.

Reconciliation Between Both Types of Justice Research

Recently, Alzola suggested a "third way" as a solution to the dilemma between integration and separation of empirical and normative research: the "reconciliation project" (Alzola 2011). Importantly, the "reconciliation" proposed by Alzola is not a middle ground between integration and separation. The goal is to respect the strengths and limitations of each of the two types of inquiry, and the boundaries between each of them. Alzola's approach seems particularly pertinent with respect to justice research. Justice has been studied by many disciplines and in many guises; for example, as a social norm in sociology, as a virtue in ethics, as a requirement to guarantee a minimum set of rights or duties in law, and—as discussed above—as a psychological construct in management studies.

Reconciling psychological-empirical and normative-ethical justice research is important for both theoretical and practical reasons. First and foremost, any subjective justice judgment is based on some normative judgment, whereby the individual compares a situation, decision or behavior to an ethical standard they have in mind. Without a better understanding of the normative standards underlying judgment, our understanding of this judgment will be limited. Second, the purpose of implementing justice and addressing injustice in organizations cannot be a purely perceptual one but instead must also be interested in the

real underlying problems of justice. In this sense, perceptions of justice are not the only focus of interest but can serve as a diagnostic device and fire detector, as justice judgments represent individual evaluations of actual social arrangements regarding justice—and it is these real social arrangements that should also be the focus of just management. Before we develop our model of justice reconciliation, we give a very brief and non-exhaustive overview of the two fields. Our overviews remain at a high level as this paper is focused on a meta-argument, namely the reconciliation between two fields, rather than on the reconciliation of a specific theory with specific empirical findings. First, we revise some of the main theoretical approaches to normative justice and second we provide an overview of the main empirical findings of organizational justice.

## Normative Philosophical Approaches to Justice

Normative justice theories are concerned with what is just, with justice being an ideal. The two main questions asked by justice philosophers have been (1) what is a just society? and (2) what is a just person? Both streams of research have considered justice to be an important requirement for either individuals or for a complete society. As such, each of the two groups also explains why justice is important. A connection between both streams is that people living in a just society can achieve greater personal development and thus may become personally more just.

### What is A Just Society and Why is Justice Important for Society?

An important difference between justice theories is whether they are searching for an ideal of justice, or whether they are more "practical," focusing on societal and personal development through the exercise of practical wisdom. One of the first philosophers to point out the importance of justice in society was Plato (2006), based on Socrates' dialogs in the *Republic*. Particularly in Book VI Plato considers justice to be the most important requirement in social life to achieve goodness. According to Plato, justice is based on two principles: the principle of Functional Reciprocity and the principle of Proportional Equality (Heinaman 1998). Functional Reciprocity is concerned with equal rights of people to the benefits that they require to perform their role in society. Proportional Equality states that justice exists when goods are distributed to people according to their merit or desert.

Plato's pupil, Aristotle, proposed that justice in societal systems was necessary to facilitate the happiness of the citizens, which he considered the ultimate end of society (Aristotle 2000). Following Aristotle ideas, new

Aristotelians base justice on "phronesis" (Aristotle's practical wisdom) and propose that conflicts are necessary to fight against established ideas of justice that have been shown to produce unfair arrangements for minorities. They stress context dependence more than Aristotle did and argue that what is just will also depend on local circumstances (Chomsky and Foucault 1974; Foucault 1988). Contemporary Aristotelian researchers like Finnis (1980) also suggest that justice must include the respect of human rights, to permit people to improve their condition and fully develop in that society.

In summary, while Plato focused on justice as an abstract ideal, Aristotle's school of justice suggested specific systems and mechanisms that would lead to justice by proposing practical wisdom as the way to implement justice through government. Even contemporary philosophers may be classified according to whether they have an "ideal" or a "practical" view of justice (see for a discussion Flyvbjerg 1998).

A second differentiation between theories of a just society is the one between libertarian and utilitarian thought, whereby the utilitarian scientists argue that the consequences of any societal design determine whether the arrangement is just. From the utilitarian perspective, as long as consequences of particular arrangements are good for people, those arrangements are right and just (Bentham 1948). Libertarians argue for minimal state interference and prefer that arrangements be set between individual parties. Justice rights are associated with property rights and can be publicly defended (Locke 1952; Nozick 1974). Libertarians can be seen as ultimately utilitarian because they argue that if the property and contract arrangements are right, they will lead to good consequences for people.

A third classification within normative theories of justice is between those that focus on content and those that focus on procedures (Habermas 1990; Rawls 1971, 2003) or on the content of societal relationships (Aristotle 2000; Pieper 1972). Amongst those concerned with content, there are differences with respect to which contents are the main focus. For example, relationships amongst people, and between people and the state may be the focus (Aristotle 2000; Pieper 1972), or individual justice (which will be discussed in more detail in the next part) may be the main consideration (Finnis 1980; Kant 1981).

The focus on just procedures amongst contemporary justice theorists is relevant for our purpose, as there are obvious parallels to the organizational justice literature, which also has a strong focus on procedures. We therefore briefly review a few of these individual contributions. Rawls for example has suggested that the fairest system would be designed when everyone put their self-interests and differences aside and if everyone decided on the principles of justice behind a "veil of ignorance." Rawls

argues that, under this condition, everyone would agree with a system of equal benefit to all. He defines social justice as the "standard whereby the distributive aspects of the basic structure of society are to be assessed" (Rawls 1971, p. 9). The resulting ideal system of justice is to give equal liberty to everyone, as long as this liberty is compatible with the liberty of others. Economic inequalities are only justified if they occur under conditions of fair equality of opportunity and if they are to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society (*maximin* principle).

