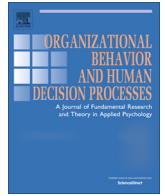




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Nostalgia buffers the negative impact of low procedural justice on cooperation



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ABSTRACT

This research integrates the discrete emotion of nostalgia (a sentimental longing for the past) with relational models of procedural justice. An organizational survey and four experiments demonstrated that nostalgia buffers (i.e., weakens) the deleterious impact of low (compared to high) procedural justice on organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and cooperation with authorities. Low procedural justice undermined social connectedness with authorities, and nostalgia's buffering role derived from its capacity to block the pathway from this reduced social connectedness to decreased OCB and cooperation. This research presents the first evidence that a discrete emotion—nostalgia—functions as a resource that aids individuals in coping with low procedural justice. Nostalgia thus facilitates cooperation even with authorities and organizations that display low procedural justice.

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Introduction

It is essential for the proper functioning of organizations that individuals focus on the welfare of the collective and its members rather than indulging their own interests (De Cremer & Tyler, 2005; Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009). Yet, the display of such cooperative behavior is undermined when members find that their social connectedness to the organization and its authorities (e.g., supervisors, managers, leaders) is compromised (Thau, Aquino, & Poortvliet, 2007). Members may base their sense of connectedness on the fairness of decision making or outcome allocation procedures (i.e., procedural justice; Sedikides, Hart, & De Cremer, 2008; Van Prooijen, Van den Bos, & Wilke, 2002). According to relational justice models, high procedural justice (i.e., decision making procedures being perceived as fair) contributes to a sense of social connection with the collective and its authorities, whereas low procedural justice (i.e., decision making procedures being perceived as unfair) engenders a sense of exclusion. Hence, low procedural justice damages cooperation (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001), because it dents employees' social connectedness (De Cremer & Tyler, 2005; Tyler & Blader, 2003).

Compromised social connectedness (e.g., as resulting from low procedural justice) is likely distressing (Baumeister, 2012; Leary, 2005). Yet, research is surprisingly silent about how organization members cope with this situation. Members may cope directly with social connectedness deficiencies by forming or repairing relationships with suitable interaction partners or by retaliating (Williams, Forgas, & von Hippel, 2005). Indeed, low procedural justice renders individuals more likely to strike back, passively withdraw, or exit from the organization (Ambrose, Seabright, & Schminke, 2002; Colquitt et al., 2013). However, such actions may culminate in undesirable status consequences (e.g., reduced privileges associated with organizational membership or seniority), reputation, or tangible outcomes (e.g., salary, promotion). Thus, organization members may often need to resort to indirect compensatory mechanisms involving mental representations of social bonds as a source of social connectedness in order to cope with the aversive experience of low procedural justice (Gardner, Pickett, & Knowles, 2005; Leary, 2005). We propose that individuals can cope with social connectedness deficiencies that accompany low procedural justice by recruiting nostalgic recollections as an indirect compensatory strategy.

A burgeoning literature, which we review below, indicates that a core function of nostalgia is to serve as a reservoir of social connectedness (Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, Arndt, & Zhou, 2009; Sedikides et al., 2015). By communicating that one's connectedness to the organization or its authorities is compromised, low procedural justice constitutes a psychological threat. In light of nostalgia's versatility in bringing to life meaningful connections

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from one's past (even connections far removed from organizational reality), we expect that it helps individuals to cope with reduced connectedness to a specific collective or authority. This implies that nostalgia facilitates keeping up high cooperation in the face of low procedural justice. Fig. 1 depicts our proposed model.

We aim to make two contributions to the literature. First, compromised connectedness (e.g., as resulting from low procedural justice) is a ubiquitous aspect of social and organizational life (Baumeister, 2012; Johnson, Lanaj, & Barnes, 2014). Yet, current theory does not explain how individuals cope with low procedural justice while simultaneously maintaining high levels of cooperation. Building on the need to belong literature (Baumeister, 2012; Baumeister & Leary, 1995), we argue that nostalgia may be recruited as an indirect strategy to cope with the compromised connectedness that stems from low procedural justice, allowing individuals to sustain cooperation. Second, emotions are important in shaping responses to procedural justice; yet, their exact role is poorly understood (Colquitt et al., 2013; Cropanzano, Stein, & Nadisic, 2011). We integrate the role of a discrete emotion – nostalgia – with relational models of procedural justice (De Cremer & Tyler, 2005; Tyler & Blader, 2003). In so doing, our investigation begins to bridge the gap between the emotion and justice literatures.

Procedural justice

Procedural justice is shaped by several factors. For example, procedures are perceived as fairer when they are applied consistently over time and across organizational members (Van den Bos, Vermunt, & Wilke, 1996), when they are applied accurately and are not motivated by authorities' self-interest (De Cremer, 2004), and when they allow members to voice their opinion (Thibaut & Walker, 1975). Members find procedural justice important for its own sake (i.e., as a matter of moral principle; Cropanzano, Byrne, Bobocel, & Rupp, 2001), but also because it addresses instrumental needs by helping to promote long term personal goals (while low justice jeopardizes such goals; Thibaut & Walker, 1975).

