Variations in Employee Performance in Response to Organizational Justice: The Sensitizing Effect of Socioeconomic Conditions

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According to uncertainty management theory (UMT), organizational justice helps individuals to cope with uncertainty. Employees will thus respond stronger to organizational justice when uncertainty is high. We contribute to UMT by highlighting poor socioeconomic conditions, specifically, weak rule of law, low human development, and high income inequality, as salient sources of uncertainty. We argue that when these conditions are unfavorable, the effects of organizational justice on employee reactions will be stronger than when they are more favorable. We test our arguments using a meta-analysis of 279 studies involving 315 samples from 31 countries. Our findings suggest that poor socioeconomic conditions raise the strength of the relationship between organizational justice on the one hand and task performance and organizational citizenship behavior on the other but not the relationship between organizational justice and counterproductive work behaviors. Our study responds to recent calls to place greater emphasis on contextual factors and to close the macro–micro gap in the literature on organizational justice.

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One of the most fundamental findings of organizational justice research is that employees reciprocate conditions of perceived fairness experienced in their workplace with attitudes and behaviors favorable to the employer (Colquitt, Scott, Rodell, Long, Zapata, & Conlon, 2013). The most important of these acts of reciprocity is employee performance, defined as “the aggregated value of the activities that employees contribute both directly and indirectly, positively and negatively, to organizational goal accomplishment” (Zhang, Lepine, Buckman, & Feng, 2014: 675). As ample empirical research has demonstrated, fair treatment of employees enhances their performance (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2013; Colquitt, LePine, Piccolo, Zapata, & Rich, 2012).

Similarly to other areas of organizational behavior (OB; Dietz, Robinson, Folger, Baron, & Schulz, 2003; Johns, 2006), research on organizational justice has predominantly focused on the main effects of justice, while the context in which these effects occur has been less studied. As Proudfoot and Lind (2015) recently noted, research on when and why justice matters more or less in organizations is in its infancy. Extant literature has paid especially scant attention to the wider macrolevel context that may shape how employees respond to justice in their workplace. The only such macrolevel context factor examined to date is that of national culture, which has been shown to influence employee reactions to fairness (Blader & Tyler, 2005; Kim & Leung, 2007; Shao, Rupp, Skarlicki, & Jones, 2013). However, scholars acknowledge that cultural factors do not fully account for the variation in organizational justice effects across different countries (Shao et al., 2013).

In this article, we propose that poor socioeconomic conditions (SECs) in a given country constitute salient sources of uncertainty for employees, which affects the way they react to the characteristics of their more immediate environment, including organizational justice (Hegtvedt & Isom, 2014; Schneider, 2012). We draw on uncertainty management theory (UMT; van den Bos, 2001b; van den Bos & Lind, 2002) to argue that SECs influence employee behaviors in response to the experience of fairness in their workplace. According to UMT, employees use their evaluations of organizational justice to reduce their feelings of uncertainty (van den Bos & Lind, 2002). Prior literature has implicitly understood the immediate work environment as the focal source of (un)certainty (e.g., H. Li, Bingham, & Umphress, 2007; Takeuchi, Chen, & Cheung, 2012). Complementing this literature, we argue that in societal contexts characterized by a lack of social safety networks and even outright deprivation, justice is an especially salient characteristic of the workplace as it reduces the uncertainty surrounding individuals’ daily lives. In such conditions, organizational justice also serves as an indicator that the employee is safe from exclusion and exploitation (Proudfoot & Lind, 2015). In other words, we suggest that poor SECs make employees particularly sensitive to the experience of justice within their organization.

In order to test our arguments, we apply meta-analysis to the results of 279 independent studies involving 315 samples from 31 countries. Specifically, we analyze how the strength of employee responses to organizational justice varies across three country-level SEC conditions—rule of law (Kaufmann, Kraay, & Mastruzzi, 2010), human development (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2013), and the level of income inequality.
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(Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2011)—as these conditions are particularly salient to individuals’ sense of certainty and security (Øyen, 2006). Our findings indicate that poor SECs strengthen the relationship between organizational justice on the one hand and task performance and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) on the other but not the relationship between organizational justice and counterproductive work behaviors (CWB).

We contribute to UMT by highlighting the socioeconomic environment as a fundamental source of (un)certainty that critically affects people’s lives, thereby extending previous studies that have focused on the organizational environment as the focal source of uncertainty (e.g., Takeuchi et al., 2012; H. Li et al., 2007). In line with a rich organization studies literature (e.g., Powell & Colyvas, 2008), we expect that organizational conditions generally reflect the broader societal conditions that logically precede them. However, when those societal conditions induce significant uncertainty, employees will reciprocate their organizations more strongly when the latter provide a “countermodel” of conditions that are perceived as fair and reliable. Our findings suggest that the uncertainty that originates outside organizational boundaries is valuable in the analysis of organizational justice. In contrast to the microlevel perspective taken in much of the extant UMT-based research (and in organizational justice research more generally), our study responds to calls to put greater emphasis on contextual factors and to close the macro–micro gap in this literature (Nowakowski & Conlon, 2005; Proudfoot & Lind, 2015; Shao et al., 2013).

Theory and Hypotheses

UMT and Organizational Justice

Since the seminal work of Fiske and Taylor (1991) on social cognition, it is widely recognized that uncertainty presents a strong motivator for human behavior, especially for behavior that reduces uncertainty. UMT starts with the premise that individuals want to “feel certain about their world and their place within it” (van den Bos & Lind, 2002: 5). Uncertainty can be conceptualized as the perception and feeling of unpredictability and lack of knowledge with regard to current or future events. However, UMT scholars are relatively unspecific with respect to the sources and types of uncertainty that reduce the control of individuals over their own lives and contribute to their feelings of vulnerability (see also See, 2009).

Organizational justice literature highlights uncertainty as one of the four different yet complementary reasons why employees care about justice in their organizations (Croppanzano, Byrne, Bobocel, & Rupp, 2001; Lind & van den Bos, 2002; van den Bos & Lind, 2002). Organizational justice refers to an individual’s perceptions of fairness in an organization in terms of the outcomes received (distributive justice), the decision-making processes followed to reach those outcomes (procedural justice), and the interpersonal treatment received and the explanations given (interpersonal and informational justice) (Colquitt, 2001). While the different justice dimensions have proven their usefulness, researchers have recently pointed to the value of looking at the overall judgment arising from an employee’s summative work experiences (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009; Ambrose & Arnaud, 2005; Colquitt, 2012; Rupp, 2011). Employees thus assimilate different types of justice information to an overall justice judgment and use earlier justice information to substitute and aid in the interpretation of later justice information, independent of whether this earlier information
concerns procedural, distributive, or interactional aspects (Proudfoot & Lind, 2015; van den Bos, 2015) or arise from different sources of justice (Rupp, 2011). According to Colquitt (2012: 7), a broad justice concept has theoretical and empirical advantages, as it “explicitly captures the ‘that’s not fair!’ response” of employees. Therefore, we focus on perceived organizational justice as a holistic judgment concerning employee perceptions of fairness in the workplace in this study.