Another thinker who focused on just procedures is Habermas (1987, 1990), who proposed that people need to have between subject discussions (inter-subject discussions, using Habermas' words) in order to reach a "rationally motivated agreement" (Habermas 1987). Justice, he argues, is a fundamental part of human social life, and it necessarily involves a process of reciprocal understanding in every society. He states that people should be treated as "homo democraticus," and argues that nothing coerces anyone except the force of the better argument (Habermas 1990). Requirements of Habermas' process of discourse ethics are: all parties must be included; all of them can present and criticize arguments; they must be willing to empathize with each other; they must eliminate power differences; and intentions and goals need to be explicitly recognized. Even if Habermas has been criticized for being a moralist because the process and its rules need to be set in advance, he is also considered a relativist, as what is right and "truth" depends on participants agreement (Flyvbjerg 1998).

Content theories, in contrast, have mainly looked at distributions in their discussion of what is it that makes societal relationships just. Researchers have argued that at least two types of human relationship are to be subject to the requirements of justice: the exchange of goods and the distribution of responsibilities (Spaemann 1989). While the main focus of research in organizations has been on the distributions of goods, responsibilities seem equally important. According to Aristotle, they are to be distributed following relevant criteria of suitability: those who are better prepared for specific responsibilities are the ones who should shoulder them. Pieper (1972) differentiates three possible types of relationships in societies, and hence three types of justice, as commutative (justice between parties), distributive (direction from the community to a member of it), and general (being the direction from the participant to the community in which she participates). This also has been explored in the taxonomy of relationships by Fiske (1991), which argues that not all types of relationships create the same types of obligations and rights and, for that reason, particular types of relationships (e.g., being friends or not), create different expectations and requirements for justice.

The differentiation between content and procedural theories of justice is difficult to make in the classics. Aristotle's justice of distributions is not separated conceptually from the process of deciding about the distribution. Classical theories of justice see the process and the final decision as conceptually interlinked: an unjust process cannot lead to a just outcome (Hervada 2007; Spaemann 1989).[2] Indeed, organizational justice research suggests that subjective perceptions are in line with this: the psychology of the process and the psychology of the outcome are linked (Brockner and Wiesenfeld 1996).

*Justice as a Personal Virtue*

The other main question addressed by normative justice research is what a just person is. Justice has been considered by Plato as the main virtue, the one that enables other virtues to be exercised and that belongs to the human soul (2006). According to this normative reasoning the personal virtue of justice is seen as a precondition for cooperation amongst people. Justice has been described as the main virtue that encompasses and balances the rest (Aquinas 2002; Aristotle 2000) and as a necessary requirement for developing full human potential (Finnis 1980). Generally, the virtue of justice comprises the willingness to act justly at all times (Hartman 2011)—which is of course a tautology because we need to define what acting justly means. Most of the normative theories on justice as a personal virtue focus on defining which aspects of a person's character make this person virtuously just. In his fifth book in *Nicomachean ethics*, Aristotle argued that justice is a virtue that imposes a concern to give every individual what is his by right and to use power justly. He further explains that justice usually is enacted by means of laws that guarantee peoples' rights, but that beyond the mere application of law, personal circumstances also need to be taken into account in decision making. Another important concept is injustice reparation. A virtuous just person is encouraged to repair injustices as a part of performing that virtue of justice (Aristotle 2000). This resonates with recent developments in organizational justice, whereby injustice reparation is an important aspect of managing justice (Cropanzano et al. 2007).

Finnis, a more recent philosopher inspired by Aristotle's ideas, has argued that happiness must be central to the discussion of personal justice (Finnis 1980), but not happiness as a subjective satisfaction of desires and wants. Finnis' idea of happiness is close to the flourishing of

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[2] Notice that in this literature, justice and fairness are not employed interchangeably as they are in the social science literature. An unjust process could lead to a fair outcome, but the outcome would never be just.

humans, and he considers justice to be the means that allows human beings to flourish in any type of activity they might be involved in (Finnis 1980). Finnis follows the tradition of "natural law," arguing that justice as a virtue includes respecting rights that are naturally given and inherent to everybody (i.e., respect others' lives). These natural rights are to be universally and indefinitely valid independently of any particular societal arrangement (Finnis 1980).

References to normative individual justice can also be found in the classics of management. An example is Fayol's seminal book, *General and industrial management*, in which he argues that managerial decision making "demands high moral character, impartiality and firmness" (Fayol 1949, p. 13), and that sanctions need to be decided with a sense of justice (Fayol 1949, p. 21) and "judiciously applied" (Fayol 1949, pp. 23–24).

Even though normative justice philosophers claim to develop timeless, rational and universally applicable theories, they are of course bound by their own values, reasoning and societal context. Aristotle, for example, explained justice as a virtue, but nowadays we cannot agree with all of his viewpoints. He was in a society in which slavery was thought to be good and women were seen as inferior. The changing ethics of society overall are reflected in ethicists' models of justice.

Similarly, philosophers develop their thought over time. For example, when looking at the two main treaties of Rawls (1971, 2003), we find that Rawls' arguments evolved. This change happened through reflection and introspection, not because of empirical findings. Rawls explicitly was trying to be neutral (hence, in his words, rational) when arguing that all of us would choose the same justice principles of justice. Rawls has been criticized for justifying too much the status quo of capitalism, and in doing so using the procedural rationalization called "veil of ignorance." But why would the veil of ignorance lead to the current situation and to a market economy?

On the other side, to many, it is not clear whether Rawls' principles of justice would really find wide agreement. In fact, empirical evidence suggests they would not (Scott et al. 2001). But even if Rawls' principles are not embraced by a majority, they may still be ethically sound—this is a question that the empirical data cannot determine.

