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A Deservingness Model of Procedural Fairness

Justice theories ask the question: how do we come out of a situation feeling satisfied? Specifically, theories of procedural fairness focus on identifying what factors lead us to feel we were treated fairly. The Group-Value Model claims that there are three important factors that lead us to feel satisfied with an outcome: trust, neutrality, and respect (Tyler, 1989). Trust is whether or not we trust the person we are interacting with to look out for our best interests; neutrality is whether or not we believe the person we are interacting with is neutral in their decision making processes; finally, standing is the idea that people care about their standing in a group and look to how they are treated by others to for clues about their standing. According to the Group-Value Model, standing is most important to us and is largely communicated through voice; if we are treated respectfully we will feel we were treated fairly (Tyler, 1989). Essentially, this model boils down to a rather hedonic, economist view as opposed to a justice theory: if you get what you want (respect), you'll be satisfied. To make a model of procedural fairness that actually looks like a justice theory the concept of deservingness could be invoked. Deservingness is the idea that people feel they deserve a certain kind of treatment (Feather, 1999). Feather (1999) proposed a matching hypothesis of deservingness: when people's feelings of deservingness match up with the how they are treated, they will judge procedural fairness as high. A few correlational studies have found that status can lead to feelings of deservingness for respect (Heuer, Blumenthal, Weinblatt, & Douglass, 1998; Diekmann, Sondak, & Barsness, 2007; Heuer & Davids, 2010). High status individuals have been seen to feel they deserve respect, while low status individuals do not feel they deserve respect. What's most interesting about this finding is that, contrary to the Group-Value Model, respect will not be the greatest indicator of procedural fairness. Prior research has found that the relationship between status and deservingness exists when status operationalized as rank (Heuer & Davids, 2010; Diekmann, Sondak, & Barsness, 2007), but one ignored operationalization of status has been prototypicality. Being prototypical of a group means representing the collective values of your group, and studies have shown that highly prototypical group members tend to achieve higher roles in their groups (Hoggs, Hains, & Mason, 1998; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004). A claim could be made for prototypicality being another operationalization of status. In the current study we test the role of status as a moderator of deservingness, and deservingness as a mediator of procedural fairness. Rank and prototypicality were manipulated and a leader of higher or lower status either treated participants respectfully or disrespectfully. Results showed support for a deservingness model of procedural fairness when status was operationalized through rank, but not when through prototypicality.