

[A multilevel perspective on the relationship between interpersonal justice and negative feedback-seeking behaviour](#)

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Abstract:

Drawing on social information processing theory, this study uses a multilevel design to integrate the literature on organizational justice with the literature on feedback-seeking behaviour. Results from a laboratory study with data involving 690 employees showed that individual-level interpersonal justice was related to employee negative feedback-seeking behaviour (NFSB) via the mediation of trust in the supervisor. Multilevel analysis of the follow-up field study with data involving 390 employees from 46 teams confirmed the findings of the laboratory study and indicated that team-level interpersonal justice was associated with NFSB through a supportive climate. Also, team-level supervisor support climate was positively related to individual-level trust in the supervisor. The paper discusses managerial implications of these findings and suggests directions for future research.

Keywords: interpersonal justice | negative feedback-seeking behaviour | trust in supervisor | supervisor support climate | multilevel analysis

Article:

Feedback-seeking behaviour (FSB) helps newly hired employees deal effectively with their organizational socialization (Morrison, 1993) and assists current employees in improving their performance (Chen, Lam & Zhong, 2007; Lam, Huang, & Snape, 2007; Whitaker, Dahling, & Levy, 2007). The distinction that feedback can be either positive or negative is important. Larson (1986) indicated that supervisors gave negative feedback to employees less often than positive feedback, perhaps because of the discomfort some feel when giving negative feedback or even because negative feedback is often couched in a positive form (Fisher, 1979). Audia and Locke

(2003) argued that people are reluctant to provide negative feedback because they understand the negative feelings it can incite and because of unpleasant experiences such as causing anger and conflict (Baron, 1988). Therefore, employees interested in negative feedback (as opposed to positive feedback) regarding their work behaviour would likely need to actively solicit such feedback from their supervisors.

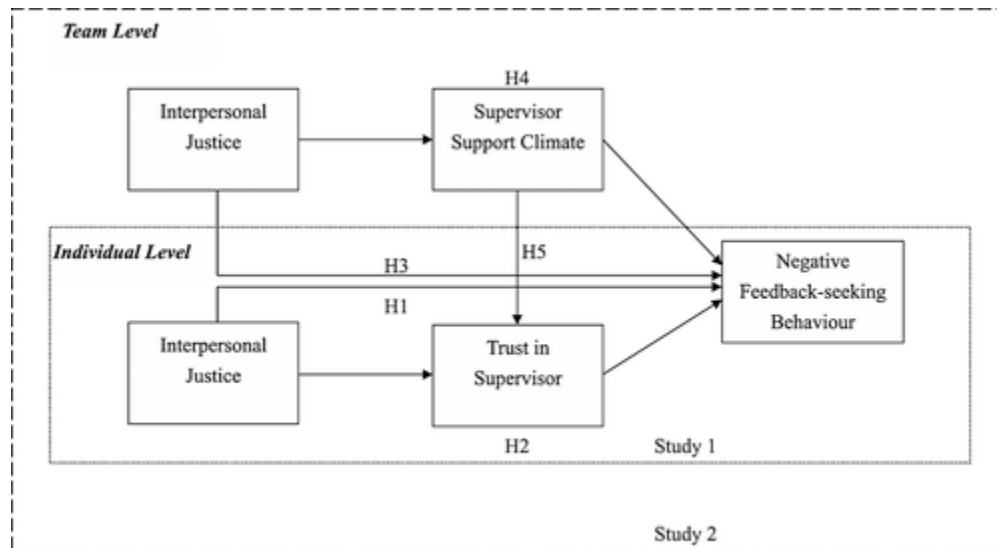
Negative feedback-seeking behaviour (NFSB) is defined as “an effort to obtain information about inadequacies in work behavior and work performance” (Chen, Z. et al., 2007, p. 202). According to Ashford and Tsui (1991), the more effort individuals exert in seeking negative feedback, the more on-track their other efforts will be with regard to stated goals. Often, however, most employees are unwilling to seek negative feedback for fear of being identified as uncertain, incompetent, and/or insecure (Ashford, Blatt, & VandeWalle, 2003). Thus, how supervisors and organizations encourage employees to seek negative feedback is crucial.

This research contributes to the literature in three ways. First, we examine how interpersonal justice is associated with NFSB at both the individual and team levels. The concepts of discretionary stimuli and ambient stimuli described in Hackman (1992) can help explain our postulations. We submit that interpersonal justice perceived by a single employee (discretionary stimuli) and interpersonal justice perceived at the aggregate (ambient stimuli) may each have a unique relationship with an individual employee's NFSB. By testing these propositions, we link the research on justice and NFSB and demonstrate that justice at both the individual and team levels may contribute to whether employees are willing to seek negative feedback from supervisors.

Second, we adopt the viewpoint of social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) to explain how perceived job environment and social information from a focal employee's leader and team members increases his or her NFSB. The employee and his/her team members' willingness to seek negative feedback depends on their perceptions of treatment from their supervisor— specifically, perceptions of the level of dignity and respect regarding procedural enactments. Perceptions of the supervisor's interpersonal justice are viewed as social cues and are likely to increase employees' willingness to interact with, and seek feedback from, their supervisor. Another possible motivating factor in employees seeking negative feedback is the team's collective perception that the supervisor directly supports feedback-seeking behaviours. Thus, in accordance with social information processing theory, we hypothesize that the leader's interpersonal justice (perceived by a focal employee and by the employee's team members) and support of feedback-seeking perceived by team members will each have a positive relationship with NFSB.

Third, we test the relationship between team-level supervisor support climate and individual-level trust in the supervisor. Stinglhamber, De Cremer, and Mercken (2006) found that perceived supervisor support increased employees' trust in their supervisors. In addition, trust in supervisor is often examined as a mediator in social exchange relationships (e.g., Aryee, Budhwar, & Chen, 2002; Pillai, Schriesheim, & Williams, 1999). This paper contributes to the literature of trust by adopting social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) to examine whether a supervisor support climate can increase employees' trust when supervisor support becomes a shared perception among members in the workplace.

This paper builds on social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) to examine how interpersonal justice leads to NFSB. We conduct both a laboratory study (Study 1) and a field study (Study 2) to examine how trust in the supervisor mediates the relationship between individual-level interpersonal justice and NFSB. In Study 2, we further investigate the cross-level effect of team-level interpersonal justice on NFSB via the mediation of a supervisor support climate, and study how this climate increase employees' trust in the supervisor. The laboratory study enables us to draw conclusions about causality and to increase internal validity; the field study allows us to test our hypotheses in real work settings and to increase external validity. Figure 1 depicts the research framework of the study.