Justice research has drawn frequently on UMT, providing support for the argument that uncertainty arising from microlevel sources moderates the effects of justice on different outcomes. In a laboratory experiment and a field study, van den Bos and colleagues (van den Bos, van Schie, & Colenberg, 2002; van den Bos, Wilke, & Lind, 1998) showed that fairness judgments had a stronger impact on satisfaction with decisions when there was high uncertainty about the decision maker. In another series of experiments, van den Bos (2001a, 2001b) and van den Bos and Miedema (2000) concluded that individuals react more strongly to justice when they are reminded of various uncertain aspects in their lives, including the uncertainty surrounding their mortality. Long (2002) showed that organizational justice has a strong effect on employee loyalty and performance under conditions of perceived job insecurity and uncertainty about reaching one’s performance goals. In a series of three studies, H. Walker, Bauer, Cole, Bernerth, Feild, and Short (2013) showed that justice signals influenced organizational attraction during recruitment processes, which are characterized by uncertainty. Similarly, Takeuchi et al. (2012) found that the positive interactive effects of procedural and interactional justice on employee voice behavior were strongest under conditions of uncertainty, which they operationalized as job and occupational tenure. Elovainio and colleagues (2005) demonstrated that uncertainty, operationalized as lack of control over working hours and negatively appraised changes at the workplace, moderated the relationship between organizational justice and absenteeism. Elovainio and colleagues (2005) demonstrated that uncertainty, operationalized as lack of control over working hours and negatively appraised changes at the workplace, moderated the relationship between organizational justice and absenteeism. H. Li et al. (2007) showed that procedural justice predicted collaborative problem solving under high uncertainty about customer demands, which induced variability into employees’ workloads. We found only one paper that studied reactions to uncertainty arising from more distal sources, namely, See’s (2009) work on how informational uncertainty about an environmental policy affected the extent to which procedural justice related to an environmental initiative influenced the support for it.

Extant literature has thus focused on justice conditions within organizations as relevant sources of (un)certainty for employees. In this study, we draw attention to an elemental, broader type of uncertainty—that arising from unfavorable SECs. These conditions affect individuals’ basic standards of living, their prospects for further development and advancement, and the stability and reliability of their country’s social and institutional structure. Poor SECs thus present a salient source of uncertainty, as they materially affect the livelihood and well-being of individuals and as the individuals concerned have little influence or control over them. We argue that the experience of organizational justice provides employees with a buffer against this kind of uncertainty (Otto, Baumert, & Bobocel, 2011; van den Bos, Poortvliet, Maas, Miedema, & van den Ham, 2005). As Lind and van den Bos (2002: 184) state, “a key function, perhaps the key function, of fairness is that it provides people with a way to cope with uncertainties that arise in their lives.” Fair treatment in the workplace can thus provide employees with a buffer against unfavorable conditions in their society, and they are likely to respond positively to it. Conversely, when uncertainty in the environment is compounded by unfair treatment in the workplace, employees are the least likely to display and engage in attitudes and behaviors favorable to their employer (Lind & van den Bos, 2002).
Our argument provides a counterpoint to assertions that continuous exposure to injustice may make individuals less aware, more acquiescent, and even more accepting of injustice—a phenomenon that can also be referred to as “normalizing,” whereby extraordinary situations are rendered ordinary (Ashforth & Anand, 2003; Ashforth & Kreiner, 2002). For example, Leung and Tong (2003: 101) argue that unfair treatment is likely to arouse fewer negative reactions “if the salient norm is more tolerant of justice violations.” Dietz and colleagues (2003) show that the prevalence of societal violence increases the likelihood of employee engagement in workplace aggression. Drawing on social learning theory, these authors argue that such “spillover effects” can be explained by individual and organizational norms that are rooted in the broader societal and community environment. Transposed to the context of the present study, this line of argument suggests that employees may come to accept injustice as a norm in their society and, consequently, in their organizations. In contrast, our emphasis is on the importance of organizational justice in the presence of uncertainty induced by poor SECs. In such conditions, employees will perceive fairness in the workplace as particularly valuable, and will react more strongly to it, than in SECs in which they have other safety nets to fall back upon. Our argument does not preclude the possibility that other environmental factors (e.g., cultural ones) may also moderate the relationship between organizational justice and its outcomes.

Our research model is depicted in Figure 1, and we develop our hypotheses below.

**Employee Reactions to Organizational Justice Under Socioeconomic Uncertainty**

Underlying UMT is the notion that uncertainty is a ubiquitous facet of modern life, both inside and outside organizations (Proudfoot & Lind, 2015). Country-level institutional, social, and economic influences—SECs—are omnipresent, highly visible, and acutely felt by members of each community (King, Reno, & Novo, 2014; OECD, 2011). As such, they affect
the resources, alternatives, and choices available to individuals (V. Mueller, Rosenbusch, & Bausch, 2013) and regulate their distribution (UNDP, 1990, 2013). Poverty and the lack of economic development are factors at the core of socioeconomic uncertainty and insecurity, especially when they affect an individual’s possibilities of everyday survival (Hollander & Howard, 2000). Similarly, access barriers to social and institutional resources (such as the legal system) present a source of socioeconomic uncertainty, influencing not only people’s daily subsistence but also their long-term goal attainment (McLeod & Kessler, 1990). If rights and contracts are not in place or if they are disrespected, individuals—particularly those in situations of dependence, for example, those in employment—risk exploitation (Lind, 2001). In this article, we focus on three SECs, namely, rule of law, human development, and income inequality, that are especially salient to individuals’ feelings of socioeconomic uncertainty and vulnerability (Øyen, 2006; Stiglitz, 2012; O’Donnell, 2004).

**Rule of law.** The rule of law refers to the level of confidence in and obedience of the rules of society (Kaufmann et al., 2010). In countries with weak rule of law, a system of rules to keep individuals safe and to resolve disputes is lacking, and legal procedures that do exist are not enforced fairly and consistently (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Agrast, Botero, Martinez, Ponce, & Pratt, 2012). In countries in which the legal system cannot be relied upon, employees may be especially inclined to use their evaluations of organizational justice to reduce their feelings of uncertainty and to assess their organizations’ and leaders’ trustworthiness (van den Bos et al., 1998). The effects of perceived fairness in the workplace should thus be particularly favorable where the reliability of a country’s institutional system is in doubt. Conversely, organizational injustice takes this “safety anchor” away.

Furthermore, in countries where the rule of law is not adhered to, fundamental rights are often not guaranteed (Agrast et al., 2012; O’Donnell, 2004). As stated by O’Donnell (2004: 32), “without a vigorous rule of law, defended by an independent judiciary, rights are not safe and the equality and dignity of all citizens are at risk.” Such countries tend to be characterized by high levels of human rights abuse and corruption, and individuals have limited options for voicing any complaints and for redressing situations of ill treatment through formal means (Agrast et al., 2012; Rigobon & Rodrik, 2005; O’Donnell, 2004). In this situation, organizational justice can provide a safety anchor and promote and encourage employees to use voice at the level of their workplace (Takeuchi et al., 2012), even when such mechanisms do not exist at the societal level. In contrast, employees in societies with strong rule of law know that employment contracts are adhered to, that employees are protected by labor laws, and that they have the opportunity to voice their concerns, for example, through formal complaints or by talking to a shop steward (Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 2005; O’Donnell, 2004).

