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An integrative conceptualization of organizational compassion and organizational justice: a sensemaking perspective

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Organizational scholars tend to view justice and compassion as incompatible. While both have important functions in organizational life, compassion's affective elements appear difficult to synthesize with the reasoning and impartiality that underlie the concept of justice. We draw on theoretical arguments from the sensemaking perspective to argue that we can integrate organizational compassion and organizational justice conceptually because both are inherently dynamic processes that rely on emotional and cognitive components, and both are shaped by the social context of the organization. Based on this integrative conceptualization, we propose a construct we call 'compassionate organizational justice', in which compassion becomes an integral element of an organization's justice requirements and members' fairness perceptions, and that those justice perceptions in turn inform future instances of organizational compassion.

Introduction

In recent years, researchers have increasingly acknowledged that organizational members experience suffering, and that such experiences have an enduring effect on organizational outcomes (Rynes *et al.* 2012). Expressions of compassion, or actions aimed at alleviating another's pain, can be effective in helping organizational members cope with such suffering and associated distress (Eddington 2010, Madden *et al.* 2012). When organizations incorporate compassion systematically into their organizational norms, values, and routines, organizational members respond collectively to alleviate others' suffering and associated pain (Kanov *et al.* 2004, Dut-

ton *et al.* 2006). The feelings of trust, belonging, and being cared for at work that result from organizational compassion lead to positive organizational outcomes such as increased commitment, lower turnover, enhanced performance, and social cohesion (Dutton *et al.* 2002, Cameron *et al.* 2004, Madden *et al.* 2012).

In contrast, other scholars tend to be critical of compassion due to its perceived incompatibility with the notion of organizational justice (Whitebrook 2002, Berlant 2004). They have associated organizational justice, or employees' perceptions of how fairly others treat them at work, with positive organizational outcomes such as higher organizational productivity and commitment, and stronger social relationships (Rupp & Cropanzano 2002, Baker

et al. 2006). Organizational justice requires that authority, systems, and their enforcement be based on impartiality, equity, and fairness (Cavanagh *et al.* 1981, Fuller & Hester 2001). As such, many organizational justice scholars assert that compassion undermines fairness, righteousness, and impartiality in the organization because of its limited scalability, replicability, sustainability, and its risk of personal favors and moralistic fallacy (Thibaut & Walker 1975, Tang & Sarsfield-Baldwin 1996, Folger 1998, d'Arms & Jacobson 2000, Kimball 2004, Gittell & Douglass 2012).

In turn, organizational compassion scholars have been critical of the concept of justice because of its limited ability to accommodate caring and compassionate gestures toward organizational members (Whitebrook 2002). Proponents of organizational compassion assert that contemporary organizations need more human-centric administrative models in which feelings of relatedness and belonging are more prominent (Rynes *et al.* 2012, Kulkarni & Ramamoorthy 2014). Such scholars argue that while justice is important, it should not come at the expense of organizational members' emotional well-being (Rawls 1972, Barry 1973, Miller 1999). In sum, justice without compassion would limit an organization's ability to create an environment where its members bring spirit, affective commitment, and positive emotions to work (Brown *et al.* 2012).

Given that organizational compassion and organizational justice are both known to be important for positive organizational outcomes, yet often are considered incompatible (Katz *et al.* 1999), organizational research would benefit from theory that integrates the two concepts (Held 1995). While some have already noted this issue (Shahzad *et al.* 2014), discussions in the extant literature have focused more on the distinctions between compassion and justice rather than on their integrative potential, and are generally limited to the individual perspective (see, e.g., Gilligan 1982, Noddings 1988, Tronto 1995). Therefore, organizational scholarship requires an organization-level, integrated conceptualization to explore the potential complementary role that compassion and justice can play in organizations (Robertson & Hammersley 2000, Lilius *et al.* 2011, Madden *et al.* 2012).