So, if empirical evidence regarding individual preferences and perceptions does not allow any conclusions regarding the ethical worth of a normative theory, what is the point in testing this theory? There are at least two good reasons. First, studies can demonstrate that people may not understand the abstract argument of a particular theory. Second, we may find reasons why people do not agree, or why they may not be able to follow a theory even if they understand it. This may in turn help to either rethink the

original theory or refine the arguments of the theory to better convince people of its value. In the field of normative ethics, empirics are indications, not refutations nor confirmations. They are signals of something that is happening and that we need to investigate further. We turn next to examining the main findings in organizational justice empirical research and how they are used to advance knowledge.

## Organizational Justice Findings and Methods

The field of organizational justice is concerned with perceptions of justice from the individual's point of view (or, more recently, the workgroup's point of view), as a psychological construct (Folger 1998; Folger and Cropanzano 1998).[3] The researchers who established justice as a separate field of study came mostly from the fields of industrial psychology and organizational behavior (for a review of the origins of the field, see Greenberg (1990b). But there were also important influences from law and social psychology [see, for instance, Thibaut and Walker's (1975, 1978) studies of procedural justice]. The aim of organizational justice research is not to prescribe what is just but instead to understand the psychology of justice in the workplace. The main questions addressed by organizational justice scholars are: (1) why do people care about justice, (2) how do people judge justice, and (3) what are the effects of (in)justice perceptions? We briefly review research in each of these three areas.

### Why Do People Care About Justice?

Organizational justice scholars have developed several theories to explain why people seem to care so much about justice in organizations and groups that they belong to. The first explanation is that people have an instrumental motive for justice, as justice can reduce uncertainty and help them attain desirable outcomes in the long run (Thibaut and Walker 1975; Tyler 1987). Think, for example, of transparent and unbiased procedures for promotion in an organization. These fair procedures may make it easier for employees to work toward a promotion and to know whether and when they will get one. Incidentally, when marketing their findings of justice research to managers and students, organizational justice scholars appear to primarily appeal to instrumental motives, suggesting that creating fairness perceptions in the workplace saves costs and increases profits (Brockner 2006).

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[3] The concepts of fairness and justice are typically used interchangeably in organizational justice research, both referring to perceptions of justice (Folger and Cropanzano 1998).

A second theory stresses the relational motives that may cause people to care about justice. The relational model (Tyler 1989; Tyler and Blader 2003) explains that people closely monitor how fairly they are treated in the groups they belong to, because fair treatment means that one is an accepted and valued group member. It is important to know one's status in a group, because we need to make decisions as to whether we should cooperate with the group—with the potential for gain, on the one hand, and the risk of exploitation, on the other hand (Lind 2001). Fair treatment indicates full group membership and that it is safe to cooperate.

Only relatively recently have justice researchers added that people may also have moral motivations for their interest in justice. In the moral virtues model, Folger (1998) argues that justice is an important virtue that people value for moral reasons and because they are interested in a meaningful life. Importantly, this view is the first to explain why people care about justice even when doing so offers no apparent personal benefit and involves strangers (Folger 1998). Indeed, several experimental studies lend support to the idea that people are willing to sacrifice gain and to implement justice even when total strangers are involved and even if their own "good deeds" will not be seen by others (Turillo et al. 2002).

It is interesting to note that empirical research shows evidence of moral reasoning concerning justice. This research does not, of course, make any statement as to whether this reasoning is morally right (e.g., is it morally right when people harshly punish an offender because they are morally motivated?). Also, people may change their moral reasoning over time, meaning that moral motivation may lead to different decisions from one day to the next. People learn. This learning in turn can only be understood if we compare people's moral reasoning to some lasting moral theory or standard.

### How Do People Judge Justice?

Much has been written about the different dimensions or aspects of justice that people judge in the workplace. Notably this social–psychological literature uses the terms justice and fairness interchangeably (for the only exception we are aware of, see Fortin and Fellenz 2008), even though the terms justice and fairness are differentiated in other fields such as philosophy (Aristotle 2000) and law or management systems (Cugueró-Escofet and Rosanas 2013). Recent frameworks have differentiated among the justice of outcomes (distributive justice), the decision making process (procedural justice), personal treatment (interpersonal justice), and whether sufficient and timely information was provided (informational justice) (Colquitt et al. 2005b).

Most justice researchers use the conceptualization of distributive justice judgments by Adams (1963, 1965), whose equity theory is based on Aristotle's logic of merit. That is, people estimate whether their own outcomes are just by comparing their own ratio of contributions and outcomes with the ratio of contributions and outcomes that others receive. Even though early justice researchers (e.g., Lerner 1974) have stated that other normative criteria than merit may be used to judge distributive justice (e.g., need, equality), this thought has barely found its way into operationalization of distributive justice in empirical research (see, for example, Colquitt et al. 2001), which continues to equate distributive justice with equity. Clearly, this line of research could benefit from investigating different normative conceptualisations of just allocations.

Similarly, procedural and interactional justice judgments have often been operationalized as the result of specific normative judgments. For example, procedural justice is assumed to be perceived when people are given a voice in the decision making process (Thibaut and Walker 1975) and when they perceive: consistency across persons and over time, absence of bias, accuracy of information, correctability of wrong decisions, and ethicality (Leventhal et al. 1980). This set has been developed through an accumulation of empirical data and without any clear reference to normative procedural justice theories.

Regarding the actual justice judgment process, two different theories have each received support in the literature: *fairness theory* and *fairness heuristics*. Fairness theory suggests that justice judgments are made by hypothetical comparisons of the actual situation with an ideal. That is, in order to judge the current state as unjust, people need to first be able to imagine a better state of affairs (Folger 1986). More specifically, fairness theory holds that people first consider whether there is a possible better state of affairs (Would it be better otherwise?), assign blame if they consider people could have chosen better ways to proceed (Could the perpetrator have acted in a different way?) and finally they introduce the moral dimension of obligation people might have and have failed to follow (should she have acted in a different way?) (Folger and Cropanzano 1998, 2001). This last "should" question acknowledges that people engage in moral reasoning and use moral standards as a benchmark of comparison (Folger et al. 2005). Tests of this theory have so far not tested what the underlying moral benchmarks of the "should" question are.

