PERCEIVED FAIRNESS IN EMPLOYEE SELECTION: THE ROLE OF APPLICANT PERSONALITY

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ABSTRACT: The present study investigated the role of applicant personality in relation to applicant procedural and distributive justice perceptions after being informed of an organization's reject/accept selection decision. A sample of 503 students completed a selection test, believing the results would be used to make initial selection decisions for an organization recruiting from the university. Participants were presented with selection decisions (randomly assigned) two weeks later, and procedural and distributive justice perceptions were assessed. Hierarchical regression analyses indicated that agreeableness, openness to experience, and test-taking self-efficacy were positively related with perceptions of procedural and distributive justice. Neuroticism was negatively associated with distributive justice perceptions. The relationships of test-taking self-efficacy with procedural and distributive justice were moderated by the organization's selection decision.

KEY WORDS: justice; selection; personality.

As organizations become increasingly aware of potential consequences from using selection devices, one underlying fact will not change: Organizations will inevitably continue to reject hopeful applicants. Given this reality, it seems appropriate to explore factors associated with applicant reactions to selection procedures. Over the past two decades,

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the amount of research investigating selection procedures and fairness perceptions has dramatically increased (cf. Konovsky, 2000). Much of this research has focused on the fairness perceptions of organizational decisions, collectively termed distributive justice, and on the fairness perceptions of the processes used to make organizational decisions, known as procedural justice. Recently, considerable progress has been made to more fully understand the many factors involved in such perceptions (for reviews, see Gilliland, 1993; Greenberg, 1990; Konovsky, 2000; Ryan & Ployhart, 2000).

Despite these developments, some potentially important topics have remained largely uninvestigated. For example, only scant attention has been devoted to the role of individual differences, such as applicant personality, influencing fairness perceptions during the selection process. In fact, only recently has there been any attempt to evaluate the role of individual applicant personality in organizational justice perceptions (e.g., Wiechmann & Ryan, 2003). While past research has investigated procedural and environmental cues, the present study investigates personalities that may predispose individuals to react to selection decisions in predictable ways.

Research exploring antecedents to reactions to selection decisions could conceivably help both employers and applicants, as organizational justice principles may serve both equally well (Konovsky, 2000). From a selection perspective, the goal of any selection process is to select the most qualified applicants for the position. How applicants react to selection tests can potentially impact an organization's ability to attract and hire the most qualified candidates (Rynes & Barber, 1990). From an attraction standpoint, a company's image is more than just products and services, it is also defined by recruiting and selection practices (Fielden & Dulek, 1982; Rynes & Barber, 1990). Organizational procedural and outcome fairness has been found to influence a variety of important reactions such as litigation intentions (Dunford & Devine, 1998; Goldman, 2001; Seymour, 1988), organizational commitment (Robertson, Iles, Gratton, & Sharpley, 1991), public image (Fielden & Dulek, 1982; Feinberg, Meoli-Stanton, & Gable, 1996), reapplication intentions (Waung & Brice, 2000), retaliation behaviors (Bies, 1987; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997), recommendation intentions (Bauer et al., 2001; Gilliland, 1993, 1994; Gilliland et al., 2001), and even willingness to continue patronizing an organization (Waung & Brice, 2000). Such findings indicate that additional research is warranted to further investigate the factors associated with applicant reactions to selection procedures and outcomes.

In addition, the current notion of the "total care" organization suggests treating applicants as if they were customers (Smither, Reilly, Millsap, Pearlman, & Stoffey, 1993). Applying this view to the selection

process, organizations should know and understand customer preferences, expectations, and needs. A failure to understand will result in fewer customers and, as the metaphor suggests, fewer qualified applicants (Smither et al., 1993). If such a proposition is correct, the benefits of organizational justice research dealing with selection processes and outcomes are apparent. However, after reviewing the selection fairness literature from 1985 to 1999, Ryan and Ployhart (2000) concluded the literature lacks a clear consensus regarding the potential causes of these perceptions. The present study seeks to address this issue.

ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE PERSPECTIVES

Traditionally, organizational justice discussions have focused on fairness perceptions of decision outcomes. What is now commonly referred to as distributive justice has a theoretical foundation in balance theories of the 1950s and 1960s (e.g., Adams, 1965; Festinger, 1957; Heider, 1958). Focusing on an individual evaluation of a theoretical ratio of perceived inputs to outputs, Adams' (1965) equity theory has been the traditional foundation of most distributive justice research (Greenberg, 1987). In terms of selection, this ratio is based on a comparison between applicants' skills, abilities, and experiences, and those needed to fill the position; further, this ratio is coupled with the selection decision to compose an applicant's perception of distributive justice.

As selection and distributive justice research has evolved, researchers have theorized that fairness perceptions are not exclusively formed as a result of the selection decision itself, but rather by a number of factors, including the procedures used during the hiring process (cf. Thibaut & Walker, 1975). While procedural justice perceptions are universally acknowledged today (e.g., Gilliland, 1993; Greenberg, 1990; Konovsky, 2000), Thibaut and Walker (1975) were the first to systematically investigate procedural influences. For example, they found procedures were perceived as more fair when participants were given an opportunity to offer input, or "voice," into the process. These findings initiated the development of organizational justice perspectives from an entirely distributive outlook to a more comprehensive framework. Using this framework, researchers began to investigate the relationships between organizational fairness in the selection process and reactions to selection decisions (e.g., Gilliland, 1993; Smither et al., 1993).

Personality Differences and the Present Investigation

More than three decades ago, Fiske (1967) suggested personality may be a basis for explaining differences in reactions to tests, but only

limited research has been designed to assess the relationships between applicants' personality traits and their fairness reactions to the use of personality tests in selection (cf. Wiechmann & Ryan, 2003). In fact, despite previous calls for investigations in this area (e.g., Ryan & Ployhart, 2000), there is surprisingly little research on the role personality may play in explaining differences in any type of justice perceptions (i.e., selection or otherwise). To date, we are aware of only one study that assessed the association between test takers' personality characteristics and their perceptions of testing justice. Wiechmann and Ryan (2003) found initial support linking personality to justice perceptions. However, Wiechmann and Ryan examined only the relationship between individual differences and process fairness and did not include outcome fairness. Moreover, the student participants in their study knew that favorable performance would not result in a hiring possibility. The present study attempts to address these limitations in its examination of links between additional personality traits and both perceived selection process and outcome fairness.

Before discussing the proposed associations of agreeableness, openness to experience, neuroticism, and test-taking self-efficacy with perceptions of procedural and distributive justice, a distinction between the variables needs to be addressed. Specifically, although we use the term personality throughout the manuscript, one of the predictor variables (i.e., test-taking self-efficacy) is more of a disposition than a personality trait. Personality traits such as agreeableness, openness to experience, and neuroticism should lead to reactions that are consistent over time and context (cf. Funder, 2004). Furthermore, personality traits are an enduring characteristic of the individual. On the other hand, test-taking self-efficacy is a disposition that will exercise an influence only in certain situations. Thus, any findings between agreeableness, openness to experience, neuroticism, and reactions to selection decisions should be consistent with how the individual reacts to situations in general. Any findings with regard to test-taking self-efficacy may be more context specific. With this in mind, we continue by discussing the theoretical conceptualizations and past findings that suggest a relationship between these traits and procedural and distributive justice.

Agreeableness

Recently, consensus among personality researchers has begun to accept a five-factor model of individual personality (Goldberg, 1990). Collectively termed the Big Five, researchers have found these traits to influence a number of relevant aspects of life (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Digman, 1989; Tupes & Christal, 1961). One of the five, agreeableness, is associated with altruism, generosity, cooperation, and sociability.

Individuals low on agreeableness are temperamental, argumentative, antagonistic, and tend toward narcissism, cynicism, and greed (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1992; Goldberg, 1990). Graziano and Eisenberg (1997) have defined agreeableness in terms of a person's motivation to avoid arguments. Their definition, coupled with past research, suggests an intuitive link between agreeableness and reactions to selection decisions. For example, past research has revealed agreeableness is negatively related with aggression, anger, and hostility and positively related with cooperation (e.g., Costa, McCrae, & Dembroski, 1989; Zuckerman, Kuhlman, Joireman, & Teta, 1993). Other researchers have suggested individuals low on agreeableness have higher levels of emotional arousal and are, therefore, more difficult to calm when distressed (Buss & Plomin, 1984; Skarlicki, Folger, & Tesluk, 1999).