To address this need, we draw on the sensemaking literature to propose that both organizational compassion and organizational justice have compatible dynamic dimensions that provide theoretical foundations for their integration. Specifically, organizational sensemaking explicates the processes by which organizational members collectively make sense of both the compassion and justice conditions in the organization's fundamentally dynamic context (Daft & Weick 1984, Weick & Roberts 1993). This argument is in line with the relatively recent notion of dynamic justice, by which justice perceptions change over time (Hausknecht *et al.* 2011, Jones & Skarlicki 2013).

Based on these arguments, we explicate a theoretical concept that we label 'compassionate organizational justice', in which organizational compassion informs the justice perceptions of organizational members, and that those justice perceptions in turn inform future instances of organizational compassion (Hedström & Swedberg 1998, Lilius *et al.* 2011). Subsequently, organizational compassion becomes integrated both in the collective sensemaking process by which members form compassion-based justice judgments and resultant fairness perceptions, as well as in the organization's management model such that it accommodates both relational (i.e., compassionate) and control-based (i.e., fair) elements (Gittell & Douglass 2012).

In so doing, we contribute to organizational scholarship in three primary ways. First, we address the presumed incompatibility between compassion and justice in the organizational setting. Specifically, we establish the theoretical foundations for their integration by highlighting the reciprocal role of emotions and cognition in developing both compassion judgments and justice perceptions. Second, we contribute to our understanding of the dynamic properties of both compassion and justice. By applying a sensemaking lens, we shed light on the mechanisms through which organizational compassion and justice inform each other recursively over time, paying particular attention to the organization as a social context for collective interpretations. Third, we introduce the concept of compassionate organizational justice to emphasize the mutually reinforcing nature of organizational compassion and organizational justice that allows organizations collectively to make integrative sense of compassion and justice.

In so doing, we highlight the importance of a relational-control model of management that accommodates both organizational members' need to work in a human-centered organization and the organization's need for control so that it may achieve its objectives.

In the remainder of our article, we proceed as follows. In the first section, we review the literatures on organizational compassion and organizational justice to highlight their emotional and cognitive foundations. In the second section, we develop arguments from the sensemaking perspective to explicate the dynamic nature of justice and the reciprocal role of emotions and cognition in members' sensemaking of compassion and justice processes. In the last section, we present our conceptualization of compassionate organizational justice, before discussing the implications of our theorizing.

Organizational compassion and organizational justice

Organizational compassion

The history of compassion extends across a range of theoretical, doctrinal, and methodological debates and major religions as a principal human virtue contributing to overall personal and social good (Dalai 1995, Sears & Carper 1998, Himmelfarb 2001, Nussbaum 2001, Armstrong 2011). However, compassion in organizational life has only recently begun to receive systematic attention through research on, for instance, compassionate leadership (Dutton *et al.* 2002), the cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of compassion in organizations (Kanov *et al.* 2004), compassion organizing (Dutton *et al.* 2006), and emergent organizational capacity for compassion (Madden *et al.* 2012).

The literature on organizational compassion emphasizes that suffering and misery are inevitable aspects of organizational life, and that without compassion, organizations can potentially endanger the dignity and humanity – the 'aliveness' and 'living forwardness' – that are so essential to organizational well-being (Weick & Roberts 1993, Frost 1999: 128). Although scholars typically study compassion at the individual level (Atkins & Parker 2012), recent research has focused on compassion as an

organization-level phenomenon – that is, a dynamic, relational process involving the collective noticing, feeling, and responding to others' pain at the organizational level (Clark 1998, Kanov *et al.* 2004, Lilius *et al.* 2011). Additionally, the social context of the organization is described as having a key role in facilitating organizational compassion through the values, practices, and routines that systematically propagate and legitimize the collective noticing, feeling, and responding to the pain of others (Dutton *et al.* 2006, Madden *et al.* 2012).

Human interaction and subjectivity make organizational compassion a complex process that may raise concerns, especially regarding the extent to which compassion can affect the organization in other areas. For instance, previous research has revealed negative consequences of compassion in organizations, such as exhaustion, burnout, and turnover, due to the extra emotional demands compassion imposes on those who give it (Frost 1999, Meyerson 2000, Miller 2007, Goetz *et al.* 2010). As such, a mindful approach is required to make compassionate members aware of the impact of their actions on others and on the organization. Therefore, the literature on organizational compassion emphasizes the role of organizational management in fostering a consistent, positive experience of collective compassion in organizations (Kunda & van Maanen 1999, Dutton *et al.* 2006).