The second well-supported theory of justice judgments is fairness heuristics theory, following an implicit bounded rationality argument. This theory describes justice judgments as heuristics that form quickly on the basis of the information we get first (Lind 2001; Lind et al. 1993). To make decisions as to whether to cooperate, people need to quickly evaluate the justice of authorities and groups and use

this justice judgment as a proxy for trustworthiness. Once people have created their justice judgment, it remains relatively stable in most situations. More recently, it has been argued that the fairness heuristic is not only important as a proxy for trust, but for dealing with uncertainty more generally. That is, in any situation of uncertainty people draw on justice judgments to reduce uncertainty—even when the uncertainty does not have its origin in unfairness (Lind and Van den Bos 2002). In order to form justice judgments more quickly, the opinion of others helps to form personal judgments, which can lead to conclusions that can reinforce the actual state of affairs without much moral reflection. Thus, Fairness Heuristics Theory also helps to explain several biases found in other literatures, which have been found to apply to justice judgments, for example, primacy effects (Lind et al. 2001) and group polarization effects (Lind et al. 1998). Beyond this, several recent contributions suggest that indeed emotions are an important determinant of justice judgments (Blader et al. 2013). The biases explained by fairness heuristics and the findings from the justice and emotions literature explain how justice judgments may be removed from rational processing, while on the other hand fairness theory suggests that people typically do use moral standards to make their justice judgments.

To conclude, the research on how people make justice judgments has uncovered different aspects of justice that people care about. While the majority of this research has focused on justice judgments from the perspective of the recipient (or the "victim"), recent contributions have also investigated justice judgments from the perspective of bystanders (or "third parties") (for a review, see Skarlicki and Kulik 2004) and from the perspective of the agents or decision makers (see for example, Allinson 1995). While each of these groups may be prone to somewhat different biases when making their judgments, the main dimensions reviewed above seem to apply to all perspectives. Note that the focus in normative ethics has of course been on the agent or decision maker, which remains an under-explored perspective in organizational justice. What also remains under-explored is whether the different justice types (distributive, procedural, interpersonal, informational) are ethically equally important, which is a normative issue. Another normative issue is whether any specific subjective judgment is really normatively justified. For example, when someone perceives injustice because they feel they did not have enough opportunity for input in the decision, is this really a normatively unjust decision?

*What are the Effects of (In)Justice Perceptions, and How can These Effects be Managed?*

Even though operationalizations of distributive justice and the other types have typically been relatively narrow in terms of a small set of typical justice antecedents, research has accumulated impressive evidence regarding the powerful effects of justice perceptions in the workplace. For example, justice seems to build trust (Colquitt et al. 2001) and commitment (Cohen-Charash and Spector 2001; Folger and Konovsky 1989). Justice perceptions can improve job performance (Colquitt et al. 2001), for example through the effectiveness with which workers display job duties, and decrease levels of absenteeism (Lam et al. 2002). Justice researchers have also found links between justice and employee organizational citizenship behaviors and increased altruistic behaviors toward other people (Cohen-Charash and Spector 2001; Fassina et al. 2008). Furthermore, promoting organizational justice has been shown to lower feelings of discrimination (Cropanzano et al. 2005) and reduce stress levels (Judge and Colquitt 2004).

The tenor behind this literature is, of course, that by understanding the cause and effect relationships of justice perceptions in the workplace, effective managers will be able to avoid the negative and costly consequences that injustice perceptions have (Brockner 2006). It is not clear how far managers really take those findings into account when designing policies to promote justice (Greenberg 2009). If they do—does it matter whether justice is managed for instrumental reasons alone? It could be argued that even when employers implement fairer systems for mercenary reasons, these can still lead to real benefits for employees (Greenberg 1990a). This may not always to be the case though—as people's known biases and cognitive shortcuts can also be used to create perceptions of fairness at the lowest possible cost and without much concern for normative justice. But, as reviewed above, justice may be promoted not only for instrumental but also for moral reasons (Folger 2001).

A second and less explored way of managing injustice perceptions is through repairing injustices (Zehr 1998). While the research on repairing injustice perceptions has focused on the victim's point of view (Barclay et al. 2009) recent studies have also pointed out the importance of repairing injustice from the perspective of observers (Cugueró-Escofet et al. 2013). This recent research is important as it accepts implicitly that injustice perceptions cannot always be avoided.

Both types of justice management—creating perceptions of justice and repairing injustice perceptions—need to be studied not only in the descriptive or perceptional domain, but questioned in terms of an ethical-based framework. By addressing perceptions alone, it is not clear whether underlying injustices are really solved or whether, in a worst case scenario, additional injustice may be created. If used in a cynical way, the above findings could help managers to manipulate fairness reasoning of subordinates with the intention of creating better results for themselves,

without any real social improvement (see also Fortin and Fellenz 2008).

## Separation, Integration, and Reconciliation for Justice Research

As stated in the introduction, this paper is about the challenging task of integrating prescriptive and descriptive inquiries. Above, we discussed how empirical research over the past 30 years has made great advances in explaining why people care about justice, how they judge justice and how they react to perceived (in)justice. In turn, these findings have been used to advance managerial recommendations for the management of justice perceptions in organizations. But, at the same time, this stream of research cannot tell practitioners how appropriate different types of reasoning might be when the purpose is to improve real justice. It would seem a good task for future theorists to use the findings summarized above in conjunction with moral theory, to suggest ways to improve the moral reasoning of justice in organizations. This needs to be done, taking into account the reality of how mental processes occur, while also having an idea of how justice ought to be in a normative sense.