^a Study 1 includes constructs at the individual level; Study 2 includes constructs at both the individual level and the team level.

Figure 1. Hypothesized model of the research framework^a

Study 1 Overview

The aim of Study 1 was to integrate the literature on organizational justice with the literature on FSB by investigating how individual-level interpersonal justice leads to NFSB. Although many studies on FSB have emphasized the issues of goal orientation (Janssen & Prins, 2007; Park, Schmidt, Scheu, & DeShon, 2007; Tuckey, Brewer, & Williamson, 2002), impression management (Ashford & Northcraft, 1992; Morrison & Bies, 1991), and situational context (VandeWalle, Ganesan, Challagalla, & Brown, 2000; Whitaker et al., 2007; Williams, Miller, Steelman, & Levy, 1999), little is known from the view of organizational justice. Research has found that interpersonal justice is more strongly related to agent-referenced evaluation (focused on the supervisor) than system-referenced evaluation (focused on management) (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001). NFSB, a kind of supervisor-referenced behaviour displayed by employees, may also be positively associated with interpersonal justice. For instance, Ashford and Cummings (1983) stated that employees might be reluctant to actively seek feedback because it can harm their pride, ego, and vanity. This assertion provides a good starting point for discussing the relationship between interpersonal justice and NFSB because supervisors may be able to promote subordinates' NFSB by treating employees politely and with

dignity. Our study thus extends knowledge of these two research paradigms and, by introducing the concept of interpersonal justice, provides a new angle from which to study NFSB.

Study 1: Theories and Hypotheses

Individual-level Interpersonal Justice and NFSB

Recent literature has distinguished organizational justice by four dimensions: distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational (Colquitt, 2001). Our study focuses on interpersonal justice, which is described as “the degree to which people are treated with politeness, dignity, and respect by authorities or third parties involved in executing procedures or determining outcomes” (Colquitt et al., 2001, p. 427). This is because among the four dimensions, interpersonal justice has arguably the greatest effect on NFSB. Interpersonal justice evidenced by supervisors’ respectful, polite treatment of employees can prevent or minimize employees’ perception of damaged self-esteem when they seek negative feedback.

Although the four-dimensional model of justice is now widely referenced, the taxonomy of justice factors has evolved over the past few decades. Interpersonal justice, in particular, has sometimes been considered a subset of either procedural or interactional justice. Moorman (1991) showed that procedural justice encompasses both formal procedures and interactional justice. For the latter, Moorman followed the work of Bies and colleagues (Bies, 1987; Bies & Moag, 1986; Tyler & Bies, 1990) to suggest an interpersonal aspect and an explanatory aspect of interactional justice. Greenberg (1993) subsequently designated the two subdimensions as interpersonal justice and informational justice, a classification widely adopted by researchers (e.g., Ambrose & Schminke, 2003, 2009; Colquitt, 2001). Although interpersonal justice has evolved from procedural and interactional justice, it has been shown to have discriminant validity with other justice dimensions (Colquitt, 2001) and to associate with different outcome variables (Jawahar, 2007; Jones, 2009).

We submit that social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) can explain the relationship between interpersonal justice and NFSB. Social information processing theory indicates that social influence and the cognitive evaluation of the dimensions of the job environment are associated with individuals’ attitudes (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). On the basis of this theory, employees may consider interactions with their leader to be a dimension of the job environment and may assess the leader's interpersonal justice based on interactions involving the enactment of decisions. If employees are treated with respect and politeness at work with regard to the leader's decisions, employees may be more likely to seek negative feedback from the leader. Empirically, Colquitt et al.'s (2001) meta-analysis of organizational justice indicated that interpersonal justice has a significant relationship with agent-referenced evaluation (focused on the supervisor). It is therefore likely that interpersonal justice is associated with supervisor-related variables such as subordinates’ feedback-seeking behaviours directed at supervisors. Therefore, we propose:

H1. Individual-level interpersonal justice is positively related to negative feedback-seeking behaviour.

Mediating Effect of Individual-level Trust in Supervisor on Individual-level Interpersonal Justice and NFSB

Interpersonal justice may be related to NFSB via the mediation of trust in supervisor. We argue that individual employees' perceptions of interpersonal justice may be associated with their trust in the supervisor. Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) suggested that trustees' integrity, ability, and benevolence were important factors that promoted trustworthiness. Thus, based on the prediction of social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978), interpersonal justice could be perceived as a kind of job-environment characteristic that may increase subordinates' positive perceptions of the supervisor and hence relate to their trust in the supervisor. A handful of empirical studies have verified the relationship between interpersonal justice and employees' trust in supervisors (e.g., Neves & Caetano, 2006).

We also submit that trust in supervisor is related to NFSB. As noted, employees are reluctant to seek feedback from supervisors for fear of either losing face or receiving negative evaluations that are considered a threat to their self-esteem (Audia & Locke, 2003). However, employees are likely to seek negative feedback from a supervisor whom they trust, even if this "seeking" behaviour renders them more vulnerable. This is because trust in supervisor may reduce the cost of losing face when one engages in FSB (Barner-Rasmussen, 2003). When subordinates trust their supervisor, they believe that their own vulnerabilities (e.g., incompetence and insecurity) will not be exploited (Mayer et al., 1995) and so they will not lose face. Trust in supervisor may also be instrumental in lessening the effort cost—that is—"the level of effort required to obtain feedback information" (Ashford & Cummings, 1983, p. 387)—because the employees' feedback-seeking is likely welcomed by their trusted supervisors (Barner-Rasmussen, 2003). Barner-Rasmussen (2003) also indicated that the greater a manager's trust in a superior, the greater the manager's feedback-seeking through inquiry. Thus, we propose:

H2. Trust in supervisor mediates the individual-level relationship between interpersonal justice and negative feedback-seeking behaviour.