During times of stress or disappointment, such as that found after being rejected from employment consideration, it seems likely the emotional arousal of a person low on agreeableness is likely to influence their fairness perceptions of the selection process and the employment decision. Further, because agreeable individuals desire support and cooperation and avoid conflict and confrontation (Costa & McCrae, 1992), individuals high in agreeableness will likely be more willing to accept an unfavorable selection decision. In this regard, Skarlicki et al. (1999) found that agreeableness was positively correlated with procedural and fairness perceptions and negatively related to organizational retaliation behaviors. These findings suggest that agreeableness may also predict perceptions of procedural and distributive justice in selection reactions. The following hypothesis is therefore advanced:

Hypothesis 1: Applicants' agreeableness will be positively associated with their perceived fairness of personality testing procedures and outcomes in the selection process.

Openness to Experience

Individuals high in openness to experience have been described as non-conforming, imaginative, original, unconventional, and independent (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Additionally, individuals high in openness also display independence of judgment. Although no direct support linking openness to experience and organizational justice perceptions has been reported, it seems plausible that these two variables are associated. Specifically, individuals low in openness are likely to fear the unknown and ambiguity involved in being evaluated during a selection process. As such, individuals low in openness are likely to react more negatively and view the process and the outcome as more unjust than those individuals who are open to new and novel experiences. A similar proposition was

suggested by Wiechmann and Ryan (2003). Although they reported only limited support relating openness and process fairness, the present study investigates this relationship in a selection situation, not a simulation-based environment. The following hypothesis is therefore proposed:

Hypothesis 2: Applicants' openness to experience will be positively associated with their perceived fairness of personality testing procedures and outcomes in the selection process.

Neuroticism

Unlike agreeableness and openness to experience, neuroticism has not been investigated in relation to selection fairness reactions. However, past research does lay a foundation for the possibility that neuroticism is correlated with perceptions of fairness of selection procedures and outcomes. For example, neuroticism has been described and associated with several tendencies and characteristics seemingly relevant to receiving a selection decision. Specifically, neurotic individuals tend to be fearful of novel situations and susceptible to feelings of helplessness and dependence (Wiggins, 1996). Additionally, neurotic individuals have been defined as self-conscious, insecure, unstable, and anxious (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Goldberg, 1990). In regard to reactions to a selection decision, neurotic individuals are particularly affected by negative life events (Suls, Green, & Hillis, 1998). Being rejected from hiring consideration could certainly be viewed as a stressful life event for a hopeful job applicant. Therefore, the following hypothesis is made:

Hypothesis 3: Applicants' neuroticism will be negatively associated with their perceived fairness of personality testing procedures and outcomes in the selection process.

Test-taking Self-efficacy

A number of different researchers have investigated the relationship between generalized self-efficacy and organizational justice perspectives (e.g., Gilliland, 1994). Self-efficacy is defined as individuals' judgment of their ability to perform certain tasks, and this disposition has been found to influence thought patterns, actions, behaviors, and emotional reactions during taxing situations (Bandura, 1982). In organizational justice contexts, self-efficacy has been found to be lower for individuals who failed to be hired, and this relationship was intensified under fair hiring conditions (Gilliland, 1994; Ployhart & Ryan, 1997). Given this founda-

tion, Wiechmann and Ryan (2003) and Chambers (2002) have suggested that self-efficacy is predictive of judgments of procedural and distributive justice.

In the selection process, test-taking self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to perform well during test-taking situations. This disposition is influenced by previous successes and failures on tests taken in the past. Initial support linking test-taking self-efficacy and perceptions of justice has been previously found (e.g., Bauer, Maertz, Dolen, & Campion, 1998; Wiechmann & Ryan, 2003). Generally, individuals low in test-taking self-efficacy are expected to have negative emotions and thoughts during test-taking situations, and these cognitions and emotions, in turn, will negatively influence their post-test perceptions (Gist, Schwoerer, & Rosen, 1989; Wiechmann & Ryan, 2003). However, it seems likely those individuals who expect to do well on a selection test (i.e., high test-taking self-efficacy), and then fail to meet organizational hiring standards, will react more negatively than those individuals who did not expect to do well. Thus, on the basis of the literature on test-taking self-efficacy and past research, the following hypothesis is made:

Hypothesis 4: Selection decision outcome (i.e., rejected versus not rejected by the organization) will moderate the positive relationships of test-taking self-efficacy with perceived fairness of the selection procedure and selection decision. Specifically, these relationships will be greater when the applicant is not rejected by the organization.