On a positive note, the empirical research of organizational justice motives suggests that managers may have a moral motivation for justice that goes beyond instrumental motives. Researchers and teachers can appeal to this moral motive, openly acknowledging the important role of ethical reasoning. Ethical considerations are the proper way to limit which theories are applicable and which ends and means may be desirable. However, the possible best alternative may not actually be seen in reality and may not conform to people's preferences. At the same time, we need to be critical about how people actually enter into moral reasoning. Empirical evidence needs to be taken into account if solutions to real world problems are to be found. In short, we reject full separation of empirical and normative justice. But what is the alternative to separation?

Weaver and Treviño (1994) propose three possible degrees of integration of empirical and normative research: "parallel," in which integration is not possible, "symbiotic," in which integration is instrumental and finally "integrative," in which there is a need of deeper merging "prima facie distinct forms of inquiry, involving alterations or combinations of theory, meta-theoretical assumptions and methodology" (Weaver and Treviño 1994, p. 129).

Regarding the justice literature, an issue of parallel integration seems to be that prescriptive questions and descriptive questions cannot be answered in the same way. Empirical studies cannot tell us what justice should be, and philosophical theory cannot tell us how people actually make justice judgments in reality. Clearly, the two literatures have focused on different questions, as reviewed above, and each have used methods and approaches suitable for the questions they addressed.

Despite this, there seem to be some possibilities for symbiotic integration, which involves empirical research drawing on normative reasoning but without questioning critically the consequences of using that normative construct in empirics. This is happening when we say people care about justice because they are moral beings, but we do not provide a specific way of including morality in current models of people's motivations. For example, fairness theory explains that people draw on moral "ought to" judgments, but does not dwell on the content of these.

For the last level of integration, Weaver and Treviño (1994) differentiate among three possible ways this integration could occur. The first one is "conceptual importation," meaning that one field of inquiry invokes basic concepts of another field, for feeding the framework of the first field's theorizing. We can find conceptual importation in Adam's equity theory (Adams 1963, 1965). Adams drew on prescriptive arguments following Aristotle's work in *Nicomachean ethics* and applied them to the empirical arena of relative deprivation theory.

The second one is "theoretical reciprocity," whereby an explanatory framework incorporates both empirical and normative issues at the same time. An example of integration in the conceptual domain can be found between concepts of distributive and procedural justice. In philosophy, a requirement for the outcome of substantial justice is that the decision procedure follows standards of justice. This is to say that an outcome is only considered just if it is achieved through a just process. In empirics, perceptions of injustice regarding outcomes and procedures have both been found to be relevant. In a recent study, Hartmann and Slapnicar (2007) show evidence suggesting that perceptions of procedural justice are in fact a necessary condition to get to perceptions of distributive justice. They suggest (in line with normative research) that even if people are concerned with both procedures and outcomes, it is not clear whether we can say outcomes are just if procedures are not. This is new in the empirical literature, which so far has considered both as if they were fully independent and could be varied orthogonally in experiments. We argue that this development could in fact lead to theoretical reciprocity, incorporating both empirical and normative issues regarding the interplay between procedural and distributive justice at the same time.

Finally there is "theoretical unity," in which the distinction between the normative and empirical is rejected as methodologically and meta-theoretically unstable (see Weaver and Treviño 1994). We have not found, in the justice literature, examples of integration of "theoretical unity." As discussed above, it is not clear whether such integration is possible or even desirable. As Alzola

suggests, "what people believe or do is different from substantive moral claims" (Alzola 2011, p. 30). Indeed, it seems impossible to design experiments that test whether giving voice is morally right or whether biased procedures are morally wrong. We need to evaluate if some behaviors or business practices are right or wrong and we need to keep this "logically differentiated from the causal forces that explain or predict such practices or behaviours" (Alzola 2011, p. 30). Similarly, normative theories cannot be assessed based on their predictive power. In fact, normative reasoning can include ways of predicting but, as they are based on the long run assessment of some remote future, it is difficult to stress that some reasoning is right only because it predicts short-term effects. Therefore, Donaldson suggests that the full project of integration is like attempting to combine triangularity and circularity (Donaldson 1994). If we integrate both inquiries, we lose the particular identity associated with each and then we cannot have the same valuable findings from the different types of questions both inquiries pose. This is why we argue that reconciliation, based on the theory by Alzola (2011) is not only a more viable but also a more desirable option than full integration.

## Depicting a Model of Reconciliation for Justice Theories and Research

The fundamental argument underlying Alzola's suggestion for reconciliation is that "we cannot both understand causal relationships and assess morally relevant behavior using the same set of premises. We must recognize the limitations that these approaches reciprocally place on each other" (Alzola 2011, p. 32). This is exactly the dilemma that proponents of the justice theories are facing. We have argued that both of these streams are crucial, as justice is overall an ethical concept, but, at the same time, justice is a psychological construct and a sociological aspect of systems in any type of social institution.

Specifically, Alzola proposes that a field of normative inquiry and a field of empirical inquiry differ along several dimensions, namely the questions asked, the object of study (in his words, language), the methods used, the view of human nature, and the goal (or how to evaluate whether it is a useful study). He then shows general differences along each of these dimensions and argues that both fields cannot be fully integrated, but that they naturally inform each other and pose boundaries for each other.

We build on this model in several ways. First, we apply this general model to a specific domain, namely justice. In doing so we use the table depicted in Alzola's paper (on p. 25), and we adapt it to our endeavor by examining the "Questions," "Objects of study," "Methods used," "Assumptions about

human nature," and "Goals" of descriptive versus normative justice. The questions that descriptive justice research asks are about "is," and about what ought to be justice in the case of normative theories of justice. The objects of study are perceptions for descriptive justice scientists, and conducting data analyses of these perceptions is the method of study. Normative justice studies in terms of good or right, and bad or wrong, and employs conceptual analyses and rational critique. For descriptive justice, human nature is deterministic, whereby justice dynamics are applied to people and therefore can be easily managed. For the normative approach, on the other hand, human nature involves autonomy, which implies that justice can affect people, but they can in turn change how they use justice, look at justice or are affected by justice. The overarching goal of descriptive justice theories appears to be improved managerial effectiveness through the management of justice dynamics. For the normativist approach, people and justice are tightly interlinked, which means that theories of justice are there to help to provide a reflective equilibrium between how justice ought to be and the actual beliefs about justice that people have.

