

Justice Change Matters: Approach and Avoidance Mechanisms Underlying the Regulation of Justice Over Time

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The experience of justice is a dynamic phenomenon that changes over time, yet few studies have directly examined justice change. In this article, we integrate theories of self-regulation and group engagement to derive predictions about the consequences of justice change. We posit that justice change is an important factor because, as suggested by self-regulation theory, people are particularly sensitive to change. Also consistent with self-regulation, we posit that experiencing justice change will influence behavior via separate approach and avoidance systems. Across three multiwave and multisource field studies, we found that justice change predicts employees' engagement in work via perceived insider status along an approach path, whereas it predicts employees' withdrawal from work via exhaustion along an avoidance path, after controlling for the effects of static justice level. Moreover, these approach and avoidance effects are bounded by employees' perception of their employment situation, consistent with a regulatory fit pattern. As expected, employees' perceptions of employment opportunity, which correspond to gains, strengthen the effects along the approach path. Meanwhile, their perceptions of threat of job continuity, which correspond to losses, strengthen the effects along the avoidance path. Importantly, our set of studies highlight the unique influence of justice change incremental to static justice level.

Keywords: organizational justice, self-regulation, change, approach/avoidance, group engagement model

Research conducted over the past 30 years has confirmed the importance of employees' perceptions of fairness (see Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2013; Colquitt & Zipay, 2015). The accumulated evidence shows that employee perceptions of justice in the workplace, which are collectively referred to as organizational justice (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998; Greenberg, 1987), predict various work attitudes and behaviors (German et al., 2016; Lennard et al., in press; Olkkonen & Lipponen, 2006; Zhang et al., 2014). Most of this empirical evidence is based on employees' static perceptions of fairness assessed at a single point in time. Typically, studies have been conducted by measuring or manipulating employees' current fairness perceptions in the laboratory or field and then using them to predict current or subsequent affect, cognition,

or behavior (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009; Colquitt et al., 2006; Johnson & Lord, 2010).

Although the research on static justice perceptions is informative, it paints an incomplete picture of the role of justice at work. This is evidenced by an emerging body of research which suggests that perceptions of justice are dynamic, and that the nature of how they increase or decrease over time has implications for employees' reactions (Colquitt & Zipay, 2015; Fortin et al., 2016; Jones & Skarlicki, 2013). In their review, Fortin et al. (2016) concluded that more attention should be paid to the temporal dynamics of justice perceptions because relationships may manifest differently when changes in justice perceptions are considered vis-à-vis static justice perceptions. For example, although perceiving high levels of justice is generally beneficial in that it prompts favorable reactions from employees (e.g., better performance), if justice perceptions are trending downward over time (e.g., from very high to high), then employees may actually react negatively despite moderately high levels of justice. Indeed, research on self-regulation (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Johnson, Howe, & Chang, 2013) suggests that people are particularly sensitive to change. For example, employees are more satisfied when their initial performance is poorer (Lawrence et al., 2002) or starting salary is lower (Hsee & Abelson, 1991) and gradually increases over time compared to starting with a higher yet stable performance or salary, even though net performance or earnings is higher in the latter case. Thus, the impact of organizational justice may be underestimated when justice change is overlooked (Fortin et al., 2016; Hausknecht et al., 2011).

Fortunately, researchers have begun to consider the change in justice perception. For example, Hausknecht et al. (2011) examined the effects of static justice perceptions vis-à-vis justice change on employees' attitudes and found that justice change predicted job

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satisfaction and commitment above and beyond static justice. Ambrose and Cropanzano (2003) and Kim et al. (2015) similarly observed that change in justice over time explained unique variance in employees' satisfaction and commitment after controlling for the baseline level of justice. Studies have also revealed large proportions of within-person variability in justice perceptions and behaviors, albeit the effects of justice change per se were not examined (Holtz & Harold, 2009; Johnson et al., 2014; Koopman et al., 2020; Lennard et al., in press; Loi et al., 2009; Matta et al., 2014, 2017).

While these initial findings are encouraging, questions remain about the nature and role of justice change. One question concerns the lack of consensus regarding how to incorporate justice change into contemporary theories of justice. To date, researchers have explained the effects of justice change by adapting theories and models from outside the justice literature, such as gestalt characteristics theory (Hausknecht et al., 2011; Rubenstein et al., 2019) and the outcome satisfaction model (Kim et al., 2015). However, the implications of these theories and models for contemporary justice theories have not been fully fleshed out. A second question concerns the lack of knowledge of the mechanisms and boundary conditions associated with justice change and its effects. Prior research established direct relations of justice change with distal work attitudes (Hausknecht et al., 2011; Kim et al., 2015), yet the mechanism underlying the effects of justice change and the corresponding boundary conditions that either strengthen or mitigate these indirect relations remain largely unknown. Finally, a third question concerns the breadth of justice change outcomes. Changes in organizational justice have been linked to work attitudes (e.g., satisfaction and commitment; Hausknecht et al., 2011), yet theoretical and empirical inquiry is needed to ascertain whether the effects of such change also extend to employee behavior. Doing so is important because as Hausknecht et al. (2011) concluded, researchers and practitioners need to understand potential behavioral reactions toward justice change.

To address these unresolved questions, we examine justice change by integrating self-regulation theory with a contemporary justice theory—the group engagement model. Self-regulation signifies the intentional, conscious, and effortful capacity to control one's affect, cognition, and behavior (Lord et al., 2010). According to self-regulation theory, people regulate their behaviors according to the comparison between incoming information from the environment and internal standards and goals (Chang et al., 2010). The group engagement model suggests that a fundamental goal for monitoring justice information is to inform people about their social status in the work group (Anderson et al., 2015; Tyler & Blader, 2000, 2003). The information of status within the group is important in regulating employee behaviors because it helps employees to decide how to invest their resources in the group—whether to embrace cooperation or avoid engagement (Colquitt & Rodell, 2011; Lind, 2001; Tyler & Blader, 2003). Specifically, through the process of self-regulation (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Johnson, Chang, & Lord, 2006), employees monitor change in justice to infer their status in the organization, which guides whether they approach or avoid focal work activities. We therefore examine employees' engagement and withdrawal from work as behavioral consequences of justice change.

People respond to external events, including change, via separate approach and avoidance systems (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Lanaj et al., 2012). According to the group engagement model

(Tyler & Blader, 2000, 2003), justice change sends signals of one's social status, of being either valued or rejected by the organization (depending on the direction of the justice change), which triggers approach and avoidance operations to regulate behavior. An increase in justice signals that one is socially valued, which ensures one's status as an insider within the approach system. A decrease in justice, however, signals that one is socially rejected, which leads to exhaustion owing to continuous monitoring for and coping with threats within the avoidance system. As such, perceived insider status (i.e., seeing themselves as insiders within the organization; Armstrong-Stassen & Schlosser, 2011; Guerrero et al., 2013; Schaubroeck et al., 2017; Stamper & Masterson, 2002) and exhaustion (i.e., fatigue from monitoring for social threats and exploitation; Barclay & Kiefer, 2014; Howard & Cordes, 2010; Johnson et al., 2010) are proximal approach and avoidance mechanisms that explain employees' distal engagement and withdrawal behaviors.

We also consider whether these approach and avoidance effects are bounded by broader perceptions of the work situation. Based on the principle of regulatory fit (Higgins, 2000), when employees' self-regulation processes match the orientation of the situation, they exhibit greater dedication and engagement (e.g., Johnson et al., 2017). Some perceptions of the situation (e.g., employment opportunity) signal opportunities for more desirable work conditions, thereby making approach-based reactions more salient by highlighting gains. Other perceptions (e.g., threat of job continuity) reveal potential risks to preserving current work conditions, thereby leading to more salient avoidance-based reactions by highlighting losses. Thus, we expect that the theorized approach and avoidance processes triggered by justice change will be more pronounced in approach- and avoidance-oriented situations, respectively.

This research contributes to the organizational justice literature in three key ways. First, our study provides consensus (Hollenbeck, 2008) in integrating justice change into existing justice theories. According to our integrated view of self-regulation and the group engagement model, justice change serves as feedback regarding one's social status in the organization, guiding employees to regulate their behavior toward or away from work activities. Self-regulation theory also explains why justice change, above and beyond static justice, is meaningful for employees. Employees are reactive to change because it offers information about goal progress, which helps to regulate future behavior in addition to merely knowing one's current situation (Chang et al., 2010; Lawrence et al., 2002). Our focus on group engagement (Tyler & Blader, 2003) also highlights the important role of justice for communicating information about group status, which is often overlooked owing to the dominant social exchange framework in the justice literature (Colquitt et al., 2013).

Second, our theoretical integration clarifies how employees process justice change information and then use this information to regulate their behavior. We propose a model with dual approach and avoidance pathways that account for unique self-regulation processes. These two pathways are separate systems that operate in tandem (Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Johnson, Chang, et al., 2013), yet they are rarely considered together in contemporary justice theories. For example, the group engagement model (Tyler & Blader, 2003) involves developing psychological connections with fair entities (an approach process), whereas uncertainty management theory (Van den Bos & Lind, 2002) involves escaping anxiety-associated uncertainty (i.e., an avoidance process). We posit that justice change simultaneously triggers approach and avoidance processes, both of which deserve attention because they

have unique effects—behavioral engagement and withdrawal, respectively. Our theorizing extends the literature by providing a more comprehensive framework for integrating the unique processes and outcomes associated with justice perceptions.

Third, we extend knowledge of justice change by identifying boundary conditions that strengthen or mitigate the approach and avoidance effects of justice change. Although justice change has both approach and avoidance pathways, the relative importance of these pathways likely varies across situations and persons, as suggested by the phenomenon of regulatory fit (Higgins, 2000). For example, employees in situations that highlight the desirability and gains associated with employment (i.e., high employment opportunity) should react more strongly along the approach path, and those in situations that signal possible losses with their employment (i.e., high threat of job continuity) should react more strongly along the avoidance path. Our research contributes to the justice literature by explaining how these perceptions of the work situation interact with justice change via regulatory fit, by identifying key approach and avoidance mechanisms of justice change, and by answering calls to model multiple justice mediators and moderators simultaneously. As Ambrose et al. (2015, p. 120) noted, “research examining conditional indirect effects (i.e., both mediators and moderators) is undoubtedly warranted. The examination of more complex models will likely enhance our understanding of the influence of overall justice on outcomes.”

Overall, the present research proposed and tested a dual moderated mediation model of justice change, such that justice change predicts employee engagement in work via perceived insider status along an approach path, whereas it predicts employee withdrawal from work via exhaustion along an avoidance path, after controlling for the effects of static justice level. Moreover, these approach and avoidance effects are bounded by employees’ perceptions of their employment situation. Our theoretical model is depicted in Figure 1.

Theory and Hypotheses

Static and Dynamic Perceptions of Organizational Justice

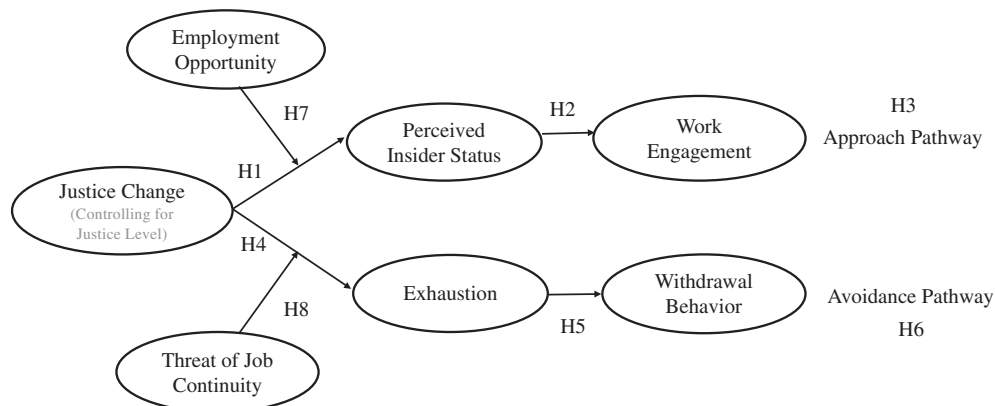
Initial justice research mainly focused on specific dimensions of justice (e.g., distributive and procedural justice), showing that these

dimensions predict organizational outcomes such as job performance and organizational citizenship behavior (e.g., Ambrose & Schminke, 2009; Colquitt, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001). More recent research sought to understand why and how justice impacts individual and organizational outcomes, demonstrating that, for example, justice triggers exchange-based processes (e.g., reciprocity and trust) and affect-based processes (e.g., positive mood and emotions) that have downstream effects on job attitudes and performance (Barclay & Kiefer, 2014; Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2013). As Colquitt et al. (2013) showed in their meta-analysis, social exchange and affect are the most popular perspectives for understanding justice. However, an emerging stream of research has highlighted the important link between justice and group status, such that justice treatments enable individuals to categorize themselves as insiders of the group by signaling their positive social worth (De Cremer & Tyler, 2005; Johnson et al., 2010; Johnson & Lord, 2010; Lind, 2001; Tyler & Blader, 2000).