Study 1: Method

Scenarios

Study 1 employed a between-subjects experimental design. We used the interpersonal justice scenario and the interpersonal injustice scenario from Scott and Colquitt (2007). The scenarios described a retail-work context in which a new manager had been recently transferred. We instructed the study participants to imagine themselves in the role of an employee supervised by this newly transferred manager. We randomly assigned each participant to either an interpersonal justice or injustice scenario. We told participants that they would have noticed several things since the new manager's arrival. For example, they would have noticed that the new manager (a) was *either* very polite and understanding to them and never made comments that could seem offensive *or* was very harsh and inconsiderate to them and often made comments that they found offensive; (2) seemed *either* particularly respectful to them and to others *or* often treated them and others in a very disrespectful manner; (3) was *either* very considerate and thoughtful *or* was very insensitive when conducting evaluations of their performance; and (4) was *either* courteous

and sensitive to their needs and always treated them with dignity *or* was usually quite disrespectful and insensitive. For these statements, the interpersonal justice condition was the first disjunct and the interpersonal injustice condition was the second disjunct. The participants were then asked to assess their level of trust in the new manager and the likelihood that they would engage in NFSB.

Participants and Procedure

We recruited the participants via one of the largest job bank companies in Taiwan, which had a substantial pool of online job seekers. At our request, the company distributed our survey to its members via its internet-based research service. This data collection approach had been used in previous management studies (e.g., Judge, Ilies, & Scott, 2006; Neubert, Kacmar, Carlson, Chonko, & Roberts, 2008). For each scenario, the company sent email invitations to 1,500 of its members. To increase the response rate, and as a token of appreciation, participants could choose to be enrolled in a lottery. Of the 3,000 invitations distributed (1,500 per scenario), 690 employees responded (justice scenario: 342; injustice scenario: 348), constituting our final usable sample (for a response rate of 23%). Of these, 52% were men and participants were on average 34.11 years old. A majority (75%) of the participants had at least a bachelor's degree, and 92% of the participants had at least two years of full-time work experience. Over half (57%) of the respondents had been employed at their current company for more than two years.

Measures

All scenarios and measures except for the NFSB scale were originally in English. To retain equivalency of meaning, we used the back-translation procedure, which was performed by two bilinguals proficient in English and Chinese (Brislin, 1980).

Interpersonal justice

As mentioned, we adopted the justice scenarios developed by Scott and Colquitt (2007). We measured the interpersonal justice variable by coding the value 1 for the respondents assigned to the just condition and 0 for those assigned to the unjust condition.

Trust in supervisor

We adopted Schoorman, Mayer, and Davis' (2007) 7-item scale to measure trust in supervisor. Participants responded using a 5-point Likert scale (anchored by "1 = strongly disagree" and "5 = strongly agree"). Example items included: "The manager in the above scenario keeps my interests in mind when making decisions" and "I would be willing to let the manager in the above scenario have complete control over my future in this company." Since the original 7-item scale had low reliability, we deleted two reversed items. Cronbach's alpha was .81.

Negative feedback-seeking behaviour

The NFSB scale was derived from Chen, Z. et al. (2007), which adapted Vandewalle et al.'s (2000) FSB scale. We asked participants to assess how likely they would go to the manager in

the assigned scenario to seek feedback regarding inadequacies in their own (a) overall job performance, (b) technical performance, (c) role fulfillment, (d) social behaviour, and (e) values and attitudes appropriate to the firm. We modified the 5-item NFSB scale by adding “I would seek feedback from the manager in the above scenario on ...” in front of each item to better orient the participants. Scale anchors ranged from 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely). The alpha coefficient was .95.

Control variables

We controlled for employee demographic characteristics comprising *age* (reported in 11 categories ranging from “1 = 20 years old or younger” to “11 = 66 years old or older” with 5 years as the class interval), education level (measured by 5 categories ranging from “1 = senior high school or vocational school or less” to “5 = Ph.D.”), and organization tenure (reported in 14 categories ranging from “0 = unemployed” to “13 = twelve years or more” with 1 year as the class interval). We controlled for age because younger employees have been shown to be more motivated to manage their career and to seek feedback than older workers (London, Larsen, & Thisted, 1999). Also, employees with longer tenure are more prone to keep a confident image; they are thus less likely to seek feedback (Ashford, 1986). Finally, research has demonstrated that demographic variables such as education level have to be controlled for because they can inflate or suppress relationships between other variables such as interpersonal justice (McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992; Staines, Pottick, & Fudge, 1986). Also, Chen et al. (2007) controlled for education level while predicting NFSB. In addition to demographic variables, we also controlled for employee personality. Krasman (2010) indicated that employees with high extraversion and conscientiousness had more FSB through direct inquiry from their supervisors. We used Goldberg's (1999) 10-item measure for each personality variable. A sample item for conscientiousness was “I am always prepared,” and one for extraversion was “I feel comfortable around people.” Scale anchors ranged from 1 (very inaccurate) to 5 (very accurate). Cronbach's alphas were .84 and .84, respectively.¹

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

To examine the distinctiveness of our major study variables, we conducted a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) and compared the hypothesized three-factor model with four competing models. Table 1 shows that the hypothesized three-factor model appeared to have the best model fit. The chi-square difference tests demonstrated a significant difference between the chi-square value of the hypothesized model and that of each competing model. To further corroborate these results, we followed Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) procedure. First, with the three-factor model, we fixed the correlation parameter (ϕ) between each pair of constructs at one and compared the chi-square value for the constrained ($\phi = 1$) and unconstrained models. The results indicate that the chi-square value of the unconstrained model was significantly lower

¹ One reviewer suggested that we consider the meaning of our independent variables with the control variable variance removed (Breugh, 2008). Breugh (2008) noted that the residual independent variables could be meaningful if the inclusion of control variables is justified and the shared variance between the original independent variable and the residual independent variable is substantial. In our study, we provided theoretical arguments for the inclusion of our control variables and we found that the shared variance for interpersonal justice and trust in supervisor are both large. We are thus confident that our independent variables remain meaningful even with the control variable variance removed.

than that of all constrained models. Second, none of the confidence intervals for the estimated correlation parameter (ϕ) of each pair of these three constructs included the value of one. In addition, all values of ϕ were smaller than .85 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2001). Taken together, the results show statistical support for treating our major study variables as distinct constructs.