METHOD

Participants

Participation in the study was solicited from undergraduate business students enrolled in multiple sections of a large management class at a comprehensive southeastern university. Two survey administrations were given to these students. A total of 612 of a possible 715 individuals (86%) participated in the first survey. Of the 612 participants who completed the first survey, 524 individuals returned the second survey (a participation rate of 86%). Due to incomplete data on either the first or second surveys, 21 of the 524 surveys returned were removed from the study. Therefore, the overall participation rate was 70%. Of the 503 usable surveys, 38% were from females and 62% from males. Additionally, 72% of participants had at least one year of part-time work experience. Results indicated no differences in grade-point average or work experience between those participants who completed both surveys and those students who failed to complete the second survey.

Procedure

Participants were notified during class and through electronic mail that a *Fortune* 500 company that recruits from the university was considering using a new selection test for on-campus recruiting events. They were further instructed that, in an effort to test the reliability and validity of the test and its impact on recruiting efforts, the company had contacted this university and several others to set up pilot studies. Additionally, students were told those students who performed well on the test would be contacted by the organization for future employment or internship opportunities. Extra course credit and raffle prizes were offered to students for their participation in the study.

During the first phase of the study, participants completed paper-and-pencil tests assessing the four study predictors: agreeableness, openness to experience, neuroticism, and test-taking self-efficacy. Participants were informed that the organization would score the inventory, and results would be given to participants at a later date. Two weeks later, immediately before the administration of the second survey, each participant was given an envelope with an individually addressed letter communicating the organization's decision in relation to the participant's status. The letter informed participants they had either met or failed to meet hiring standards (randomly assigned); further, they were either encouraged or discouraged from applying for employment in the spring. In addition, the letter stated the inventory had been found to be statistically reliable and valid, and the organization had decided to use the inventory in future employment decisions. Participants were also told the vice president of human resources would be sending each successful applicant an e-mail with directions on how to apply for a job. Finally, participants were informed that the organization's name was being withheld until completion of survey two in order to avoid bias in the results. Next, a second survey was administered to participants that gathered data on the criterion variables used in the study (i.e., procedural and distributive justice perceptions). After all participants finished the second survey, they were debriefed and informed about the true nature of the study.

Predictors

Agreeableness, Openness to Experience, and Neuroticism.

Agreeableness, openness to experience, and neuroticism were each measured using 12 items from the NEO-FFI (Costa & McCrae, 1992). An example item for agreeableness is "I try to be courteous to everyone I meet." An example of an openness to experience item is "I often enjoy playing with theories or abstract ideas." Finally, an example statement for neuroticism is "When I'm under a great deal of stress, sometimes

I feel like going to pieces.” Alphas for the three scales were .70 (agreeableness), .71 (openness to experience), and .84 (neuroticism).

Test-taking Self-efficacy.

A four-item measure designed by Bauer et al. (1998) was used to assess test-taking self-efficacy. A sample item from this measure is “I think my chances of being hired as a result of the test I took today are high.” Coefficient alpha for the measure was .71.

Selection Decision Outcome.

In the selection decision, participants were informed that, on the basis of their performance on the selection inventory, they had either met (scored 0) or failed to meet (scored 1) organizational hiring standards.

Criteria

Procedural justice.

A five-item measure was adapted from previous research by Elkins and Phillips (2000) to assess perceptions of procedural justice. Elkins and Phillips used the term “biographical data instrument” in their items; the present study replaced this term with “Organizational Leadership Test,” which was the label used for the selection measure administered during phase one of the study. An example item was “Overall, I believe using the Organizational Leadership Test was fair.” Elkins and Phillips reported an alpha of .85; alpha for the scale in the present study was .87.

Distributive Justice.