Regardless of whether existing research examined justice through the lens of exchange-, affect-, or status-based processes, in nearly all cases justice perceptions have been treated as static phenomena. This is, however, a questionable assumption: as employees continually encounter new justice information in the environment, their perceptions of justice are likely to evolve because new information can alter employees’ expectations and standards regarding justice (Jones & Skarlicki, 2013; Lind, 2001). In line with this view, there is emerging theoretical and empirical support for the notion that perceptions of justice change over time (e.g., Hausknecht et al., 2011; Kim et al., 2015; Koopman et al., 2020; Lennard et al., in press; Loi et al., 2009; Matta et al., 2017; Soenen et al., 2017). Thus, overlooking the dynamic nature of justice perceptions by only investigating static perceptions paints an incomplete picture of the role of justice at work.

Consider, for example, two employees who perceive the same current level of justice as neutral (e.g., a rating of “4” on a 7-point scale). Although the employees perceive the same level of justice, they may have very different reactions depending on whether their justice perceptions changed and the direction of that change. The first employee may have experienced an increase in justice from very unjust treatment to neutral (e.g., a rating from “1” to “4”), whereas the second employee may have experienced a decrease from very just treatment to neutral (e.g., a rating from “7” to “4”).

Figure 1
Theoretical Model of the Approach- and Avoidance-Based Consequences of Justice Change



Consequently, we might expect the first employee to be more engaged than the second. Only considering the static perception of “4” paints an incomplete picture of the situation because changes in justice perceptions (both increases and decreases) contain relevant information that informs employees’ reactions (Kim et al., 2015). Thus, it is vital to consider the effects of both static and dynamic justice perceptions, which some initial studies have done by showing that justice change predicts work attitudes (e.g., Ambrose & Cropanzano, 2003; Hausknecht et al., 2011; Kim et al., 2015). In a recent review, Fortin et al. (2016) called for more attention to be paid to the temporal dynamics of justice perceptions, including the need to develop theoretical frameworks to understand justice change.

Understanding Justice Change Through a Self-Regulation Framework

In line with existing research (e.g., Ambrose & Cropanzano, 2003; Jones & Skarlicki, 2013), we define overall justice change as the difference between current and past justice perceptions. Two points about this definition should be noted. First, justice change can vary in direction: it can increase (current justice perceptions are better than the past), decrease (current justice perceptions are worse than the past), or remain unchanged (current and past justice perceptions are the same). Second, the magnitude of justice change can vary from a small to a large extent. A small change may not be sufficient to attract attention, whereas a large change can be attention grabbing and motivate a response. We expect that both direction and magnitude of justice change influence subsequent work attitudes and behaviors.

Although organizational scholars have begun to assess justice change, theoretical frameworks specifying the mechanisms through which justice change affects outcomes, including employee behavior, are lacking. Self-regulation theories are useful in this regard because (a) they explain how people adapt to ever-changing feedback from the environment and (b) have been applied to understand organizational justice. For example, Thau and Mitchell (2010) showed how justice information can affect self-regulatory resources and cause breakdowns that lead to employee deviance. Johnson et al. (2014) found that enacting justice behaviors affected the availability of managers’ self-regulatory resources, which either hindered or helped them to regulate their subsequent behavior. Barclay and Kiefer (2014) found that overall justice perceptions influenced how employees regulated their actions via approach and avoidance emotions. Specifically, overall justice was positively associated with approach-related outcomes (e.g., helping) via positive emotions and negatively associated with avoidance-related outcomes (e.g., psychological withdrawal) via negative emotions. As a final example, Lennard et al. (in press) demonstrated how employees regulate and respond to discrepancies between desired and actual levels of justice, which changed daily. This initial evidence suggests that self-regulation is a useful framework for understanding how employees process justice information and use it to regulate their work behavior. Although this self-regulation perspective has appeared in the static justice literature (Barclay & Kiefer, 2014; Brebels et al., 2011; Thau & Mitchell, 2010), it is yet to be leveraged to inform research on justice change.

A core principle of many self-regulation theories is the feedback control system, which compares incoming information from the

environment with prior goals or expectations, and then responds by modifying subsequent behavior via activation within approach and avoidance motivation systems (Carver & Scheier, 1998). In line with this idea, the group engagement model suggests that justice perceptions are closely related to one’s goal of having a favorable social status at work (Tyler & Blader, 2000, 2003), and justice change information provides feedback to employees to regulate their behavior within workgroups. When the feedback reveals no difference between current and past justice (i.e., stable social status in the organization), self-regulation unfolds automatically in such as-expected circumstances and people’s current affect, cognition, and behavior remain unchanged (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2004). However, when the feedback indicates a discrepancy between current and past justice—either an increase (being more socially valued in the organization than previously) or a decrease (being less socially valued or having become socially rejected in the organization)—it captures employees’ attention and motivates a response (Chang et al., 2010; Johnson, Howe, & Chang, 2013). When the change is an improvement, people feel more connected to others and invest greater effort in the group. In contrast, when the change is a decline, it leads to a conscious allocation of more attentional resources to deal with potential threats and losses, which induces anxiety and gradual withdrawal (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Johnson, Howe, & Chang, 2013). In the following section, we discuss the specific responses that justice change feedback is expected to evoke within the approach and avoidance motivation systems.

Implications of Justice Change for Self-Regulation

Lind (2001) suggested that people face a fundamental social dilemma when interacting with others. They can embrace cooperation to gain more benefits while leaving open the risk of being rejected or exploited by others or they can opt out of collective endeavors to prevent rejection and exploitation yet also miss out on the potential benefits of collaboration. To resolve this dilemma, employees monitor justice information (both consciously and unconsciously) to infer their social status and regulate their behavior accordingly (Colquitt & Rodell, 2011; Koopman et al., 2020). In this way, justice change provides feedback that signals the quality of an individual’s status within the organization or workgroup (Lind, 2001; Tyler & Blader, 2003; Tyler & Lind, 1992). When justice increases, it signals an improvement in one’s social status and a greater likelihood that instrumental (e.g., financial bonuses) and socioemotional (e.g., praise and recognition) rewards can be attained through engaging with others (Lind, 2001). This feedback is relevant for both the approach and avoidance systems. As we discuss below, feedback signaling positive social status brings a greater sense of inclusion, which is regulated by the approach system. Also, such positive feedback also frees people from the exhausting activity of closely monitoring the environment for potential social threats, which is regulated by the avoidance system.

One way in which an approach state manifests is through status within the group (Tyler & Blader, 2001, 2003). If the discrepancy between one’s current and past justice indicates an increase in justice, this signifies employees’ gain in social status and cultivates perceptions of inclusion in the organization. When this happens, employees begin to internalize organizational goals and perceive themselves as valued members in the company, all of which are regarded as desirable ends. By psychologically acknowledging their

insider status in the organization, employees can potentially achieve more desirable instrumental and socioemotional gains than they can on their own.

The discrepancy, however, could indicate a change in the opposite direction. In cases where the discrepancy indicates a decrease in justice, it signals employees' loss in social status. When this happens, employees feel rejected by the organization and therefore remain focused on their individual uniqueness and welfare, rather than identifying with the insider values and best interests of the organization. In support of these approach-oriented responses, empirical evidence suggests that experiencing justice can cause employees to feel included and see themselves as insiders of the group (e.g., Armstrong-Stassen & Schlosser, 2011; De Cremer & Tyler, 2005; Johnson & Lord, 2010). Given people's sensitivity to change information (Hsee & Abelson, 1991; Lawrence et al., 2002), including change in current versus prior justice (Jones & Skarlicki, 2013; Lind, 2001), increases (decreases) in justice should lead to higher (lower) perceived insider status, beyond the effects of justice level.

Hypothesis 1: Justice change is related to perceived insider status, such that an increase (decrease) in justice is associated with higher (lower) perceived insider status in the organization, controlling for justice level.

Cognitively approaching the organization via perceived insider status in turn motivates employees to engage in productive and cooperative activities that benefit the group (Blader & Tyler, 2009; Tyler & Blader, 2003). By viewing themselves as insiders in the organization, employees internalize the company's values and goals and strive to contribute more efforts to the organization (Stamper & Masterson, 2002). These employees also derive a sense of achievement from engaging in work activities that contribute to the welfare and success of the company. Thus, employees who perceive themselves as insiders view their work goals and responsibilities as desirable ends, which leads them to approach their work with greater effort, enthusiasm, and concentration (Blader & Tyler, 2009; Jackson et al., 2006; Johnson & Saboe, 2011). Work engagement is an example of an approach-oriented response (Lanaj et al., 2012), as it is a positive work state characterized by investing effort, showing enthusiasm, striving for high performance, and being deeply engrossed in work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Together with our earlier arguments about justice change and the approach system, we expect that perceived insider status will cultivate behavioral engagement and mediate the effects of justice change on behavioral engagement in one's work.

Hypothesis 2: Perceived insider status is positively related to work engagement.

Hypothesis 3: Justice change is indirectly related to work engagement, such that an increase (decrease) in justice is associated with more (less) engagement via perceived insider status, controlling for justice level.

Justice change information also serves as feedback for self-regulation within the avoidance system (Carver & Scheier, 1998). In work contexts, although an employee can achieve more by working with others, doing so also carries the risk that he or she

may be rejected by the group or that others may contribute less to the group and thus unduly benefit from the employee's contributions (Lind, 2001). Therefore, part of employees' ongoing self-regulation involves continuously monitoring the environment for information signaling potential risks or losses, which is then used to adjust behavior accordingly (McCullough & Willoughby, 2009). Common responses of the avoidance system to risks and losses are psychological and behavioral withdrawal (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Lanaj et al., 2012).

Justice information, in particular, provides useful evidence about one's social status in the workgroup (Tyler & Blader, 2003), even to the point where it is used as a surrogate for trust when no other information is available (Lind, 2001). When employees detect a discrepancy revealing that current justice is higher than past justice, it signals a low probability of being socially rejected or exploited. In the absence of such threats, the vigilance level of the avoidance system toward the immediate environment remains low. Hence, less attentional resources are needed for monitoring potential threats and losses. However, if it is revealed that current justice is lower than past justice, which signals a higher probability of being rejected by the group, the avoidance system goes into high alert mode by consciously and continually monitoring the work environment for cues signaling losses and by regulating people away from negative end states and threatening possibilities (Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Johnson, Chang, & Lord, 2006). Moreover, downward justice change as a negative cue naturally attracts attentions and leads to the allocation of more resources for dealing with potential threats and losses (Carver & Scheier, 1998).

Although the operation of this avoidance system is adaptive in that it helps individuals detect and avoid possible threats, the downside is that doing so generates anxious emotional states and consumes attentional resources (Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Johnson, Chang, et al., 2013; Lanaj et al., 2012). This experience of anxious emotions and the needed expenditure of attentional resources to manage such emotions are taxing to people's well-being, leaving them feeling exhausted (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Johnson et al., 2018). In fact, negative feedback implicating the self is especially distressing because it elicits worries and rumination about self-worth, personal agency, and impression management concerns, all of which deplete attentional resources (Baumeister et al., 1993; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Feedback signaling social rejection is also exhausting owing to its deleterious effects on hormonal and cardiovascular systems that respond to stress (Dickerson & Kemeny, 2004; Mendes et al., 2008), which has been shown in the case of unjust treatment (e.g., high cortisol levels; Yang et al., 2014).