Organizational justice

In contrast to organizational compassion, work on organizational justice is much more established in organizational scholarship. The foundations of the organizational justice concept can be traced back to work in the early 1960s on the equitable distribution of resources and outcomes in social settings (Homans 1961, Blau 1964, Adams 1965). In the organizational context, French (1964) first used the term to address justice issues in people management. Later, Greenberg (1987) used it to highlight the prevalence of people's fairness perceptions in making judgments. Organizational justice, in general, refers to fairness perceptions that people hold about their employment relationships, especially regarding decision making and resource allocation in organizations (Fortin 2008). Organizational members develop their justice perceptions in light of the fairness they receive

in the organization from management. Research shows that fairness perceptions have a strong impact on several constructive individual and organizational outcomes (Baker *et al.* 2006), whereas perceptions of injustice lead to a host of negative attitudinal, behavioral, and organizational outcomes (Daly 2002).

Much of the justice literature takes an instrumental perspective, in which motivation is formed by self-interest and the need to ensure control over favorable outcomes (Tyler 1987). Such traditional perspectives have typically explored distinct dimensions of justice in isolation, such as distributive or procedural justice (Ambrose 2002). Other models, in contrast, take a broader approach to justice. For instance, Lind and Tyler (1988) emphasize a relational ‘group value’ model according to which organizational members need justice to form their statuses and identities within the organization. Similarly, Folger (1998) presented a moral virtue model in which justice forms a supreme value and an expression of human dignity. Thus, recent perspectives propose that justice is required to fulfill all instrumental, relational, and virtuous needs or interests, such that we should consider them holistically instead of each in isolation (Cropanzano *et al.* 2008).

Consequently, an integrative, monistic perspective has emerged in which we understand organizational justice as a multidimensional and dynamic construct (Roberson & Colquitt 2005). This perspective is consistent with the notion that people base their justice perceptions on the subjective evaluations they make of their justice experiences as a whole, as opposed to any single component of those experiences (Ariely & Carmon 2000, 2003). Therefore, although no unanimous understanding of the fundamental objectives of organizational justice exists, we may conclude that organizational members make justice perceptions not only on the basis of economic or control factors, but also on the basis of relational aspects such as organizational members’ socioemotional need for social harmony and recognition by their peers (Nadise 2006).

A sensemaking perspective on compassion and justice

In the preceding sections, we established that both organizational compassion and organizational jus-

tice are dynamic processes based on social interaction in the organizational context (Kanov *et al.* 2004, Shultz & Brender-Ilan 2004, Dutton *et al.* 2006, Jones & Skarlicki 2013, Stedham & Beekun 2013). In the current section, we show how these features allow for the adoption of organizational sensemaking as a lens through which to integrate thinking on compassion and justice (Kahneman *et al.* 1993, Hernes & Maitlis 2010).

Organizational sensemaking as an integrative lens

During recent years, sensemaking has emerged as a powerful perspective to understand the way members of organizations collectively construct their realities, form their identities and the organization’s image, define their roles, and participate in different decision-making and strategic change processes (Daft & Weick 1984, Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991, Weick *et al.* 2005). Organizational sensemaking occurs when organizational members collectively face ambiguous, uncertain, and conflicting information or situations (Berger & Luckmann 1967, Maitlis 2005, Weick *et al.* 2005). In organizations, sensemaking allows members to deal with this ambiguity and uncertainty by developing a coherent collective understanding of their inherently uncertain environment (Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991). This understanding, in turn, influences organization-level strategic choices, responses to the changing environment, innovative and creative behaviors, and socialization processes (Hill & Levenhagen 1995, Sluss *et al.* 2012).