A four-item measure adapted from Elkins and Phillips (2000) was used to assess perceptions of distributive justice. Again, the items were slightly modified to replace the term “biographical data instrument.” An example item includes “Overall, I feel the result of the selection decision was unfair” (reverse scored). Elkins and Phillips reported an alpha of .81. In the present study, alpha for distributive justice was .90.

Confirmatory Factor Analyses

To assess the distinction between procedural and distributive justice, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis. We compared the following models: (a) all items loading on a global justice factor (Model 1), (b) our hypothesized model with the procedural and distributive justice items loading on two separate latent variables that were allowed to covary (Model 2), and (c) a third model that included a single higher order factor of justice (Model 3). Model 1 fit indices CFI, TLI, GFI, and AGFI (.89, .84, .82, and .68, respectively) and RMSEA (.17, $p < .01$) indicated a

poor model fit. The hypothesized Model 2 provided a better fit compared to Model 1 as suggested by the chi-square difference test, ($\Delta\chi^2 = 259.0$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p < .01$). In addition, the RMSEA was non-significant (.05, $p = .22$, LO90 = .033, HI90 = .073), and high values of CFI, TLI, GFI, and AGFI (.99, .99, .98, and .96, respectively) suggested a close fit to the data. Finally, Model 3 yielded slightly lower values of CFI, TLI, GFI, and AGFI (.87, .82, .90, and .82, respectively) and a significant RMSEA (.18, $p < .01$). Furthermore, the chi-square difference revealed Model 2 was a better fit than Model 3 ($\Delta\chi^2 = 301.0$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p < .01$). Thus, confirmatory factor analysis provided evidence that procedural and distributive justice were related but distinct factors.

Data Analyses

Hierarchical moderated regression was used to examine the relationships of applicant personalities with perceived procedural and distributive justice. In our moderated regression models, the five independent variables (agreeableness, openness to experience, neuroticism, test-taking self-efficacy, and selection decision) were entered in the first step followed by entry of the set of personality trait $\times$ selection decision favorability interactions in the second step. Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 implicitly imply that the relationship between agreeableness, openness, neuroticism, and justice perceptions should not be dependent on the selection decision. Therefore, the interactions between the three personality traits and selection decision were tested to ensure the hypothesized relationships were not dependent on an acceptance/rejection decision. When the interaction term was found to be non-significant, we examined the main effects for significant relationships between the personality trait and justice perceptions. To reduce the effect of multicollinearity between the interaction terms and the main effects (Cohen & Cohen, 1983), we centered the interaction terms around zero before estimating the model (Aiken & West, 1991).

RESULTS

Table 1 reports the means, standard deviations, intercorrelations, and coefficient alphas for the study variables. As has been found in previous research, participants' distributive and procedural justice ratings were positively correlated ($r = .70$, $p < .01$). Meta-analysis research by Hauenstein, McGonigle, and Flinder (2001) found a mean $r = .64$ between these two constructs. Although the two justice measures were highly related, we decided to treat them as separate variables for two reasons: (a) the confirmatory factor analysis results indicated the two

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations for Study Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Agreeableness	3.76	.41	(.70)						
Accepted applicants ¹	3.78	.39							
Rejected applicants	3.73	.42							
2. Openness to experience	2.78	.48	-.02	(.71)					
Accepted applicants	2.80	.48	.02						
Rejected applicants	2.76	.48	-.05						
3. Neuroticism	2.48	.59	-.25**	.12**	(.84)				
Accepted applicants	2.49	.55	-.25**	.02					
Rejected applicants	2.47	.62	-.25**	.10					
4. Test-taking self-efficacy	3.70	.65	.15**	-.18**	-.46**	(.71)			
Accepted applicants	3.72	.66	.10	-.14*	-.45**				
Rejected applicants	3.68	.64	.17**	-.23**	-.46**				
5. Selection decision ²	.48	.50	-.07	-.04	-.02	-.03	—		
6. Procedural justice	3.41	.79	.14**	.11*	.00	.03	-.59**	(.87)	
Accepted applicants	3.85	.51	.20**	.09	-.13*	.16**	—		
Rejected applicants	2.92	.74	.06	.11	.06	-.10	—		
7. Distributive justice	3.35	1.10	.12**	.09*	-.05	.04	-.79**	.70**	(.90)
Accepted applicants	4.20	.54	.23**	.06	-.23**	.25**	—	.54**	
Rejected applicants	2.47	.77	.03	.13*	-.02	-.14*	—	.46**	

Note: *N* = 503. Coefficient alphas for all 503 participants are reported on the diagonal.