In addition, when justice information trends downward over time, more attentional resources are allocated to the avoidance-oriented activities of monitoring for potential threats and losses and keeping negative emotions and ruminating thoughts in check. In contrast, when justice information trends upward, these resource-intensive activities of the avoidance system are disengaged because improvements in justice signal a low likelihood of social rejection and exploitation (Lind, 2001). In this latter case, employees are less likely to experience exhaustion (i.e., the feeling that one's emotional and attentional resources are depleted) because fewer self-regulatory resources are consumed by vigilantly monitoring the environment for potential threats and losses (Howard & Cordes, 2010).

Hypothesis 4: Justice change is related to exhaustion, such that a decrease (increase) in justice is associated with more (less) exhaustion, controlling for justice level.

The emotions and behavioral tendencies associated with avoidance states (e.g., anxiety, withdrawal) culminate in avoidance-oriented behaviors, such as being absent or scaling back effort on work activities (e.g., Howard & Cordes, 2010; Lanaj et al., 2012; Long & Christian, 2015). In fact, withdrawing effort to conserve mental and physical resources is an adaptive coping strategy used by employees who are exhausted from searching the work environment for potential threats and losses (Deery et al., 2002; Hobfoll, 1989). As noted above, experiencing increased justice frees employees from engaging in these exhausting avoidance-oriented searches and thereby reduces their reliance on behavioral withdrawal as a coping response. In line with this logic, some evidence reveals that justice level is indirectly and inversely related to cognitive withdrawal via exhaustion (e.g., Campbell et al., 2013; Cole et al., 2010). We extend this work by considering justice change (controlling for justice level) and behavioral withdrawal (i.e., withholding effort and/or being physical absent from work). Based on our earlier arguments about justice change and the avoidance system, we posit that exhaustion leads to withdrawal behavior and mediates the effects of justice change on withdrawal.

Hypothesis 5: Exhaustion is positively related to withdrawal behavior.

Hypothesis 6: Justice change is indirectly related to withdrawal behavior, such that a decrease (increase) in justice is associated with more (less) withdrawal via exhaustion, controlling for justice level.

Approach and Avoidance Boundary Conditions of Responses to Justice Change

Extrapolating from self-regulation theory, a key premise of our research is that *change* in justice matters. When circumstances change and produce discrepancies between employees' current justice experiences and internal expectations based on prior experience, it captures employees' attention and prompts them to revise their approach- and avoidance-oriented behaviors accordingly (Jones & Skarlicki, 2013; Lind, 2001). When justice perceptions increase over time, employees approach the organization by defining themselves as insiders and becoming more engaged, and they avoid becoming exhausted and withdrawn from worrying about potential threats and losses. Although employees are expected to exhibit both types of reactions to justice change, the magnitude of the employees' engagement (approach pathway) and withdrawal (avoidance pathway) in the organization likely depends on how they evaluate the broader work context, such as their current employment situation. As we describe below, employees' employment situation can be perceived in approach (high employment opportunity) and avoidance (high threat of job continuity) ways, which reinforce approach and avoidance processes, respectively. This phenomenon is known as regulatory fit (Higgins, 2000), which occurs when people's approach and avoidance strategies match the approach and avoidance orientation of the situation. When regulatory fit exists,

motivation-based processes and effects are magnified (Spiegel et al., 2004).

Employees perceiving high employment opportunity are optimistic about attaining desirable job opportunities (either within their current company or elsewhere) owing to favorable evaluations of their personal employment-related attributes (e.g., knowledge, skills) and environmental factors (e.g., labor market, occupation trends; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007). Such workers view their employment situation in terms of desirability, a sense of personal control, and movement toward an ideal state (De Cuyper et al., 2012; Fugate et al., 2004; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007). This optimistic perception of the employment context attunes people to opportunities for developing and improving their current situation (Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Lanaj et al., 2012) and consequently makes employees focus more on what they can gain (rather than lose) during self-regulation processes (Vanhercke et al., 2015). A situation of high employment opportunity therefore has regulatory fit with approach system processes. As such, we expect the direct effect of justice change on approach-oriented mechanisms and the indirect effects of justice change on outcomes via approach-oriented mechanisms will be stronger when employees perceive higher (vs. lower) employment opportunity in their work situation.

In contrast, employees who perceive high threat of job continuity feel powerlessness to preserve their employment status quo (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984) owing to pessimistic evaluations of their personal capabilities and work environment conditions (Sverke et al., 2002; Wang et al., 2015). Situations that generate a high threat of job continuity heighten employees' sensitivity and reactivity to potential risks and losses (Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Lanaj et al., 2012). In such situations, employees likely view their employment in terms of what may be lost (rather than gained) and focus on preventing risks and problems from materializing (Ashford et al., 1989; De Cuyper et al., 2012; Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984). A situation of high threat of job continuity therefore has regulatory fit with avoidance system processes. If justice is perceived to decrease in situations characterized by employment uncertainty, processing in the avoidance system will be magnified as the environment is vigilantly monitored for threats, resulting in greater exhaustion. Thus, we expect the direct effect of justice change on avoidance-oriented mechanisms and the indirect relationships of justice change on outcomes via the avoidance-oriented mechanisms will be stronger when employees perceive a higher (vs. lower) threat of job continuity in their work situation. Taken together and in accordance with regulatory fit, we predict the following:

Hypothesis 7: Employment opportunity moderates the indirect relationship of justice change with engagement via perceived insider status, such that this indirect relationship is stronger when employment opportunity is higher (vs. lower).

Hypothesis 8: Threat of job continuity moderates the indirect relationship of justice change with withdrawal behavior via exhaustion, such that this indirect relationship is stronger when threat of job continuity is higher (vs. lower).

Overview of the Current Research

We conducted three multiwave field studies to test our set of hypotheses. Study 1 was a two-wave design that examined justice

change over a 2-month interval, Study 2 was a three-wave design with a 3-month interval, and Study 3 was a three-wave design with a 2-week interval. Measuring justice change and its consequences across time helps mitigate concerns owing to common method bias and provides more robust evidence for any presumed causal order among the variables (Johnson et al., 2011; Podsakoff et al., 2003). We used 2-week and monthly intervals to allow sufficient time for perceived insider status, exhaustion, and behavioral outcomes to change (Huang et al., 2017; Schaubroeck et al., 2017; Tims et al., 2013). In all studies, employees reported justice information at two time points, which enabled us to calculate justice change using latent difference score (LDS) modeling (Selig & Preacher, 2009) and to control for initial justice level when testing our predictions regarding the effects of justice change (as summarized in Figure 1).

Study 1

Method

Sample and Procedure

We collected data at two time points separated by 2 months from employees in a factory located in China.¹ Participation was voluntary, and employees received a gift (worth \$7 USD) for completing both questionnaires. Research assistants provided consent forms and information sheets to participants and assured them of confidentiality. In order to match responses across the two time waves, a unique code was assigned to each participant. All measures were administered in Chinese (for measures that had not yet been used and published with a Chinese sample, we followed the back translation procedure recommended by Brislin, 1986). Organizational justice was measured at both time points, and the mediator and outcome variables were measured at Time 2. We received 549 valid questionnaires at Time 1 (we dropped participants who did not pass the attention checks; Huang et al., 2015) and 447 valid questionnaires at Time 2. Of the 549 participants, 379 completed both surveys (a matched rate of 69%). The average age of these employees was 30.4 years ($SD = 7.2$), 40% were male, their average organizational tenure was 3.7 years ($SD = 3.4$), 62% were married, and 19% had a Bachelor's degree or above. Because 170 participants did not complete the Time 2 survey, we conducted attrition analyses to determine whether attrition bias led to nonrandom sampling (Goodman & Blum, 1996). Specifically, we regressed a dichotomous variable (i.e., those who did vs. did not complete the Time 2 survey) on organizational justice at Time 1 ($b = -.07$, $SE = .11$, ns), age ($b = -.02$, $SE = .02$, ns), and gender ($b = -.10$, $SE = .20$, ns). Results indicated there was no nonrandom sampling bias.

Measures

Organizational Justice. Organizational justice was assessed at both time points using a 3-item Chinese version (Wang et al., 2015) of Ambrose and Schminke's (2009) scale, which captures perceived overall justice. A sample item is "In general, I can count on this organization to be fair." Participants responded to the items via a 6-point scale (from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*). The coefficient omega total (ω ; Lance et al., 2006; McNeish, 2018) was .87 (Time 1) and .87 (Time 2).

Justice Change. A change in organizational justice score was created using a LDS model (Selig & Preacher, 2009). Specifically,

following the recommendations and practices of others (e.g., Bamberger et al., 2017; Petrou et al., 2018; Selig & Preacher, 2009; Taylor et al., 2017; Toker & Biron, 2012), justice change between Time 1 and Time 2 is represented as a distinct latent construct by (a) holding the loadings of justice indicators equal at Time 1 and Time 2 to impose measurement invariance, (b) fixing the loadings of the paths from justice change to Time 2 justice as 1, with the residual's variance set at 0, (c) specifying the Time 2 justice as a function of the Time 1 justice with weightings fixed to 1 and the residual variance set at 0, and (d) regressing justice change on Time 1 justice. The key reason for using a LDS model is that the change score is represented as a distinct latent construct, which avoids problems associated with difference scores (e.g., measurement error, regression to the mean bias; Taris, 2000; Wainer, 1991). There are two possible directions of justice change in our LDS model: an increase (above "0") or decrease (below "0"). In addition, the magnitude of justice change can differ. For example, "3" indicates that the current justice perception has increased 3 units from the past, "-2" indicates that the current justice perception has decreased 2 units from the past, while "0" indicates that there is no difference between the current and the past justice perception. In Study 1, 43% of the variance in overall justice perceptions across Times 1 and 2 was within-person.

It is well established that static perceptions of organizational justice influence employees' affect, cognition, and behavior (e.g., Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001). However, changes in justice perceptions are expected to account for additional variance in the outcomes. To demonstrate that justice change explains incremental variance, we followed previous change-based studies (Chen et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2012; Toker & Biron, 2012) by controlling for initial level of justice (i.e., Time 1 justice) in all of our analyses.

Perceived Insider Status. Based on the group engagement model (Tyler & Blader, 2003), we used a 6-item Chinese version of perceived insider status scale ($\omega = .87$; Chen & Aryee, 2007) developed by Stamper and Masterson (2002) to assess the extent to which employees perceived themselves as insiders within the organization at Time 2. A sample item is "I feel I am an 'insider' in my work organization." Participants responded to the items via a 6-point scale (from 1 = *totally disagree* to 6 = *totally agree*).

Exhaustion. We measured exhaustion at Time 2 using the 5-item Chinese version of a scale ($\omega = .92$; Lu et al., 2016) developed by Schaufeli et al. (1996). A sample item is "I feel emotionally drained from my work." Participants responded to the items via a 6-point scale (from 1 = *totally disagree* to 6 = *totally agree*).

Work Engagement. We administered the 9-item Chinese version ($\omega = .92$; Lu et al., 2014) of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2006) at Time 2. A sample item is "I am immersed in my work." Participants responded to each item via a 7-point frequency scale (from 1 = *never* to 7 = *always*).

Withdrawal Behavior. We used eight items ($\omega = .91$) from Dalal et al. (2009) to measure withdrawal-based forms of counterproductive behavior at Time 2, which is similar to approaches used in other studies (e.g., Matta et al., 2017; Spector et al., 2006).

¹ Both Study 1 and Study 2 were initiated in China where Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval is not required and/or common. However, we followed the ethical policies regarding data collection on human subjects in alignment with U.S. IRB standards and APA ethical guidelines.

A sample item is “Did not work to the best of my ability.” Participants responded to each item via a 6-point frequency scale (from 1 = *never* to 6 = *always*). Using self-reports to assess withdrawal behavior is appropriate because, according to Berry et al. (2012), counterproductive behavior tends to be covert and thus is only known to the employee who exhibits such behavior.