Second, we have added two dimensions to Alzola's model. The first is "Perspective," which we consider to be subjective in the descriptive justice and objective in the normative justice. This is linked to the point regarding "Human nature," which (almost paradoxically) in the subjective perspective is deterministic, as it is based on facts observed that lie beyond the human will. Whereas in the objective perspective, "Human nature," is seen as more autonomous, as it is considered that it can evolve using the will to a better state of affairs. The second dimension added is "problems with transfer of findings," regarding what happens when we transfer normative findings directly to descriptive justice or empirical findings to normative justice. Specifically, when trying to transfer empirical findings to normative reasoning regarding justice we can incur the natural fallacy, whereby something is seen as right simply because it is the current state of affairs. If we try to transfer normative justice and we impose its prescriptions to the real world we may preclude the further examination of what is happening and risk to enter into dogmatic thinking (See Table 1).

Furthermore, we go beyond Alzola's theorizing by explicitly considering the role of time, and therefore, the role that learning plays in how to use empirical findings and normative theories of justice. Finally, we present a graphical representation of this model and a possible implementation, showing the specific roles empirics and normative inquiries must take in terms of applying justice in organizations (see Fig. 1, which will be described in more detail below).

The purpose of our model of justice reconciliation is threefold: First, it shows the importance of studying

**Table 1** Descriptive and normative justice

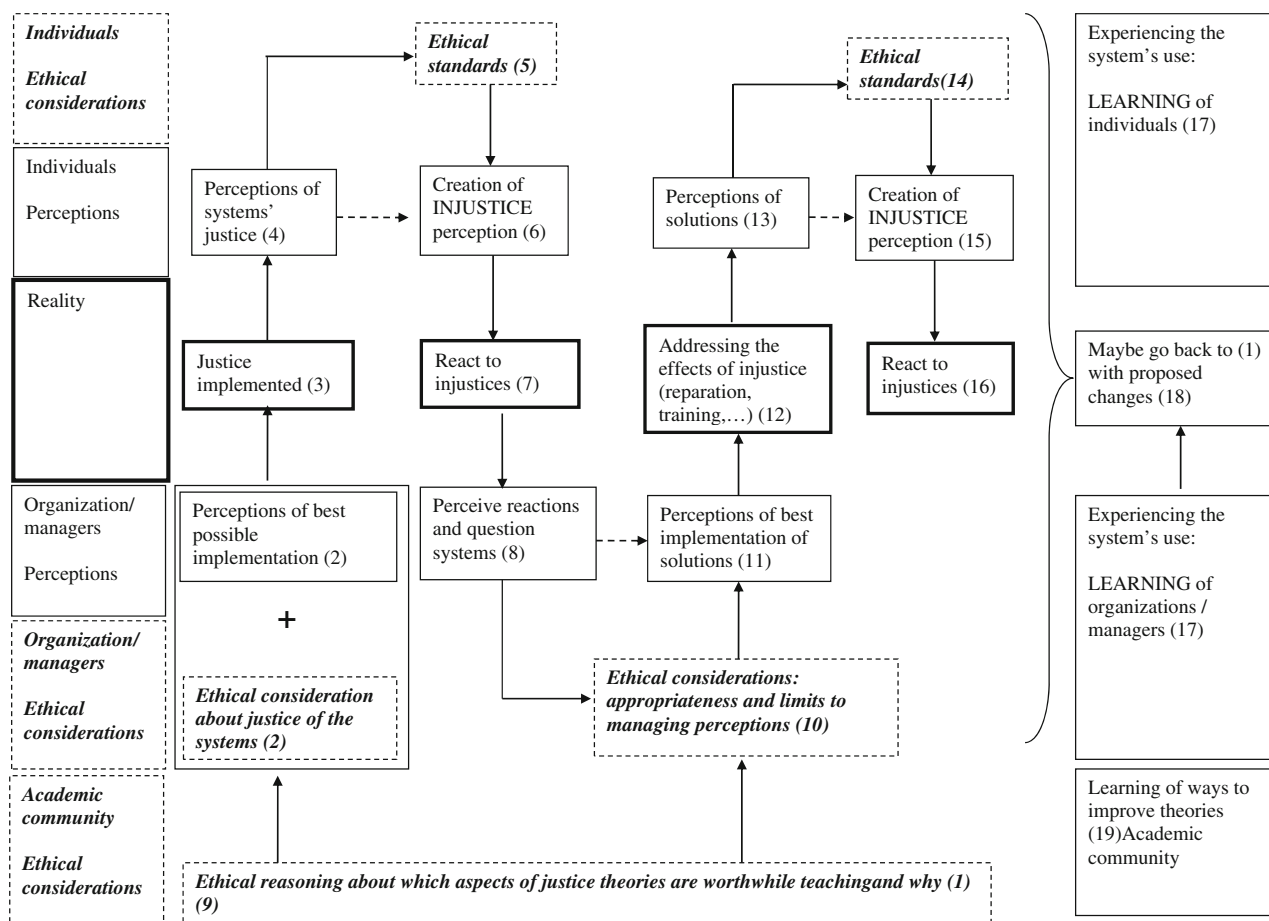|  | Descriptive justice | Normative Justice |
|---|---|---|
| Question | Is | Ought to be |
| Object of study (language) | Perceptions of justice, justice judgments | Just (good and right)/Unjust (bad and wrong) |
| Perspective | Subjective | Objective |
| Methods used | Testing hypotheses with data | Conceptual analysis and rational critique of moral judgments around justice |
| Human nature | Deterministic | Autonomy |
| Goal (evaluation) | To improve managerial effectiveness through the management of justice dynamics | To provide reflective equilibrium between proposals of normative justice and our considered judgments and beliefs about justice |
| Problems with transfer of findings (1) | If transferred to normative: natural fallacy | If transferred to descriptive: dogmatism |
| Problems with transfer of findings (2) | Empirical evidence trying to suggest inadequacy of normative theory (wrong) | Normative grounds trying to assess the existence of some empirical evidence (wrong) |



