

The Influence of Explanations for Selection Test Use, Outcome Favorability, and Self-Efficacy on Test-Taker Perceptions

Michael Horvath and Ann Marie Ryan

Michigan State University

and

Sandra L. Stierwalt

Bowling Green State University

Previous research has shown that an explanation for an event can affect reactions to that event. This study examined this effect within a selection context by varying the type of explanation (causal, ideological, referential) and outcome favorability. A sample of 202 undergraduates completed a selection test and reported their perceptions of that test both before and after the outcome was known. Both the type of explanation and outcome favorability interacted with participants' self-efficacy in determining perceptions of validity and fairness. Implications and directions for future research are discussed. © 2000 Academic Press

Organizational justice research has attempted to address the practical question of designing decision-making procedures that employees view as fair. Perceptions of fairness have been related to job performance (e.g., Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991), withdrawal behaviors such as intention to quit (Sujak, Parker, & Grush, 1998) and absenteeism (Schmitt, 1996), and retaliatory behaviors (Greenberg, 1990; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). While most of the research has focused on individuals already employed, recent research has begun to

Please address correspondence and reprint requests to Michael Horvath, Department of Psychology, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824. E-mail: horvat22@pilot.msu.edu. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 14th Annual Conference of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Atlanta, GA.

The authors would like to thank Matt Bennett, Rob France, Regan Hollowell, and Rob Ployhart for their assistance with this research.

theorize about and explore fairness perceptions *before* individuals join an organization, using both laboratory studies as well as applied samples (Gilliland, 1993, 1994; Ployhart & Ryan, 1998; Smither, Reilly, Millsap, Pearlman, & Stoffey, 1993). This research focuses on job applicants' perceptions of selection procedures, with the primary goal of providing organizations with information about what procedures and what features of procedures create the most positive fairness perceptions among applicants.

One method of enhancing fairness perceptions that has been researched in the social justice literature is the explanation provided for the decision (a promotion, a layoff, a hiring, etc.). Several studies have shown that the presence of an explanation reduces perceptions of unfairness in certain situations (Baron, 1990; Bies, Shapiro, & Cummings, 1988; Gilliland, 1994; Greenberg, Bies, & Eskew, 1991). While most of this research has been conducted outside of a selection context, researchers have begun to explore the effects of an explanation for hiring decisions on perceptions of fairness (Gilliland, 1994; Ployhart, Ryan, & Bennett, 1999).

Research on the effects of explanations on perceptions of selection systems is needed for several reasons. First, explanations are potentially a low cost method of enhancing fairness perceptions (Greenberg, 1990). Second, explanations for the selection decision itself have received some research attention (Ployhart et al., 1999), but explanations for why a particular procedure is being used have not. Although Gilliland's (1993) model of organizational justice in selection contexts discusses selection information as an influence on procedural fairness perceptions, it focuses on the amount of information one receives about a procedure, not on possible effects of different explanations for procedure use. For example, an organization that plans to use a selection test can inform applicants that they are using the test to be objective, to be efficient, to be unbiased, or because of demonstrated job relatedness of the procedure. Third, given that the outcome of a decision is often a major determinant of fairness perceptions (Bauer, Maertz, Dolen, & Campion, 1998; Gilliland, 1994; Macan, Avedon, Paese, & Smith, 1994; Smither et al., 1993; Tyler & Dawes, 1993), there is a need to examine whether explanations for a procedure can mitigate the effects of a negative outcome in selection contexts. Finally, research is needed on how individual differences function in relation to the above variables.

In this study, we examined whether different types of explanations for selection procedures have differential effects and whether explanations can mitigate the effects of a negative selection outcome. Additionally, we explored how self-efficacy beliefs interacted with the type of explanation provided. We first provide an overview of the research on explanations, followed by a brief review of the role of outcome favorability in influencing applicant reactions. We then discuss how self-efficacy may also influence reactions to an explanation.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON EXPLANATIONS

Research that has studied explanations in detail has used Bies' (1987) taxonomy of explanations (e.g., Bies, 1987; Bies et al., 1988; Sitkin & Bies, 1993);

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