Control Variables. We controlled for participants’ age, gender, and marital status in all our analyses because previous research suggests these variables impact the self-regulation of engagement and withdrawal (Blau, 1985; Ugwu et al., 2014).

Results

The descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and correlations for the Study 1 variables are listed in Table 1. Before testing our hypotheses, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the hypothesized six-factor model (justice from Times 1 and 2, perceived insider status, exhaustion, engagement, and withdrawal; Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). We then compared the fit of this six-factor model with three alternative models: a four-factor model in which the two mediators were combined into one factor and the two outcomes into another factor, another four-factor model in which perceived insider status and engagement were combined into one factor and exhaustion and withdrawal into another factor, and a one-factor model. As shown in Table 2, the six-factor model had good fit with the data and fit better than the alternative models (Hu & Bentler, 1999). All scale items had significant loadings on their corresponding construct (standardized loadings ranged from .72 to .95). These results provide evidence for the discriminant validity of our focal variables.

Following prior practice (Geiser, 2013; Vandenberg & Lance, 2000), we also assessed measurement invariance. Specifically, we compared the baseline six-factor model with the metric invariance model in which factor loadings of the same justice items are equal across the two times, and the scalar invariance model in which factor loadings and intercepts of the same justice items are equal across the two times. Results showed that the model fitness of the metric invariance model, $\chi^2(139) = 191.4, p < .01, RMSEA = .032, CFI = .99$, did not significantly differ from that of the baseline model, $\Delta\chi^2(2) = 0.4$, critical $\Delta\chi^2$ for 2 *df* = 5.99, *ns*. Moreover, the scalar model, $\chi^2(141) = 196.9, p < .01, RMSEA = .032, CFI = .98$, did not significantly differ from the metric model,

$\Delta\chi^2(2) = 5.5, ns$. These results together demonstrated sufficient measurement invariance for justice across the two time points.

To test our set of hypotheses, we used the LDS model (Selig & Preacher, 2009) to calculate justice change within-person and examined the effects of justice change with a between-person approach. By doing so, we were able to identify the between-person differences in within-person changes (McArdle, 2009). First, we tested our set of hypotheses by analyzing two models: a full mediation model (M₁) and a partial mediation model (M₂; Shrout & Bolger, 2002). In both M₁ and M₂, the structural paths corresponding to Hypotheses 1–6 and the effects of the justice level (i.e., justice at Time 1) were controlled. The direct effects of justice change on the outcome variables were estimated in M₂ but not in M₁. Also, because the mediator and outcome variables were measured at the same point in time, we controlled for the effects of an unmeasured latent method factor when testing the models (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Both models showed good fit to the data, M₁: $\chi^2(165) = 219.5, p < .01, RMSEA = .03, CFI = .99$ and M₂: $\chi^2(163) = 217.8, p < .01, RMSEA = .03, CFI = .99$. Comparing the two models (Hu & Bentler, 1999), the fit of the more parsimonious M₁ did not significantly differ from that of M₂— $\Delta\chi^2(2) = 1.7, ns$. Thus, we proceeded with the full mediation model (M₁) for hypothesis testing.

Our results indicated that all proposed paths were statistically significant and in the hypothesized direction (see Figure 2). In terms of the approach pathway, justice change positively predicted perceived insider status at Time 2 incremental to justice at Time 1 ($\gamma = .57, p < .001, R^2 = .62$), which in turn was related to work engagement at Time 2 ($\gamma = .65, p < .001, R^2 = .42$), thus supporting Hypotheses 1 and 2. With respect to the avoidance pathway, justice change negatively predicted exhaustion at Time 2 incremental to the justice at Time 1 ($\gamma = -.22, p < .05, R^2 = .10$), which in turn was positively related to withdrawal behavior at Time 2 ($\gamma = .70, p < .001, R^2 = .50$), thus supporting Hypotheses 4 and 5.

To test mediation, we used a bootstrapping approach with 95% confidence intervals (CI) and 1,000 bootstrap samples in Mplus 8.4 (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). As shown in Table 3, justice change has a significant indirect relationship with work engagement via perceived insider status, 95% CI = [.349, .650]. Justice change also had a significant indirect relationship with withdrawal behavior via exhaustion, 95% CI = [-.305, -.075]. Hypotheses 3 and 6 were therefore supported.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics, Reliabilities, and Correlations (Study 1)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	30.37	7.22	—								
2. Gender	—	—	.04	—							
3. Marital status	—	—	-.51**	-.21**	—						
4. Organizational justice (T1)	4.59	.94	.20**	.09	-.18**	(.87)					
5. Organizational justice (T2)	4.53	1.02	.25**	.04	-.23**	.57**	(.87)				
6. Perceived insider status (T2)	4.51	.86	.30**	.07	-.24**	.48**	.67**	(.87)			
7. Exhaustion (T2)	2.72	1.14	-.30**	-.01	.20**	-.22**	-.39**	-.42**	(.92)		
8. Work engagement (T2)	4.56	1.09	.28**	.16**	-.19**	.31**	.47**	.56**	-.39**	(.92)	
9. Withdrawal behavior (T2)	1.68	.63	-.24**	-.10	.25**	-.20**	-.25**	-.34**	.33**	-.27**	(.91)

Note. Gender: “1” = “male”; “2” = “female.” Marital status: “1” = “married”; “2” = “single.” Reliability coefficients omega (ω) are reported along the diagonal in the brackets. T = time.
** $p < .01$.

Table 2
Measurement Model Comparisons (Study 1)

Model	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI	TLI
Six-Factor model	191.0	137		.032	.031	.99	.98
Four-Factor Model A	1346.1	146	1155.1	.148	.172	.67	.61
Four-Factor Model B	1036.7	146	845.7	.127	.129	.75	.71
One-Factor model	2092.5	152	1901.5	.184	.139	.46	.39

Note. Four-Factor Model A denotes a model in which perceived insider status and exhaustion were combined into one factor and work engagement and withdrawal behavior into a second factor. Four-Factor Model B denotes a model in which perceived insider status and work engagement were combined into one factor and exhaustion and withdrawal into a second factor. RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root-mean-square residual; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index.

Taken together, our Study 1 results were encouraging in that we found that justice change significantly predicted work engagement and withdrawal behavior via approach (perceived insider status) and avoidance (exhaustion) mechanisms, respectively. Importantly, these relationships were observed after controlling for the initial level of justice, thus lending credence to our main thesis that change in justice matters above and beyond static justice. Although encouraging, Study 1 was limited in a few respects. First, all data were self-reported, which raises concerns about common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Although employees are in the best position to rate their own justice perceptions, perceived insider status, exhaustion, and engagement, withdrawal behavior can be accurately tracked via other means. In Study 2, we operationalized withdrawal behavior as unexcused absences from organizational records. Second, the mediator and outcome variables were assessed at the same time, which can bias the results in favor of a mediation pattern (i.e., outcomes have stronger relationships with mediators compared to predictors; Maxwell & Cole, 2007). In Study 2, we collected the mediator and outcome data at separate times. Third, mediation is ultimately a causal argument, yet it is difficult to tease apart the direction of the relationships in Study 1. In Study 2, we controlled for the baseline levels of the outcomes, thus providing

more compelling evidence about the direction of the relationships (Toker & Biron, 2012; Yang et al., 2020).

Study 2

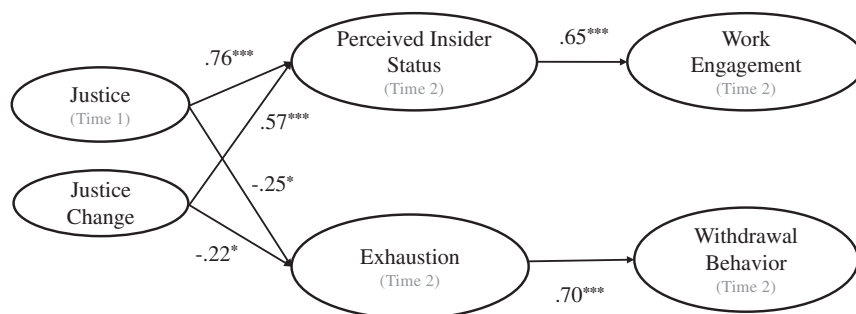
Method

Sample and Procedure

We collected data from employees in a factory located in China (a different factory from that in Study 1). Data were collected at three times, each separated by 3 months. Participation was voluntary, and employees received a gift (worth \$7 USD) for completing all three questionnaires. Research assistants provided consent forms and information sheets to participants and assured them of confidentiality. To match survey responses with absenteeism data from company records, a unique code was assigned to each participant. Although the HR department knew the names of employees, their unique codes, and their absenteeism data, it did not have access to participants' survey responses. In contrast, the research team had access to the unique codes, survey responses, and absenteeism data, but not employee names.

We distributed 400 questionnaires at three time points and received 360 valid questionnaires (we dropped participants who did not pass the attention checks; Huang et al., 2015) at Time 1 (response rate 90%), 320 valid questionnaires at Time 2 (response rate 80%), and 322 valid questionnaires at Time 3 (response rate 81%). Of the 360 participants, 243 completed the survey at all three time points (a matched rate of 68%). The average age of these employees was 30.7 years ($SD = 7.8$), 12% were male, their average organizational tenure was 2.7 years ($SD = 2.9$), 70% were married, and 11% had a Bachelor's degree or higher. Because 117 participants did not complete the two follow-up surveys, we conducted the same attrition analyses as in Study 1 by regressing a dichotomous variable (i.e., those who did vs. did not complete the two follow-up surveys) on organizational justice ($b = .16$, $SE = .13$, *ns*), engagement ($b = .15$, $SE = .12$, *ns*), withdrawal behavior ($b = .01$, $SE = .02$, *ns*) at Time 1, age ($b = -.02$, $SE = .02$, *ns*), and gender ($b = 1.16$, $SE = .35$, $p < .05$). Results indicated there was no nonrandom sampling bias in studied

Figure 2
Structural Path Coefficients for the Full Mediation Model (Study 1)



Note. Standardized path coefficients are reported in the figure. Demographic variables including age, gender, and marital status were controlled. Justice change is created with justice at Time 1 and Time 2 using the LDS model (Selig & Preacher, 2009). More details can be found in the Measures section. LDS = latent difference score.

* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 3
Estimates for the Indirect Effects of Justice Change (Study 1)

Mediators	Outcomes	Estimates	SE	95% CI
Perceived insider status	Work engagement	.487	.08	[.349, .650]
Exhaustion	Withdrawal behavior	-.174	.06	[-.305, -.075]

Note. Unstandardized estimates are reported.

variables (the only significant finding was male participants were less likely to complete all three surveys).

As in Study 1, all measures were administered in Chinese. Organizational justice was measured at Times 1 and 2, the mediators at Time 2, and engagement at Time 1 (baseline) and Time 3. Absenteeism data (withdrawal behavior) over the previous 3 months were gathered from company records at Time 1 (baseline) and again at Time 3.

Measures

We used the same measures as in Study 1 for organizational justice ($\omega = .72$ and $.79$ at Times 1 and 2, respectively), perceived insider status ($\omega = .78$), and exhaustion ($\omega = .90$). Justice change was operationalized using the LDS model as in Study 1 (Selig & Preacher, 2009), and we observed that 68% of the variance in overall justice perceptions across Times 1 and 2 was within-person.

Work Engagement. The same measures as in Study 1 was used for work engagement ($\omega = .90$ and $.91$ at Times 1 and 3, respectively). In Study 2, we controlled the Time 1 baseline level of work engagement to indicate change in engagement.

Withdrawal Behavior. With the aid of an HR manager, we were granted access to the company's record of unexcused absences at Time 1 (baseline) and Time 3. In this company, unexcused absences refer to nonsickness absences (i.e., avoidable leaves), and excused absences refer to sickness absences, where employees need to provide proof to the company (e.g., a doctor's note). Research has pointed out that sickness absences are influenced by external factors that restrict employees from work, while avoidable leaves reflect more of a choice to withdrawal or escape from an undesirable work situation (Magee et al., 2016). The amount of time the employees were absent, recorded in hours, served as our measure of withdrawal behavior. Although absenteeism can also be operationalized in terms of frequency, Johns and Al Hajj (2016, p. 456) concluded in a meta-analytic review that "time lost and frequency are equally reliable, that the relationship between them approximates unity when corrections for measurement artifacts are applied, and that there is very little evidence for differential criterion-related validity." We controlled the Time 1 baseline level of absences to indicate change in withdrawal behavior.