¹The breakdown of final data is as follows: 240 rejected participants; 263 accepted participants.

²Coded as 1 = rejected; 0 = accepted.

**p* < .05.

scales were distinct, and (b) previous research has treated these variables as distinct measures (e.g., Elkins & Phillips, 2000). Procedural justice was correlated with agreeableness ($r = .14, p < .01$) and openness to experience ($r = .11, p < .05$). Distributive justice was also correlated with agreeableness ($r = .12, p < .01$) and openness to experience ($r = .09, p < .05$). Additionally, the selection decision was associated with both procedural ($r = -.59, p < .01$) and distributive justice ($r = -.79, p < .01$). Table 1 also provides the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for the two subgroups of participants (i.e., rejected participants and accepted participants). Closer attention to the means of accepted and rejected participants on procedural ($M = 3.85$ for accepted versus $M = 2.92$ for rejected) and distributive justice ($M = 4.20$ for accepted versus $M = 2.47$ for rejected) helps illuminate the strength and nature of the interaction suggested in the study. Likewise, the clear difference in ratings help serve as a manipulation check for the study methodology.

Tests of Hypotheses

Table 2 contains the results of hierarchical multiple regression analyses used to test the study hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 stated agreeableness will be positively associated with perceived fairness of the selection procedure and selection decision. The results in Table 2 show that agreeableness was related to both procedural ($\beta = .10, p < .01$) and distributive justice perceptions ($\beta = .06, p < .05$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported. Hypothesis 2 stated openness to experience will be positively associated with the perceived fairness of the selection procedure and selection decision. This hypothesis was supported as openness to experience was positively associated with perceptions of procedural ($\beta = .09, p < .05$) and distributive ($\beta = .06, p < .05$) justice. Hypothesis 3 stated neuroticism will be negatively associated with the perceived fairness of the selection procedure and selection decision. Neuroticism was negatively related with distributive justice ($\beta = -.07, p < .05$), but no association was found with procedural justice. Thus, Hypothesis 3 received only partial support.

Finally, Hypothesis 4 stated that selection decision outcome will moderate the relationship between test-taking self-efficacy and perceived

Table 2
Results of Moderated Regression Analyses for Procedural and Distributive Justice

Variable	Procedural justice β	Distributive justice β
<i>Step 1:</i>		
Agreeableness	.10**	.06*
Openness to experience	.09*	.06*
Neuroticism	.00	-.07*
Test-taking self-efficacy	.01	-.02
Selection decision ¹	-.58***	-.79***
ΔR^2 after Step 1	.36***	.63***
<i>Step 2:</i>		
Agreeableness $\times$ Selection decision	-.02	-.03
Openness to experience $\times$ Selection decision	.01	.01
Neuroticism $\times$ Selection decision	.03	.00
Test-taking self-efficacy $\times$ Selection decision	-.09*	-.11***
ΔR^2 after Step 2	.01*	.02***
Overall R^2	.37***	.65***
Overall adjusted R^2	.36	.64

Note. $N = 503$. β is the standardized regression coefficient. All β s shown are those in the final model. All tests are two-tailed.

¹Coded as 1 = rejected; 0 = accepted.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

fairness of the selection procedure and selection outcome. The positive relationships of test-taking self-efficacy with perceptions of procedural and distributive justice are predicted to be stronger when the selection decision is to not reject. The test-taking self-efficacy $\times$ selection decision interaction term accounted for unique variance in participants' perceptions of both procedural ($\Delta R^2 = .01, p < .05$) and distributive ($\Delta R^2 = .02, p < .001$) justice. These results indicated that the relationship of test-taking self-efficacy with perceived fairness of the selection procedures and outcomes was moderated by selection decision favorability. To better interpret the significant moderating effects of selection decision outcome, plots were made for both procedural and distributive justice ratings. Figure 1 depicts the moderating effects of selection decision on the relationship between test-taking self-efficacy and perceived distributive justice. (A very similar plot was also found for procedural justice but is not shown.)