At its core, organizational sensemaking encompasses three distinct but highly interrelated processes – scanning, interpretation, and action – through which organizational members go collectively to give meaning to and make sense of a new situation (Weick *et al.* 2005). Scanning is a process of collective monitoring and gathering information about the trends, changes, and factors in the environment that can potentially affect the performance of an organization, and members use it in the collective interpretation and action stages (Daft & Weick 1984). Interpretation is a process by which groups translate events into conceptual schemas and develop a shared understanding about those events. At the action

stage, organizational members collectively decide on appropriate behaviors based on the gathered information and shared understanding.

While some have argued that organizational sensemaking is essentially a cognitive construct (Weick 1979, Daft & Weick 1984, Ashmos *et al.* 1990, Thomas & McDaniel 1990), contemporary research offers a broader conceptualization of sensemaking that includes emotional and relational dimensions as well (Gioia & Thomas 1996, Weick *et al.* 2005, Bartunek *et al.* 2006, Maitlis *et al.* 2013). According to this perspective, organizational sensemaking is an ongoing process of social construction in which organizational members rely heavily on the use of relational and emotional cues (Maitlis 2005, Bartunek *et al.* 2006).

Given the critical and reciprocal relationship between emotions and cognition in organizations (Choi *et al.* 2011, Muller *et al.* 2014), there is growing interest in an emotional-cognitive understanding of organizational sensemaking among organizational scholars. For instance, Maitlis *et al.* (2013) revealed the role of emotions in energizing, fueling, and shaping organizational sensemaking processes. Similarly, Bartunek *et al.* (2006) studied the role of emotions in sensemaking about organizational change and highlighted the enduring impact of emotional responses and subjective judgments on organizational members' sensemaking.

Thus, sensemaking influences, and is influenced by, the organizational context, both in terms of its social dimensions as well as its more formal management model. Pertaining to sensemaking, the organizational social context encompasses the values, beliefs, experiences, and cognitive frameworks widely shared and held by organizational members (Harris 1994, Allard-Poesi 2005, Dougherty & Drumheller 2006), whereas the management model encompasses formal hierarchy, rules, management practices, and coordination systems (Balogun & Johnson 2004). These informal and formal elements work together to enable organizations to develop and govern members' behaviors (Reddy 1984, Havens & Knapp 1999). In particular, through a process known as 'sensegiving' (Maitlis & Lawrence 2007), the organizational context shapes members' perceptions of events, the meanings they attribute to those events, and their responses to those events, by

influencing their cognitive and interpretive schemes (Mantere *et al.* 2012).

Sensemaking in organizational compassion

As a three-step process involving the collective noticing, feeling, and responding to the suffering of others in the organization (Kanov *et al.* 2004), organizational compassion entails emotional, cognitive, and social-contextual elements (Weick & Roberts 1993, Nussbaum 1996, Moreland & Myaskovsky 2000, Dutton *et al.* 2006, Frost *et al.* 2006, Goetz *et al.* 2010). With regard to emotion, organizational compassion represents a collectively shared emotional urge to act with the aim of alleviating another's suffering (Kanov *et al.* 2004). At the same time, the decision to act depends on cognitive elements such as assessments of the magnitude of the other's need or his or her perceived deservingness (Atkins & Parker 2012). Similarly, context is important because organizational members notice and interpret others' suffering through, for example, social interactions (Barsade 2002) or organizational norms of appropriateness (Muller *et al.* 2014). By emphasizing emotional, cognitive, and social-contextual aspects, the literature on organizational compassion indirectly provides clues to how organizational members make sense of the need for compassion (Dougherty & Drumheller 2006, Dutton *et al.* 2006, Grant *et al.* 2008).

Moreover, these processes unfold recursively: cognitive appraisals evoke specific, discrete emotions in organizational members, while at the same time different pre-existing emotional states can lead to dissimilar appraisals of the same stimuli (Weiss *et al.* 1999). In the context of our theorizing, when making sense of an organizational member's suffering and requisite compassionate action, the collective cognitive appraisal of the suffering or sufferer gives rise to specific emotions (compassionate feelings), which leads to subsequent actions (compassionate responding), which in turn evokes new cognitive appraisals (Lazarus 1991). These processes unfold in an organizational context that offers a shared frame of reference through which organizational members collectively interpret others' needs and the urgency of action (Isabella 1990, Weick & Roberts 1993, Balogun & Johnson 2005).