Control Variables. As in Study 1, we controlled for justice level (i.e., justice at Time 1) in all analyses to verify that justice change predicted the outcomes incremental to the static justice level. Moreover, we controlled for the Time 1 baseline levels of work engagement and withdrawal behavior to indicate changes in these outcomes, enabling us to better determine the direction of relationships (Toker & Biron, 2012; Yang et al., 2020). Finally, as in Study 1, we again controlled for participants' age, gender, and marital status.

Results

The descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and correlations for the main variables are reported in Table 4. We first conducted a CFA on the hypothesized six-factor model that included justice from Times 1 and 2, perceived insider status and exhaustion from Time 2, and engagement from Times 1 and 3. We compared the fit of this six-factor model with that of four alternative models: a five-factor model in which the two mediators were combined into one factor, a five-factor model in which engagement at Times 1 and 3 were combined into one factor, a three-factor model in which the Time 1 variables were combined into one factor, Time 2 variables were combined into one factor, and Time 3 variables into another factor, and a one-factor model. As shown in Table 5, the six-factor model had good fit with the data and fit better than the alternative models. All items had significant loadings on their respective construct (standardized loadings ranged from .50 to .94). We also tested the measurement invariance of justice across two time points. Results showed that the model fitness of the metric model, $\chi^2(159) = 239.0$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .047, CFI = .96, did not significantly differ from that of the baseline model, $\Delta\chi^2(2) = 1.0$, *ns*. Moreover, the scalar model, $\chi^2(161) = 243.5$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .047, CFI = .96, did not significantly differ from the metric model, $\Delta\chi^2(2) = 4.5$, *ns*. Together, these results demonstrate sufficient measurement invariance for justice across the two time points.

As in Study 1, we tested our hypotheses by comparing the full (M_1) and partial (M_2) mediation models. The results revealed that both models had a good fit with the data, M_1 : $\chi^2(195) = 284.8$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .045, CFI = .96; M_2 : $\chi^2(193) = 279.3$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .044, CFI = .96, and that the fit of M_1 did not significantly differ from that of M_2 — $\Delta\chi^2(2) = 5.5$, *ns*. Thus, we used the full mediation model (M_1) to test our hypotheses. The results for the full mediation model indicated that all proposed paths were statistically significant and in the hypothesized direction (see Figure 3). In terms of the approach pathway, justice change positively predicted perceived insider status at Time 2 incremental to justice at Time 1 ($\gamma = .78$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .56$), which in turn predicted work engagement at Time 3 (controlling the effect of work engagement at Time 1; $\gamma = .30$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .37$). Thus, Hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported. In terms of the avoidance pathway, justice change negatively predicted exhaustion at Time 2 incremental to justice at Time 1 ($\gamma = -.27$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .14$), which in turn predicted withdrawal behavior at Time 3 (controlling the effect of withdrawal behavior at Time 1; $\gamma = .12$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .11$), thus supporting Hypotheses 4 and 5.

To test the mediation hypotheses, we used the same bootstrapping approach as in Study 1. As shown in Table 6, perceived insider status mediated the relationship between justice change and work engagement, 95% CI = [.106, .308]. Justice change also had a significant indirect relationship with withdrawal behavior via exhaustion, 95% CI = [-.666, -.005]. These results are in line

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics, Reliabilities, and Correlations (Study 2)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Age	30.66	7.82	—										
2. Gender	—	—	-.04	—									
3. Marital status	—	—	-.67**	-.09	—								
4. Justice (T1)	4.15	1.07	.02	.01	.11	(.72)							
5. Justice (T2)	3.97	1.10	.09	-.14*	.00	.34**	(.79)						
6. Perceived insider status (T2)	3.87	.83	.09	-.30**	.03	.21**	.59**	(.78)					
7. Exhaustion (T2)	3.38	1.10	.01	.20**	-.10	-.19**	-.25**	-.33**	(.90)				
8. Work engagement (T1)	3.94	1.23	.17**	-.15*	-.09	.30**	.16*	.29**	-.30**	(.90)			
9. Work engagement (T3)	3.62	1.16	.20**	-.22**	-.10	.22**	.18**	.42**	-.31**	.52**	(.91)		
10. Withdrawal behavior (T1)	4.76	9.81	-.15*	.01	.05	.11	.06	.01	-.05	.01	-.02	—	
11. Withdrawal behavior (T3)	3.77	8.72	-.19**	.08	-.14*	-.16*	-.11	-.10	.07	-.15*	-.03	.18**	—

Note. Gender: “1” = “male”; “2” = “female.” Marital status: “1” = “married”; “2” = “single.” Reliability coefficients omega (ω) are reported along the diagonal in the brackets. T = time.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

with Hypotheses 3 and 6. As we controlled the baseline of work engagement and withdrawal behavior at Time 1, the results indicate that perceived insider status mediated the relationship between justice change and change in work engagement, and exhaustion mediated the relationship between justice change and change in withdrawal behavior.

Taken together, Study 2 replicated the findings of Study 1 using a three-wave survey with archival absences data. Nevertheless, both Studies 1 and 2 were conducted in a Chinese context, which may limit the extent to which our results generalize to other cultural contexts. In Study 3, we collected data from the United States to verify the robustness of our model in a different context. Furthermore, in Study 3, we conducted a full test of our model by including the proposed moderators—employment opportunity and threat of job continuity.

Study 3

Method

Sample and Procedure

We collected data from employees in the United States at three times, each separated by 2 weeks. The data were from a larger

Table 5
Measurement Model Comparisons (Study 2)

Model	χ^2	<i>df</i>	$\Delta\chi^2$	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI	TLI
Six-Factor model	238.0	157		.047	.053	.96	.95
Five-Factor Model A	465.5	162	227.5	.090	.105	.84	.81
Five-Factor Model B	531.0	162	293.0	.099	.077	.81	.77
Three-Factor model	795.8	169	557.8	.127	.107	.67	.63
One-Factor model	1330.6	172	1092.6	.171	.137	.39	.33

Note. Five-Factor Model A denotes a model in which perceived insider status and exhaustion were combined into one factor. Five-Factor Model B denotes a model in which work engagement (Time 1 & Time 3) were combined into one factor. Three-Factor model denotes a model in which the Time 1 variables were combined into one factor, Time 2 variables into a second factor, and Time 3 variables into a third factor. RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root-mean-square residual; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index.

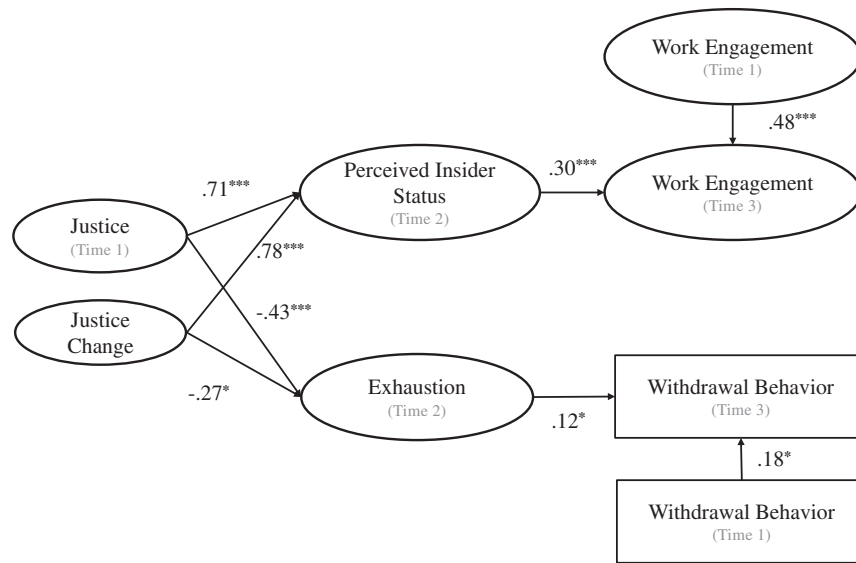
research project titled “Employees’ Health, Well-Being, and Behaviors during the COVID-19 Pandemic.” The project process was reviewed and approved by the subcommittee of Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Peking University (Protocol: #2020-02-19). Invitation links were sent through Amazon Mechanical Turk to potential respondents who were working full time in the United States. Consent forms were signed by participants, and they were informed about the purpose of the survey. Participation was voluntary, and employees received \$5.80 USD for completing all three questionnaires.

We distributed 500 questionnaires at all three times and received 455 valid responses (we dropped participants who did not pass the attention checks; Huang et al., 2015) at Time 1 (response rate 91%), 315 valid questionnaires at Time 2 (response rate 63%), and 336 valid questionnaires at Time 3 (response rate 67%). Of the 455 participants, 262 completed all three surveys (a matched rate of 58%). The average age of these employees was 39.7 years ($SD = 9.6$), 45% of the participants were women, their average organizational tenure was 7.9 years ($SD = 6.3$). Organizational justice was measured at Times 1 and 2, the mediators and moderators at Time 2, and engagement and withdrawal behavior at Time 1 (baseline) and Time 3. Because 193 participants did not complete the two follow-up surveys, we conducted an attrition analyses for organizational justice ($b = .01$, $SE = .11$, ns), engagement ($b = -.12$, $SE = .07$, ns), withdrawal behavior ($b = -.40$, $SE = .07$, $p < .001$) at Time 1, age ($b = .05$, $SE = .01$, $p < .001$), and gender ($b = .32$, $SE = .19$, ns). Results showed that there was no nonrandom sampling bias in most of the studied variables, other than participants who were younger or those with higher withdrawal behavior were less likely to complete every survey.

Measures

We used the same measures as in Studies 1 and 2 for organizational justice ($\omega = .95$ and $.95$ at Times 1 and 2, respectively), perceived insider status ($\omega = .96$), and exhaustion ($\omega = .95$). Justice change was again operationalized using the LDS model, and we observed that 18% of the variance in overall justice perceptions across Times 1 and 2 was within-person. Work engagement was measured by three items (Schaufeli et al., 2019) from the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2006; $\omega = .89$ and $.88$ at

Figure 3
Structural Path Coefficients for the Full Mediation Model (Study 2)



Note. Standardized path coefficients are reported in the figure. We controlled for the relations of the baseline (Time 1) outcome measures with their counterparts at Time 3. Demographic variables including age, gender, and marital status were also controlled. Justice change is created with justice at Time 1 and Time 2 using the LDS model (Selig & Preacher, 2009). More details can be found in the Measures section. LDS = latent difference score.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Times 1 and 3, respectively). Withdrawal behavior was measured by three items from Dalal et al. (2009; $\omega = .82$ and $.85$ at Times 1 and 3, respectively). Employment opportunity was assessed using four items ($\omega = .86$) from Rothwell and Arnold (2007). A sample item is “If I needed to, I could easily get another job like mine in a similar organisation.” Threat of job continuity was measured using three items ($\omega = .91$) from De Cuyper et al. (2009). A sample item is “Chances are, I might lose my job.”

Control Variables. As in Studies 1 and 2, we controlled for justice level (i.e., Time 1 justice) in all analyses to verify that justice change predicted the outcomes incremental to the static justice level. Moreover, as in Study 2, we controlled for the Time 1 baseline levels of work engagement and withdrawal behavior to indicate changes in these outcomes. We also controlled for participants’ age, gender, and position. Finally, our data were collected when the U.S. reopened for business during the pandemic from July 10 to August 9, 2020. The Coronavirus “disease (COVID-19) pandemic poses health and financial threats to employees, which may affect employees’ self-regulation of engagement and withdrawal (Chong et al., 2020; Hu et al., 2020). We therefore controlled for death threat

using an item adapted from Pyszczynski et al. (2015; i.e., “In general, COVID-19 reminds me facing death”). Responses were coded via a 5-point scale from 1 = *never* to 5 = *always*. We also controlled for income threat using an item from the European Social Survey (2014; i.e., “Which of the descriptions comes closest to how you feel about your household’s income nowadays?”). Responses were coded via a 4-point scale from 1 = *finding it very difficult on present income* to 4 = *living comfortably on present income*.