**Fig. 1** Mechanisms of generating injustice perceptions: reconciling normative and descriptive justice approaches

perceptions, as we need to know about people's experience and learn how they might react. Second, the model points out the different stages where perceptions could be improved and managed (including reparation) and depicts

ways of entering into possible modifications of the system (e.g., modifying rules, applying some discretionary solutions, among others). But, most importantly, imposing a limit to the subjective perceptual domain, the model shows

that the different aspects of the perceptual domain (knowing perceptions, managing them, and modifying the system) need to be informed with a conscious and in-depth analysis of the ethical dimension of the consequences of those policies implemented. Are those policies and actions going against a sound concept of justice? Are they aligned to it? Looking at perceptions may depict the real state of affairs, but does not necessarily lead to ways of managing these perceptions in a way that is ethically appropriate. Perceptions may show a picture of reality or possible ways of improvement, but ethical justice reasoning needs to set limits on the way those perceptions are to be managed, and may suggest even more radical ways of improvement by departing from the observable. We argue that on this level academics can and should play an important role, as they make knowledge available to managers. They are the ones who choose, amongst other things, which theories they will teach to executives and future executives.

No empirical research is needed to support normative reasoning; just because a current type of distribution is dominant in practice does not make it normatively just. When normative reasoning suggests that women are equal to men in terms of deserving the same rewards, one cannot argue that "research does not support this normative reasoning." "Ought to" can never be inferred following a set of "is" premises. On the other hand, empirical findings may discover a limit to what can normatively be expected from people. So, while ethics needs to be critical of reality and may propose sound changes to current states of affairs, the ethical "ought" needs to include the possibility of "can." We cannot ask people to become an ideal type that does not correspond to what they can realistically achieve. For example, people's justice judgments will underlie certain biases, some of which we reviewed above. But being realistic does not require accepting a worse version of human beings than the best version they could become, only based on the fact that we cannot see it realized in the world today. Not every unrealized "ought" is an ideal impossible state—it can perfectly be a realizable possible future state, which has not been realized yet. We cannot preclude improvement of our theories (Fortin and Fellenz 2008).

Following the previous arguments and looking at the managerial level, we further argue that managers cannot escape from assuming the ethical implications when choosing between different avenues of decision making related to justice implementation. The problem of structuring decisions, or framing the decision, is an ethical problem (Bastons 2008). Choosing among given alternatives is different than deciding which alternatives to consider and include in the decision. And managers not only choose between given routes but are also responsible for their own framing. It is up to managers to include the

consideration of ethical and sound justice in their decision making, rather than considering subjective impression management and instrumentality alone. Empirical justice research supports that people are generally capable and willing to engage in moral justice reasoning. In some cases, managers may shy away from their natural instinct to engage in normal justice reasoning because their training or the organization has taught them to limit themselves to instrumental thinking.

Our full model thus takes into account different actors (see Fig. 1): First, there are those who react to justice implementation (we label them individuals—the justice literature might have described them as victims or as employees). Second, there are those who proactively act to implement systems and procedures and who make decisions regarding allocations (we label them as organizations and managers). We also have added a third actor, the academic community, which can provide different rationales that guide those in charge of managerial responsibilities.

Furthermore, we differentiate between the levels of ethical considerations and perceptions for these actors. For managers and individuals, it does not only matter what they subjectively experience (perceptions) but also which normative-ethical framework they apply in thinking through their experiences (as implied for example in fairness theory, which was reviewed above). As for academics, who play an outside advisory role in our model, we have introduced the subject of ethicality and specifically the influence on the ethicality of managers. Finally, going beyond people's subjective experience and normative standards, we have also included the level of reality, in which we include the actual implementation of the systems, the implementation of solutions, the specific reaction of individuals, and possibly changes in implementation. And it is about his reality that people form perceptions.

These three actors and different levels make for a complex model. To provide a clearer overview of the model, we have created a figure (Fig. 1) with numbers (in parentheses) that denote the order of the steps in the model in the sequence that we chose to describe these steps. Academics will inform managerial thinking through theory and research (1). Informed by this thinking, managers will be considering what they perceive is the best way to implement any specific plan or decision ("is it going to work?") (2) and taking into account ethical consideration ("Is it just?") (2). Consequent managerial actions create a new reality, as systems and decisions are implemented (3).

What follows is individuals' perceptions of this new reality (4), and—by comparing this reality with moral standards (5), as suggested by fairness theory—they will make a justice judgment regarding the decisions and systems (6). As reviewed above, justice perceptions create real world effects in terms of attitudes and behaviors and even

health outcomes (7). These effects will also be reflected at the organizational level.

Thus, in step 8, managers perceive the reactions to the decisions and systems that they have implemented. The effects they see may need to be addressed. This may be done by engaging in purely instrumental thinking regarding the management of people's perceptions and reactions (jump directly to 11). In this paper, we argue that a more useful way of reacting would be to also take into account the appropriateness and real justice of different options (10) by drawing again from theories of justice (9, as 1), before making the decision to implement which solution (11).