For example, organizational members will not necessarily always collectively notice, feel, and respond to others' pain (Lilius *et al.* 2008). Noticing is a cognitive process of becoming aware of another's pain that takes place by reading subtle cues in daily social interactions that reveal people's emotional needs (Frost 2003). Their emotional responses and cognitive appraisals of the suffering or sufferer are influenced by the organizational context, involving both its 'social architecture', formed by its collectively shared values, routines, and networks (Dutton *et al.* 2006: 71), as well as its formal management structures (Balogun & Johnson 2004, Maitlis & Lawrence 2007). Thus, a sensemaking lens opens up new ways to understand organizational compassion based on the dynamic interplay between cognitive, emotional, and contextual elements (Dutton *et al.* 2006, O'Donohoe & Turley 2006).

Sensemaking in organizational justice

In contrast, extant research on organizational justice tends to focus on the cognitive aspects of justice perceptions, and pays relatively little attention to issues such as emotions and social context. However, a growing body of literature indicates that justice perceptions change over time and are susceptible to social influence (Montada & Schneider 1989, Mikula *et al.* 1998, Colquitt *et al.* 2005, Fortin 2008, Holtz & Harold 2009). These arguments have led some to take a more dynamic perspective on organizational justice (Rupp & Cropanzano 2002, Pitariu & Ployhart 2010, Jones & Skarlicki 2013). This dynamic perspective proposes that as organizational members receive and interpret new information through, for example, observation, interpersonal communication, and the experience of new justice events (Holtz & Harold 2009, Hausknecht *et al.* 2011), their collective perceptions about justice change. They assess collected information for fairness in light of prior experiences, personal perceptions, and expectations about the actors involved in the event (Jones & Skarlicki 2013). Moreover, organizational members observe the way their peers are treated and gain insights into the perceptions their peers have about justice and what norms exist in the organization (Rupp 2011).

However, whereas this dynamic perspective has gained increased acceptance in recent years, the mechanisms through which people form and change their perceptions of fairness over time are not well understood (Barclay *et al.* 2005, Fortin 2008, Schoefer & Diamantopoulos 2008). Similarly, while the social context is known to be a factor in the formation of justice perceptions (Colquitt *et al.* 2005), this area has received relatively little attention (Fortin 2008). A small stream of recent research suggests that emotions play a key role in people's perceptions of justice in organizations, and that these emotional aspects have collective, social properties. While emotional responses to (in)justice or emotions as a driver of actions in response to perceived (in)justice have been studied previously (Weiss *et al.* 1999, van den Bos *et al.* 2003), research is only beginning to reveal the role emotions play in the dynamic elements of changing justice perceptions (van den Bos 2003, Schoefer & Diamantopoulos 2008).

A sensemaking lens can help shed light on these processes because sensemaking involves both emotions and cognition and relies on social-contextual elements. Since the scanning and interpretation of information and events take time and require heavy cognitive involvement, people tend to make immediate, subjective sense of (in)justice on the basis of their past experiences and emotional responses (Daft & Weick 1984, Lind 2001). Research suggests that people's colleagues, prior experiences, and current emotional states strongly influence their justice judgments and resultant (un)fairness perceptions (van den Bos 2003). For instance, people sometimes experience justice events indirectly and then make a collective sense of those events through observing and conversing with their colleagues (Roberson & Colquitt 2005, Rupp 2011, Jones & Skarlicki 2013). Thus, a typical justice perception is subjective and socially constructed based on cognitive and emotional appraisal made in the context in which the situation occurs (Lazarus 1996, Weiss *et al.* 1999).

In sum, we can link both compassion and the dynamic view of justice perceptions in organizations to the sensemaking perspective. As to the former, sensemaking helps us to understand the role of cognitive appraisals in the predominantly emotional process of compassion and in the way an organization's social features influence people's sensemaking

about compassion processes in the organization. As to the latter, sensemaking validates the temporal and changing nature of justice perceptions by explaining the role of experiences and the social context. This sensemaking perspective forms a first step toward resolving the perceived incompatibility between compassion and justice.