Results

The descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and correlations for the main variables are reported in Table 7. We first conducted a CFA on the hypothesized 10-factor model that included justice from Times 1 and 2, engagement and withdrawal behavior from Times 1 and 3, and perceived insider status, exhaustion, employment opportunity, and threat of job continuity from Time 2. We compared the fit of this 10-factor model with that of four alternative models: a nine-factor model in which the two moderators were combined into one factor, an eight-factor model in which the two mediators were combined

Table 6
Estimates for the Indirect Effects of Justice Change (Study 2)

Mediators	Outcomes	Estimates	SE	95% CI
Perceived insider status	Work engagement	.201	.05	[.106, .308]
Exhaustion	Withdrawal behavior	-.245	.18	[-.666, -.005]

Note. Unstandardized estimates are reported.

Table 7
Descriptive Statistics, Reliabilities, and Correlations (Study 3)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Age	39.69	9.56	—											
2. Gender	—	—	.02	—										
3. Justice (T1)	4.00	.91	.09	-.11	(.95)									
4. Justice (T2)	3.97	.95	.05	-.09	.82**	(.95)								
5. Perceived insider status (T2)	3.79	1.01	.12*	-.13*	.66**	.72**	(.96)							
6. Exhaustion (T2)	2.64	1.14	-.07	.16**	-.47**	-.50**	-.56**	(.95)						
7. Employment opportunity (T2)	3.63	.84	-.16*	-.11	.19**	.15*	.24**	-.23**	(.86)					
8. Threat of job continuity (T2)	2.16	1.03	.06	.05	-.29**	-.30**	-.37**	.39**	-.41**	(.91)				
9. Work engagement (T1)	4.48	1.49	.15*	-.11	.56**	.54**	.66**	-.69**	.22**	-.26**	(.89)			
10. Work engagement (T3)	4.52	1.46	.12	-.12*	.50**	.51**	.66**	-.67**	.26**	-.29**	.88**	(.88)		
11. Withdrawal behavior (T1)	1.91	1.11	-.20**	-.00	-.23**	-.20**	-.31**	.33**	-.10	.10	-.30**	-.29**	(.82)	
12. Withdrawal behavior (T3)	2.00	1.23	-.20**	.05	-.19**	-.20**	-.34**	.40**	-.09	.11	-.38**	-.38**	.84**	(.85)

Note. Gender: “1” = “male”; “2” = “female.” Reliability coefficients omega (ω) are reported along the diagonal in the brackets. T = time.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

into one factor and the two outcomes into another factor, a three-factor model in which the Time 1 variables were combined into one factor, Time 2 variables were combined into one factor, and Time 3 variables into another factor, and a one-factor model. As shown in Table 8, the 10-factor model had good fit with the data and fit better than the alternative models. All items had significant loadings on their respective construct (standardized loadings ranged from .57 to .98). In addition, we tested the measurement invariance of justice across the two time points. Results showed that the metric model, $\chi^2(298) = 540.0, p < .001, RMSEA = .056, CFI = .97$, did not significantly differ from the model fitness of the baseline model, $\Delta\chi^2(2) = 0.04, ns$, and the scalar model, $\chi^2(300) = 540.7, p < .001, RMSEA = .055, CFI = .97$, did not significantly differ from the metric model, $\Delta\chi^2(2) = 0.7, ns$. These results indicate sufficient measurement invariance for justice across the two time points.

As in Studies 1 and 2, we tested our hypotheses by comparing the full (M_1) and partial (M_2) mediation models. The results revealed that both models had a good fit with the data, $M_1: \chi^2(331) = 827.8, p < .001, RMSEA = .076, CFI = .93; M_2: \chi^2(329) = 822.8, p < .001, RMSEA = .076, CFI = .93$, and that the fit of M_1 did not significantly differ from that of M_2 — $\Delta\chi^2(2) = 5, ns$. Thus, we used the full mediation model (M_1) to test our hypotheses. The results for the full mediation model indicated that all proposed paths were statistically significant and in the hypothesized direction (see Figure 4). In terms of the approach pathway, justice change positively predicted perceived insider status at Time 2 incremental to justice at Time 1 ($\gamma = .35, p < .001, R^2 = .57$), which in turn predicted work engagement at Time 3 (controlling the effect of work engagement at Time 1; $\gamma = .15, p < .01, R^2 = .86$). Thus, Hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported. In terms of the avoidance pathway, justice change negatively predicted exhaustion at Time 2 incremental to justice at Time 1 ($\gamma = -.21, p < .01, R^2 = .29$), which in turn predicted withdrawal behavior at Time 3 (controlling the effect of withdrawal behavior at Time 1; $\gamma = .19, p < .001, R^2 = .83$), thus supporting Hypotheses 4 and 5. To test the mediation hypotheses, we used the same bootstrapping approach as in Studies 1 and 2. As shown in Table 9, perceived insider status mediated the relationship between justice change and work engagement, 95% CI = [.047, .290]. Justice change also had a significant

indirect relationship with withdrawal behavior via exhaustion, 95% CI = [-.123, -.015]. These results are in line with Hypotheses 3 and 6. As we controlled the baseline of work engagement and withdrawal behavior at Time 1, these results indicate that perceived insider status mediated the relationship between justice change and change in work engagement, and exhaustion mediated the relationship between justice change and change in withdrawal behavior.

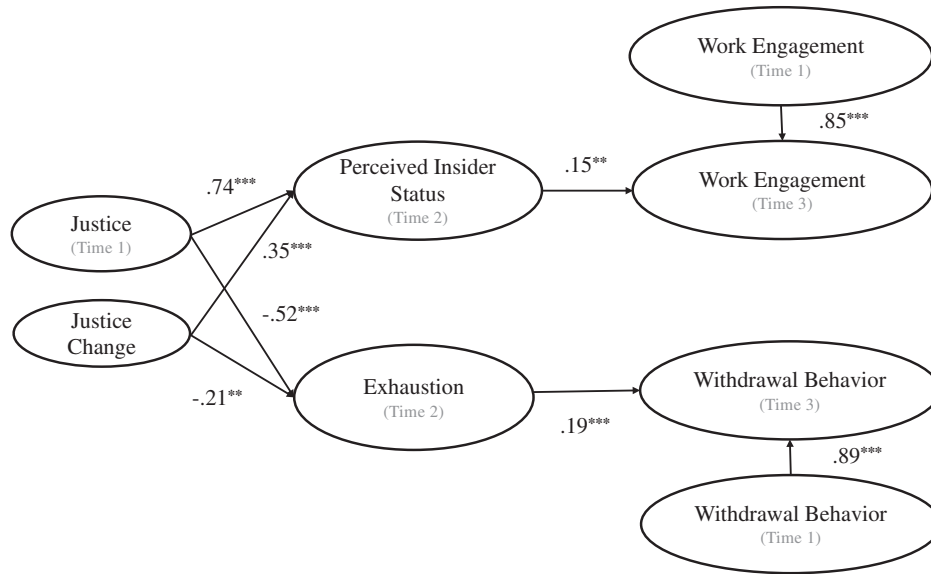
Finally, we tested Hypotheses 7 and 8 by including the latent interaction effects for Justice change \times Employment opportunity predicting perceived insider status and for Justice change \times Threat of job continuity predicting exhaustion (see Figure 5). We followed Klein and Moosbrugger’s (2000) guidelines for testing the latent interactions via maximum likelihood estimation using numerical integration. This procedure accounts for the characteristics of the nonnormally distributed interactions between the latent variables, produces unbiased parameter estimates, and is more efficient than other methods such as weighted least squares based on an augmented moment matrix (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 1998). The moderated mediation model ($-2\log$ likelihood = 16,271.93) fit the data significantly better than the full mediation model (M_1) without the interaction terms ($-2\log$ likelihood = 16,306.24),

Table 8
Measurement Model Comparisons (Study 3)

Model	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI	TLI
Ten-Factor model	540.0	296		.056	.047	.97	.96
Nine-Factor Model A	786.2	305	246.2	.078	.074	.94	.92
Eight-Factor model	1331.4	313	791.4	.111	.100	.87	.84
Three-Factor model	2910.6	335	2370.6	.171	.122	.66	.62
One-Factor model	3310.0	341	2770.0	.182	.126	.61	.57

Note. Nine-Factor Model A denotes a model in which employment opportunity and threat of job continuity were combined into one factor. Eight-Factor model denotes a model in which the two mediators were combined into one factor and the two outcomes (Time 3) into another factor. Three-Factor model denotes a model in which the Time 1 variables were combined into one factor, Time 2 variables into a second factor, and Time 3 variables into a third factor. RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root-mean-square residual; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index.

Figure 4
Structural Path Coefficients for the Full Mediation Model (Study 3)



Note. Standardized path coefficients are reported in the figure. We controlled for the relations of the baseline (Time 1) outcome measures with their counterparts at Time 3. Demographic variables including age, gender, position, death, and income threats were controlled. Justice change is created with justice at Time 1 and Time 2 using the LDS model (Selig & Preacher, 2009). More details can be found in the Measures section. LDS = latent difference score.
** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

$\Delta -2\log$ likelihood (4) = 34.31, critical $\Delta\chi^2$ for 4 df = 9.49, $p < .05$, thus indicating the existence of significant latent interaction effects.

The Justice change \times Employment opportunity interaction predicting perceived insider status was significant ($\gamma = .39, SE = .17, p < .05$). As illustrated in Figure 6, the positive relationship between justice change and perceived insider status was stronger when employment opportunity was higher (+1 $SD, b = .98, SE = .22, p < .001$) versus lower (-1 $SD, b = .20, SE = .24, p = .41$). The Justice change \times Threat of job continuity interaction predicting exhaustion was significant ($\gamma = -.30, SE = .13, p < .05$). As illustrated in Figure 7, the negative relationship between justice change and exhaustion was stronger when threat of job continuity was higher (+1 $SD, b = -.69, SE = .14, p < .001$) versus lower (-1 $SD, b = -.08, SE = .23, p = .73$).

Furthermore, we tested the moderation of employment opportunity on the indirect relationship of justice change with engagement via perceived insider status, and the moderation of threat of job continuity on the indirect relationship of justice change with withdrawal via exhaustion, following the procedure of Preacher et al. (2007). We

found that employment opportunity significantly moderated the indirect relationship of justice change on engagement via perceived insider status (moderated mediation index = .09, $SE = .04, p < .05$). As illustrated in Figure 8, this indirect relationship was stronger when employment opportunity was higher (indirect effect = .22, $SE = .08, p < .01$) versus lower (indirect effect = .04, $SE = .06, p = .43$). Meanwhile, threat of job continuity significantly moderated the indirect relationship of justice change on withdrawal behavior via exhaustion (moderated mediation index = -.04, $SE = .02, p < .05$). As illustrated in Figure 9, this indirect relationship was stronger when threat of job continuity was higher (indirect effect = -.09, $SE = .03, p < .01$) versus lower (indirect effect = -.01, $SE = .03, p = .73$). These results provide support for Hypotheses 7 and 8.