In addition, relational justice models emphasize that procedures address relational needs (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & Lind, 1992). This is a key reason why members are attentive to information about their connectedness to the collective (De Cremer & Blader, 2006; Tyler & Smith, 1999). Fairly enacted procedures signal that one is included in and valued by the collective (Smith, Tyler, Huo, Ortiz, & Lind, 1998; Van Dijke & De Cremer, 2008). This increases motivation to cooperate for the purpose of benefitting the collective and its representative authorities (Van Dijke, De Cremer, Brebels, & Van Quaquebeke, *in press*). Indeed, procedural justice promotes cooperation in experimental (De Cremer, Van Dijke, & Mayer, 2010) and field (Blader & Tyler, 2009) settings.

A well-documented outcome of procedural justice is organizational citizenship behavior (OCB; Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001). OCB is a key index of employee cooperation, because it describes various types of discretionary or extrarole behaviors that contribute to effective organizational functioning but that are not explicitly required (Organ, 1988). OCB includes

behaviors as varied as voluntarily helping one's supervisors or coworkers and speaking up to improve the way in which work is organized. Taken together, procedural justice promotes connectedness to the collective, which facilitates various cooperative behaviors (Blader & Tyler, 2009; Van Dijke, De Cremer, Mayer, & Van Quaquebeke, 2012).

Nostalgia

Nostalgia has been historically regarded as a brain malfunction, psychiatric disorder, or variant of depression (Batcho, 2013; Sedikides, Wildschut, & Baden, 2004). Recent evidence indicates that this uncomplimentary view is undeserved. Hepper, Ritchie, Sedikides, and Wildschut (2012) found that laypersons conceptualize nostalgia as a predominantly positive, social, and past-oriented emotion. In nostalgic reverie, one remembers an event from one's past—typically a fond, personally meaningful episode pertaining to one's childhood or a close relationship. One often views the recollection through rose-tinted glasses, misses that time or person, and may even long to return to the past. As a result, one typically feels sentimental, most often happy but with a tinge of longing. These lay conceptions of nostalgia are shared across cultures (Hepper et al., 2014) and dovetail with formal dictionary definitions; *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* (1998) defines nostalgia as “a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past” (p. 1266). Nostalgia occurs relatively frequently (e.g., about 3 times a week in a sample of university students; Wildschut, Sedikides, Arndt, & Routledge, 2006) and is experienced by almost everyone (Boym, 2001; Routledge et al., 2011; Wildschut, Sedikides, Routledge, Arndt, & Cordaro, 2010). Nostalgia has a powerful, positive impact on how individuals perceive themselves, how meaningful they perceive life to be, how optimistic they see their future, and how connected they feel to others (Cheung et al., 2013; Routledge, Wildschut, Sedikides, Juhl, & Arndt, 2012).

Indeed, a core psychological function of nostalgia is the provision of social connectedness. On the basis of their analysis of the nostalgia construct, Hepper et al. (2012) concluded that close others (friends, family, partners, and even pets) along with interpersonal elements or concepts (belonging, cuddles, tender moments, warmth, love) are perceived as centrally defining features of nostalgia. Content analytic and survey studies have established that close others and momentous life events involving close others comprise the bulk of nostalgic referents (Abeyta, Routledge, Sedikides, & Wildschut, *in press*; Holak & Havlena, 1992; Wildschut et al., 2006). In addition, when experimentally induced, nostalgia springs sociality. It nurtures sentiments of being protected and loved, reduces attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance, and engenders perceptions of social support that counteract loneliness. Nostalgia also raises estimates of the number of friends one has, augments volunteering intentions and actual charity donations, and increases helping behavior (Stephan et al., 2014; Zhou, Sedikides, Wildschut, & Gao, 2008; Zhou, Wildschut, Sedikides, Shi, & Feng, 2012). In all, the literature underpins the idea that, by rendering accessible mental representations of close relationships from the past, nostalgia strengthens social connectedness in the present (Wildschut et al., 2006, 2010). For example, nostalgic recollections of time spent with a dear friend may fortify one's sense of being valued by others, even when current events (e.g., falling victim to low procedural justice) question this.

Nostalgia as a buffer against low procedural justice

Low (vs. high) procedural justice communicates to members that they are not valued by or included in the organization, and this signal can diminish cooperation (De Cremer & Blader, 2006).

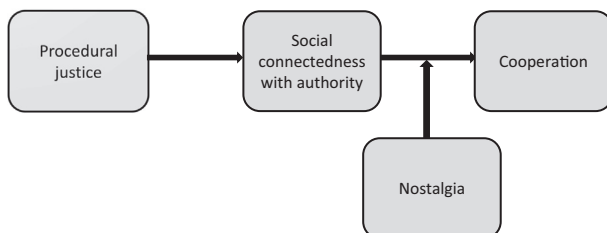


Fig. 1. How nostalgia buffers the effect of low (vs. high) procedural justice on cooperation.

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