Toward an integrative conceptualization

In the current section, we take a more systematic approach to this integration by introducing the construct of compassionate organizational justice to capture the dynamic, recursive interplay between organizational compassion and organizational justice, within the social context of the organization and embedded in the organization's model of management. We illustrate these relationships in Figure 1, and elaborate on them below.

Compassionate organizational justice

We introduce the term 'compassionate organizational justice' to mean that organizational compassion can serve as a reference point for organizational members to interpret justice requirements and form resultant (un)fairness perceptions, and that fairness

perceptions can subsequently inform organizational compassion. To illustrate, imagine an organizational member who, because of her father's acute illness and subsequent death, had been unable to perform in the last quarter of the year despite having received high performance evaluations in the first three quarters of the same year. Justice requirements, as per company policy, might dictate that management announces a potential 'Employee of the Year' award based on four quarters of consistent performance. In contrast, an organization whose members promote and expect compassionate behaviors might find it unfair to exclude that person from consideration for the performance award.

The expectation of compassionate behaviors implies that perceptions of justice requirements in this scenario will change and other organizational members will find it fairer to nominate that person based on the first three quarters' performance only. While a violation of policy, it will give a feeling of caring and belongingness not only to that person, but also to all other members who believe that such events might also take place in their lives and who would hope to be treated in the same way. At the organizational level, such compassionate treatment thus establishes a reference point, or 'prototype for reflexive judgment' (Watley 2014: 4), on whose basis organizational members can revisit and adjust their assumptions to make sense of compassion and justice requirements in the future. In other words, compassionate organizational justice relies on both the cognitive and emotional dimensions of compassion and justice as they unfold in the context of the organization.

In the example above, for instance, the decision to exclude the bereaved sufferer's last quarter performance from the annual performance award criteria is not an emotional decision; rather, emotional reactions inform members' cognitive appraisals of fairness and reciprocity within the context of the organization. Other organizational members might think that such hardship could befall anyone at any time, and thus compassionate responses will create a collective sense of justice requirements that indicates the organization should treat everybody facing similar hardships the same way in the future. As such, the process of making sense of justice requirements, while at the same time producing a compassionate

Figure 1: Compassionate organizational justice: an integrative conceptualization

response that will adhere to those requirements, is inherently subjective (Arthur 1994, Crisp 2003, Kahneman 2003).

Therefore, because of the dynamic, social, and subjective nature of justice, it is not always possible for justice requirements to be defined objectively. Given the rational and logical requirements of justice, compassionate behavior can only be developed after a delicate thought process and after making good sense of the urgency, relevance, and importance of the required compassionate response. It follows then that the interplay between emotions and cognition is an important integrative element of our theorizing (Eddington 2010). Hence, we argue that compassion and justice, through their emotional and cognitive cues, inform each other recursively over time in such a way that organizational compassion informs the justice perceptions of organizational members, and that those justice perceptions in turn inform future instances of organizational compassion (Hedström & Swedberg 1998, Lilius *et al.* 2011).

Fostering compassionate organizational justice

These arguments allow us to address the compassion-justice incompatibility and to develop a theory-driven platform to integrate thinking about compassion and justice in organizations. However, this integration raises questions about how these processes can exist together in organizations such that emotions and cognition work in a synergetic manner. To address this issue, we return to our previous discussion of the role of the organizational context.

With respect to management models, the literature suggests that organizations on the one hand face increasing pressure to adopt 'relational' approaches to management that allow for compassion, and on the other hand experience pressure to adopt 'control'-based approaches to align members' behaviors with long-term organizational goals, which seems more appropriate from a justice perspective (Rausch 1978, Chen & Kao 2009). Thus, we need a hybrid approach to management, such that compassion and justice can work in collaboration. To address this, we argue for a 'relational-control' management model (cf. Gittell & Douglass 2012) that fulfills an organization's requirement to maintain

control over members' behaviors as well as managing affective connections with its participants. A relational-control model provides formal structures to control members' behaviors, while allowing for the 'values, routines and networks' (Dutton *et al.* 2006: 83) that enable organizational compassion.