In sum, we argue that fair treatment in the workplace is likely to present an especially valuable resource for employees in unstable and unpredictable institutional conditions, more so than in a stable and predictable institutional environment. Employees are thus especially likely to reciprocate fair conditions in the workplace by expanding effort, by making constructive contributions to their organization, and by refraining from counterproductive work behaviors when the overall society is characterized by weak rule of law.

**Hypothesis 1:** Rule of law moderates the relationship between organizational justice and performance outcomes in such a way that the lower the level of rule of law in a country, the stronger this relationship.
Human development. The notion of human development refers to the extent to which individuals have the freedom and the capabilities to lead lives that they value and have reason to value (UNDP, 2011, 2013). The level of human development assesses social well-being from the perspective of the availability of education, access to health care, and the ability to achieve a decent standard of living (King et al., 2014; UNDP, 1990). These factors enhance the capacities of human beings and allow them not only to engage in economic welfare creation but also to foster their sense of stability and security in the society they live in (Gomez & Gaspar, 2012; Sen, 2004; UNDP, 1990). Differential vulnerability based on SECs thus not only is a result of financial constraints but reflects more pervasive disadvantages at the societal level (McLeod & Kessler, 1990). As Gomez and Gaspar (2012) note, many aspects of human development relate to people’s sense of security in a broader sense.

In societies where the level of human development is low, individual empowerment tends to be similarly low, due to poverty and the lack of access to good education and health care (UNDP, 2013). This lack of empowerment means that individuals have limited capacity to actively and meaningfully participate in the processes that shape their lives (UNDP, 2015), limiting people’s capacity to reduce uncertainty in their lives. In situations of low human development, individuals may be forced to earn their living under exploitative or demeaning working conditions; they thus face greater risks, uncertainty, and the loss of freedom and autonomy (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2016; UNDP, 2013). In the absence of a basic societal safety net, individuals are particularly economically dependent on their jobs. Therefore, the conditions that individuals experience in their workplace are of particular importance to them (Brief, Brett, Raskas, & Stein, 1997; Brockner, Grover, Reed, & Lee Dewitt, 1992). Employees who can draw confidence from the experience of fair treatment that their efforts will be rewarded will be willing to invest greater effort in their work. In the language of expectancy theory, the instrumentality link will be stronger (Vroom, 2013).

Existing research also shows that the level of human development influences uncertainty on a societal level. The level of human development is positively related to social trust (Özcan & Bjørnskov, 2011) and negatively related to corruption (Sims, Gong, & Ruppel, 2012); the latter undermines individuals’ trust in the country’s institutions and leadership (Transparency International, 2016). Previous research has operationalized uncertainty as the lack of trust in authorities and organizations, and it has been shown to moderate fairness effects (van den Bos et al., 2002). Further, in his study of the effect of education on the demand for life insurance, Outreville (2013) finds that education and human development are negatively related to risk aversion. Colquitt, Scott, Judge, and Shaw (2006) in turn demonstrate that risk aversion is related to an increase in employees’ sensitivity to justice and strengthens the effects of organizational justice on employee performance and CWB. Therefore, low human development that creates uncertainty for individuals should reinforce their reactions to the experience of justice in the workplace. Conversely, if the uncertainty faced by employees in countries with low human development is compounded by low justice at work, employees may become particularly frustrated and alienated, and thereby reduce their contribution to their organization.

In contrast, in conditions of high human development, individuals enjoy a sense of positive freedom that goes beyond the mere absence of constraints—through access to resources such as education, health care, and fundamental means of living (UNDP, 2013). In such societies, individuals can derive a sense of security from the awareness that these resources
are available and accessible to them. The availability of these resources also reduces the existential dependency of employees on their organizations for the provision of basic means of living, thus making employees less sensitive to events in their more immediate environment at work. The UNDP (2015: 3) states that “the link between work and human development is synergistic” and that through better health, education, and opportunities, high human development increases security, participation, voice, dignity, and recognition at the workplace—all reasons why employees care about organizational justice.

**Hypothesis 2:** The level of human development moderates the relationship between organizational justice and performance outcomes in such a way that the lower the level of human development in a country, the stronger this relationship.

**Income inequality.** Income inequality describes disparities in the distribution of wealth in a society (OECD, 2011). Inequality negatively affects a wide range of social and economic outcomes, including aggregate levels of happiness, health, the stability of social relations, and mutual trust (Kawachi, Kennedy, Lochner, & Prothrow-Stith, 1997; Pryor, 2012; Stiglitz, 2012; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009a, 2009b)—all aspects central to an individual’s sense of control over his or her life. Indeed, different strands of literature suggest that individual-level and societal uncertainty both result from and contribute to inequality. On the individual level, inequality creates feelings of relative deprivation among low-income individuals (Neckerman & Torche, 2007) and increases concerns about maintaining one’s status among higher-income individuals (Blader & Chen, 2011). People in countries where there is high income inequality are typically aware of their relative status in society and worry about the prospects of improving or maintaining it (Zhao, 2012). The awareness that others are better off raises expectations with respect to one’s own possible outcomes (Collins, 1996).

Inequality also induces individuals to engage in self-enhancement, that is, efforts to portray themselves in a favorable light, and to compete with others for resources and social status (Loughnan et al., 2011). Such competitive behaviors, in turn, induce uncertainty about the behaviors of proximal others. “Last place aversion” in highly unequal societies encourages individuals to engage in risky yet unproductive behaviors, such as gambling (Kuziemko, Buell, Reich, & Norton, 2014). Economic inequality is associated with a wide range of behaviors that pose dangers to others, including violence, drug abuse, and crime (Mishra, Son Hing, & Lalumière, 2015). It is also detrimental to the formation of social capital, for example, in the form of civic engagement and membership in community organizations (Kawachi et al., 1997). Furthermore, economic research suggests that the possibility of the occurrence of unplanned and negative events, such as unemployment or poor health, affects individuals more strongly and more avariciously in environments with high income inequality than in countries with low income inequality (Pickett & Wilkinson, 2010; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009a, 2009b). In these situations, individuals feel uncertain about their own future, and they are likely to look for organizational “safety anchors” to offset these dangers. These arguments are consistent with Pickett’s (2014: 2) observation that there is “a fundamentally subjective and psychological dimension to inequality.”

While the above arguments see inequality as a source of uncertainty, economic theory also suggests that uncertainty may reinforce inequality. Uncertainty discourages individuals at the lower end of the income distribution from making profitable investments—in particular, investments in their own human capital (Grossman, 2008; Krebs, 2003)—which would have...
the capacity to lift them out of their economic plight. In contrast, individuals at the higher end of the income distribution are more able to make such high-risk/high-return investments, leading to a widening of the gap between rich and poor (Blackburn & Chivers, 2015). In sum, inequality and uncertainty are mutually related.