On the surface, it appears those individuals high in test-taking self-efficacy who were accepted reacted more positively than those individuals low in test-taking self-efficacy. Conversely, individuals high in test-taking self-efficacy who were rejected reacted more negatively than those individuals low in test-taking self-efficacy. While the graphs of the interactions seemed to suggest differences between high and low test-taking self-efficacy and reactions to being accepted, and differences between high and low test-taking self-efficacy and reactions to being rejected, post-hoc tests did not reveal differences between the two conditions (i.e., high test-taking self-efficacy accept versus low test-taking self-efficacy accept, and high test-taking self-efficacy reject versus low test-taking self-efficacy reject). Despite these results, both of the overall interactions were significant. However, interpretations of the interac-

Figure 1
Plot of the Moderating Effects of Selection Decision Outcome on the Relationship Between Applicants' Test-taking Self-efficacy and Their Perceptions of Distributive Justice.

tions must be made with caution (cf. Horvarth, Ryan, & Stierwalt, 2000). Overall, these findings provided only modest support for Hypothesis 4.

DISCUSSION

Ultimately, all applications of organizational justice theories include one commonality, the assessment of responsibility. Being rejected by an organization presents important questions to an applicant regarding the cause of failure. Bies, Tripp, and Kramer (1997) indicated individuals faced with negative events (e.g., rejection from a selection process) will attempt to assign blame for such actions. One manner in which applicants may attempt to assign responsibility is by engaging in attributional searches. Wong and Weiner (1981) found that spontaneous attribution searches were more likely when an outcome was negative or unexpected. There is no need to search for an explanation if experiences conform to beliefs and expectations. Effectively coping with negative events (e.g., receiving a rejection decision) depends on the ability to locate or find the cause of such events.

In this regard, the present study found participants' personalities were associated with perceived fairness of selection procedures and outcomes. Specifically, agreeableness and openness to experience were positively related with perceptions of both procedural and distributive justice, neuroticism was negatively related with perceptions of distributive justice, and the relationships of test-taking self-efficacy with procedural and distributive justice were moderated by the selection decision. Non-significant interaction terms suggest that the association of agreeableness, openness to experience, and neuroticism with perceived fairness was not dependent on selection decision favorability. These findings are consistent with past findings regarding agreeableness, openness to experience, and neuroticism. For example, research has shown agreeableness to be linked with cooperation and conflict avoidance, indicating that participants high in agreeableness tend to accept organizational decisions regardless of their level of favorability (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1992). Moreover, individuals high in openness to experience seemed to be more accepting and understanding of different experiences (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1992; Goldberg, 1990). Finally, highly neurotic individuals are more anxious and agitated by organizational decisions (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Wiggins, 1996). These findings, coupled with past justice research (e.g., Skarlicki et al., 1999), indicate certain individuals may be more predisposed to accept selection processes and outcomes as fair.

The organization's selection decision outcome was also found to moderate the relationship between test-taking self-efficacy and

participants' reactions to selection fairness. Stronger positive relationships between test-taking self-efficacy and perceived fairness were found when the selection decision was to not reject. While the effect sizes of the interaction terms were relatively small ($\Delta R^2=.01$ for procedural justice, and $\Delta R^2=.02$ for distributive justice), they may in fact mask substantial differences in the impact of the moderator hypothesis (McClelland & Judd, 1993). For example, Evans (1985) and Mellor (1992) have argued that R^2 increments of 1% are not likely to be trivial, especially in cases in which a directional prediction has been made to anticipate the interactive effect (Mellor, 1992, p. 593). Further, Evans (1985) and McClelland and Judd (1993) have demonstrated that, even under the most extreme conditions, interaction effects may account only for a relatively small amount of variance.

Our findings support the principle of discounting attributions suggested by past researchers (e.g., Gilliland, 1994; Ployhart & Ryan, 1997; van den Bos, Bruins, Wilke, & Dronkert, 1999; Wong & Weiner, 1981) in which applicants protect their own self-image by discrediting the source of negative information. In regard to test-taking self-efficacy, if applicants expect to do well only to find out they did not, their reactions will naturally be more negative than those applicants who did not expect to do well on the test. This negative reaction can be discounted by convincing themselves that the process and decision were unfair, thus explaining their low justice ratings in the unfavorable selection condition.