Table 1. Study 1 Comparison of Measurement Models^a

Model	Description	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	SRMR	CFI	IFI	NFI	NNFI	Change from model 1	
										$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf
Model 1	Three-factor model ^b (Hypothesized model)	473.80	42	11.28	.08	.95	.95	.95	.94		
Model 2	One-factor model ^c	1798.37	44	40.87	.16	.84	.84	.83	.80	1324.57***	2
Model 3	Two-factor model ^d	489.82	43	11.39	.09	.95	.95	.95	.94	16.02***	1
Model 4	Two-factor model ^e	664.43	43	15.45	.11	.93	.93	.93	.91	190.63***	1
Model 5	Two-factor model ^f	1798.37	44	40.87	.16	.84	.84	.83	.80	1324.57***	2

^a n = 690. SRMR = standardized root mean square residual; CFI = comparative fit index; IFI = incremental fit index; NFI = normed fit index; NNFI = non-normed fit index.

^b Three factors: interpersonal justice, trust in supervisor, and NFSB.

^c One factor: all three variables combined.

^d Two factors: interpersonal justice and trust in supervisor combined; NFSB.

^e Two factors: interpersonal justice and NFSB combined; trust in supervisor.

^f Two factors: interpersonal justice; trust in supervisor and NFSB combined.

*** p < .001.

Manipulation Checks

To assess the manipulations of interpersonal justice, we adopted Colquitt's (2001) 4-item interpersonal justice scale comprising 5 points (from "1 = to a small extent" to "5 = to a large extent"). We instructed respondents to assume the role of the employee in the scenario to which they were assigned and to rate the extent to which the new manager adhered to such rules as "Has he/she treated you in a polite manner" and "Has he/she treated you with dignity?" Cronbach's alpha was .97.

Study 1: Results

Manipulation Checks

We compared the score of the manipulation check scale (i.e., interpersonal justice) in the interpersonal justice condition with the one in the interpersonal injustice condition via one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The results reveal that the effect of interpersonal justice manipulation was significant ($F(1, 688) = 427.63, p < .001$). The effect size (Cohen's d) was 1.57, which is considered large according to Cohen (1988). Thus, the manipulation of interpersonal justice was successful.

Regression Results of Hypothesis Testing

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations for Study 1 variables. Table 3 presents the results of the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression concerning the relationship between interpersonal justice and NFSB. *H1* posits that individual-level

interpersonal justice is positively related to NFSB. The results reveal that interpersonal justice was significantly associated with NFSB ($\beta = .33, p < .001, M3$). Therefore, *H1* was supported. *H2* proposes that trust in supervisor mediates the individual-level relationship between interpersonal justice and negative feedback-seeking behaviour. To verify this hypothesis, we followed Baron and Kenny's (1986) procedures. First, individual-level interpersonal justice should be related to NFSB; this relationship was supported by the test results for *H1*. Second, we found that interpersonal justice was significantly related to trust in supervisor ($\beta = .74, p < .001, M1$), fulfilling the second requirement of the procedures. In the final step, we included both interpersonal justice and trust in supervisor in the model. The results indicate that trust in supervisor was significantly related to NFSB ($\beta = .49, p < .001, M4$), while the relationship between individual-level interpersonal justice and NFSB became nonsignificant. Thus, trust in supervisor fully mediated the relationship between individual-level interpersonal justice and NFSB, supporting *H2*. Sobel's (1982) test further supported the assertion that individual-level interpersonal justice had an indirect effect on NFSB via trust in supervisor ($z = 8.99, p < .001$). We also used the bootstrapping procedure by Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2012) to verify the indirect effect, since recent research has indicated that the use of bias-corrected confidence intervals is an alternative, appropriate method for testing indirect effects (Cheung & Lau, 2008; Lau & Cheung, 2012). Results show that the bias-corrected bootstrapping confidence interval (using 1000 re-samples) did not include zero (.27, .45), thus corroborating a significant indirect effect.

Table 2. Study 1 Descriptives, Individual-level Intercorrelations, and Internal Consistency Reliability^a

Variable	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3
1. Interpersonal justice ^b	.50	.50	-		
2. Trust in supervisor	3.20	.77	.49***	.81	
3. Negative feedback-seeking behaviour	3.45	.87	.18***	.45***	.95

^a $n = 690$. Cronbach's alpha is on the diagonal of the table.

^b For interpersonal justice, 1 represents the just condition and 0 represents the unjust condition.

*** $p < .001$.

Table 3. Study 1 OLS Regression Results: Effects of Interpersonal Justice on NFSB^a

	Trust in supervisor		NFSB	
	M1	M2	M3	M4
Intercept	2.99***	1.36***	1.10***	.17
Age	-.01	.01	.01	.03
Education	-.04	.02	.02	.04
Tenure	.00	-.01	-.01	-.01
Extraversion		.34***	.35***	.28***
Conscientiousness		.30***	.31***	.20**
Interpersonal justice	.74***		.33***	-.04
Trust in supervisor				.49***
R^2	.24	.08	.12	.26
ΔR^2			.04 ^b	.14 ^c

^a $n = 690$.

^b ΔR^2 was obtained by deducting R^2 in the current model from R^2 in M2.

^c ΔR^2 was obtained by deducting R^2 in the current model from R^2 in M3.

** $p < .01$;

*** $p < .001$.

To summarize, the results of Study 1 show that individual-level interpersonal justice was related to NFSB, and that this relationship was mediated by trust in supervisor.

Study 2: Overview

The purpose of this field study was twofold. First, we attempted to replicate the findings of Study 1 for *H1* and *H2* in a field setting to see if this might help strengthen external validity (Leung, Su, & Morris, 2001). Second, controlling for individual-level interpersonal justice, we examined whether (a) team-level interpersonal justice would enhance NFSB, whether (b) supervisor support climate would mediate the above relationship, and whether (c) supervisor support climate would enhance trust in supervisor. Here we articulate the theoretical arguments for the cross-level effects of team-level interpersonal justice and supervisor support climate.

Study 2: Theories and Hypotheses

Team-level Interpersonal Justice and NFSB

Hackman's (1992) two types of stimuli (discretionary and ambient) can help us understand the effects of interpersonal justice at different levels. Discretionary stimuli are “transmitted or made available to individuals differentially and selectively at the discretion of the other group members” (Hackman, 1992, p. 201). The distinct leader–follower exchanges that result from the same supervisor using different leadership styles on different employees exemplify discretionary stimuli. Thus, in our study, this type of transmission corresponds to individual-level interpersonal justice. Ambient stimuli pervade the group and are shared by all employees in the group. Examples of ambient stimuli include shared group climate, group composition, and shared work environment. In our study, the uniform effect of team-level interpersonal justice on each team member represents ambient stimulus. In a group, other team workers’ cognitions and attitudes comprise a source of ambient stimuli, and a focal worker may be influenced by other members’ perceptions of the same stimulus (Jones & Skarlicki, 2005). This conception corresponds with social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) because team members are considered one of the primary providers of social information (Griffin, 1983). Thus, in addition to the influence of individual-level interpersonal justice, team-level interpersonal justice explains unique variance on NFSB. For example, research has indicated that the supervisor-focused interpersonal justice climate is significantly related to both supervisory commitment and supervisory satisfaction beyond the effects of individual-level justice perceptions (Liao & Rupp, 2005). Therefore, we propose the following:

H3. Team-level interpersonal justice is positively related to negative feedback-seeking behaviour.