Building on UMT, we thus expect employees in countries with high income inequality to react more strongly to perceived organizational justice by increasing their contributions to the organization. We expect this effect to occur as fair treatment reduces the risk of exploitation and the sense of instability and consequent vulnerability, which present prominent threats in societies characterized by high income inequality. We thus propose the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 3:** The level of income inequality moderates the relationship between organizational justice and performance outcomes in such a way that the higher the level of income inequality in a country, the stronger this relationship.

**Data and Methods**

We use meta-analysis to examine the moderating effects of SECs on the organizational justice–performance outcomes relationship (Hunter & Schmidt, 1990; Lipsey & Wilson, 2001). We thus test the direction and magnitude of the effects of these moderators by statistically aggregating the findings from empirical studies and exploiting the heterogeneity of the SECs in the countries in which the primary studies were carried out.

**Literature Search**

In order to locate studies examining the relationship between organizational justice, OCB, CWB, and task performance, we searched the Business Source, PsycINFO, and Open Access Theses and Dissertations (OATD) databases using the keywords organizational (in)justice, organizational (un)fairness, workplace (in)justice, procedural (in)justice, procedural (un)fairness, distributive (in)justice, distributive (un)fairness, inter* (in)justice, inter* (un)fairness, inform* (in)justice, inform* (un)fairness, inequity and performance, organizational citizenship behavior, OCB and its dimensions, counterproductive work behavior, and CWB and all its dimensions. In order to ensure that we had a comprehensive set of articles, we reviewed the reference lists of past meta-analyses on organizational justice (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2013; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001; Shao et al., 2013) to identify articles we might have missed. As we were interested in including as many studies from as many countries as possible, we did not restrict our search to specific journals but included all published papers on organizational justice, yielding a total of 796 studies. Although Dalton, Aguinis, Dalton, Bosco, and Pierce (2012) have found the file-drawer problem not to be a serious threat to the reliability of meta-analysis, we sought to avert this possibility by sending a call for unpublished studies through the listserv facility of a leading academic association in our field. This step yielded four further studies previously unknown to us. To guard against the possibility of publication bias, we applied the “trim-and-fill” method and funnel plot analyses (Duval & Tweedie, 2000), which provided no indication that publication bias was a problem.

For our final sample, we excluded non-empirical studies and those that did not report information that could be used to calculate effect sizes between the different dimensions of
organizational justice and OCB, CWB, or task performance. We also excluded studies for which it was unclear which country the study was carried out in. Finally, we excluded papers on third-party justice and on justice climate. These steps left us with 279 independent studies and 315 samples (some studies used multiple samples) from 31 countries. A list of these studies is available from the authors; an overview of the represented countries and their strength of rule of law, human development, and level of income inequality is provided in Appendix A (the appendices are available as online supplements). Over half of our sample (181) are from studies conducted in North America, 80 from studies conducted in Asia, 35 from Europe, 11 from the Middle East, and eight from studies conducted in Australia, the Caribbean, and Africa.

Variables

The dependent variables in our meta-analysis are the effect sizes between organizational justice and its performance outcomes. Performance is a multidimensional construct (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002; Zhang et al., 2014) involving three dimensions: task performance, OCB, and CWB.

**Task performance.** Task performance is defined as activities that execute, maintain, or serve an organization’s technical core or mission (Motowildo & Van Scotter, 1994). Many studies used Williams and Anderson’s (1991) in-role behavior scale, while a few studies used the scale developed by Tsui, Pearce, Porter, and Tripoli (1997). Alternative terms used in the primary studies include *job performance* and *work performance*.

**OCB.** OCB is defined as “individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization” (Organ, 1988: 4). Many studies used the scales by Williams and Anderson (1991) or Smith, Organ, and Near (1983) to measure OCB. We also included studies that examined one or more dimensions of OCB (altruism, courtesy, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, and civic virtue; Podsakoff, Ahearne, & MacKenzie, 1997). We measured OCB by calculating composite correlations across dimensions.

**CWB.** CWB is defined as voluntary and intentional actions that go against organizational or societal norms and therefore threaten the well-being of the organization or its members (Dalal, Lam, Weiss, Welch, & Hulin, 2009; Spector, Fox, Penney, Bruursema, Goh, & Kessler, 2006). In the studies included in our sample, CWB was usually measured using the scale by Bennett and Robinson (2000). For studies that focused on one or more dimensions of CWB (product deviance, abuse, withdrawal, sabotage, and theft), we measured overall CWB by calculating composite correlations across dimensions.

**Organizational justice.** Organizational justice is a higher-order construct with four components: distributive justice, procedural justice, informational justice, and interpersonal justice (Colquitt & Shaw, 2005). The first two components were mostly measured using the scales by Price and Mueller (1986). The latter two were measured using the scales by Niehoff and Moorman (1993). Interpersonal justice and informational justice were largely measured using the scales by Colquitt (2001). We aggregated the justice dimensions into an overall justice construct by averaging across dimensions. This approach to measuring overall justice
has been previously used by Cohen-Charash and Mueller (2007) and Lang, Bliese, Lang, and Adler (2011) (see also Zhang et al., 2014). An alternative way to operationalize overall justice is provided by Ambrose and Schminke (2009), who conceptualized overall justice as a separate construct independent from the four dimensions of justice. We opted for using the aggregated justice construct rather than the one by Ambrose and Schminke in order to maximize the number of primary studies (and, thus, countries) we were able to take into account.

**Rule of law.** We measured the rule of law using the World Bank Governance Indicator (WGI) developed by Kaufmann et al. (2010; Kaufmann, Kraay, & Mastruzzi, 2013). The WGI assesses the quality of governance in over 200 countries from 1996 to 2011 on a scale of −2.5 to +2.5, with higher scores corresponding to better governance. It is perceived to be “superior to other indices used in empirical studies” (Globerman & Shapiro, 2002: 1902) and has been used in numerous studies to measure governance effectiveness or the rule of law (Globerman & Shapiro, 2003; S. Li & Filer, 2007; Oh & Oetzel, 2011; van Essen, Heugens, Otten, & van Oosterhut, 2012). We used WGI’s Rule of Law index, which measures perceptions of the extent of confidence in and obedience of the rules of society. Until 2002, the WGI was reported every other year. However, the values do not vary greatly between years, so we replaced missing values with the average of the values for the previous and following years.

**Level of human development.** We measured the level of human development by using the Human Development Index (HDI) (UNDP, 2012, 2013). The HDI is a composite measure of a country’s level of human development involving three components: GDP per capita income, average life expectancy, and average number of years of formal education. Its values range from 0 to 1. It has been applied in numerous studies in management, economics, and public health (Cole, 2011; V. Mueller et al., 2013; van der Kooi, Stronks, Thompson, Der-Sarkissian, & Arah, 2013).