Having decided on a course of action, managers will again implement these solutions in reality (12), triggering the same process of perceptions of the solutions from individuals (13, as 4) who will compare the solution with their ethical standards (14, as 5) to decide whether they perceive injustice (15, as 6). Based on these justice perceptions, they will react (16, as 7).

We could now expect that this cycle will simply repeat endlessly in the same way. But this is not the end of the story. The process generates learning from both the individual and the organization (17). And this learning, from the part of the organization, may lead to partial changes in how the system needs to be implemented (18). Then, it is necessary to gain an understanding from academics of the ethical consequences of applying those theories—in other words, they need to learn ways to improve theories (19). This assessment, which we believe is not currently systematically performed, generates the changes and teachings we think are appropriate in order to create a sound implementation of justice.

The backbone of the present model is that ethical discussion is necessary on all levels. There is a need to discuss which notion of "justice" should prevail, and arguments should be made against and in favor of every specific notion we have in mind about what justice needs to look like. It is only after this discussion that we can truly understand each actor's perceptions and decisions and find ways of implementing real improvement of justice in organizations. Without ethical consideration, justice research can provide tips on how to improve justice perceptions in specific situations, but it will lack reference to a real underlying justice objective and will fail to fully understand important aspects of the justice process which are concerned with making ethical judgments.

In the model, implementation effects are shown following the logic of perceptions. Thus, normative scholars and organizations need to touch base with reality to see how fair specific justice implementations are really perceived to be. Even though this does not imply that the underlying normative justice theory is right or wrong, it shows whether something needs to be done about the perceptions and the implementation—maybe a discourse about what is normative justice needs to be conducted between the parties.

But apart from entering into normative discussion, we cannot as researchers preclude moral commitments. The way we frame our studies depends on our own morality. We can study perceptions with the intention of controlling behaviors, such as to create perceptions of fairness that help managers to take advantage of them (Fortin and Fellenz 2008). Or we can study perceptions with the intention of enhancing justice in organizations, taking into account perception. We should be thinking about the right purpose for doing research and how to improve it (as we have depicted in our model, see step 19), which implies that we regularly take stock and assess how our findings are actually used in practice and what effect they have. We cannot preclude the necessary moral discussion in any step of our theory development and theory testing, and we need to know explicitly which are our moral commitments and underlying assumptions.

## Conclusion and Managerial Implications

Our first conclusion is that when managers consider justice as part of their managerial practice, they need to acknowledge that the concept of justice is deeply rooted in the field of ethics. Thus, the previously descriptively oriented field of organizational justice—even if it has been built on the logic of social sciences—will need to face the challenges that the business ethics field is facing. However, the possible payoff is that managing justice today leads not only to greater efficiency tomorrow, but also to a better organization not limited by the actual state of affairs but open to more radical improvements.

Second, we have argued that full integration of descriptive and normative claims for justice in organizations is not desirable and probably not feasible; yet we feel equally strongly that both fields cannot and should not ignore each other. This is why we suggest that reconciliation, following Alzola's approach (2011) may be the best solution. As such, our approach differs from Weaver and Trevino's "full integration approach," as we think that the benefits of both fields of justice can only be achieved if each can continue to ask different types of questions. This allows us both to understand reality and think of radical improvements. Thus, the intention of our model is not to fully integrate but instead to reconcile the two types of justice by including both normative and descriptive approaches and acknowledging their respective specific roles regarding justice at the level of recipients of decisions, decision makers and academics. Our model points

out the many intersections between both fields of justice in a sequential manner.

As illustrated in the model, we suggest that both approaches are necessary to understand the full picture and to create better frameworks for future justice research. People are affected by perceptions and, at the same time, they reason following their own normative standards of what they consider is soundly just. Those normative standards are learned and actualized by experience and ingrained in every individual as she lives and encounters situations in which justice is central. We suggest that perceptions need to be addressed as they are what create real effects and consequences. But perceptions are generated by people, with different motives (Cropanzano et al. 2001) and who are concerned about ways of behaving more justly, in a learning process, where ethical learning is involved (Rosanas 2008).

The question is: are we ethical beings? If the answer is yes, then we have different motives for caring about justice, including moral motives, and we can grasp a personal sense of what we think ought to be just by following our justice standards. We also update our ethical reasoning based on actual experience of the systems' use. If we deny reasoning around sound justice as a moral matter, then this search is relative to the individual. Hence, cross-fertilizing between psychological and philosophical inquiries can only be done by creating a high level of relativism in the philosophical one and by centering ourselves in perceptions as if there was no difference between desires and desirable futures.

To solve the dilemma between separation and integration of normative and empirical justice, we propose a way of dealing with individual perceptions of justice but, at the same time, include the limits of sound ethical justice. We need to know what exists (justice perceptions) and address it through finding ethical justice arguments that can also take into consideration why those aspects have been or have not been found in the real world, so far. Empirical inquiries can help us to avoid naïve dogmatism in doing so, while philosophical inquiries can help us to be aware of our ingrained normative commitments in our empirical inquiries.

The third and final conclusion is that this model of reconciliation of justice permits a deeper understanding of ways of managing justice perceptions. They can be addressed through injustice reparation and through justice creation. The argument behind reparation is that it is necessary in the short run, to account for system flaws. Small injustices may always occur as no governance mechanism is perfect and neither are the people who are implementing systems. Even small injustices accumulate and create effects if they are not properly solved (Husted and Folger 2004). Creation of justice is necessary to have a long-term

justice standard that allows for a more positive approach to justice. Finally, the system could be proposed for changes and improvements if injustice perceptions persist. But, more importantly, all these corrections (reparation, creation of justice perceptions, and system changes) need to be understood within the limits of sound ethical judgments regarding justice. Perceptions need to be managed in a way that does not address perceptions of injustice alone but looks at the underlying reasons for those perceptions and solves the real problem of injustice, not only the perceptual one.

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