Mediating Effect of Team-level Supervisor Support Climate on Team-level Interpersonal Justice and NFSB

Past research has shown that employees who experience interpersonal justice are more likely to perceive their supervisor as supportive (Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, & Taylor, 2000; Murphy,

Wayne, Liden, & Erdogan, 2003; Stinglhamber et al., 2006). At the team level, we surmise that supervisory support could be conceptualized as a shared climate perceived by team members. Kozlowski and Doherty (1989) argued that when employees interacted with an immediate supervisor, the quality of these interactions could serve as “a key filter in the interpretations that provided the basis for subordinates’ climate perceptions” (p. 547). Therefore, supervisor support climate could share the same formation process as leader-related climates such as the leadership climate, which refers to leadership behaviours directed at the team as a whole (e.g., Charbonnier-Voirin, El Akremi, & Vandenberghe, 2010; Chen, Kirkman, Kanfer, Allen, & Rosen, 2007). Specifically, the leadership climate is formed by a social learning process, which implies repeated interactions between team members and the leader. During this process, team members’ shared perception of the leader's behaviour is developed (Charbonnier-Voirin et al., 2010; Zohar & Tenne-Gazit, 2008). Empirical evidence shows that a leader's support of followers could be theorized as a shared climate variable at the team level as well (e.g., Kozlowski & Hults, 1987). When employees are collectively aware that they are treated with dignity and respect in relation to their supervisor's decisions, they may be more likely to form the shared impression that the supervisor is willing to help when they seek feedback.

According to Morrison and Bies (1991), individuals who believe feedback-seeking behaviours will be interpreted favourably by others are more likely to seek feedback. Thus, by observing co-workers’ positive experience of seeking negative feedback from supervisors, employees may feel more comfortable seeking negative feedback from their own supervisors. Empirical studies have indicated that the more supervisor support an employee perceives, the more likely the employee is to increase his/her NFSB (Whitaker et al., 2007; Williams et al., 1999). Therefore we propose:

H4. Team-level supervisor support climate mediates the relationship between team-level interpersonal justice and individual-level negative feedback-seeking behaviour.

Team-level Supervisor Support Climate and Individual-level Trust in Supervisor

Can a supervisor support climate help strengthen employees’ trust in the supervisor? Social information processing theory argues that social-context information, in addition to job-environment characteristics, is an antecedent of attitude. The supervisor support climate is a kind of social context in which employees under the same supervision perceive the supervisor's support similarly. This type of climate will reduce the distance between employees and their supervisor and will, in turn, strengthen employees’ trust in the supervisor. Therefore we propose:

H5. Team-level supervisor support climate is positively related to individual-level trust in supervisor.

Study 2: Method

Participants and Procedure

We tested the hypotheses by sampling team members from various companies in Taiwan. Most teams were in financial insurance (43%) and electronic technology (43%) companies; others were in real estate, intellectual property, and telecommunications, among others. We ensured that

the team members and their corresponding supervisors interacted frequently on a daily basis. We approached each company through a contact person and identified a body of respondents comprising 518 team members in 51 teams from 17 companies. We instructed the contact person to distribute and collect the surveys in each company. Participation in the current study was voluntary, and we presented token gifts as an incentive to all participants. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, we provided employees with envelopes and asked them to seal the completed surveys in these envelopes before returning the surveys to the contact person.

Of the 518 team members approached, 467 responded (90%). After discarding unusable surveys with incomplete answers, we had a final sample of 417 team members (81%) from 51 teams (100%). Lack of information on nonrespondents prohibited us from comparing the nonresponse sample to the response sample, so we compared the final usable sample with the unusable sample in regards to employee-related demographics and key measures (e.g., interpersonal justice, supervisor support climate, and NFSB). We used the t-test and the Cochran-Mantel-Haenszel chi-square test (Agresti, 1996) and found no significant differences between the two samples. Thus, our data were not susceptible to substantial sampling bias.

In our final sample, the number of team members per team ranged from 2 to 29 (mean = 8.18). Of the team members, 44% were men, 41% were women, and 15% had missing data in this category. The employees were on average 32.62 years old. Over half (82%) of the employees had at least a bachelor's degree, and over half (59%) of the employees had been employed at the company for more than three years.

Measures

Individual-level interpersonal justice

To measure employees' perceived interpersonal justice, we adopted Colquitt's (2001) scale as used in Study 1's manipulation check. In Study 2, we instructed respondents to think about the interpersonal treatment they received from their supervisor while procedures were enacted. The alpha coefficient was .91.

Team-level interpersonal justice

Following previous research (Liao & Chuang, 2007; Liao & Rupp, 2005), for each team we averaged the team members' evaluations of their corresponding team leader's interpersonal justice to form a team-level interpersonal-justice score.

Supervisor support climate

Supervisor support climate was measured on the basis of the 3-item scale developed by Williams et al. (1999) using a 7-point Likert scale (anchored by "1 = strongly disagree" and "7 = strongly agree") to indicate each supervisor's support. In addition, to better capture how supervisory support functioned as a shared climate, we modified the items with the referent-shift method before aggregating them to the team level. Example items are "All the employees in my team felt

comfortable asking the team leader about their performance” and “All the employees felt that the team leader was very willing to give them feedback.” The alpha coefficient was .93.

Trust in supervisor

We adopted the same measure used in Study 1 to assess trust in supervisor. Participants responded using a 5-point scale (anchored by “1 = strongly disagree” and “5 = strongly agree”). Since the original 7-item scale had low reliability, we deleted two reversed items so that the scale's Cronbach's alpha achieved an acceptable level (Cronbach's alpha = .68).