**Income inequality.** We measured income inequality using the Gini coefficient, the most widely used index of inequality (Davis & Cobb, 2010; Shaw, Galobardes, Lawlor, Lynch, Wheeler, & Smith, 2007). The Gini coefficient captures the extent to which the distribution of income among individuals or households within a country deviates from equality (World Bank Group, 2000). Ranging from 0% (perfect equality) to 100% (perfect inequality), it is based on the comparison of cumulative proportions of the population against cumulative proportions of income they receive. We obtained annual Gini data by country from the World Bank Development Indicators (World Bank Group, 2012) and the OECD Income Inequality Tables (OECD, 2013). There were missing data for a few years. An examination of the Gini coefficients showed that figures for each country do not vary greatly even over extended periods of time; hence we used data imputation methods to provide an approximation for the few missing values. For our meta-analysis, we calculated the average income inequality for each country for the time period 1987 to 2015, the time period over which the studies in our sample were conducted; we proceeded in the same way with respect to the other two SEC variables.

**Control variables.** We included three types of control variables. First, we used a set of methodological controls. Of the 315 samples in our analysis, 140 measured task performance, CWB, or OCB using self-reports. The rest of the sample used supervisor ratings, coworker ratings, or company archives/performance appraisals for this purpose. In order to account for
the possibility of common-method bias in our primary studies, we included the method of performance measurement (self vs. other) as a control variable. We also controlled for journal quality, using the impact factor as reported in the ISI Social Science Citation Index 2012 as a measure of journal quality, and for year of publication. Finally, we included controls for the industry in which the primary studies were carried out, distinguishing between manufacturing, services, and mixed/other.

Second, we controlled for unemployment as an indicator of the state of the economy, and the availability of “outside options” for employees. We used data on unemployment rates from the International Monetary Fund (2014). We computed the average length of the time lag between the collection of the data and the publication of the study concerned in those studies where the year of data collection was given. This time lag was 5 years. When the year of data collection was unclear, we used the unemployment rate 5 years before the study was published.

Third, national culture has been shown to have a significant moderating effect on the relationship between organizational justice and its outcomes (Shao et al., 2013). Therefore, we included indicator variables for the four cultural dimensions in Hofstede’s original framework (Hofstede, 1980, 2013; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). As a robustness check, we also included interaction effects between the three SECs and the uncertainty avoidance dimension of culture in our regressions. Due to the high correlations between power distance and individualism, we performed a factor analysis, applying varimax rotation. We retained one factor with an eigenvalue of 1.39, which we named “power distance and individualism.” Power distance and individualism are also highly correlated with rule of law and human development. We therefore excluded power distance and individualism from the regressions where rule of law and human development are the main moderators of interest.

**Meta-Analytical Procedures**

We employed two meta-analytical procedures for testing our hypotheses. First, we used the Hedges and Olkin (1985) method of meta-analysis (HOMA) in order to perform split-sample comparisons of mean effect sizes between samples from countries with high and low SECs. HOMA is preferable to the approach proposed by Hunter and Schmidt (1990) when the underlying data involve accurately measured economic variables (van Essen, van Oosterhout, & Carney, 2012). The correlation coefficients (r) between the (different dimensions of) organizational justice and performance in the primary studies served as inputs into the HOMA. As HOMA assumes the effect sizes to be normally distributed, we corrected the r values by transforming them using Fisher’s Z transformation. Finally, the z values were converted back into r with the inverse Z transformation (Hedges & Olkin, 1985). For studies that reported more than one effect size, as was the case with cross-national studies, we used one effect size per subsample within the study concerned (Lipsey & Wilson, 2001). To account for differences in the precision of effect sizes, we used the inverse variance weight (w), calculated as the inverse of the squared standard error, to determine the mean effect size. The inverse variance weight was also used to compute the standard error and the confidence interval of the mean effect size.

For our HOMA, we categorized the samples into groups according to the SECs prevailing in the country to which each sample referred. We calculated the average values and corresponding standard deviations of the three SEC variables across all countries (see
Appendix A in online supplement). We classified countries with income inequality higher than one standard deviation from the mean as high income inequality and countries with income inequality more than one standard deviation below the mean as low income inequality. All other countries were classified as medium income inequality. We followed the same procedure with respect to rule of law and the level of human development in principle. However, as due to the distribution of samples across countries there were no (or too few studies) further than one standard deviation from the mean for these variables (see Appendix B in online supplement), we modified the sample split criteria slightly. We classified countries with rule of law greater than or equal to 1.6 and less than or equal to 0.44 as high and low rule of law, respectively, and countries with human development greater than or equal to 0.8 and less than or equal to 0.65 as high and low human development, respectively. We tested whether our results held under alternative specifications of these sample split criteria, which they did.

Second, in order to test the effect of each moderator while controlling for other possible moderators, we conducted weighted least squares (WLS) regressions using meta-analytical regression analysis (MARA; Lipsey & Wilson, 2001). MARA is a modified type of WLS regression, in which the effect sizes (i.e., the justice–outcomes effect sizes drawn from the primary studies) serve as the dependent variables and the moderator variables of interests (i.e., the SECs) are the independent variables. Our mixed-effects model attributes the variance in effect size to systematic between-study differences, sampling error, and an unmeasured random component (Lipsey & Wilson, 2001).

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations for our variables of interest are included in Table 1. We also report mean effect sizes for all our dependent variables as calculated by the HOMA. The mean effect size for the organizational justice–task performance relationship is $r = 0.21$; for the justice–OCB relationship, $r = 0.26$; and for the justice–CWB relationship, $r = -0.20$.

In order to test the moderating effects of the three SECs, we first disaggregated the overall effect sizes by country groups with low, medium, and high SECs, using HOMA (Figure 2).

Rule of Law

The moderating effects of rule of law on the relationships between organizational justice and its outcomes are analyzed in Panels A to C in Figure 2. We find that in countries with low rule of law, the effect size of the organizational justice–task performance relationship is significantly higher ($r = 0.29$) than in countries with high rule of law ($r = 0.07$) ($\Delta r = 0.22$, $p < .001$). The same pattern holds true with respect to the justice–OCB relationship, $r = 0.26$; and for the justice–CWB relationship, $r = -0.20$. In order to test the moderating effects of the three SECs, we first disaggregated the overall effect sizes by country groups with low, medium, and high SECs, using HOMA (Figure 2).

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A similar pattern emerges with respect to the moderating effects of human development expected in Hypothesis 2 (for the results, see Panels D, E, and F in Figure 2). With poor human development, the relationships between organizational justice and task performance, and those between organizational justice and OCB, are significantly stronger ($r = 0.28$, $\Delta r = 0.90$, $p < .001$; and $r = 0.30$, $\Delta r = 0.05$, $p < .001$, respectively) than when human development is high ($r = 0.19$ and $r = 0.25$). However, with low human development, the organizational justice–CWB relationship is weaker ($r = -0.15$) than with high human development ($r = -0.21$). Hypothesis 2 is thus confirmed for the justice–task performance and the justice–OCB relationships but disconfirmed for the justice–CWB relationship. Here we also find that the moderating effect of human development is especially strong for low levels of human development rather than high levels of human development.