The results of this study have the potential to influence the way we think about organizational justice perceptions that job applicants form. Traditionally, researchers have focused on the contextual nature of the selection process (e.g., Elkins & Phillips, 2000; Ryan & Ployhart, 2000). For example, Elkins and Phillips (2000) have discussed the potential influence of the particular selection instrument used (e.g., biographical data inventory) on perceptions of procedural and distributive justice. Other researchers have also treated environmentally based influences such as job context (e.g., Ryan & Ployhart, 2000). However, the present findings reveal applicant personality may account for a portion of variance in organizational justice perceptions, thus suggesting there may be a stable component to justice perceptions in addition to contextual factors.

Given Skarlicki et al. (1999) have previously linked personality and fairness in retaliation behavior, it would be interesting to investigate if personality accounts for variance in justice perceptions across situations. Recall, organizational justice has been linked to a variety of attitudes and behaviors such as litigation intentions, organizational commitment, and retaliation behaviors. It would be beneficial to know if personality accounts for a portion of variance in these contexts as well.

Limitations

One potential limitation of the study was the use of a student sample. However, use of student participants who are either already being recruited by organizations or soon will be may not constitute a significant limitation as they represent a significant component of the potential labor force for entry-level managerial and professional positions. In this regard, Rynes and Boudreau (1986) suggested a student sample is representative of the target population of many organizations. Further, several other researchers have noted that the nature of organizational justice perceptions research justifies the use of both student and field samples (e.g., Bauer et al., 1998, Ryan & Ployhart, 2000). Additionally, the use of a student sample may serve to weaken the effects of our present findings (Gilliland, 1994; Ployhart & Ryan, 1998).

Although statistically significant, results reported in Tables 1 and 2 are rather small. While clear differences in the mean ratings of procedural and distributive justice ratings of accepted versus rejected participants can be seen in Table 1, the actual correlations and predictability of the criterion variables remains small. Thus, interpretations and implications should be made cautiously.

A third limitation further expands on this point. Specifically, the participants completed the four-predictor measures under conditions that would encourage faking (since applicants believed the possibility of a job offer depended on their test scores). Assuming that a faking tendency was present, it likely served to reduce variance in the predictor measures and thereby depress the magnitudes of the obtained relationships. Absent the influence of faking, the magnitudes of study relationships would have likely been greater.

A fourth limitation concerns the extent to which study participants believed they were participating in an actual project that had important employment implications for them. In this regard, special care was taken to convince them of the reality of the study. Specifically, participants were told successful applicants would be receiving communication from the vice president of human resources with directions about contacting and applying for a position with the company. To help insure participants believed their results, two actions were taken. First, the test results were given back in an envelope with each participants' name typed on it. Second, a personally addressed selection decision letter was included inside each envelope. While we cannot say with certainty that these steps were completely effective, we do have evidence to suggest they helped. Specifically, independent *t* tests between rejected versus non-rejected applicants' justice ratings revealed the mean ratings to be different and in the anticipated direction for both procedural, $t(501) = 16.19, p < .001$, and distributive, $t(501) = 28.62, p < .001$, justice (i.e., rejected applicants

rated both procedural and distributive justice lower than non-rejected applicants).

One final limitation of the study was a failure to collect data on extraversion and conscientiousness. While evidence exists to suggest a relationship between the other traits of the Big Five and organizational justice, we failed to see such a connection between extraversion and conscientiousness. A replication of this study with currently employed individuals would be well served by collecting data on each of the Big Five.

Implications and Future Research

Our research indicates that individuals with certain personality traits may be more likely to view an organization's selection procedures and decisions as unfair. When coupled with research by Skarlicki et al. (1999), who found agreeableness to be negatively related to organizational retaliation, the implications for applicant-initiated actions against organizations appears plausible. Future research is needed to investigate other personality traits in varying contextual situations. Likewise, it would be interesting and beneficial to investigate whether or not there is a stable component of justice perceptions. Thus, we hope the present study encourages future research into the areas of personality, selection, and organizational justice.

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