Negative feedback-seeking behaviour

The items on NFSB were identical to those used in Study 1. Following Chen, Z. et al. (2007), we asked participants to rate how frequently they sought feedback from the team leader regarding inadequacies in their own (a) overall job performance, (b) technical performance, (c) role fulfillment, (d) social behaviour, and (e) values and attitudes appropriate to the firm. These responses were measured on a 7-point scale (anchored by “1 = never” and “7 = always”). The alpha coefficient was .93.

Control variables

At the team level, we controlled for team size. Research has shown that team size could have an effect on team processes (Hülshager, Anderson, & Salgado, 2009). For example, Colquitt, Noe, and Jackson (2002) found that team size was negatively related to procedural justice climate. Thus, it is conceivable that team size would be associated with interpersonal justice climate as well. Other control variables were individual-level controls, identical to those used in Study 1 (i.e., age, education, organizational tenure, conscientiousness, and extraversion). The measures of conscientiousness and extraversion were the same as those adopted in Study 1. The Cronbach's alphas were .83 and .79, respectively.

We asked employees to respond to our measures because those measures assessed employees' own perceptions and behaviours. Glick, Jenkins, and Gupta (1986) noted that “...it is individual perceptions and attitudes that ultimately determine employees' responses to work environments, self-reports may be a valid and useful source of data” (p. 459). Thus in our study, employees served as an appropriate source for gauging these measures. However, by doing so, those ratings were vulnerable to common method variance (CMV). To reduce concerns about CMV and to help control priming effects, we followed Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff's (2003) procedural remedies by counterbalancing the order of the measurements of predictor and dependent variables in our questionnaires. We also ensured confidentiality and anonymity so that participants would respond to the items as honestly as possible. We followed Podsakoff et al.'s statistical remedies, which will be addressed in the discussion section.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

To test for the distinctiveness of our major study variables and to address CMV concerns, we performed a series of CFAs and chi-square difference tests. Table 4 indicates that the

hypothesized four-factor model appeared to be the best model. Also, as with Study 1, we followed Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) procedure for additional evidence of discriminant validity. The results indicate that (a) the chi-square value of the unconstrained model was significantly lower than that of all constrained models ($\phi = 1$); (b) none of the confidence intervals of the estimated correlation parameter (ϕ) of each pair of these four constructs included the value of one; and (c) all values of ϕ were smaller than .85 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2001). The combined evidence demonstrated good discriminant validity among our study variables and shows that method variance might not completely account for the covariation among our measures.

Table 4. Study 2 Comparison of Measurement Models^a

Model	Description	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	SRMR	CFI	IFI	NFI	NNFI	Change from model 1	
										$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf
Model 1	Four-factor model ^b (Hypothesized model)	253.94	113	2.25	.04	.99	.99	.97	.98		
Model 2	One-factor model ^c	3435.55	119	28.87	.16	.76	.76	.75	.73	3181.61***	6
Model 3	Two-factor model ^d	1319.13	118	11.18	.08	.91	.91	.90	.90	1065.19***	5
Model 4	Three-factor model ^e	1078.32	116	9.30	.07	.92	.92	.91	.91	834.38***	3
Model 5	Three-factor model ^f	448.98	116	3.87	.06	.97	.97	.96	.96	195.04***	3
Model 6	Three-factor model ^g	541.16	116	4.67	.08	.96	.96	.95	.96	287.22***	3

^a $n = 417$. SRMR = standardized root mean square residual; CFI = comparative fit index; IFI = incremental fit index; NFI = normed fit index; NNFI = non-normed fit index.

^b Four factors: interpersonal justice, supervisor support climate, trust in supervisor, and NFSB.

^c One factor: all four variables combined.

^d Two factors: interpersonal justice, supervisor support climate, and trust in supervisor combined; NFSB.

^e Three factors: interpersonal justice and supervisor support climate combined; trust in supervisor; NFSB.

^f Three factors: interpersonal justice; supervisor support climate and trust in supervisor combined; NFSB.

^g Three factors: interpersonal justice and trust in supervisor combined; supervisor support climate; NFSB.

*** $p < .001$.

Analysis Strategy

The respondents were nested in teams, implying that our model was multilevel in nature. Thus, we conducted hierarchical linear modelling (HLM) analyses to test our hypotheses (Mathieu & Taylor, 2007). HLM accounts for the nested nature of the data, estimates the influence of predictors at different levels on individual outcomes, and, at the same time, maintains appropriate levels of analysis for the predictors (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). We adopted group-mean centering on major level-1 predictors and reintroduced group means back into the level-2 intercept model in order to (a) ensure that level-1 effects were controlled for when testing the incremental effects of level-2 variables, (b) lessen the problem of multicollinearity in level-2 estimations by decreasing the correlation between the level-2 intercept and slope estimates, and (c) separately examine the between-group and within-group mediation effects (Hofmann & Gavin, 1998; Zhang, Zyphur, & Preacher, 2009). Additionally, all models analyzed by HLM had a random intercept and random slopes. To save the degrees of freedom, control variables were grand-mean centered. This practice of using group-mean centering for main variables and grand-mean centering for control variables has been used in previous multilevel research (e.g., Erdogan & Enders, 2007; Liu, Liao, & Loi, 2012).

Study 2: Results

Table 5 presents the means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations for all study variables. We computed $r_{wg(j)}$ to justify the appropriateness of the within-group agreement of our team-level constructs. Regarding the calculation of $r_{wg(j)}$, researchers have indicated that using a uniform distribution as an estimate of expected variance is not reasonable in many circumstances due to various response bias (James, Demaree, & Wolf, 1984; LeBreton & Senter, 2008). Therefore, we chose a small negative skew for the expected variance to adjust the potential response bias (Burke, Finkelstein, & Dusig, 1999; James et al., 1984; LeBreton & Senter, 2008). The mean r_{wg} values of .79 and .83 were obtained for interpersonal justice and supervisor support climate, respectively.² In addition, we calculated the intraclass correlation (ICC1): this was .19 for interpersonal justice, .21 for supervisor support climate, .11 for trust in supervisor, and .04 for NFSB. Last, the reliability of group mean (ICC2) values were .62 for interpersonal justice, and .64 for supervisor support climate. Both of these values were comparable to the recommended value of .60 (Glick, 1985).