Supplementary Analyses

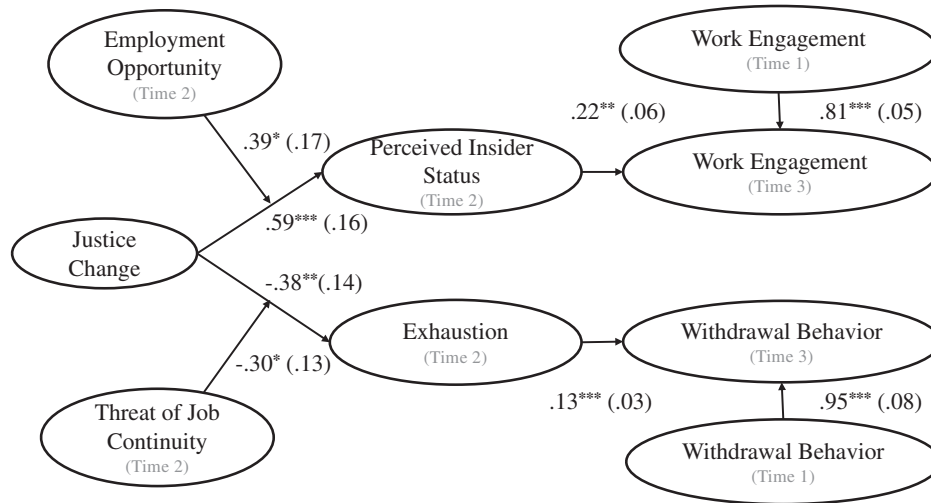
To further assess the robustness of our hypothesized model, we conducted four sets of supplementary analyses. First, according to self-regulation theory (e.g., Carver & Scheier, 1998;

Table 9
Estimates for the Indirect Effects of Justice Change (Study 3)

Mediators	Outcomes	Estimates	SE	95% CI
Perceived insider status	Work engagement	.153	.06	[.047, .290]
Exhaustion	Withdrawal behavior	-.062	.03	[-.123, -.015]

Note. Unstandardized estimates are reported.

Figure 5
Structural Path Coefficients for the Moderated Mediation Model (Study 3)

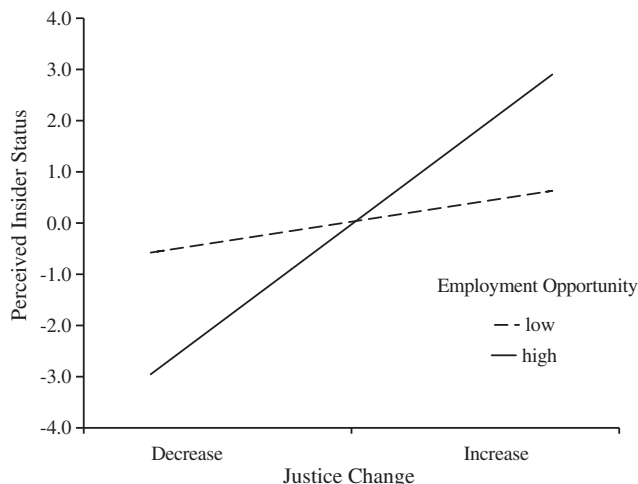


Note. Unstandardized path coefficients are reported in the figure, and standard errors are reported inside the parentheses. Justice change is created with justice at Time 1 and Time 2 using the LDS model (Selig & Preacher, 2009). More details can be found in the Measures section. Although not depicted, the relations of justice at Time 1 with the mediator and outcome variables were controlled for. Demographic variables including age, gender, position, death, and income threats were controlled. We also controlled for the relations of the baseline (Time 1) outcome measures with their counterparts at Time 3. LDS = latent difference score.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Johnson, Howe, & Chang, 2013), change information is impactful incremental to static information. Our results indicated that justice change predicts employees' work behaviors through approach and avoidance pathways incremental to justice level, yet this does not indicate whether the indirect effects of justice change are comparable to those of justice level. We therefore empirically tested this possibility using recommended practices (see Lau & Cheung, 2012). Results showed that the indirect effect of justice change on engagement via perceived insider status was equal to the indirect effect of

justice level, that is, justice at Time 1; indirect effects difference = $-.03$, $SE = .04$, ns , 95% CI $[-.110, .034]$. Similarly, the indirect effect of justice change on withdrawal behavior via exhaustion was equal to the indirect effect of justice level, indirect effects difference = $.03$, $SE = .02$, ns , 95% CI $[-.019, .078]$. Thus, the effects of justice change appear equivalent to those of justice level.² These findings indicate justice change is as impactful as justice level, and thus, there is utility in considering the effects of justice change when examining organizational justice.

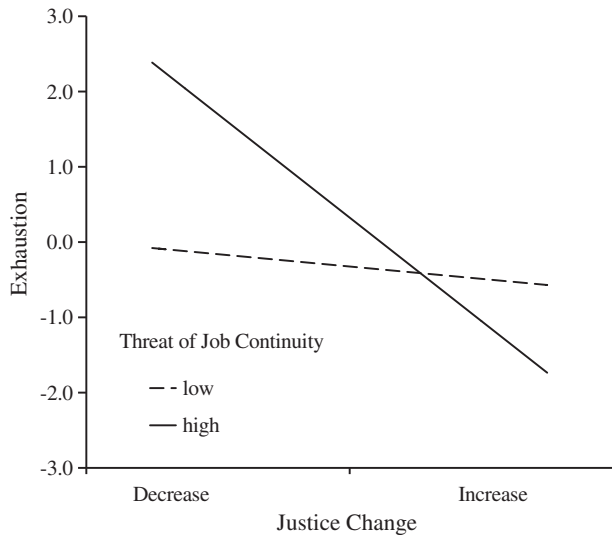
Figure 6
Interaction of Justice Change With Employment Opportunity Predicting Perceived Insider Status



Second, based on our approach and avoidance framework, engagement and withdrawal were specified as unique approach- and avoidance-oriented behaviors, respectively. We did not expect that engagement would be predicted by the avoidance mechanism (exhaustion) nor that withdrawal would be predicted by the approach mechanism (perceived insider status). In addition, according to regulatory fit, the approach-oriented moderator (employment opportunity) should not influence the effects of justice change in the avoidance path and the avoidance-oriented moderator (threat of job continuity) should not influence the effects of justice change in the

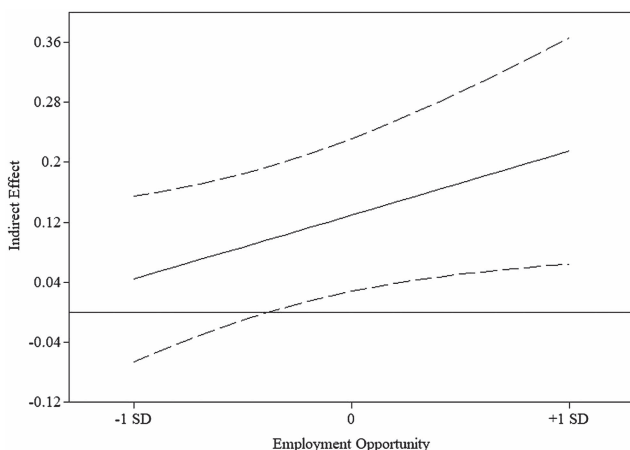
² Similar results were found in Studies 1 and 2. In Study 1, the indirect effect of justice change on engagement via perceived insider status was equal to the indirect effect of justice level, indirect effects difference = $-.06$, $SE = .08$, ns , 95% CI = $[-.193, .101]$. The indirect effect of justice change on withdrawal behavior via exhaustion was also equal to the indirect effect of justice level, indirect effects difference = $-.01$, $SE = .09$, ns , 95% CI = $[-.108, .116]$. In Study 2, the indirect effect of justice change on engagement via perceived insider status was equal to the indirect effect of justice level, indirect effects difference = $-.01$, $SE = .03$, ns , 95% CI = $[-.083, .046]$. The indirect effect of justice change on withdrawal behavior via exhaustion was equal to the indirect effect of justice level, indirect effects difference = $.20$, $SE = .18$, ns , 95% CI = $[-.019, .663]$.

Figure 7
Interaction of Justice Change With Threat of Job Continuity Predicting Exhaustion



approach path. To verify this empirically, we tested these nonhypothesized crossover relationships in our Study 3 mediation model and moderated mediation model. Results from the crossover mediation model showed that exhaustion did not mediate the relationship of justice change with engagement, 95% CI = [-.066, .051], nor did perceived insider status mediate the relationship of justice change with withdrawal, 95% CI = [-.010, .112]. In addition, results from the crossover moderated mediation model showed that employment opportunity did not moderate the relationship of justice change with exhaustion ($b = .04, SE = .33, ns$) nor did threat of job continuity moderate the relationship of justice change with perceived insider status ($b = .12, SE = .13, ns$). These findings are consistent with Carver's (1996, p. 320) claim that approach and avoidance are distinguishable pathways in the self-regulation system: "Although

Figure 8
Indirect Effect of Justice Change on Engagement via Perceived Insider Status at Different Level of Employment Opportunity (From -1 SD to +1 SD)



[approach and avoidance tendencies] are often layered across each other in the topography of behavior, they are conceptually distinct from each other."

Third, according to self-regulation theory (Carver, 2006; Carver & Scheier, 1998), the effects of justice change on outcomes are not expected to be moderated by justice level. To verify this empirically, we included the Justice change \times Justice level interaction term in the Study 3 model. Results revealed no significant interaction effects of justice change and justice level on perceived insider status ($b = .11, SE = .17, ns$) nor exhaustion ($b = -.22, SE = .17, ns$). Taken together, these supplementary results provide further support for the independent effects of justice change on unique approach and avoidance pathways.

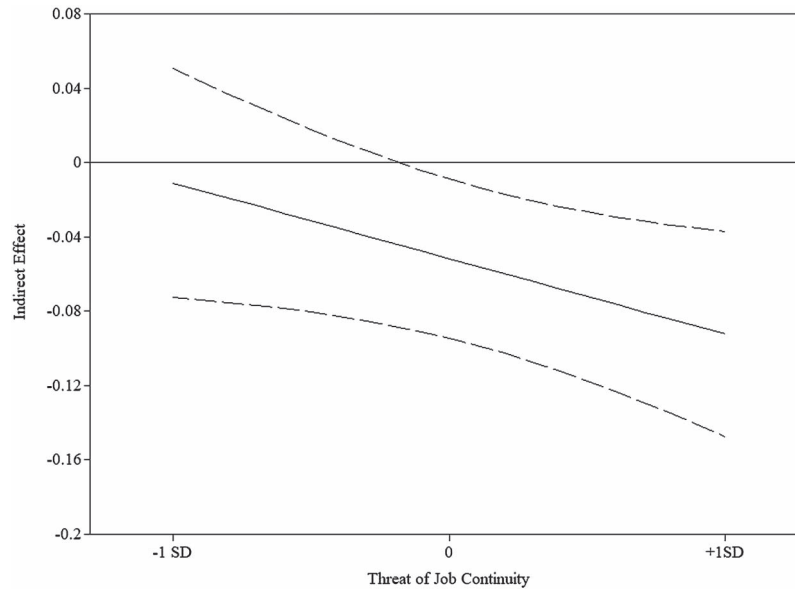
Finally, looking beyond self-regulation and group engagement, other explanatory mechanisms exist for explaining the effects of organizational justice, of which social exchange is the most prevalent (Colquitt et al., 2013). To verify that our focal mechanisms explain unique variance, we controlled for a commonly examined social exchange variable in the justice literature: leader-member exchange (LMX; see Colquitt et al., 2013) in Study 2. LMX was assessed using the 7-item Chinese version of a scale ($\omega = .89$; Liao et al., 2010) developed by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995). Results showed that although justice change predicted LMX at Time 2 ($\gamma = .56, p < .001, R^2 = .33$), LMX did not predict work engagement ($\gamma = .01, ns$) or withdrawal behavior ($\gamma = -.08, ns$) at Time 3 nor did LMX mediate the relationships of justice change with work engagement, 95% CI = [-.093, .097], or withdrawal behavior, 95% CI = [-1.118, .216]. When LMX was included in the model, justice change still predicted perceived insider status ($\gamma = .88, p < .001, R^2 = .66$) and exhaustion ($\gamma = -.29, p < .05, R^2 = .13$), and perceived insider status still mediated the relationship of justice change with work engagement, 95% CI = [.095, .395], and exhaustion still mediated the relationship of justice change with withdrawal behavior, 95% CI = [-.700, -.003]. Thus, results of our self-regulation model appear robust and distinct from social exchange.³

General Discussion

Over the past three decades, the primary focus of the justice literature has been on understanding how justice perceptions at a given moment in time form and the effects of these static perceptions on employees' subsequent feelings, thoughts, and behaviors (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001, 2013). This focus is beginning to expand via conceptual (e.g., Jones & Skarlicki, 2013; Lind, 2001) and empirical (e.g., Ambrose & Cropanzano, 2003; Hausknecht et al., 2011; Holtz & Harold, 2009; Loi et al., 2009) research that considers how justice perceptions change over time and what the consequences of such change are (see Fortin et al., 2016, for a review). Our research adds to this developing conversation by identifying a useful theoretical

³ Similar results were found in Study 1. After LMX was included in the Study 1 model, justice change still predicted perceived insider status ($\gamma = .57, p < .001, R^2 = .61$), which in turn predicted work engagement ($\gamma = .44, p < .001, R^2 = .47$). Similarly, justice change still predicted exhaustion ($\gamma = -.35, p < .01, R^2 = .16$), which in turn predicted withdrawal behavior ($\gamma = .44, p < .05, R^2 = .24$). The indirect relationships of justice with engagement via perceived insider status, 95% CI = [.099, .496], and with withdrawal via exhaustion, 95% CI = [-.288, -.009], also remained significant after controlling for LMX.