### Income Inequality

Panels G, H, and I in Figure 2 show the differences in mean effect sizes when income inequality is used as the moderator. We find that when income inequality is high, the effect of...
Figure 2
Results: Categorical Meta-Analysis (HOMA)

For counterproductive work behavior (CWB), graphs show absolute values.
organizational justice on task performance is significantly stronger ($\bar{r} = 0.35$) than when income inequality is low ($\bar{r} = 0.12; \Delta \bar{r} = 0.23, p < .001$). Similarly, under high income inequality, the justice–OCB relationship is significantly stronger ($\bar{r} = 0.29$) than when income inequality is low ($\bar{r} = 0.25; \Delta \bar{r} = 0.04, p < .001$). The results are similar for justice–CWB, although the difference is less ($\bar{r} = -0.20$ for countries with high income inequality as compared to $\bar{r} = -0.18$ for countries with low income inequality; $\Delta \bar{r} = 0.02, p < .001$). These findings provide support for Hypothesis 3.

Whereas our HOMA took a categorical approach, comparing the effects of organizational justice between “extreme” conditions, the MARA analyzed the moderating role of continuous values of SECs in a multivariate framework (see Tables 2 through 5). The baseline model (Model 1) in Table 2 confirms the mean effect sizes for the three justice–performance relationships reported above. The same table also contains the controls-only models (Model 2). In order to guard against problems of multicollinearity, we checked variance inflation factors (VIFs) for all the variables included together in our regressions. The maximum VIF value was 4.7, below conventional threshold values (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1995); thus multicollinearity was not a concern. All of the regressions reported in Table 2 (Model 2) and in the following tables also include the methodological control factors (year of data collection, performance self-report, impact factor, industry [manufacturing, services, and other]). These controls turn out to have hardly any effect on the dependent

### Table 2

**Results of Meta-Regression Analysis (MARA): Base and Controls-Only Models**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Base Models</th>
<th>Controls-Only Models*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 1.1</td>
<td>Model 1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Task</td>
<td>OCB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean effect size ($z$)</td>
<td>0.21***</td>
<td>0.26***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate</td>
<td>-0.08(0.08)</td>
<td>-0.20(0.09)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power distance and individualism (factorized)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty avoidance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$Q_{model}$</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$Q_{residual}$</td>
<td>103.68</td>
<td>119.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$K$</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Regression coefficients are presented for study moderators and substantive controls, with standard errors in parentheses. All regression coefficients are inflated by a factor of 10. OCB = organizational citizenship behavior; CWB = counterproductive work behavior.

*The controls-only models include methodological controls (year of data collection, performance self-report, impact factors) and controls for industry (manufacturing, services, other).

†$p < .10$.

*$p < .05$.

**$p < .01$.

***$p < .001$.
variables; thus we refrained from providing the coefficients in the tables. We find that both unemployment and the three variables denoting culture (including the factor-analyzed variable power distance and individualism) have a statistically significant effect on the strength of the justice–OCB relationship and that uncertainty avoidance also has a significant effect on the justice–CWB relationship (see Models 2.2 and 2.3 in Table 2). These controls are not statistically significant in the justice–task performance relationship.

Against this background, we now return to the moderating effects of the three SECs. With some minor qualifications, the results are in line with those produced by the HOMA.

### Rule of Law

We expected the strength of the rule of law in a country to reinforce the relationship between organizational justice and performance (Hypothesis 1). The results in Table 3 confirm this expectation with respect to the justice–task performance relationship (Models 3.1 and 3.2) and the justice–OCB relationship (Models 3.3 and 3.4): The coefficients on rule of law are significant and carry the expected negative sign (e.g., $\beta = -0.036, p < .05$, in Model 3.2 and $\beta = -0.030, p < .05$, in Model 3.4). In Models 3.3 and 3.4, the uncertainty avoidance variable is also statistically significant, but its interaction term with rule of law is not significant.
significant (Model 3.4). However, Hypothesis 1 is not supported with respect to the justice–CWB relationship (Models 3.5 and 3.6).

**Human Development**

In line with Hypothesis 2, we find that the human development variable is statistically significant and carries the expected negative sign when included in the regressions on the justice–task performance relationship (Models 4.1 and 4.2 in Table 4) and those on the justice–OCB relationship (Models 4.3 and 4.4). Again, the uncertainty avoidance variable is positive and significant in Models 4.3 and 4.4, but its interaction effect with human development is not. The moderating effect of the level of human development is not significant in the justice–CWB relationship (Models 4.5 and 4.6).

**Income Inequality**

Model 5.1 in Table 5 shows that income inequality reinforces the justice–task performance relationship ($\beta = 0.013, p < .01$); the same holds in Model 5.2. The inclusion of
income inequality in the regression increases the quality of the model significantly as compared to the controls-only Model 5.1, as indicated by the differences in the $R^2$ and the $Q_{model}$ values. However, in contrast to the results of the HOMA, the effect of income inequality on the justice–OCB relationship is not statistically significant (see Models 5.3 and 5.4). Furthermore, income inequality also does not moderate the justice–CWB relationship (see Models 5.5 and 5.6). Uncertainty avoidance is significant in the justice–OCB and the justice–CWB relationships, but its interaction term is not significant (see Models 5.4 and 5.6).

Overall, the results of the MARA, which allow us to study the interactions between different moderator variables (Baltes, Briggs, Huff, Wright, & Neuman, 1999), confirm the findings of the categorical HOMA presented before. They suggest that SECs provide an important contribution to explaining variations in the strength of the organizational justice–task performance relationship and of the organizational justice–OCB relationship, above and beyond the variations explained by other factors, such as culture, and by methodological differences between the primary studies. However, SECs do not significantly reinforce the relationship between organizational justice and CWB.

### Table 5

Results of Meta-Regression Analysis (MARA): Income Inequality as a Moderator

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Organizational Justice–Task Performance</th>
<th>Organizational Justice–OCB</th>
<th>Organizational Justice–CWB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 5.1</td>
<td>Model 5.2</td>
<td>Model 5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>$-0.17 (4.81)$</td>
<td>$0.61 (4.80)$</td>
<td>$-0.23 (5.26)$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean effect size ($z$)</td>
<td>$0.21^{***}$</td>
<td>$0.21^{***}$</td>
<td>$0.26^{***}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate</td>
<td>$-0.09 (0.08)$</td>
<td>$-0.07 (0.08)$</td>
<td>$-0.18 (0.10)^{†}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power distance and individualism (factorized)</td>
<td>$-0.13 (0.19)$</td>
<td>$-0.21 (0.20)$</td>
<td>$-0.34 (0.17)^*$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity</td>
<td>$0.00 (0.01)$</td>
<td>$0.00 (0.01)$</td>
<td>$0.03 (0.02)^{†}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty avoidance (UA)</td>
<td>$0.02 (0.01)^{†}$</td>
<td>$0.29 (0.19)$</td>
<td>$0.03 (0.01)^{**}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income inequality</td>
<td>$0.13 (0.04)^{**}$</td>
<td>$0.46 (0.14)^{**}$</td>
<td>$-0.01 (0.04)$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income Inequality × UA</td>
<td>$0.16 (0.14)$</td>
<td>$0.16 (0.14)$</td>
<td>$-0.15 (0.10)$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| $R^2$                        | $0.17$  | $0.19$  | $0.22$  | $0.23$  | $0.14$  | $0.15$  |
| $Q_{model}$                  | $18.74$  | $20.03$  | $29.77$  | $32.19$  | $12.66$  | $13.50$  |
| $Q_{residual}$               | $89.58$  | $87.75$  | $106.23$  | $105.37$  | $79.98$  | $78.21$  |
| $K$                          | $104$  | $104$  | $114$  | $114$  | $84$  | $84$  |

**Note:** Regression coefficients are presented for study moderators and substantive controls, with standard errors in parentheses. All regression coefficients are inflated by a factor of 10. OCB = organizational citizenship behavior; CWB = counterproductive work behavior.