Table 5. Study 2 Descriptives, Individual-level Intercorrelations, and Internal Consistency Reliability^a

Variable	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5
1. Individual-level interpersonal justice	3.77	.79	.91				
2. Team-level interpersonal justice ^b	3.77	.40	.51***	.91			
3. Supervisor support climate ^b	4.76	.60	.42***	.83***	.93		
4. Trust in supervisor	3.55	.62	.54***	.30***	.36***	.68	
5. Negative feedback-seeking behaviour	3.49	1.29	.25***	.19***	.23***	.37***	.93

^a n (individual-level) = 417; n (team-level) = 51. Cronbach's alpha is on the diagonal of the table.

^b We assigned team means of the variables of team-level interpersonal justice and supervisor support climate to employees of the same team and calculated their *individual-level* correlations. The correlation between these two disaggregated variables was high ($r = .83$), compared to other correlations involving these variables. We calculated the correlation between these two variables *aggregated* to the *team-level* and the correlation was high ($r = .85$) as well. We surmise that the reason those correlations were high was that individual-level measurement errors were removed when the group means were calculated (Ostroff, 1993).

*** $p < .001$.

Table 6 presents the HLM results of the multilevel relationships between interpersonal justice and NFSB. The results in M2 show that individual-level interpersonal justice was significantly related to NFSB ($\gamma = .22, p < .01$), and that team-level interpersonal justice was also significantly related to NFSB ($\gamma = .42, p < .01$). Therefore, *H1* and *H3* were supported. *H2* proposes that trust in supervisor mediates the relationship between individual-level interpersonal justice and NFSB. We followed Mathieu and Taylor (2007), who drew heavily on Baron and Kenny's (1986) procedures, and we controlled for team-level interpersonal justice to verify the mediation effect. First, individual-level interpersonal justice should relate to NFSB—a relationship that was supported by the test results for *H1*. Second, we found that individual-level interpersonal justice was significantly related to trust in supervisor ($\gamma = .42, p < .001, M6$), fulfilling the second requirement of the procedures. In the final step, we included both individual-level interpersonal

² Because five teams were associated with unacceptable r_{wg} values ($< .60$), they were removed from further hypothesis testing. Following this deletion, our sample size for hypothesis testing was 390 individuals nested within 46 teams.

justice and trust in supervisor in the model. The results indicate that trust in supervisor was significantly related to NFSB ($\gamma = .63, p < .001, M3$), while the relationship between individual-level interpersonal justice and NFSB became nonsignificant. Thus, trust in supervisor fully mediated the relationship between individual-level interpersonal justice and NFSB, supporting *H2*. Sobel's (1982) test further supported the assertion that, in general, there was an indirect effect of individual-level interpersonal justice on NFSB via trust in supervisor ($z = .3.95, p < .001$). The bias-corrected bootstrapping confidence interval (using 1,000 re-samples) did not include zero (.11, .32), thus corroborating a significant indirect effect.

Table 6. Study 2 Hierarchical Linear Modeling Results^a

		Negative feedback-seeking behaviour				Trust in supervisor		
		M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7
Individual level	Intercept	3.49***	1.81**	1.14 [†]	1.93**	3.66***	1.96***	1.89***
	Age	.05	.03	.05	.05	.03	.01	.02
	Education	.03	.01	.03	.03	.02	.03	.02
	Tenure	-.02	-.01	-.02	-.01	-.01	.01	.00
	Conscientiousness	.24 [†]	.25 [†]	.22	.24 [†]			
	Extraversion	.81***	.69***	.55***	.55***			
	Interpersonal justice		.22**	-.05	-.05		.42***	.42***
Team level	Trust in supervisor			.63***	.64***			
	Team size	.00	.01	.01	.01	-.01	.00	.00
	Interpersonal justice		.42**	.35*	-.13		.42***	.05
	Mean trust in supervisor			.27	-.19			
	Supervisor support climate				.56**			.31***
Deviance ^b		1266.04	1259.41	1235.87	1234.33	718.46	601.01	597.31

^a n (individual-level) = 390; n (team-level) = 46. In all models, individual-level variables were group-mean centered, except for control variables being grand-mean centered.

^b Deviance represents the model fit in each model: the smaller the deviance, the better the model fit.

[†] $p < .10$;

* $p < .05$;

** $p < .01$;

*** $p < .001$.

H4 proposes that team-level supervisor support climate mediates the relationship between team-level interpersonal justice and individual-level NFSB. To verify *H4*, we performed a procedure similar to the one for *H2*. In the first step, as supported by the finding for *H3*, we found that team-level interpersonal justice was positively related to NFSB, thus meeting the first requirement. In step 2, since supervisor support climate is a team-level variable, it was appropriate to verify the relationship between team-level interpersonal justice and supervisor support climate by using the OLS analysis. The results indicate that team-level interpersonal justice was positively related to supervisor support climate ($\beta = 1.25, p < .001, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .74$). In step 3, both team-level interpersonal justice and supervisor support climate were included in the model. The results show that supervisor support climate was positively related to NFSB ($\gamma = .56, p < .01, M4$), while the relationship between team-level interpersonal justice and NFSB became nonsignificant. Therefore, supervisor support climate fully mediated the relationship between team-level interpersonal justice and NFSB. Thus, *H4* was supported. Moreover, Sobel's (1982) test confirmed the presence of a mediation effect ($z = 2.86, p < .01$). The bias-corrected

bootstrapping confidence interval (.28, .86) did not include zero, indicating a significant indirect effect.

The results in M7 suggest that supervisor support climate was positively related to trust in supervisor ($\gamma = .31, p < .001$) after interpersonal justice was controlled for at the two levels; therefore, *H5* was supported.³

Discussion

Summary

Although extant studies on FSB have been productive, the research field has paid little attention to NFSB. We integrate organizational-justice literature into FSB literature by using social information processing theory, and conduct both a laboratory study and a field study with a multilevel approach for examining the antecedents of NFSB. We found that interpersonal justice could function differently in NFSB at the individual and team levels through trust in supervisor and through supervisor support climate, respectively. We hope that our research will help to develop a better understanding of the relationship between organizational justice and NFSB, and we call for further studies along these lines.

Contributions to Scholarship

Our findings contribute to the literature in a number of ways. First, we have integrated organizational-justice research and feedback-seeking research. The results of the study show that interpersonal justice at both the individual level (Study 1 and Study 2) and the team level (Study 2) positively related to NFSB. This finding is consistent with the justice literature, which has found that interpersonal justice is associated with supervisor-related outcomes (Colquitt et al., 2001) and that this effect could be in operation at both the individual and group levels (Liao & Rupp, 2005). In addition, past research has demonstrated that extraversion and conscientiousness are positively related to FSB (Krasman, 2010). The results from our two studies indicate that after controlling for these two personality variables, social information cues of interpersonal justice could increase team members' NFSB.