Figure 9
Indirect Effect of Justice Change on Withdrawal Behavior via Exhaustion at Different Level of Threat of Job Continuity (From -1 SD to +1 SD)



framework—self-regulation (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Lord et al., 2010)—for understanding justice change and demonstrating how it can be applied to and extend a contemporary theory of organizational justice—the group engagement model (Tyler & Blader, 2000, 2003). Consistent with our self-regulation framework, the results from three field samples suggest that justice change is regulated via separate approach and avoidance systems that shape employees' behavioral engagement and withdrawal, respectively. We discuss the theoretical and practical implications of our findings in the following section.

Theoretical Implications

A self-regulation perspective has proven useful for understanding justice and its antecedents and consequences in static contexts (e.g., Brebels et al., 2011; Johnson, Selenta, & Lord, 2006; O'Reilly et al., 2016; Thau & Mitchell, 2010). We extended this perspective to understand justice processes in dynamic contexts that involve change. Indeed, doing so led to two important insights. The first insight is that information about justice change is impactful above and beyond static justice. In fact, people are especially sensitive to information signaling change (Hsee & Abelson, 1991; Johnson, Howe, & Chang, 2013), as evidenced by findings from empirical studies showing that, for example, task satisfaction and effort are affected more by performance feedback that conveys information about change versus static levels (Chang et al., 2010; Lawrence et al., 2002). We consistently observed across three studies that justice change predicted perceived insider status and exhaustion incremental to static justice level. In addition, in supplementary analyses, we found that justice change had indirect effects on engagement and withdrawal behaviors equal to static justice level in every case. This suggests that the total effect of

organizational justice is underestimated when justice change is overlooked. For a comprehensive understanding of the impact of organizational justice, both justice change and level must be considered.

The second insight provided by our self-regulation perspective owes to the tenet that people use separate approach and avoidance systems to respond to environmental feedback (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Lanaj et al., 2012). Although the exploration of this approach–avoidance distinction is in a nascent stage in the justice literature, the initial evidence suggests that justice information evokes processing in both systems (e.g., Barclay & Kiefer, 2014; Johnson et al., 2010, 2012). Our research adds to this literature by verifying that perceived insider status and engagement are unique outcomes of the approach system, whereas exhaustion and withdrawal have distinct ties to the avoidance system. Importantly, these approach and avoidance systems operate independently and have unique effects on organizational outcomes (Johnson, Chang, et al., 2013; Lanaj et al., 2012), which is verified by our supplementary results. Indeed, we observed moderate average correlations between perceived insider status and exhaustion (average $r = 1.44$) and between engagement and withdrawal (average $r = 1.27$) across our three studies, and the fit of the measurement model significantly worsened when we combined the approach and avoidance mediators and the approach and avoidance outcomes. This finding underscores the importance of teasing apart the approach and avoidance outcomes of justice and enables examination of the unique mechanisms that underlie each system, which is rarely done.

Our self-regulation framework for understanding justice change also has implications for existing organizational justice theories, which we demonstrated by applying it to the group engagement model (Tyler & Blader, 2000, 2003). This model posits that

experiencing justice activates a positive evaluation of one's status in the group. This positive evaluation can be characterized by perceiving oneself as an insider within the organization (Blader & Tyler, 2009), which are desirable end states that, as our data show, operate within the approach system. Consistent with this idea, our results revealed that perceived insider status is linked to approach-oriented behavior (viz., engagement in one's work) and is susceptible to the moderating effects of an approach-oriented perception of the situation (i.e., employment opportunity). Although this status-relevant mechanism has received empirical support (e.g., Armstrong-Stassen & Schlosser, 2011; Blader & Tyler, 2009; De Cremer & Tyler, 2005; Tyler & Blader, 2000), this attention should not come at the cost of overlooking possible avoidance-oriented mechanisms within the group engagement model.

Employees' experience of exhaustion, arising from coping with the threats of social rejection and economic exploitation that arise when justice decreases, is an avoidance-oriented mechanism that fits the logic of the group engagement model. Other justice theories may similarly be extended by considering dual approach–avoidance mechanisms. For example, the avoidance system likely plays key roles in the deontic model of justice (Cropanzano et al., 2003) because moral acts are framed in terms of obligations and avoiding harm (Janoff-Bulman et al., 2009). The avoidance system is also relevant for uncertainty management theory (Van den Bos & Lind, 2002) because uncertainty is a negative state that people are motivated to move away from.

Practical Implications

Our self-regulation framework has practical implications for managing justice in the workplace. First, our findings suggest that organizations need to recognize the importance of justice change. Employees are sensitive to justice change and, as our results indicate, their work behavior is altered as a result. Thus, organizations need to be consistent in their enactment of justice to ensure that their employees' justice perceptions increase or at least remain stable (cf. Johnson et al., 2014; Matta et al., 2017). For example, in the case of an event in the organization that could lead to perceptions of justice change (e.g., mass layoffs or divestitures, new policies, change of supervisors; Gopinath & Becker, 2000; Ritter & Lord, 2007; Rodell & Colquitt, 2009), employees' attitudes and behaviors will change to the extent that there is a change in justice perceptions. Therefore, organizations need to be aware that employees respond not only to the current level of justice but also to the magnitude and direction of the change from past justice. We suggest that companies should monitor their employees' justice perceptions over time to maintain employee engagement and prevent withdrawal.

Second, managers should be cognizant of how changes in justice affect employees' behavior (e.g., Matta et al., 2017; Sherf et al., 2019). Our results suggest that perceived insider status and exhaustion play key roles in justice change. With an understanding of the mechanisms that affect behavior in times where a decrease in justice cannot be avoided, managers may be able to mitigate some of the damage by taking steps to increase their employees' perceived insider status and/or decrease their exhaustion. For example, managers can create a supportive climate (e.g., by enhancing supervisory support and coworker support), which has been found to strengthen employees' perceived insider status (Lapalme et al.,

2009; Wang et al., 2019). In addition, organizations can organize activities and opportunities for respite (e.g., meditation workshops, happy hours, and other social outings) to help alleviate any exhaustion employees may be experiencing (Hülshager et al., 2013).

In addition, managers must utilize different strategies to deal with justice change in different situations. Our results indicate that high employment opportunities may strengthen employees' approach reactions and that threat of job continuity may strengthen employees' avoidance–approach reactions. Therefore, managers should pay heed to understanding context such as the labor market when selecting approach or avoidance interventions for their hoped for effective strategies. For example, when high labor demands exist in the job market, employees generally perceive high employment opportunities (Hall, 1991). In this case, they will exhibit stronger approach-oriented responses to justice change. Managers thus can adopt strategies to increase employees' perceived status in the organization. In the case of economic recessions or mass layoffs, employees generally experience high threats to their job continuity (Brockner et al., 1992). As such, avoidance-oriented responses to justice change will be more prominent and managers can adopt strategies to mitigate employees' exhaustion. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, where threat to job continuity became more salient to employees (Thomas et al., 2020), strategies to mitigate employee exhaustion should be incorporated into management.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

While our studies had several strengths, including multiwave designs, multisource data, and baseline controls, some limitations warrant mention. First, like any application of mediation, our research did not itself generate evidence that establishes causality (MacKinnon et al., 2007). We posited that justice change affects perceived insider status and exhaustion, which in turn affect engagement and withdrawal, respectively. However, reverse relationships may also be plausible (e.g., engagement leads to perceptions of higher status in the organization). Although we lagged our variables and, in both Studies 2 and 3, controlled for baseline levels of the outcomes to indicate change (Wood et al., 2008), doing so does not establish causality. Follow-up research using experimental designs to test our hypothesized model would offer key empirical contributions.

A second limitation is that justice change was only modeled across two points in time. Although we adopted the LDS model, which is regarded as a reliable method to model change within two time points (Li et al., 2014; Ritter et al., 2016; Toker & Biron, 2012), having only two time points limits our ability to estimate more nuanced justice change trajectories over time. In the future, researchers should collect data at three or more times for a more fine-grained analysis of within-person justice change, and how information gleaned from these more nuanced justice trajectories is used to regulate behavior through dual approach–avoidance systems. With such data, researchers could, for example, estimate the amount of justice change that is needed to exceed the threshold necessary for producing change in work attitudes and behaviors (Taylor, 2001).

Third, as an initial test of justice change within our self-regulation framework, we examined changes in overall perceptions of justice (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009; Ambrose et al., 2015; Hollensbe et al., 2008). However, justice can also be examined at a facet level by distinguishing between the fairness of outcomes, procedures, and

interactions (see Colquitt, 2001). It is thus possible that the effects of justice change we observed may be driven by a subset of these facets. For example, the group engagement model emphasizes procedural justice as the trigger of social status evaluation (Tyler & Blader, 2003), yet it has been found that the fairness of outcomes and interpersonal treatment have implications for social status as well (Armstrong-Stassen & Schlosser, 2011; Blader & Tyler, 2009). Thus, a needed direction for future research is to examine whether approach- and avoidance-based effects apply equally across the different justice facets. For instance, decreases in interpersonal justice, which is more proximal and affect-laden (Bies, 2001), may have a stronger effects on exhaustion than do decreases in the other facets.

A final direction for future research is to consider alternative approach- and avoidance-based variables. For example, we tested the role of employment opportunity and threat of job continuity in the approach and avoidance pathways, respectively, in our model. Employment opportunity and threat of job continuity are unique in that they are appraisals of employment situation that involve a mix of both personal (e.g., an employee's knowledge and skills) and contextual (e.g., supply and demand and competition in the labor market) factors (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; Sverke et al., 2002). There are, however, other potential moderators that reflect the approach-avoidance distinction. For example, personality traits like extraversion and promotion focus may moderate approach-based relationships, whereas neuroticism and prevention focus may moderate avoidance-based relationships (Johnson, Chang, et al., 2013; Lanaj et al., 2012). Similarly, contextual factors such as compensation systems that emphasize gains (e.g., bonuses, stock options) versus losses (e.g., at-risk pay) may strengthen approach-versus avoidance-based relationships, respectively (Gamache et al., 2015). Although the search for moderators of justice-based effects has not always proven fruitful (Colquitt et al., 2006), our self-regulation framework reveals new avenues for exploration based on an approach-avoidance distinction.

Conclusion

To date, the organizational justice literature has primarily comprised studies of the effects of static perceptions of justice on outcomes at a concurrent or later time (Fortin et al., 2016). Yet, empirical evidence is mounting that justice perceptions and behaviors change over time (e.g., Ambrose & Cropanzano, 2003; Hausknecht et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2014; Koopman et al., 2020; Lennard et al., in press; Matta et al., 2017). As a way of bridging the old and the new, we integrated theories pertaining to self-regulation and group engagement to account for how changes in justice perceptions influence subsequent employee behavior. Consistent with our integrative framework, we found that justice change affects engagement and withdrawal via approach and avoidance mechanisms, respectively, and explained as much variance in these variables as justice level. Accounting for change over time and distinguishing between approach and avoidance processes appear to be promising directions for further developing our knowledge of the nature of organizational justice information and how it affects employees' subsequent regulation of their affect, cognition, and behavior.

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