In so doing, a relational-control model facilitates greater balance between members' relational-emotional needs and the organization's need for control to ensure the organization is able to achieve its objectives (Baumgartner *et al.* 1975, Banks 2007). A relational-control model affords organizations the ability to extend rationalized and knowledgeable compassionate responses toward individual members' needs by ensuring the transparency, scalability, and replicability of those responses for the rest of the members. That is, there is always a risk of misinterpretation of events, information, and behaviors by organizational members, which can potentially lead to inappropriate emotional responses and thus perceptions of unfairness (Hine 2004). The relational-control arrangement guides organizations in this regard to familiarize their members with each other's and the organization's needs. Social processes that allow members to interact in a compassionate manner to form compassionate responses direct this process.

With respect to the role of sensegiving in organizational sensemaking, organizational members' ability to select a balanced response toward organizational members' suffering requires an organizational structure that enables frequent communication, knowledge sharing, empowerment, and participation (Monin *et al.* 2013). In the context of relational control, Monin *et al.* (2013) explain the role of sensegiving in the sensemaking process of justice perceptions. With respect to sensegiving, they explain three possible justice notions; that is, sensebreaking about justice (breaking previously established senses of justice), sense specification about justice (providing specific meanings to justice), and sensehiding about justice (deliberately avoiding a particular sense of justice) that organizational members or leaders can sell to other members as a lens through which to observe organizational issues. They propose three possible reactions that organizational members could demonstrate including accepting (acceptance of specific senses of justice), resisting (resistance to

senses of justice), or distancing (taking distance from senses of justice).

From this typology, we can infer that sensegiving about justice influences organizational members' sensemaking about the fairness of compassionate responses that might compromise organizational justice requirements. These arguments imply that interconnected processes of sensegiving about compassion and justice – that is, compassionate organizational justice – can be operationalized in formal organizational structures such as job design, selection, training, performance evaluation, compensation, and so forth, through which relational and compassionate orientation can be screened, endorsed, rewarded, and embedded in organizational members' roles (Gittell & Douglass 2012, Monin *et al.* 2013). Through the facilitation of sensemaking processes, the relational-control model will enable organizational members to make collective sense of their colleagues' needs and to develop scalable, replicable, and sustainable compassionate responses that continuously inform justice perceptions in the organization. In so doing, organizational leaders can facilitate the development of a social context that serves as an informal control mechanism by providing people with a collective reference point around which to make sense of compassionate behaviors and (un)just events.

Discussion

In this article, we endeavored to integrate thinking on compassion and justice in the organizational context through the adoption of a sensemaking perspective. We have argued that the oft-assumed incompatibility of compassion and justice is based on an unnecessarily restrictive, static interpretation of organizational justice. Subsequently, we proposed that organizational compassion interacts dynamically with perceptions of organizational justice in the social context of the organization and that over time this interplay can lead to what we call 'compassionate organizational justice'. In so doing, our article makes three main contributions to organizational scholarship, while also generating practical implications for management. We discuss these below.

Theoretical implications

First, we address the presumed incompatibility between compassion and justice in the organizational setting. The extant literature on dynamic justice highlights the role of experiences and prior expectations in shaping justice judgments (Jones & Skarlicki 2013), but the interplay of emotion and cognition – and the social embeddedness of this interplay – have thus far been underemphasized. In turn, the extant literature on organizational compassion pays insufficient attention to the risks associated with compassion in terms of the need for organizational control. In our article, we emphasize how both compassion and justice are based on interpretations within the social context that require the use of cognitive and emotional cues (Holtz & Harold 2009, Lilly *et al.* 2010, Jones & Skarlicki 2013), thereby providing the theoretical foundations for their integration. Future research could develop a more formal model explicating the cyclical interactions between emotion and cognition in both processes.