Second, drawing on social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978), the results of our two studies indicate that trust in supervisor fully mediated the relationship between individual-level interpersonal justice and NFSB. The result is consistent with previous research demonstrating that trust in the supervisor mediates interactional justice and supervisor-related outcomes (e.g., Aryee et al., 2002). Our study extends the literature of trust and FSB to focus on “negative” FSB. Specifically, our findings indicate that trust in supervisor is associated with the type of seeking behaviour (i.e., negative) that could be seen as risk-taking in a relationship (Mayer et al., 1995). This type of seeking behaviour is risky because employees fear casting

³ Because our data were also nested in companies, we used a 3-level HLM model to account for the company effect by adding three company-level variables: company size, company age, and industry type. The results are identical to those of the 2-level model in terms of whether the variables were significant. However, because six companies had only one team participating in our study, our 3-level results were exploratory. Nonetheless, they provide preliminary support for the robustness of our results.

themselves in a bad light and giving the supervisor a negative impression. However, our findings also show that, despite the risks, employees who trust the supervisor are more likely to engage in NFSB. While this study demonstrated that trust in supervisor enhanced employee's NFSB, future research could investigate how trust in co-workers or trust from co-workers may promote NFSB among employees.

The results of Study 2 also show that team-level interpersonal justice is positively related to individual-level NFSB insofar as supervisor support climate mediated the relationship between team-level interpersonal justice and individual-level NFSB. The results demonstrate the important role that co-workers' shared perceptions might play in personal behaviour related to negative feedback seeking. This finding contributes to the FSB literature, which has treated individual-level factors as antecedents. We incorporated the concept of organizational climate, a higher-level antecedent factor, into our model. However, because we did not specifically measure co-workers' shared perceptions or how social information was provided by co-workers, it is left for future research to delineate the role that co-workers play in the relationship between team-level interpersonal justice and individual-level NFSB.

Third, we have proposed that team-level supervisor support climate has a positive relationship with individual-level trust in supervisor. The results of Study 2 are consistent with our hypothesis and corroborate the prediction of social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) that the social cues provided by others are directly related to an employee's attitude toward the job environment. The results show that an employee's trust in his or her supervisor depends not only on personal perceptions of interpersonal justice, but also on shared perceptions of how the supervisor supports FSB among team members. Therefore, building on the many studies discussing how justice serves as an antecedent of trust in supervisor (e.g., Aryee et al., 2002; Pillai et al., 1999), our results introduce a new, higher-level antecedent: social influence. We recommend, therefore, that future studies continue to examine whether and how other team-level perceptions are associated with employees' trust toward supervisors.

Applied Implications

Although supervisors should provide feedback in order to improve employee performance, employees may be reluctant to seek feedback, especially negative feedback, because it may damage their self-esteem. The findings of our study provide ideas about how to encourage employees to seek negative feedback from their supervisors. We found that both individual-level and team-level interpersonal justice increase NFSB, and that individual-level interpersonal justice specifically enhances NFSB via trust in supervisor. Thus, using various methods such as role-playing, group discussions, lectures and case studies, team leaders could be trained to personify interpersonal justice with each subordinate team member and exhibit an overall pattern of interpersonal justice with employees (Skarlicki & Latham, 1996, 1997). The training content should also include discussion on how supervisors can treat employees in a respectful manner and how to refrain from inappropriate comments when enacting procedures and decisions. In turn, through interpersonal justice, trust can establish itself and thrive in each member's mind, ultimately enhancing the likelihood that team members will seek negative feedback.

The results indicate that supervisor support climate is a mediator between team-level interpersonal justice and individual-level NFSB. Therefore, team leaders should foster team members' shared perception that support accompanies feedback seeking because this shared perception can strengthen employees' behaviour in seeking negative feedback. In addition, a supervisor support climate can increase trust in the supervisor. Thus, we further suggest that organizations should create policies and rules that shape a positive feedback-seeking environment in the work context to enhance employees' trust.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study is not without limitations. First, we collected the variables of Study 2 from employees, an approach that may result in CMV. To reduce concerns about CMV, aside from the procedural remedies elucidated earlier, we followed Podsakoff et al.'s (2003) statistical remedies. We conducted Harman's single-factor test (Harman, 1967) by performing principal components factor analysis with unrotated factor solution. The results show that neither a single factor emerged nor a general factor accounted for the majority of the variance. In addition, the results of CFA and chi-square difference tests for Study 2 demonstrated discriminant validity for our measures. Finally, Study 1 was a laboratory study that incorporated an objective measure (manipulated interpersonal justice) and relied on different measurement methods (manipulation and employee rating) that made its results less vulnerable to CMV. Yet, it was possible to replicate the results in the field study (Study 2). The evidence we have presented in this paper shows that substantial CMV bias was not likely to have occurred. However, future research should use multiple sources of raters and methods in order to reduce the influence of CMV.

Second, previous research has measured NFSB either by means of self-reporting (Janssen & Prins, 2007) or other-rating (Chen, Z. et al., 2007). We measured NFSB in Study 2 by self-rating, but our score (mean = 3.49) was similar to the score of Chen, Z. et al.'s (2007) supervisor-reported NFSB (mean = 3.14). Nevertheless, it should be noted that self-reported ratings may differ from other-reported ratings (Ashford, 1986; Mount, Barrick, & Strauss, 1994). Therefore, while the self-reported measure of NFSB used in our study would be a reliable measure to assess employees' NFSB, future research should seek to assess NFSB using an independent rating when appropriate.

Finally, we collected the samples in our research in Taiwan, which has a high power distance culture. Recent meta-analysis has shown that the effects of supervisor-focused justice were weaker with samples from high power distance settings (Shao, Rupp, Skarlicki, & Jones, 2013). In addition, previous research also indicated that in a culture of high power distance, people engaged in feedback-seeking behaviour less frequently (Morrison, Chen, & Salgado, 2004). Although we used high power distance samples, our research found a significant relationship between interpersonal justice and NFSB. Nonetheless, future research should investigate how our findings could be replicated in a low power distance context, and whether certain dimensions of justice are more susceptible to cultural differences in relation to NFSB.

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