$^{†} p < .10$.

$^{*} p < .05$.

$^{**} p < .01$.

$^{***} p < .001$. 
Discussion

In this research, we position SECs as important macrolevel boundary conditions that influence employee performance in response to organizational justice. We extend both UMT and justice research by arguing that poor SECs reflect and cause uncertainty in employees’ lives and that in the presence of such uncertainty, organizational justice provides employees with a safety anchor. Therefore, employees react to fairness in unfavorable SECs more strongly than they do in favorable SECs. According to UMT, one of the primary reasons for employees to care about organizational justice is that the perception that their work environment is fair helps them to cope with uncertainty (van den Bos & Lind, 2002).

Our work contributes to UMT by highlighting the role of SECs as a relevant source of uncertainty outside organizational boundaries. In line with UMT, our results show that after controlling for culture, poor SECs strengthen the relationship between organizational justice and employee positive contributions in the form of task performance and OCB. Conversely, when socioeconomic uncertainty is compounded by the experience of low organizational justice, it discourages and demotivates employees from putting in extra effort in the form of task performance and OCB. We thus propose that uncertainty arising from broader societal sources influences employee reactions to justice. Our findings are consistent with the argument by Lind and van den Bos (2002: 213) that “fair treatment at work is especially desirable—and especially productive—when life events inside or outside work have increased general feelings of uncertainty.” It is worth noting that our findings are particularly strong in “extreme” situations: The results of the HOMA suggest that the moderating effects of SECs are strongest and most visible when rule of law and human development are (very) low (e.g., countries such as Nigeria and Pakistan, the countries with the least favorable SECs in our sample) and when income inequality is (very) high (e.g., Turkey, Malaysia, Thailand). Relatively minor variations between SECs between different “developed” countries—those countries where the vast majority of management research takes place—have limited effects on the way that employees respond to fairness conditions within their organizations.

In sum, conditions of “existential uncertainty” appear to make employees especially sensitive to organizational justice. Individuals typically evaluate the fairness of the treatment they receive by comparing it to their standards and expectations regarding such treatment (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001; Shapiro & Kirkman, 2001). Researchers have argued that unfair treatment may be perceived as particularly harsh when it is unexpected (D. Walker, van Jaarsveld, & Skarlicki, 2014). Our findings suggest that such a contrast effect functions also the other way around and may even be stronger when fairness is not expected but nonetheless received. Namely, in poor SECs, employees are likely to hold low expectations regarding just treatment as a result of their daily experience and hence react more strongly when they receive it in their organizations. In other words, when poor SECs induce uncertainty, organizational justice provides a particularly important safety anchor for employees. They react more positively and more strongly to its presence, and more negatively to its absence, than in situations that provide individuals with a basic safety net of stability and reliability. As Lind and van den Bos (2002) explain the core tenet of UMT, a central function of fairness is to provide people with a way to cope with uncertainties that arise in their lives. On the basis of our findings, we can conclude that the motivation to care about organizational justice is influenced by the broader socioeconomic context. When times are rough, organizational justice matters most.
However, our findings do not support the hypothesized moderating effect of SECs on the relationship between organizational justice and outright negative behaviors in the form of CWB. Several factors may explain this result. Reductions in task performance and OCB may present more covert ways of responding to unfair treatment. In contrast, fear of retribution, as well as internal and moral standards, may prevent employees—especially those in a position of low power relative to their superiors—from engaging in overtly negative responses (Fortin & Fellenz, 2008; Holtz & Harold, 2013). This interpretation is consistent with our finding that the mean size of the effect of organizational justice on CWB ($r = -0.20$) is lower than the one of organizational justice on OCB and task performance ($r = 0.26$ and $r = 0.21$, respectively). Furthermore, compared to other outcomes of organizational justice, such as task performance ($K = 104$) or OCB ($K = 114$), the number of studies examining CWB as a justice outcome is smaller ($K = 84$). Finally, most CWB research is by necessity carried out using self-assessment questionnaires, and employees may be unwilling to disclose to coworkers or supervisors that they have participated in CWB (Spector & Fox, 2002).

Our finding that poor SECs sensitize employees to organizational justice points in a different direction than, but are not incompatible with, cross-cultural research suggesting that employees in China (Leung, Smith, Wang, & Sun, 1996), Taiwan (Blader, Chang, & Tyler, 2001; Erdogan & Liden, 2006), and Hong Kong (Lee, Pillutla, & Law, 2000) react less strongly to the experience of injustice than those in North America. We believe that three reasons may account for these differences. First, China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong are characterized by higher power distance and greater collectivism than countries such as the United States (Hofstede, 2013). These cultural factors may imply that employees in the former group of countries are more accepting of the conditions in their workplace at a given point in time. Our focus on SECs in this article does not exclude, but complements, the importance of cultural factors as moderators of the justice–outcomes relationship. Second, our explanatory approach is of most relevance for countries that differ most starkly in terms of their SECs (as is the case when comparing countries such as Nigeria or Thailand on the one hand with countries such as Finland, Norway, or the Netherlands on the other; see Appendix A in online supplement). In contrast, the differences in the socioeconomic indicators analyzed between China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong and the United States are not quite as wide, at least not in every respect. For example, in terms of income inequality, they belong to the medium group as defined for the purpose of our HOMA. Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the United States also fall into the same medium group in terms of rule of law. Third, the normalizing effect revolves around the argument that poor SECs may make injustice in the workplace appear normal and thus acceptable. In contrast, our focus in this article is on situations where poor SECs that cause uncertainty are met with a “counterprogram,” that of organizational justice. In poor SECs, justice in the workplace may be less likely, but where it does exist, employees may respond in a particularly positive manner, according to our results.

Our work responds to calls for greater emphasis on the contextual boundary conditions in OB research (Dietz et al., 2003; Johns, 2006; Rousseau & Fried, 2001) in general and in organizational justice research in particular (Nowakowski & Conlon, 2005; Proudfoot & Lind, 2015). According to some scholars, its focus on individual- and group-level processes has made OB research look placeless and timeless (Fortin, Cojuharenco, Patient, & German, 2014; Johns, 2006). Bamberg (1998: 844) notes that “robust theory in the social sciences demands an appreciation of how individuals both shape their context and are shaped by it,” and Johns (2006) argues that context can strengthen or even reverse well-established
relationships. With our focus on SECs, our study enriches the understanding of the moderating factors that influence the extent to which employees react to organizational justice by adjusting their (positive) performance contributions.

**Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

Our study has limitations that should be addressed in future research. The first set of limitations relates to the notion of justice perceptions. We have little information about the positions (in terms of both organizational hierarchy and socioeconomic status) of the employees included in the primary studies. Extant evidence suggests that individuals in more advantageous positions tend to perceive the present state of affairs as fairer than those in less advantageous positions (Côté, 2011). We also recognize that perceptions of justice are not absolute. There may be national differences in the meaning of justice (Blader et al., 2001; Tyler, Lind, & Huo, 2000) and in terms of what is perceived as just or unjust (Erdoğan & Liden, 2006). Future research could explore how what is perceived as just or unjust differs depending on SECs, culture, and an individual’s standing in society, and how these differences influence reactions to fairness. In this context, we acknowledge that our meta-analysis includes samples from 31 countries, just 15% of the 206 countries currently recognized by the United Nations. Many of these 31 countries are characterized by relatively good SECs. We encourage future organizational justice scholars to investigate justice perceptions and outcomes in regions that are underrepresented in research, for example, Eastern Europe and Africa.

Second, our operationalization of overall organizational justice differs from that of Ambrose and Schminke (2009), who conceptualized overall justice as a construct that is distinct from the four dimensions of justice. Future research should examine the moderating effects of SECs on the reactions of employees to each of the different dimensions of justice and to overall justice perceptions as conceived by Ambrose and Schminke. This approach would enable researchers to apply the target similarity model (Rupp, Shao, Jones, & Liao, 2014), matching the source of justice perceptions with the target of justice reactions, and to add precision to the analysis. For example, due to the importance of relative status in countries where income inequality is high (Zhao, 2012), reactions to interpersonal justice perceptions (e.g., in the employee–manager relationship) may be stronger than in countries where inequality is low.

Third, we see a need to compare our approach and empirical findings with other theoretical perspectives in OB. For example, our emphasis on SECs differs from a wealth of literature in OB and sociology that has elaborated on the impact that “proximal others” may have on individuals and their attitudes and behaviors (Festinger, 1954; Lavelle, Rupp, & Brockner, 2007; C. Mueller & Lawler, 1999). This perspective sees the boundary conditions as being much nearer to a focal individual than we portray them to be. Nevertheless, we do not believe that the two perspectives necessarily exclude each other; they may also complement and even reinforce one another. Future multilevel research should address these issues in order to provide a comprehensive perspective on the various contextual phenomena that may moderate the relationships between justice perceptions and outcomes.

Fourth, future research should further explore which macrolevel conditions sensitize employees to organizational justice and which ones elicit normalizing effects among employees. Our results, together with those in Shao et al.’s (2013) meta-analysis, suggest that the effects of culture and SECs have important independent effects on justice outcomes. It is
interesting to note that in our study, the interaction effects between culture and the three SECs are not significant. It is therefore possible that the effects of macrolevel conditions (culture and SECs) may occur simultaneously, with normalizing and sensitizing effects taking place at the same time.

We acknowledge that while our hypotheses are predicated on the argument that poor SECs induce uncertainty, our measures relate to the former, not the latter. Extant studies using UMT, which focus on more proximal sources of uncertainty, do not use direct measures of this construct either. Overall, the notion of uncertainty has been quite vaguely conceived in justice research (See, 2009). Future research should advance UMT further by developing a typology of factors at the macro-, meso-, and microlevel that induce uncertainty and that may affect employee reactions to organizational justice. If even seemingly distal macrolevel factors, such as a country’s SECs, create uncertainty that influences employee behaviors in the workplace, we can expect mesolevel factors—for example, family and community conditions—to do so even more strongly.

Finally, our findings indicate that SECs moderate the relationship between justice and positive outcomes (task performance, OCB) but not the one between justice and negative outcomes (CWB). Future research should explore a greater range of justice outcomes and establish clear theoretical links between contextual moderating factors and the specific justice–outcomes relationships under study. For example, previous research shows that unfairness at work is positively related to negative health outcomes, such as stress and strain (Robbins, Ford, & Tetrick, 2012), and SECs have been linked to societal health (e.g., Pickett & Wilkinson, 2010). Exploring these relationships may extend our understanding of the boundaries of the “buffering” effect of fairness on the uncertainty that poor SECs impose on employees.

**Implications for Practice**

Our study has implications especially for multinational organizations and those operating in countries with unfavorable SECs. We show that organizational justice is not a luxury that only organizations in countries with good SECs can afford to care about. In addition to being a value in its own right, fairness in the workplace also serves an economic function (Lind & van den Bos, 2002). As organizational justice helps employees to cope with the uncertainty induced by poor societal conditions, they respond to it by providing greater performance and better citizenship behaviors. Thus, in countries with poor SECs, firms should care at least as much, if not more, about organizational justice. Our work alerts managers to the effects that uncertainty produced by conditions outside the organizational boundaries may have on employees. Thus, employers may want to do good to employees by being fair to them, especially in tough circumstances, and thereby also advance the goals of their organizations.

Organizational justice demonstrates responsible leadership. By ensuring fair treatment of their employees, organizations can begin to fill some (but not all) of the void left by societies that fail to provide reliable structures, putting their citizens at risk of exploitation. Moreover, organizations are not just influenced by, but also influence, the SECs in the countries they operate in (Davis & Cobb, 2010; Hegtvedt & Isom, 2014). By perpetuating unfavorable social, legal, and economic institutions in countries where SECs are poor, organizations reinforce the negative effects of these conditions on their relationships with their employees.
With fair treatment, organizations may also help to open the eyes of their employees to recognize justice issues and to make appropriate fairness assessments both within and outside their organizations. As noted by Fortin and Fellenz (2008), organizations have the power and capacity to shape what is considered just and fair.

Notes

1. The other three motivators include instrumental, relational, and deontic motivators. In the early works on organizational justice, self-interest was thought to be the driving force for why individuals care about and react to organizational (in)justice (Cropanzano, Byrne, Bobocel, & Rupp, 2001). This instrumental model (Tyler, 1987) of organizational justice assumes that individuals are largely motivated by economic rationality. Later writings on organizational justice recognize that individuals care about justice for reasons beyond their self-interest. For example, Tyler and Lind’s (1992) relational model focuses on workers’ psychological need for belongingness. Individuals care about justice because fair (or unfair) treatment conveys information pertinent to a sense of self-worth and self-esteem and indicates the extent to which they are valued by the organization, which in turn affects their attitudes and behaviors at work (Cropanzano et al., 2001; Rupp, 2011). Research has also shown that justice may be important for deontic reasons—that is, because it supports universal rules regarding what is moral and right (Cropanzano, Goldman, & Folger, 2003; Folger, 1998)—and that employees are “aversive to injustice for no other reason than the fact that injustice involves a discretionary, unethical act against an undeserving party” (Rupp, 2011: 74).

2. A key characteristic of uncertainty (as opposed to risk) is that it arises from factors outside an actor’s control (Berger, 1994).

References