Second, we contribute to our understanding of the dynamic properties of both compassion and justice. By applying a sensemaking lens, we shed light on the mechanisms through which organizational members perceive, interpret, and develop compassion judgments and justice perceptions over time, paying particular attention to the organizational context. We conceptualize how compassion prompts collective sensemaking in response to others' suffering, which can adjust justice perceptions in light of organizational and social needs. Similarly, sensemaking provides a theoretical foundation for a process of socially constructed justice perceptions that allows for relational, emotional elements. Future research could explore more closely the impact of organizational features on these processes and perceptions.

Third, we introduce the concept of 'compassionate organizational justice'. Compassionate organizational justice refers to the recursive interplay between sensemaking processes related to compassion and sensemaking processes related to justice in the organization. Compassionate organizational justice means that organizational compassion can serve as a reference point – a 'prototype for reflexive judgment'

(Watley 2014) – based on which organizational members' justice perceptions can change. In turn, those changing justice perceptions shape the way in which organizational members make sense of subsequent organizational compassion. Further, we theorized that compassionate organizational justice relies on sensegiving provided by the organizational context, both in terms of its social elements as well as its management model. In particular the need to strike a balance between relational components and bureaucratic control is consistent with other perspectives in which an organization simultaneously manages two contradictory goals, such as exploitation and exploration, innovation and standardization, or low cost and differentiation (Gibson & Birkinshaw 2004, O'Reilly & Tushman 2004, Han & Celly 2008). Future research could elaborate on these sensegiving processes or the relational-control model in greater detail.

While our conceptualization provides foundations for a theoretical integration of compassion and justice, at the same time it may raise concerns of argumentum ad misericordiam, where justice may be compromised based on an appeal to pity on irrelevant grounds or using emotional levers to seek compassion (Walton 1995). Argumentum ad misericordiam usually takes place in contexts where people emotionally engage in another's situation without objectively looking at the relevance of arguments in the given circumstances (Rudolph & Kleiner, 1991). However, Eddington's (2010) conceptualization of intelligent compassion suggests that compassionate organizational justice avoids this fallacy because it goes through an informed sensemaking process involving a collective cognitive appraisal and social approval. In social settings such as organizations, where people know each other personally and have strong relational ties, organizational members can easily make an accurate collective sense of the relevance and truthfulness of another member's reported suffering while paying attention to the justice aspects of compassionate responding (Hoggett *et al.* 2006). Thus, it seems unlikely in such settings that members will attempt to come up with illogical or irrelevant arguments to seek pity or compassion due to fear that if detected they will be shamed and embarrassed.

Managerial implications

Our conceptualizations also have relevance for management. For one, our perspective of collective sensemaking in the social context of organizations highlights opportunities for organizational leadership to shape these sensemaking processes. By sharing stories of compassionate responding and then rationalizing those stories, organization leaders can provide a historical reference point around which sensemaking about compassion and justice will take place. Additionally, our theory implies that managers should consider how organizational control models relate not only to justice but also to compassion, and should introduce policies and mechanisms that support members' collective inclination toward the pain and suffering of their colleagues. As a result, managers may come to think about compassion as an integral part of the dynamics surrounding organizational justice perceptions. Lastly, the relational-control model of management we propose may have a broader relevance. For instance, the balance between fostering positive relationships and keeping behaviors congruent with managerially defined goals is likely to be important in, for example, knowledge-intensive, highly team-oriented, and customer-centric firms (Alvesson & Willmott 2002, Fletcher 2008, Heaphy & Dutton 2008). Future research may explore this broader relevance further.

Conclusion

A sensemaking lens reveals that the supposed incompatibility between organizational compassion and organizational justice based on a cognitive-emotive dichotomy is misleading. Conceptualized in the social context of the organization, compassion and justice rely on the mutual involvement of both emotions and cognition in making sense of organizations' compassion needs and justice requirements. Further, compassion and justice are fundamentally dynamic constructs that unfold through emotional and cognitive processes stemming from interpretations and social interaction. These arguments lead to the concept of compassionate organizational justice, by which compassion informs justice perceptions. Thus, our perspective implies that organizational scholars should pay attention to the impact of justice

on people instead of the implementation of justice for its own sake.

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